

## The Highland Council No.8 2024/2025

Minutes of Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 12 December 2024 at 9.30am.

**Ken Gowans in the Chair**

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

**Present:**

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

**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 A Baldrey, Mrs H Crawford, Mr A Graham, Mr B Lobban and Ms M Smith.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

**3. Review of the Highland Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils  
2024/25  
Ath-sgrùdadh de Sgeama Stèidheachaidh na Gàidhealtachd airson  
Chomhairlean Coimhearsnachd 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/40/24 by the Chief Officer - Housing and Communities.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- attention was drawn to recommendation ii. as it should refer to Section 8 of the report instead;
- clarification was sought and provided as 13.3 of the report referred to dissolving a Community Council (CC) if membership fell to below 2 members, however the quorum in the standing orders at 11.1 required 4 members. In this regard it was queried what happened to the CC bank account if the CC was dissolved;
- regarding 8.11 of the report, it was queried what the difference was between abeyance and dissolution;
- attention was drawn to question 15 of the October 2024 CC questionnaire as it did not flow from question 14 which had questioned if there should be increased membership of 16- to 18-year-olds on a CC and only allowed for a yes/no response. In this regard, it was felt that further research should be undertaken to identify any other age groups who were under-represented at CC's;
- young persons were encouraged to be involved in their CC. In this regard it was queried if there was scope to lower the minimum age for young persons to become involved, such as 14 years of age and above;
- it was queried if members of the Highland Youth Parliament could be invited to join a CC;
- many CC found monthly bookkeeping obligations to be onerous especially as they were volunteers and often had no movement of finances within a month. In this regard, it was queried if the HC could hold the CC bank accounts to reduce CC banking fee's;
- it was felt that being part of a CC was a good stepping stone to potentially becoming a Councillor;
- suggestion was made that the HC make financial provision to CC's to employ a minute taker as it was felt to be a daunting and onerous task;
- it was felt that a more robust advertising and marketing process was required to encourage people to join their local CC;
- regarding the change of boundaries of CC areas, it was queried what measurements were used to facilitate this and if it was underpinned by an objective tool;
- suggestion was made to increase the grant percentages to CC's to help them reinforce, strengthen and exist. In this regard, further suggestion was made that CC's were able to apply for additional donated grant funds if required, but be provided with practical hardware such as a printer and appropriate laptop to fulfil their duties;

- it was highlighted that not all CC's were equal in terms of accessing available funding sources in their area, such as wind farm funding, which greatly impacted how they operated. In this regard, it was felt that HC required to assess how equitable they were in terms of accessing support and facilities to develop their own place plans; and
- it was requested that the HC review and consider further financial support of CC's as much of their financial grant was spent on insurance policies.

Thereafter, the Council:-

- i. **AGREED** to the formal review of the Highland Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils as required under section 53 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973;
- ii. **AGREED** the draft proposals outlined in Section 8 of the report and in appendices 1-3 of the report;
- iii. **NOTED** that a three-month consultation would take place seeking public views on the draft proposals and seeking further representations for amendments to the Scheme; starting in January 2025; and
- iv. **NOTED** that a report outlining the feedback and proposed amendments would come forward to Council on 8 May 2025.

The meeting was concluded at 10.05am.

**The Highland Council  
No.9 2024/2025**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 12 December 2024 at 10.20am.

**Bill Lobban in the Chair**

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

**Present:**

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

**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 Mrs H Crawford and Ms M Smith.

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

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

Item 4 – Mr M Cameron, Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg  
Item 7 - Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg  
Item 9 - Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg  
Item 10 (Question 3) – Mr B Lobbam  
Item 10 (Question 11) - Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg  
Item 16.1 – Mr D Gregg

## 3. **Medium Term Financial Plan: 2025/26 – 2027/28** **Plana Ionmhasail Meadhan-ùine 2025/26 gu 2027/28**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/41/24 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the detail of the Scottish Government's grant settlement had not yet been received and officers would require time to analyse the impacts on the Council's financial plans;
- given the workload of officers in preparing the budget for 2025/26 to be considered at the Special Council meeting on 6 March 2025, it was proposed a recommendation be added that Members agree not to hold a special meeting to consider any aspects of the budget in the interim;
- the role of the Opposition was to scrutinise and improve upon the Administration's budget and the above proposal removed the democratic right of Opposition Members to requisition a special meeting of the Council to discuss the budget;
- concern that details of new and additional savings proposals and other strategies would therefore not be shared with Opposition Members until the Special Council meeting on 6 March 2025;
- constituents would expect all Members, irrespective of political allegiances, to be involved in open discussions as part of the budget setting process in the interests of transparency and to allow for more Member and public scrutiny;
- the report repeated the information previously reported to Council on the budget gap, uncertainties, pressures and inflation and concern there was no urgency from the Administration in response to these issues;
- proposed increases in Council Tax did not recognise the pressures on people's domestic budgeting, projected low pay awards, increased use of food banks and the impact of the increase in national insurance contributions on charities, third sector and businesses;
- it was important to recognise the report had been issued prior to the Scottish Government's budget and settlement being confirmed;
- the Scottish Government's settlement for local authorities was better than expected and it provided the Council with choices and a new canvas for the work around the budget. The Administration would seek to ensure the budget reflected the priorities of Members and the people of the Highlands;

- the additional recommendation had been brought forward on the basis that the significant volume of officer time required to deliver the budget in March 2025 would have to be diverted into preparing papers for a special meeting;
- the Administration welcomed the input of any Member who wished to bring forward proposals as part of the budget setting process;
- the Administration had actively sought to protect Highland communities from the level of Council tax rises implemented by other local authorities and would continue to do so as part of the work to be undertaken prior to the scheduled Council budget meeting in March 2025;
- concern that local Members had not been consulted on, included in any review, or made aware that earmarking of reserves was no longer required for the Badaguish Outdoor Centre. This proposal should be withdrawn until local Members had been fully briefed and all possible uses of these reserves in Ward 20 fully explored;
- further clarification was sought, and provided, that official confirmation had not yet been received in relation to how much of the increase in national insurance contributions for the public sector would be covered by monies from the UK and Scottish Governments. The wider partner impact and associated implications for the Council was also being highlighted as a risk;
- there was a need to restructure the Council to make it more efficient, and ensure the maximum use and prudent management of its finances and the importance of not investing in projects that did not enjoy overall public support;
- the potential for engagement with the public on the budget to be undertaken outwith the festive holiday period in future given this was one of the busiest times of year for Highland residents;
- concern at the Scottish Government's rationale for the Council not receiving a further share of Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) funding for a substantial part of its new school estate and that as a result Council tax payers in Highland were being asked to fund investment in new schools;
- further clarity was sought, and provided, on the reasons for repurposing of earmarked reserves in respect of Mental Health Officers, Phase 3 of the Investment Fund – Green Energy Hub, Phase 2 Investment Fund - Environment/Climate Change – Renewables, and Phase 1 Investment Fund - Visitor Management Strategy. It was emphasised that the relevant Services had been fully involved in the review of earmarked reserves;
- further clarity was sought, and provided, on the reasons for repurposing of earmarked reserves in respect of Period Poverty and Staffing Conditions and Development Fund - Consolidation of Living Wage. In addition, it was explained that earmarked reserves continued to be in place to support change and transformation around depots and office rationalisation;
- further clarity was sought, and provided, on the reasons for repurposing of earmarked reserves in respect Education Transitional Funding and Phase 4 Investment Fund - Innovation in Education. It was emphasised that reserves could only be used for one off or non-recurring items and that the element required to support the Workforce for the Future Portfolio continued to be for education related delivery; and
- a proposal to repurpose the £700K from the Education Transitional Fund directly into the Education budget to help improve the attainment performance across the Highlands and for additional PSA support.

Thereafter, Mr R Bremner seconded by Mr B Lobban **MOVED** the recommendations in the report and the following additional recommendations:-

- i. repurposing of Earmarked Reserves in Appendix 3 of the report be withdrawn and the Badaguish reserve remain as it was, and where it was, until local Members for Badenoch and Strathspey had been fully briefed as to the status of this reserve and all possible uses for this reserve in Ward 20 had been fully explored; and
- ii. not to hold any special meeting of the Council in relation to the review, discussion of or receipt of an update in respect of the Council's annual budget or budget preparation work in respect of the annual budget prior to the Special Meeting of the Council on 6 March 2025.

As a **FIRST AMENDMENT**, Mr R Gale, seconded by Mrs B Jarvie, moved the recommendations in the report and the following additional recommendations:

- i. repurposing of Earmarked Reserves in Appendix 3 of the report be withdrawn and the Badaguish reserve remain as it was, and where it was, until local Members for Badenoch and Strathspey had been fully briefed as to the status of this reserve and all possible uses for this reserve in Ward 20 had been fully explored; and
- ii. to repurpose the £700K from the Education Transitional Fund directly into the Education Budget to help improve the attainment performance across the Highlands and for additional PSA support.

As a **SECOND AMENDMENT**, Mr A MacKintosh, seconded by Mr D Gregg, moved the recommendations in the report and the following additional recommendations:

- i. repurposing of Earmarked Reserves' in Appendix 3 of the report be withdrawn and the Badaguish reserve remain as it was, and where it was, until local Members for Badenoch and Strathspey had been fully briefed as to the status of this reserve and all possible uses for this reserve in Ward 20 had been fully explored; and
- ii. that this Council allows special meetings called by councillors to discuss the forthcoming budget before the already timetabled meeting.

On a vote being taken between the **MOTION** and **FIRST AMENDMENT**, the **MOTION** received 42 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, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, 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, Mrs T Collier, 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 E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr G MacKenze, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Ms M Ross, Ms K Willis.

#### **For the Amendment:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmundson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Siggers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

On a vote being taken between the **MOTION** and **SECOND AMENDMENT**, the **MOTION** received 43 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 27 votes, with no abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

#### **For the Motion**

Ms S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, 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, Mrs T Collier, 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 E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr G MacKenze, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr W MacKay, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Ms M Ross, Ms K Willis.

#### **For the Amendment:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmundson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

#### **Decision**

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the update provided relating to the UK Government Budget;
- ii. **NOTED** the update provided relating to the 4 December 2024 Scottish Government Budget;
- iii. **NOTED** the update relating to Medium-Term Financial Planning, the forecast budget gap, and actions and workstreams being taken forward;
- iv. **NOTED** the update provided regarding review of Earmarked Reserves;
- v. **AGREED** to the re-allocation of re-purposed reserves into the Future Investment Capacity Fund;
- vi. **NOTED** the update provided regarding the potential Highland Investment Plan (HIP) funding implications and Capital Quantum, and relevance to the separate HIP update provided on the agenda for this meeting;
- vii. **NOTED** the update provided regarding Budget Engagement;
- viii. **NOTED** the proposed draft Financial Sustainability Indicators with these to be updated and incorporated into the report to Special Council on 6 March 2025;
- ix. **AGREED** repurposing of Earmarked Reserves' in Appendix 3 of the report be withdrawn and the Badaguish reserve remain as it was, and where it was, until local Members for Badenoch and Strathspey had been fully briefed as to the status of this reserve and all possible uses for this reserve in Ward 20 had been fully explored; and
- x. **AGREED** not to hold any special meeting of the Council in relation to the review, discussion of or receipt of an update in respect of the Council's annual budget or budget preparation work in respect of the annual budget prior to the Special Meeting of the Council on 6 March 2025.



#### 4. Highland Investment Plan (HIP) – 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 M Cameron – as a family member was an employee at Charleston Academy**  
**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/42/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, who gave a presentation in amplification of the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Administration had launched the HIP to provide a way forward that would continue the Council’s sustainability and substantially increase investment in roads across Highland, particularly in the areas that needed it most. The HIP would also invest in the Council’s school estate, with a particular focus on Dingwall and Thurso. Additionally, there would be a focus on Community Points of Delivery (PODs) and other investment in capital infrastructure. The HIP was considered to be one of the most innovative programmes by a local authority in Scotland, supporting the ability to deliver a capital programme that could not have been realised without it. It was based on a sound financial footing, and the importance of support and buy-in from communities was emphasised;
- attention was drawn to section 7.3 of the report relating to flood mitigation work in Dingwall, which was welcomed as businesses and development at Dingwall Business Park had been badly affected for years by flooding in the area;
- St Clement’s School had been mentioned at 14 Full Council meetings since the current Administration had come into power in 2022, and the new school would have been completed if the Council had gone ahead with it when it had originally been moved. Other Members added that St Clement’s School had been the subject of discussion for many years prior to 2022, and welcomed the fact that something was now being done about it;
- concerns raised previously regarding secondary school pupils who were unable to eat their lunch in a dry, warm and secure place were reiterated, and disappointment was expressed regarding the response to the Member Question in that regard;
- whilst there were some good elements in the HIP, such as the approach to procurement, it was not holistic;
- the primary reason the HIP had been established was the failure of the Scottish Government to award LEIP funding for five new school buildings, and it had been the right thing to do. However, it was questioned how the money that was being borrowed was going to be repaid, and what impact that repayment would have on future Councils;
- investment in schools and improving the educational environment and learning experience for young people in Highland was to be welcomed, but it was necessary to be realistic;

- the HIP would allow the Council to improve services across local communities. The proposed PODs would include, where possible, new schools, leisure and community facilities, external sports provision, Service Points, office spaces, partner services and improved depots. The HIP would be transformational for Highland, adopting a place-based approach to service delivery and providing key partners, such as NHS Highland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, NatureScot, the emergency services and others with opportunities to co-locate, enabling a range of essential public services to be delivered from a new or refurbished local accessible site. It was crucial that all future place-based projects supported further integration and enabled the evolution of lifelong services for Highland communities;
- the internal design team had made excellent progress with the development of concept POD designs, and Members commended the most recent design video, which brought the concepts to life, providing a 3D view of how PODs could enable communities and act as a catalyst for the delivery of modern integrated Council services;
- the HIP would be a key economic driver, increasing Highland-wide job opportunities including apprenticeships, and would help maximise community benefit and support the Council's drive to sustain Highland communities;
- it was important to acknowledge the ambition and vision being shown by the Council in terms of the HIP;
- in relation to procurement, the proposed partnership approach was welcomed, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether there was facility within the proposed approach to use local contractors, as that was important, and who would be responsible for carrying out quality assurance. With regard to the Phase 1 projects, it was welcomed that the traditional means of procurement would probably be used as this meant the projects could proceed at pace. Other Members reiterated the importance of using local contractors, both in terms of community wealth building and build quality. Experience in Caithness and North Sutherland, particularly in the nuclear industry, had shown that whilst procurement frameworks could offer significant benefits there was sometimes a reliance on Tier 1 contractors to deliver significant pockets of work and, where they were not available, that could present challenges. Due to the remote location and the cost base of delivering there, sometimes only Tier 2 or 3 contractors were available and, where small parcels of work were available, it might be that the added social value was reduced. Local contractors needed to be supported to scale to the Council's needs, and offering them a clear pipeline of work into the future could give them clarity and potentially the confidence to invest in their plant equipment and staff;
- it was important to ensure the Demonstrator Project in Portree, whereby a number of public agencies were involved in moving into one location, was a success and was used as a model of good practice;
- the proposed Learning Estate Strategy that would be reported to the Education Committee worked alongside the Sports Strategy. Engagement with **sportscotland** indicated they were impressed by what the Council was doing in terms of the HIP, and it was hoped this would facilitate match funding being made available;
- the importance of supporting officers was emphasised, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether there were sufficient staff resources to drive forward the work in the HIP;
- several Members spoke to the proposals in respect of St Clement's School, during which it was emphasised that pupils from several Wards attended the school, and it was necessary to include more Elected Members in the engagement that was taking place. The proposals were exciting and positive, and some Members supported the idea of co-location on the proposed POD

site, adjacent to Dingwall Primary School, as this offered the best educational outcomes for young people. However, it was frustrating for parents and the wider community that, once again, consultation was taking place on a different site. Parents had asked for the delay in making the final decision on where the school would be because they did not have enough information. They had also asked Local Members to say that their preferred site was the existing school site;

- Dingwall Leisure Centre had just celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and needed upgrading, and Local Members would welcome working in partnership with High Life Highland to try to improve the facilities. Reference was also made to Highland Disability Sports, and it was suggested there was an opportunity to build a Highland-wide centre of excellence in Dingwall;
- reference was made to the opportunities associated not only with the Dingwall workstream but the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, and it was hoped there would be consultation with NHS Highland regarding the need for increased hospital provision in the area;
- attention was drawn to the feedback in Appendix 3 of the report which indicated that extensive free parking in Dingwall was greatly appreciated;
- thanks were expressed to officers for the significant amount of work that had gone into the HIP, and the pace at which work was progressing;
- on the point being raised, it was clarified that there was a typographical error in the report, and that the final paragraph of section 6.10 summarised the partnership procurement model;
- schools were the foundation of communities, and it was extremely disappointing that Highland had the worst school estate in Scotland, with issues including damp, mould, rodents, asbestos and RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete). Particular reference was made to the condition of St Clement's School, where some of the most vulnerable children were educated, which should have been addressed years ago. Concern was expressed that previous requests to investigate whether the condition of schools had any impact on attainment, and to carry out an analysis of the schools that could not provide a warm dry place for pupils to eat lunch, had been refused, and it was suggested that Members needed to look at how they could work together to make things better for some of the most vulnerable and needy in society;
- in terms of the financial viability of the HIP, a similar model of ringfencing revenue to generate capital had been used successfully, over a period of 25 years, to build infrastructure in New York;
- given that the HIP was a multi-billion-pound programme, it could offer fantastic opportunities for local communities beyond the buildings themselves being fit for purpose;
- Local Members welcomed the ongoing dialogue with officers regarding the Thurso workstream, and it was hoped that the community would be brought along as part of the process and there would be as much buy-in as possible;
- if the Council was making a generational commitment to Highland it was only right that the Scottish Government did so too, and it was suggested the Scottish Government should be called upon to look at the HIP. Hundreds of millions of pounds had gone to the Scottish Government as a result of ScotWind leases and consents, many of which lay along the Highland coast, and it had been promised that the funds would be used for transformational change. There was nothing more transformational than investing in young people in Highland and giving them the school estate and public services they would need for the jobs of tomorrow and the ability to stay, work and thrive in the communities they grew up in;

- reference was made to forthcoming housing development at Balloch, Tornagrain and Inverness East, and the development at Ardersier Port which was anticipated to lead to 3,500 jobs, and a plea was made that consideration be given to a community POD for Inverness East because services were already struggling;
- housing played an integral role in supporting the health and wellbeing of an aging population, and it was necessary to look to the future and implement housing solutions to meet the demands of a rapidly aging society. Information was sought, and provided, as to where these points came into the HIP;
- the inclusion of Fortrose Academy, which had not previously been in the Capital Programme, in the HIP was welcomed, as was the fact that the school estate had been looked at in the round and a methodology had been implemented to ensure that the schools in the worst condition were focused on first;
- an assurance was sought, and provided, that end users would be consulted on concept designs for future PODs, and staff safety, health and wellbeing would be prioritised;
- if the HIP came to fruition, it would deliver a totally regenerated level of infrastructure across Highland, and it was welcomed that Golspie, Dornoch and Brora featured highly in the first 10 years. However, concern was expressed that future generations would be left to repay the debt, and a request was made for a review looking at how the burden of debt could be reduced and the capital, and not just the loan charges, could be repaid. Conversely, other Members did not see the HIP as burdening future generations. The borrowing was for a purpose, which was why it was widely supported by the public, and would leave a legacy of much improved infrastructure; and
- in relation to the options appraisal process in respect of St Clement's School, Option B would require a statutory consultation. Attention was drawn to the lengthy timescale associated with statutory consultations, and it was queried whether consideration would be given to holding a Special Meeting of the Education Committee to expedite the process in the event such a consultation was required. An assurance was provided that every effort would be made to accelerate matters.

## Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the potential indicative quantum of capital funding available over the five-year period and the associated financial implications;
- ii. **NOTED** the procurement approach to develop the five agreed Phase 1 projects to tender stage and the progress in exploring procurement routes for the delivery of other future HIP projects;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed location for a Community Point of Delivery (POD) development in Dingwall and to commence discussions with the landowner regarding the future purchase of the required site area;
- iv. **AGREED** a contribution of £150,000 from the approved capital programme towards the flood mitigation work being carried out in Dingwall;
- v. **NOTED** the progress in identifying the short-list of options to be taken forward to the next stage of the options appraisal process for the Community POD location in Thurso and that the Stage 3 outcome would be reported to the Council meeting on 26 June 2025;
- vi. **NOTED** that the outcomes from Stage 2 of the options appraisal process for each of the five other prioritised Phase 1 locations at Alness, Brora, Dornoch, Golspie and Invergordon (i.e. a short list of options for each location) would be reported to Council on a phased basis throughout the course of 2025.;

- vii. **NOTED** the progress in developing concept designs for future Community POD arrangements and the work being progressed in relation to how these facilities should operate differently in future;
- viii. **APPROVED** the timeline of future decisions on the Highland Investment Plan in 2025, as described in section 11.4 of the report; and
- ix. **NOTED** the progress in developing a Learning Estate Strategy and that the final version would be reported to the Education Committee meeting on 26 February 2025.

## 5. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Council **AGREED** to **RESOLVE** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for Item 6 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.

## 6. Highland Investment Plan – Investment Plana Tasgaidh na Gàidhealtachd – Tasgaidh

There had been circulated separately to Members only Confidential Report No. HC/43/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following discussion, the Council **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

## 7. Proposed Change to the Model of Integration Atharrachadh ga Mholadh a Thaobh a' Mhodail Amalachais

**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 to Report No. HC/44/24 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- reference was made to the unprecedented challenges facing Adult Social Care (ASC), and the need for a new governance model that aligned with that used by all other Local Authorities and Health Boards in Scotland, for the benefit of the Council, NHS Highland, third sector partners, and service users. Change could lead to uncertainty, so it was critical a transparent communications strategy was put in place;
- if correctly implemented, there should be no detrimental impact for service users, and the new model would help to tackle the challenges being faced;
- timelines and target dates were required for the transition;
- it was queried how the financial challenges would be addressed during the transition period, and what the shorter term impacts might be;
- information was sought, and provided, on the stakeholders for the proposed steering group, whether lessons could be learnt from other Integration Joint Boards, the anticipated duration of the engagement process, and what pressure was being put on the Scottish Government to address the funding challenges in ASC;

- the reasoning behind the proposed change of model was summarised, and reference was made to the representations that had been made to the government in relation to the unique challenges facing ASC in Highland;
- the new integration model provided an opportunity to strengthen the collaboration between the Council and NHS Highland and improve the shift to more community based care;
- the importance of supporting families and unpaid carers through the new model was emphasised;
- with reference to the Scottish Government's suspension of implementation of the national care service bill, it was suggested that the proposals could have had a detrimental impact on ASC; and
- a summary was provided of the planned changes to governance and the anticipated benefits, which included improved access to services. If the proposals were agreed, work would commence to develop timelines and move at pace, though within NHS governance structures, with a further report anticipated in the early 2025, with input from the steering group, and the development of a risk register.

## Decision

The Council **AGREED**:-

- to reconsider the model of the Scheme of Integration, including the option of moving from a Lead Agency Model to a body corporate model;
- that preparatory be undertaken to identify the optimal future integration model in Highland and to make recommendations on modifications to the model currently in place in Highland;
- a strategic Steering Group be created to oversee the required work with representation from both lead agencies including councillor and officer representation from The Highland Council and executive and non-executive director representation from NHS Highland; and
- the approach to joint communications advised in this report, to ensure that all stakeholders were fully appraised of plans as they evolved and had the chance to shape them.

## 8. UK Government Consultation: Electricity Consenting in Scotland Co-chomhairleachadh Riaghaltas na RA: Aontachadh Dealain ann an Alba

There had been circulated Report No. HC/45/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Government consultation sought views on the right to appeal for initiating a challenge to a consenting decision of Scottish Ministers for onshore electricity infrastructure be reduced to 6 weeks (currently 3 months). The proposed response agreed with this timescale and the reason for this was queried as some community groups had highlighted concerns that this would not be sufficient time to submit an appeal. There was a general view amongst Members that 6 weeks to lodge an appeal was not sufficient and the majority of Members were fundamentally opposed to this;
- the proposals contained in the consultation process were designed to make the process for consenting electricity infrastructure in Scotland faster. It was felt that rushed decisions were often poor decisions. Removing the democratic right of Highland Council to call for a public local enquiry was an attempt to

centralise control and undermine the role and responsibilities of the Council. Concerns about double handed consenting could be resolved by decisions being made locally by the Council and not by the Energy Consent Unit;

- one of the arguments for quicker planning decisions was in relation to constraint payments. In 2023 constraint payments to generators were £1.4 billion in the UK and was estimated to rise to £8 billion by 2030. Ofgem should advise energy generators that the network was constrained and if they choose to build extra capacity the constraint payments would be capped. The current system rewarded developers at the expense of consumers;
- constraint payments hit the pockets of many hard working people in the Highlands that faced disproportionate high levels of fuel poverty;
- in the pre-application stage communities needed to be fully involved in order that they could trust the process; and the consultation process required to be properly defined, agreed and funding needed to be available to Community Councils to assist them with responding to major applications. In terms of public inquiries, these were an important part of the planning process and in no circumstances should the automatic right to have an inquiry be removed from local authorities. If implemented this change would have dire consequences for the Highlands;
- the push by the Government to transition to green energy to address climate change and for cheaper energy bills was behind the proposals to speed up the consenting process. The long term view of tackling climate was of utmost importance and local communities should be given all the support the Council could provide in the planning process; and
- it was stressed that the best people to make decisions about matters affecting local communities were local Elected Members.

## Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the officer response set out in Appendix 1 to the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to reflect further points raised at the meeting in the Council's formal response. Changes made to the response would be shared with all Members of the Council.

## 9. Members' Learning and Development Programme Prògram Ionnsachaidh agus Leasachaidh Bhall

**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/46/24 by the Chief Officer, Legal & Corporate Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and to officers for their hard work to prepare the 2025 framework;

- Members were encouraged to participate in the training and briefing sessions as much as possible, as this contributed to the Council's scrutiny and decision-making processes along the way;
- thanks were expressed to the business teams for agreeing to implement shorter Member surveys which would encourage participation;
- Members were also encouraged to attend the all Members event 2025 which provided an opportunity to put forward any learning and development suggestions for future workshops. In this regard, it was suggested that self-care of Members and officers be included as concern was raised that some were working after hours, over weekends, and during recess periods which could impact their health;
- regarding 7.2 of the report, it was highlighted that training and workshops should include adaptation as part of the net zero approach; and
- it was felt that Member training should include courses that provided transferable recognised qualifications in the event that Members had to seek employment out with local government. In this regard it was requested that the Chief Executive provide a report on this to a future relevant committee.

## Decision

The Council:-

- APPROVED** the refreshed Members' Learning and Development Framework;
- APPROVED** the draft Members' Learning and Development Programme for 2025;
- AGREED** the Members' Learning and Development Programme for 2025 be kept under review by the Governance Review Steering Group;
- AGREED** a future report was considered at Council on 11 December 2025;
- AGREED** Committee Chairs, in consultation with Committee Members, establish individual committee learning and development pathways;
- AGREED** to deliver an all Members event in 2025; and
- AGREED** to bring a report to the relevant committee on supporting Members with training qualifications which would support out with Council employment.

## 10. Question Time Àm Ceiste

**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:-**

**Item 10.3 - Mr B Lobban- as a director of Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd**

**Item 10.11 - Mr A Christie – as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland**

**Item 10.11- Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Members Questions and responses received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance.



**Member Questions**

**1. Mr A Christie**

**To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, As Vice Chair of the Redesign Board, the Leader would have been aware that options were being considered to create a staff welfare area which would include a canteen and coffee shop, it was queried what message the Leader had for the children of Inverness Royal Academy and Culloden Academy who had to eat their lunch in the carpark or the street.

In response, it was confirmed that the existing issues in each school would be investigated and programme would be developed to address them.

**2. Mr A Christie**

**To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether assurances had been sought from the Chief Executive that there would be no further significant overpayments to employees.

In response, it was confirmed that this would be looked into with the complexities of paying 10,000 employees being taken into consideration.

**3. Mr J Bruce**

**To the Leader of the Council**

There was no supplementary question.

**4. Mr D Gregg**

**To the Chair of Education Committee**

In terms of a supplementary question, a report to Education Committee was requested to look at how subject availability could be improved across all schools.

In response, the Chair of Education indicated his willingness to look into this.

**5. Mr M Reiss**

**To the Chair, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy Committee**

In terms of a supplementary question, information was sought on the location of the five road sweeper vehicles not mentioned in the original answer.

In response, the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee confirmed that the information would be circulated.

**6. Ms K Willis**

**To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried when special verge locations and the specialist management requirements, including appropriate care of mature trees along roadsides, would be identified in Lochaber.

In response, it was clarified that the roads department did not routinely identify special verges for management but they did work with Nature Scot, the Council's environment team, Community Councils and other interested parties to identify these.

**7. Mr R Stewart**

**To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if the Leader of the Council would take responsibility for the failure of the Academy Street project.

In response, the Leader stated that decisions regarding the project were made by the City of Inverness Area Committee.

**8. Mr A Graham**

**To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if the Leader wished to comment on the usage and low level of income generated by school property lets.

In response, the Leader felt it would be appropriate to review this in the future.

**9. Mrs H Crawford**

**To the Chair of Education Committee**

There was no supplementary question.

**10. Mr P Logue**

**To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if Members would be kept informed as the electric vehicle policy progressed.

In response, it was confirmed that this would be the case.

**11. Mrs I MacKenzie**

**To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if the Council would consider funding the Shopmobility Highland service.

In response, it was said that funding of this nature would need to be considered as part of the Council's budget process.

**12. Dr M Gregson**

**To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if the Leader agreed that the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation was not fit for purpose in terms of rural areas.

In response, the Leader indicated that he had already made contact with the Scottish Government, and officers had been asked to put together a brief in terms of what the Council was doing to mitigate what was in the report and how to corporately move forward.

**13. Mrs J McEwan**

**To the Chair of Health and Social Care**

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if there was a timescale for the completion of the domestic abuse services review.

In response, it was said that the pan-Highland review was in the early stages of the procurement and consultation process. A timescale would be provided once available and a paper would be issued to all Members in due course.

**14. Ms M Smith**

**To the Chair of Communities and Place**

There was no supplementary question.

**15. Mr R MacKintosh**

**To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, given the importance of Highland Council having a presence on social media platforms used to expand communication and engagement with the public, should Highland Council also be looking to depart social media. Police have moved away from the platform called X, previously known as Twitter. Will the Council be planning a move away from this platform also.

In response, it was advised that there were currently no plans to move away from social media platforms.

**16. Mr C Ballance**

**To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, will costs in dealing with waste packaging material being dealt with by the producer rather than Highland Council. Will there be a commitment if money comes into Highland Council, that it goes to waste removal services.

In response, there was no ability to make such an assurance, and this would have to be fed into the budget process between now and March 2025.

**17. Mr D Macpherson****To the Leader of the Council**

In terms of a supplementary question, what pleases you most and least about the report titled "Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Highlands and Islands?"

In response, acknowledgement was made regarding the whole report. There would be a requirement to identify any outstanding issues of concern to people across the Highlands.

**11. Membership of the Council  
Ballrachd na Comhairle**

The Council **NOTED** that, following the By-Election held on 21 November 2024, Mr Andrew Baxter had been elected as a Member of Ward 21 (Fort William and Ardnamurchan).

In this regard, Mr Baxter was welcomed to the Council and responded accordingly.

**12. Membership of Committees etc  
Ballrachd Chomataidhean msaa**

It was **NOTED** that Mr S Mackie had joined the Scottish Liberal Democrats and as a result of the By-Election the political make-up of the Council was as follows:-

SNP – 21 / Highland Independent – 16 / Scottish Liberal Democrats – 15 / Highland Alliance – 7 / Scottish Conservative and Unionist – 6 / Scottish Green Party – 4 / Labour – 2 / Alba – 1 / Non-Aligned - 2.

It was also **NOTED** that the formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees remained the same, 6/4/4/2/2.

Revised Committee membership lists had also been tabled at the meeting and were **AGREED**.

**13. Appointment of Office Bearers  
Cur an Dreuchd Luchd-oifis**

The Council **AGREED** that Mr P Oldham be appointed as Vice Chair of Pensions Committee.

**14. Appointment of Members to the Highland Licensing  
Cur Bhall an Dreuchd gu Comataidh Ceadachd na Gàidhealtachd**

Following the resignation of Mr P Oldham from the Highland Licensing Committee, the Council was asked to appoint a Member from Wards 11-21.

In this regard, nominations were received as follows:-

Cllr K MacLean  
Cllr D McDonald

On a vote being taken, Ms K MacLean received 45 votes and Mr D McDonald received 26 votes, with no abstentions, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**Votes for Ms K MacLean**

Ms S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, 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 T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden Ms M MacCallum, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Ms M Ross, Ms K Willis.

**Votes for Mr D McDonald:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr S Mackie, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair Mr R Stewart.

**Decision**

The Council **AGREED** Ms Kate MacLean be appointed as a Member of the Highland Licensing Committee.

**15. 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 31 October 2024.

**16. Notices of Motion**  
**Brathan Glusaid**

**Transparency Statements: Mr D Gregg declared a connection to item 16.1 as an employee of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare:-**

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

1. Council notes the 46 privately run care homes across the Highlands will not get any reimbursement for costs related to recent National Insurance changes.

Council notes 85% of our care homes already operate at a financial disadvantage due to the National Care Home Contract, which assumes 50 beds operating at 100% capacity.

Council notes the loss of 218 care home beds since 2022, and the distress each of these closures has caused to residents, their families, and local communities.

Council requests the council leader, and the Chair of Health and Social Care Committee, writes to the UK Government

- 1) to request an exemption from recent National Insurance changes for Highland care home providers to avoid additional financial pressures on our already vulnerable care homes,

- 2) to invite the Secretary of State for Scotland to meet Council Group Leaders first hand to discuss the specific circumstances affecting Highland care homes to help develop policy solutions to secure their future

**Signed:** Mr D Gregg                      Mr J Grafton                      Mrs T Robertson                      Mrs J McEwan  
                 Mr M Baird                              Mr A Baxter                              Ms M MacCallum                      Mr A Graham  
                 Mr R Gunn                                  Mr R Gale

**Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:**

This motion is **not** anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council. There will be the requirement of Member/Officer time involved in the preparation of proposed letter and arrangements for the proposed meeting. It is assumed can be managed within existing time/resources.

This financial implication assessment is limited to the direct implications and actions within the motion as worded. Any subsequent implications could only be assessed were there to be any subsequent change, and assessment of implications at that time.

**Integrated Impact Assessment:**

The motion seeks a letter to be written to the UK Government and discussions to take place, in relation to the impact national insurance changes will have on care homes. As a result, there are no anticipated direct impacts as a result of the motion.

During a summary of the Motion, Mr D Gregg indicated that Mr D Fraser had proposed an amendment which he had accepted. Mr Fraser commented that the Motion showed one of the pressures care homes were under. He thanked Mr Gregg for bringing it forward and for accepting his amendment, which was to include care at home as well as care homes.

**Decision**

The Council **AGREED** the amended Motion, as follows:-

Council notes the 46 privately run care homes across the Highlands will not get any reimbursement for costs related to recent National Insurance changes.

Council notes 85% of our care homes already operate at a financial disadvantage due to the National Care Home Contract, which assumes 50 beds operating at 100% capacity.

Council notes the loss of 218 care home beds since 2022, and the distress each of these closures has caused to residents, their families, and local communities.

Council requests the council leader, and the Chair of Health and Social Care Committee, writes to the UK Government

- 1) to request an exemption from recent National Insurance changes for Highland care home providers to avoid additional financial pressures on our already vulnerable care homes,
- 2) to request an exemption from recent National Insurance changes for Highland Care at home providers to avoid additional financial pressures on our already care providers,

- 3) to invite the Secretary of State for Scotland to meet Council Group Leaders and Chair of Health & Social Care first hand to discuss the specific circumstances affecting Care delivery in the Highlands in respect to Highland care homes and Care at Home to help develop policy solutions to secure their future.

## 2. Break up the Highland Council

This Council acknowledges and welcomes the repeated acknowledgement and statements from multiple senior elected members of the Scottish Government, that the Highland Council area is geographically too large. The increasingly frequent statements in support of reviewing the governance arrangements of the Highland Council area, with some going as far as openly supporting breaking up the area into smaller Councils, are welcome support for the unique issue we face.

No amount of good intentions and efforts from this chamber and Council can realistically deliver the best for such a diverse population. The issues we face are structural in nature and were forced upon this area nearly 30 years ago in nothing more than an experiment, with no regard for the needs of the people and communities across the Highlands.

Under current arrangements, we can only do the best within a very flawed system.

Therefore, this Council agrees to take up offer made by several members of the Scottish Government and Parliament to seek a review into what a new local authority and/or governance arrangements would better serve the vast and wide range of needs of our Highland communities. The first steps being the Council Leader formally writing to the Scottish Government to express the agreement made and for Council to make initial steps to capture Member views in more detail with the establishment a workshop and working group for the delivery of local democracy

**Signed:** Mr A Jarvie                      Mr A Baxter                      Mr M Reiss                      Mr R Stewart  
                  Mr L Fraser                      Mr D Macpherson                      Mr A Christie                      Mr S Mackie  
                  Mrs B Jarvie

### Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion is not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council. There will be the requirement of Member/Officer time involved in the preparation of the proposed letter to Scottish Government and preparation for/attendance at the proposed workshop and subsequent analysis. This may be significant. It is assumed this can be managed within existing time/resources, but potentially with implications for other work priorities.

This financial implication assessment is limited to the direct implications and actions within the motion as worded. Any subsequent implications could only be assessed were there to be any subsequent change, and assessment of implications at that time.

### Integrated Impact Assessment:

The motion seeks that the Council writes to the Scottish Government seeking support and sets up a working group for the delivery of local democracy. At this stage, there are no anticipated direct impacts as a result of the motion however any review or work undertaken to review local democracy should consider assessment of impacts as part of that process.

During discussion, Mr Jarvie summarised his motion and the significant changes that had taken place in the economy since the establishment of the Highland Council. He emphasised the challenges that resulted from the large geographic area and called for a review, as detailed.

Ms Willis suggested that remote and rural areas would suffer without being part of a larger Council, and made reference to various significant projects that had been undertaken in Lochaber, including Caol flood protection, the Corran ferry upgrade, and the take-over of Moss Park Care Home. Instead of asking the Scottish Government to break up the Highland Council, she suggested instead undertaking a review of governance and funding of Area Committees.

Some Members spoke in favour of the motion, suggesting the Highland Council covered too large a geographic area, with diverse local challenges, and that local priorities were not being adequately addressed, leading to population decline, housing shortages, centralised decision-making, and lack of economic development. Smaller local authorities could respond better to local needs and ensure decision making was undertaken at a local level. The widely differing needs of an urban centre like Inverness, compared to some of the remote and rural areas of the Highlands, were highlighted.

Other Members referred to the economies of scale that were achieved through being part of the Highland Council, and that areas with low populations would receive proportionately lower funding, which could lead to reduced services in remote and rural areas. It was suggested the current Area Committee structure was the best means of ensuring effective local democracy and a review of this system should be undertaken, while remaining under the broader Highland Council umbrella.

Thereafter, Mr Jarvie, seconded by Mr Baxter, **MOVED** the motion as detailed, with the following addition from Mr Rosie: 'Further, looking at the potential future outcomes which could come as a result and the desire to be proactive, a report will come to a future meeting outlining the costs and opportunities of a Commission on Highland Democracy being established. As well as the possibility of Highland citizens being involved in the final decision via a vote on the potential options.'

As an **AMENDMENT**, Ms K Willis, seconded by Mr B Lobban, moved to replace text in the motion with the following: This Council acknowledges that Highland is geographically very large. It is important that Council recognises the importance of devolved governance to Area Committees in order to fully represent our diverse local communities and to deliver the support and services that people of the Highlands, quite rightly, demand. Therefore, this Council agrees to review the governance and funding arrangements of Area Committees so that they may better serve the needs of their local communities. The first step being to capture Member views in more detail with the establishment of a workshop and working group for the delivery of local democracy.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 31 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 37 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-



**For the Motion**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter , Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Ms L Dundas, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr M Gregson, Mr M Green, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr S Mackie, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Mr W MacKay, Ms I MacKenzie, Mr A Mackintosh, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D MacPherson, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

**For the Amendment**

Mrs S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr C Birt, Mr R Bremner, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr S Coghill, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Kraft, Mr D Fraser, Mr J Finlayson, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms E Knox, Mr S Kennedy, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Ms K MacLean, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

**Abstentions**

Mr J Edmondson, Ms S Fanet

**Decision**

The Council **AGREED** the amendment as detailed above.

3. As we continue to look at public transport options to address Climate Change it is time we considered trains.

Promises made over the years have not been fulfilled.

The Far North Line takes up to 40 minutes longer than it did in 2000. If running late this service can be held for 40 minutes at Muir of Ord.

Highland Main services to Edinburgh and Glasgow no longer arrive to suit the working day- a service that was introduced in 2000 to aid business. Transferring waste services to rail will affect capacity on the line.

Inverness to Aberdeen improvements to reduce travel time to 2 hours have not been completed.

The Highlands must have fit for purpose railway connections if we are to reduce the number of vehicles on our roads. Rail services that enable our business community to be connected to wider markets.

As a council we must become more vocal to ensure we have connections suitable for the economic changes we anticipate as the Green Freeport and all associated business comes to Highland.

I seek support for a discussion session with all interested parties to ensure we bring these issues to the fore.

<b>Signed:</b>	Mrs T Robertson	Mr A Graham	Mrs J McEwan	Mr J Grafton
	Mr D Gregg	Mr M Baird	Mrs A MacLean	Mr J Edmondson
	Ms M MacCallum	Mr R Gunn		

## **Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:**

This Motion was not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council. There would be the requirement of Member/Officer time involved in arranging and progressing proposed discussions, which it was assumed could be managed within existing time/resources.

## **Integrated Impact Assessment:**

The Motion sought a discussion session to explore issues surrounding rail services in the north. As a result, there were not anticipated to be any direct impacts as a result of the Motion.

Prior to discussion, Mrs T Robertson confirmed that she had accepted an amendment by Ms K Willis and this was shared with Members.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was asked if all routes within the Highlands could be included and it was confirmed that this would be the case;
- this would be welcomed by many users of the rail network;
- if Members chose to support the Motion, the Leader would be happy to raise it with the Minister of Transport;
- the current train service was poor, with outdated carriages, and the lack of facilities on long journeys was concerning;
- connectivity was important and it was felt that single lines contributed to delays;
- an appropriate conversation with Network Rail might be beneficial and Members welcomed further discussion;
- the Fort William train offered transport into the town which could include school transport;
- it was felt the railway should be considered as a nationally important strategic asset; and
- provision for those travelling with disabilities was questioned and better provision for bikes was requested.

Thereafter, the Council **AGREED** the amended Motion as follows:-

“As we continue to look at public transport options to address Climate Change it is time we considered trains.

Promises made over the years have not been fulfilled.

The Far North Line takes up to 40 minutes longer than it did in 2000. If running late this service can be held for 40 minutes at Muir of Ord.

Highland Main services to Edinburgh and Glasgow no longer arrive to suit the working day- a service that was introduced in 2000 to aid business. Dualling the Highland Main Line from Inverness would significantly increase capacity and service frequency on the line.

Inverness to Aberdeen improvements to reduce travel time to 2 hours have not been completed.

The HITRANS “Fort William Opportunities Around Rail” report has identified numerous opportunities to improve train services on the West Highland Line to Fort William and Mallaig. We need action to take these forward.

The Highlands must have fit for purpose railway connections if we are to reduce the number of vehicles on our roads. Rail services that enable our business community to be connected to wider markets.

As a Council we must become more vocal to ensure we have connections suitable for the economic changes we anticipate as the Green Freeport and all associated business comes to Highland.

I seek support for a discussion session with all interested parties to ensure we bring these issues to the fore”.

4. The Council notes that Education officials have been tasked with producing a review for the next Education Committee, in light of the 2024 SQA results. Whilst recognising that officials and school staff are working at a challenging time, this Council asks for thorough and clear reporting on the implications of the following:

- The removal of Principal Teacher posts from many Primary schools
- A substandard school estate
- Inadequate provision for children with Special Educational and Support Needs
- Disappointing Senior phase attainment, including deteriorating standards in 10 out of 15 key standards
- Prevailing Job insecurity for teachers and assistants
- Inadequate support for Newly Qualified Teachers
- Persistence with a ‘No School Exclusions’ policy in the face of disruptive pupil behaviour
- Continuing poor attendance levels
- Inadequate curricular and syllabus support
- Inadequate transition data across ASGs
- Failure to recruit and retain school staff at all levels and in all localities

**Signed:** Dr M Gregson      Mrs H Crawford      Mrs B Jarvie

### **Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:**

This motion was not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council. There would be the requirement of Officer time involved in the preparation of proposed reports. This might be significant given the number of topics listed. It was assumed this could be managed within existing time/resources, but potentially with implications for other work priorities.

### **Integrated Impact Assessment:**

The motion sought that the review to be undertaken as a result of SQA results considers the implications of specific factors. As a result, there were no anticipated direct impacts as a result of the motion.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Highland school estate was sub-standard with a third of schools being categorised as poor in terms of building quality and many schools such as St Clements School, Charleston Academy, Culloden Academy, Park Primary and

- Dunvegan Primary in urgent need of refurbishment or replacement;
- there was a lack of support for children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) as the number of ASN staff had decreased while the number of pupils with identified support needs had increased. It was suggested that this could have had an impact on worsening pupil behaviour;
  - there had been an increase of violence and reports of incidents of knife crime in schools, putting the safety of staff and pupils at risk;
  - attention was drawn to the low levels of job security for newly qualified teachers, the high number of teacher vacancies, the large number of staff absences within education and learning and poor pupil attendance figures;
  - clearer information on the problems faced by the Education Service was requested;
  - the decision to remove Principal Teacher posts in Primary Schools was criticised;
  - disappointment was expressed at the poor performance in numeracy in Primary 1, 4 and 7, and the growing attainment gap between the most and least deprived pupils;
  - poor levels of attainment were causing Highland pupils to be at a disadvantage when applying for university;
  - the need for a balanced view on the current situation was emphasised, while there were a lot of areas within Education that needed improvement, there were areas where improvements were being made and many achievements that were worth celebrating;
  - the close links between the school and community demonstrated by the success of events such as the Dingwall Academy Christmas Fair and Christmas Concert were commended;
  - it was highlighted that attainment figures nationally were lower than expected and that attainment in Highland had improved in several areas;
  - all permanent teaching and non-teaching posts were advertised as such and a review of staffing was carried out each spring where all temporary posts were assessed;
  - in reference to the condition of the school estate, it was highlighted that significant funds from the Highland Investment Plan would be spent on building and improving schools;
  - the total spend on Additional Support for Learning in Highland was one of the highest in the country;
  - all probationary teachers were supported by a probationer officer and had a dedicated induction and learning programme as well as support from a mentor within their school;
  - Highland did not have a no exclusion policy and that the power to exclude pupils was devolved to senior management within a school;
  - there was concern nationally about the fall in school attendance levels since 2019 and officers had been working with pupils and staff across Highland to get attendance back to pre-pandemic levels and a strategic plan for improving attendance was in place;
  - disappointment was expressed at the number of negative statements and lack of understanding around Education issues and it was suggested that non Members of the Education Committee attended future meetings of the Committee to gain a better understanding of these issues;
  - it was suggested that many of the points raised would have been best raised at Education Committee or with local Education Officers;
  - the improvement in early-years language was highlighted;
  - attention was drawn to two pupils who had achieved outstanding marks in their Higher and Advanced Higher exams, and the importance of celebrating young people's achievements;

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- the hard work of Education staff was also commended;
- the Education Service had held several workshops for Members;
- it was important to consider ways of encouraging teachers to apply for jobs in Highland; and
- the issues mentioned in the Motion were already being addressed and reports would come to the Education Committee at the appropriate time.

Thereafter, Dr M Gregson, seconded by Ms H Crawford, **MOVED** the Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr D Millar, moved that the Education Committee would continue to include in its agendas, reports that were strategically within the remit of the Committee and relevant to the work of the Committee and which were not politically motivated.

These reports would continue to be brought at times during the calendar year when they are most appropriate in consultation with the Chair of Education, Members of the Education Committee and in consultation with relevant Education Officers.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 26 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 40 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Motion:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

### **For the Amendment:**

Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, 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 E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

### **Abstentions:**

Mr S Coghill

### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** that the Education Committee would continue to include in its agendas, reports that were strategically within the remit of the Committee and relevant to the work of the Committee and which were not politically motivated. These reports would continue to be brought at times during the calendar year when they were most appropriate in consultation with the Chair of Education, Members of the Education Committee and in consultation with relevant Education Officers.

**The following motions were tabled but not debated in accordance with standing order 12.2**

## 5. Women's Aid

Highland Council notes:

- 1) The valuable work done by the Women's Aid groups across the Highlands in helping to keep our communities safe
- 2) That more than 2300 reports of domestic abuse were recorded by Police Scotland in 2022-2023
- 3) That although the vast majority of domestic abuse cases affect women and children men can also be subjected to domestic abuse
- 4) The physical and emotional needs of men and women and children while coping and recovering from domestic abuse are not the same

The Highland Council are urged to continue its financial support for all of the Women's Aid groups in the Highlands.

The Highland Council is urged to rethink the proposed commissioning strategy that would result in a 'gender neutral' service run by a single contractor across the Highlands. This strategy would lead to a centralised service unresponsive to the needs of domestic abuse survivors across the Highland area.

This would lead to closure of Women's Aid groups across the Highlands and reduce the level of safety for the survivors of domestic abuse.

**Signed:** Mr A MacKintosh    Dr M Gregson    Mr R Stewart    Mrs B Jarvie  
Mrs I MacKenzie    Mrs J McEwan

6. I urge that this chamber supports an immediate increase in ASN support to relieve some of the multiple stresses across our schools. Whilst we request the newly appointed Chief Officer of Education to fully engage and address the many inherited issues with empathy and a commonsense supportive approach.

**Signed:** Mrs B Jarvie    Dr M Gregson    Mrs H Crawford    Mr R Stewart  
Mr A Jarvie    Mrs I MacKenzie

## 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 31 October 2024 as contained in the Volume which had 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:-

Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee	4 November 2024
Nairnshire Committee	4 November 2024
Housing and Property Committee	6 November 2024
Climate Change Committee	7 November 2024
Caithness Committee	11 November 2024
Dingwall, Seaforth Committee	11 November 2024
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh Committee	12 November 2024

Lochaber Area Committee	12 November 2024
Sutherland County Committee	12 November 2024
Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee	13 November 2024
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	14 November 2024
City of Inverness Area Committee	18 November 2024
Gaelic Committee	20 November 2024
Comataidh na Gaidhlig	20 An T-Samhain 2024
Education Committee	21 November 2024
Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee	25 November 2024
Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee	25 November 2024
Communities and Place Committee	27 November 2024
Audit Committee	28 November 2024
Corporate Resources Committee	5 December 2024
Pensions Committee (Special)	6 December 2024

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

**Climate Change Committee, 7 November 2024**

**\*Starred Item 4: Net Zero Programme Update**

The Council **AGREED** the approval of the project brief templates in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council’s Net Zero Action Plan.

**Starred Item 10: The Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) Delivery Plan Update**

The Council **AGREED** the approval of the draft LHEES Delivery Plan Strategic Approach set out at Appendix 1 of the report, and the draft Delivery Plan contained in Appendix 2 of the report.

**\*Starred Item 11: Innovation Funding**

The Council **AGREED** the approval of the proposal to develop a more focused and consistent approach to bid writing around the Net Zero agenda supported by the climate and energy team as part of the innovation and investment workstream in the Council’s Our Future Highland Delivery Plan.

**Lochaber Area Committee, 12 November 2024**

**\*Starred Item 6: Fort William Common Good Asset Register**

The Council **AGREED** to the:-

- iii. publication of the Fort William Common Good Asset Register; and
- iv. re-classification of the properties included on the asset register and to the creation of the Fort William Common Good Fund.

**Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee, 13 November 2024**

**\*Starred Item 11: Champions Update**

The Council **AGREED** that Ms Sarah Atkin be appointed as a Children’s Champion.

Audit Committee, 28 November 2024

## **\*Starred Item 8: Audit Committee Annual Report 2023/24**

The Council **AGREED** to acknowledge that the necessary assurances had been provided by the Audit Committee to demonstrate that it had fulfilled its purpose and could demonstrate its impact for 2023/24.

## **Corporate Resources Committee, 5 December 2024**

### **\*Starred Item 6.a: Corporate Revenue Monitoring to 30 September 2024**

The Council **AGREED** that further consideration would be given to the remit of the Corporate Resources Committee and a report brought back to a future meeting of the Council.

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

- i. Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 23 September 2024 (approved by the Board on 20 November 2024) which were **NOTED**;
- ii. Community Planning Board held on 20 September 2024 (approved by the Board on 4 December 2024) which were **NOTED**;
- iii. Recruitment Panel held on 28 October 2024 (approved by the Panel on 19 November 2024) and 19 November 2024 which were **NOTED**; and
- iv. Redesign Board held on 20 November 2024 which were **APPROVED**.

The meeting concluded at 5.55pm.



**The Highland Council  
No.1 2025/2026**

Minutes of Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 13 February 2025 at 2pm.

**Bill Lobban in the Chair**

**Present:**

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

**In Attendance:**

Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate  
 Assistant Chief Executive – Place  
 Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance  
 Chief Officer – Housing and Communities  
 Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead - Housing & Building Maintenance  
 Joint Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms S Atkin, Mrs H Crawford, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Ms E Knox, Mr P Logue, Mr A Mackintosh, Ms L Niven, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair and Ms K Willis.

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

The Council **NOTED** that there were not any Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

**2. Notices of Amendment  
Brath Atharrachaidh**

There had been circulated an extract of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing and Property Committee of 29 January 2025.

With reference to these Minutes, the following Notice of Amendment had been received in accordance with Standing Order 13 –

“We the undersigned, being Elected Members of the Highland Council, hereby seek alteration of the decision of 29 January 2025 by the Housing and Property Committee to increase Council House 2025/26 rents by 8% by deleting expenditure line for Capital Investment Funded from Current Revenue £1.346 million, relating to “additional funding for capital investment in energy efficiency and external fabric from rent increase”, and make corresponding reduction in House Rents Income to £69.717 million. Reducing the rent increase for 25/26 to approximately 6%”.

<b>Signed:</b> Mr A Graham	Mr A Baxter	Mr M Reiss	Mr R Gale
Dr M Gregson	Mr R Stewart	Mr A Christie	Mr M Baird
Mrs A MacLean	Mrs J McEwan	Mr J Edmondson	Mrs L Saggors
Mrs I MacKenzie	Mr J McGillivray	Ms M MacCallum	

In this connection, there had been re-circulated Report No HP/01/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In support of the Notice of Amendment, it was stated this was not the appropriate time to increase rents by 8% and the resultant 20% increase over three years was unacceptable. The proposal would cause hardship for many tenants whose income would not increase by 8% next year. A lower increase would support tenants and not impact on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) service enhancements such as cyclical maintenance, electrical inspections, and level of maintenance in amenity areas. As stated, the cost would be met by deleting £1.346m from the budget for energy efficiency and external fabric, affecting around 130 properties, noting it was unfair for the full cost to be placed on all tenants. It should also be noted the Housing Capital Programme included approximately £17m for such works. In addition, there was an underspend of £1.3m on efficiency works in the current year and £7m in the previous year and therefore there was a clear track record in this regard. In terms of the Council's net zero strategy, the shift to net zero should not be at the expense of social housing tenants.

Thereafter, it was highlighted that given the current operating model, the only significant source of income for the HRA was via rent increases and Council house rents in Highland were amongst the lowest in Scotland and significantly below housing association levels. Rents had been low with minimal increases for many years and this had consequences for the sustainability of the HRA and ability to invest in and improve properties. A key message from tenants was around improving the housing stock through windows and door upgrades and installing insulation and an 8% rent increase would allow energy efficiency improvements to be accelerated all of which would

reduce tenants' energy bills. It was important to note that 70% of tenant responses to the rent consultation indicated support for a rent increase and approximately 61% of Council tenants were in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit and as such received support with their rents. The Housing and Property's Committee decision to agree an 8% rent increase was therefore measured in terms of the impact on tenants and balanced against the need to create an efficient and sustainable housing estate

Further key comments included the following:

- whilst 48% of responses to the Tenant Participation survey had supported an 8% rise, this was likely because it was the lowest option, with no lower alternative offered;
- tenant representatives had advised that while they understood the rationale for the increase, tenants were not benefiting as 43% of rental income was used to repay loan charges;
- successive governments had failed to deal with the historical burden placed on local authorities due to loan charges and despite previous and ongoing lobbying activity this issue was unlikely to be resolved;
- as the Council had no control over the above, it should therefore review all other areas within the HRA to reduce costs, such as supervision and management costs, noting these were significantly above private sector charges;
- the Council could not hold energy companies to account for their charges as this was a reserved matter handled by the UK Government and lobbying would continue on this issue;
- whilst Council rents may be comparatively low, the Highlands had the highest poverty levels and lowest wages compared to other areas and the wider poverty agenda had to be considered as highlighted by the Joseph Rowantree Foundation and others;
- the impact assessments carried out on the proposed rent increase did not adequately reflect the impacts and the need also for a gender based approach to be taken;
- many tenants, including the working poor and elderly, were already facing financial pressures and a higher increase may push them into crisis in a climate of food inflation, rising consumer price index and energy bills, and lead to increased use of foodbanks and other sources of support;
- the projected underspend on the HRA budget in 2024/25 provided an opportunity to support the worst off in communities by agreeing a lower rent increase whilst maintaining investment in the stock;
- a higher rent increase may impact significantly on any pension aged winter heating payments;
- limiting rent increases was imperative to supporting tenants in rural areas where costs were significantly higher and to address issues of depopulation;
- the proposed rent increase was likely to be exacerbated further by increases in Council tax and water rates;
- the retrofit of Council houses was already delivering significant savings for tenants on their energy bills and it was important this programme continued into the future;
- a lower increase would allow the retrofit programme to continue and highlighting challenges in spending additional rent monies on schemes given issues with contractor availability and the supply chain;

- even with a higher increase, Council rents would continue to be proportionate and represent good value and would enable timescales for repairs to be improved, help tackle void rent loss, support homelessness and ensure homes were fit for purpose;
- rent increases had been limited two years previously to protect tenants in the middle of a fuel and cost of living crisis and it was stated then the position with repairs and maintenance and energy efficiency would have to be recovered;
- a 7.95% rent increase had been agreed for the current financial year with no notice of amendment having been brought forward; and
- the Council's investment in energy efficiency would include works to over 900 houses with the potential to boost this number further, delivering significant benefits for tenants.

Thereafter, Mr A Graham, seconded by Dr M Gregson, **MOVED** the Notice of Amendment as detailed in the papers.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, seconded by Mr R MacKintosh, moved to agree the recommendations agreed at Housing & Property Committee of an 8% rent increase for 2025/26.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 25 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 37 votes and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Motion:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmundson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Ms M Smith, Mr R Stewart.

### **For the Amendment:**

Mr C Ballance, 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, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, 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 G MacKenze, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr W Mackay, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Ms M Ross.

### **Decision**

The Council **AGREED** the recommendations agreed at Housing & Property Committee of an 8% rent increase for 2025/26.

### **3. Membership of Committees etc Ballrachd Chomataidhean msaa**

The Council **NOTED** that Mr S Coghill had joined the Highland Alliance and the political make-up of the Council was as follows:-

SNP – 21 / Highland Independent – 16 / Scottish Liberal Democrats – 15 / Highland Alliance – 8 / Scottish Conservative and Unionist – 6 / Scottish Green Party – 4 / Labour – 2 / Alba – 1 / Non-Aligned - 1.

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

The meeting concluded at 3.10pm.

**The Highland Council**  
**No. 1 2024/2025**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 6 March 2025 at 9.30am.

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

**Present:**

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

**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

**Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

There were no apologies for absence.

The Convener referred to the Council Meeting on 10 March 2022 where the Freedom of the Highlands had been awarded to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in recognition of his courage and leadership in defending his country. Ukraine was still resisting the Russian invasion of its country despite daily attacks and the Council unanimously reaffirmed its support for the President and the people of Ukraine.

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

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

Item 3 – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs J McEwan, Mr P Oldham and Mr R Stewart.

**3. Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2027/28 and Revenue Budget and Council Tax 2025/26  
Plana Ionmhasail Meadhan-ùine 2025/26 gu 2027/28 agus Buidseat Teachd-a-steach agus Cis Comhairle 2025/26**

**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, General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau, a Non-executive Director of Inverness Business Improvement District, a Trustee/Non-executive Director of Eden Court Theatre and as a parent of a child in secondary education**

**Mr D Gregg – as a Board member of Inverness Citizens Advice Bureau and an employee of NHS Highland**

**Mr A Jarvie - as an employee of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland**

**Mrs J McEwan – as a Non-executive Director of a Citizens Advice Bureau**

**Mr P Oldham – as an owner of a campervan but who did not routinely park in the Council's invitation to pay car parks**

**Mr R Stewart - as he had a family member who was employed by the Highland Council**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/01/25 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

Prior to debate the Head of Corporate Finance, as S95 Officer, informed Members that the report was based on a three-year medium-term planning approach. He outlined the various factors which had influenced the budget and which included Westminster and Scottish Government budgets, inflation and cost pressures such as National Insurance increases. He gave an assurance that the report and recommendations were set out to allow the Council to fulfil its legal obligations regarding the setting of a balanced budget and Council Tax.

In moving the recommendations, the Leader of the Council acknowledged that financially challenging times continued across the country. Initial budget considerations were that there would be a flat cash settlement but there had also been a general uplift of 2.3%, a move which was welcomed. However, as already referred to, the Council needed to address the increase in Employers' National Insurance contributions, a pressure of just over £9m. The Scottish Government had increased the initial funding of Employers' National Insurance contributions to local authorities to 60% which left the Council with a pressure of approximately £2.7m. This pressure had been absorbed by other means rather than, as some other local authorities had done, passing it on to communities.

Turning to Council Tax, every effort had been made to keep this to a minimum and the proposed increase was therefore 7%, 5% of which was to deliver a balanced budget and 2% to be ringfenced to deliver the Highland Investment Plan (HIP). This meant Highland Council could potentially have the second lowest increase in Council Tax in Scotland. In addition, referring to previously agreed Reserves Strategy to use non-earmarked Reserves for the three-year period 2024-2027, the proposed budget now no longer needed the use of non-earmarked Reserves. Consequently, this would result in a more financially sustainable Council for the future and ensured it had secure, robust, financial and effective management.

Consultation on the budget had taken place over 18 months. A programme of investment had continued which sought to deliver on representations made by communities as well as the need to reduce, redesign, reallocate or increase efficiency of service delivery so that unnecessary costs could be reduced or eliminated. The intention was to protect as many jobs as possible and to avoid redundancies but where savings might impact on positions, vacancies would be managed and positions and structures redesigned. It was hoped, however, that the budget would create over 100 jobs throughout Highland to deliver improved service and support to communities.

The budget would continue to support the delivery of the HIP, the Social Value Charter and the Highland Housing Challenge. Investment in roads infrastructure would also continue with an increased level of over £20m of capital investment. Investment too was planned for schools and an update of the School Investment programme was to be considered at the next Full Council.

Other proposals included Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision; improving and implementing short break respite hubs for families in Caithness, Skye and Inverness; the establishment of a Poverty and Equalities Commission for the Highlands to address the £70m of unclaimed benefit; continued investment in Community Transport; delivering mid-market homes for rent; shared investment in Renewable Energy; setting up the Repair the Highland Challenge Fund; investing in Countryside Access Rangers; investing in teacher capacity to release time for planning and development; and freezing bereavement charges, school meal charges and school let charges.

In conclusion, he referred to the continued commitment to working with partners, including High Life Highland and NHS Highland, so as to invest in the health and wellbeing of communities.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to his intention to move an amendment, the details of which had been circulated to Members. He agreed that the proposed budget was a good budget but the amendment would sharpen it, provide clarification



and suggest ideas for consideration. It was important measures put forward were fair and transparent and cognisance had been taken of the views of others. The increase in the budget was welcomed and this could go some way to reverse the cuts of previous years. However, he referred to the success of participatory budgeting and this would engage communities with the process. Nevertheless, an increase of 7% was deemed acceptable if the proposals detailed in the amendment were accepted. It would also demonstrate that parties from various sides of the Chamber could come together.

Highland had its challenges in terms of its geography and its remote and isolated communities where transport was essential. In addition, the issues around educational attainment, adult social care, depopulation, poverty and the environment were well known. The amendment sought to address these challenges. For example, to improve attainment and in recognising that Education was the passport to the future, the following were being put forward: the provision of business support to Head Teachers freeing them up to concentrate on the curriculum; a Sixth Form College proposal that had been welcomed by young people; Subject Lead Teachers; and an ASN study. Looking to improve the countryside a zero tolerance to littering in the countryside, abandoned vehicles and dog fouling was proposed together with empowering Rangers so that they too could impose fines. The increases on the Corran ferry were being limited and a study on buses was sought. It was also important to promote Highland as a place to invest, work, live and remain in and this in turn would address depopulation. However, turning to the Poverty and Equalities Commission, while the ethos of the proposal was generally accepted, the allocation of £80k for a Chair and Consultant fees gave concern.

The Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Group also referred to his intention to move an amendment, the details of which had also been circulated to Members. His proposal sought to deliver real results, stronger communities, thriving businesses and protecting places that were cherished with a proposed Council Tax increase of only 3%, the lowest in Scotland. This would ensure families retained more money while still securing high quality local services. It prioritised efficient governance, smarter spending and delivering maximum value for money. It would deliver a more efficient, dynamic and a community-focused Council which invested in people, infrastructure and a sustainable future.

The proposal put forward included the following: free school meals for every primary school pupil in Highland; free on-street parking on Saturdays to encourage local football; maximising the value of surplus Council properties; the reinstatement of Council Rangers with enforcement powers to ensure responsible behaviour; reducing middle management by 5% over two years, through natural attrition, so resources were reallocated where they were needed; and a capped approach to fares of increases of 3%.

The Labour Group also intended to put forward an amendment, a copy of which was provided to Members at the start of the meeting. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the rise of unacceptable behaviour by pupils and parents, frequent changes in curriculum and examinations, lack of adequate resources and changes in management arrangements and work practices had led to a substantial increase in teacher stress and resultant absences. Early intervention was needed by managers to address sickness absence, to offer support and to ensure that changes in working practice or conditions which might assist in reducing absences were implemented as soon as practical.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- Officers were thanked by all parties for their hard work, assistance and advice in the lead up to Budget meeting;
- the invitation by the Administration to offer collaboration with the budget had been accepted by the Scottish Green Party and they welcomed the poverty and environmental approach, especially the Repair the Highland Challenge Fund which would go towards establishing a network of repair and reuse initiatives throughout Highland;
- this was a transformational budget in the current economic climate providing long term financial resilience and capital investment in vital infrastructure. Investment in the Highlands and adopting a strategic approach to sustainability was crucial to drive economic growth and to benefit communities across Highland;
- it was the culmination of reports to Council and Member briefings. It also met the Audit Scotland recommendation of not using Reserves;
- some welcomed the Poverty and Equalities Commission and there were calls for a Members' workshop to help direct the scope of the Commission. £870k was to be invested lifting families out of poverty and putting money back into the pockets of those most needing it, thus also benefiting the Highland economy. However, others contended that there were already organisations – such as CAB – which already provided this service. The proposal was to employ nine welfare officers but, by the time they were recruited and trained, the £870k would be gone. It was suggested that the establishment of such a Commission would in fact be simply another Council Quango. There was concern about the remuneration of the Chair and it was contended much of this work had already been done through the Council's previous Poverty Working Group;
- cuts over the years had affected service provision;
- strengthening planning enforcement was welcomed;
- funding for the ecology strategy would enable it to be enacted;
- investment in public transport, renewables, grass cutting and roads was well received;
- ASN provision had been enhanced. Pupils could attend school with their peers but there was provision for them to remove themselves if and when they struggled;
- the HIP would see new schools being built and with the £4.3m of added investment for education it was a positive time of change. It would consolidate the journey of improvement, strengthen the support for pupils and teachers, support those pupils most affected by poverty, develop leadership capacity building and increase teacher capacity. With falling rolls and the difficulties of teacher recruitment it also provided an opportunity to look at how staff were deployed;
- the HIP had already generated £3.3m in income and this could be used for direct service provision and investment;
- the Opposition budget looked to spend £500k on feasibility studies and an addition £1.3m on additional management layers in education, £850k on three super Head Teachers, £500k on Business Managers and a Sixth Form College in Inverness. However, with UHI, it was argued that the Sixth Form College was unnecessary. Others contended that a Sixth Form College would ease the transition between school to university and would enable pupils to concentrate on specific subjects;

- the return of Access Rangers was welcomed and would ensure visitors to Highland would have a better experience. As they would now have enforcement rights they could stop illegal activity, look after the long-distance routes and ensure they were properly maintained, benefiting the rural communities along the way;
- pensioners living in rural areas faced increased costs and a 7% increase in Council Tax would detrimentally impact them further. For those in Council properties, an 8% rent increase had already been agreed - all this in light of only a 4.9% increase in the state pension;
- the Administration budget included 0.3% efficiency savings and this would perhaps suggest that the Administration believed the Council was therefore 99.7% efficient;
- there was a disconnection between the Highland Council and the business community and Third Sector. However, the purchase of D&E coaches had been well received and had been seen as the Council working in a more commercial manner;
- the lack of transport was one of the main drivers of depopulation and community transport was desperately needed in Lochaber;
- whilst the budget proposals for the Corran Ferry were understandable, given the decades of underfunding, there was concern at the 10% increase in fares. Those living on the Ardnamurchan peninsula had no choice but to use the ferry and this above inflation increase would detrimentally affect them and local businesses;
- the investment in care was welcomed;
- a call was made to also provide a short break respite hub in Fort William and an assurance was provided that respite provision would be available throughout Highland. The provision of respite meant that more young people were able to remain with their families;
- referring to Community Services, having listened to the constructive criticism at last year's budget, there would be no uplift for burial lairs, cremation services and brown bin garden waste collection. Cognisance had also been taken of the complaints regarding the lack of grass cutting during the 2024 growing season and this year's grass cutting season had therefore been increased. Furthermore, rather than the Council's fleet having to be transported to a central location for repair, mobile mechanics were to be employed who could repair vehicles in situ. Recycling had been improved and these appeared to have been well received by communities. As a result, £500k of grant funding had been received from the Scottish Government and it was hoped this would encourage local communities to come forward with their own recycling projects. Nairn itself would be bringing forth a state-of-the-art Repair/Reuse facility;
- delivering housing would in turn provide a future revenue stream for Highland Council. It would also help getting working people back to Highland;
- a call was made for an enhancement of Ward Discretionary Funds;
- some questioned the increase in funding from the Scottish Government a year from an election;
- it was suggested that the Council Tax was an unfair tax and needed to be revamped;
- the provision of universal free school meals would generate a saving of £40 per month for families and would remove the current stigma. The Administration was encouraged to consider this;
- appreciation was expressed for retaining the funding commitment for the real-time online mapping for Electricity Generation Transmission and Storage Projects across Highland;

- £400k would make a big difference in improving public spaces; and
- the good nature of debate of the Budget was commended.

Following summing up by the Leader of the Council and the movers of the amendments, the Council proceeded to the vote as follows:-

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

As a third **AMENDMENT**, Mr A MacKintosh, seconded by Mr M Gregson, moved the amendment relating to the management of stress in schools.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 43 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 28 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Motion:**

Ms S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, 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 E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

### **For the Amendment:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mrs H Crawford, Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

**Abstentions:** Ms M Smith, Mr S Coghill.

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

As a second **AMENDMENT**, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mrs I MacKenzie, moved the amendment as detailed in their alternative budget proposals as circulated.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 55 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 12 votes, with 6 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

### **For the Motion:**

Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Edmondson, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr P Logue, Mr D Louden, Ms M MacCallum, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R

MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr S Mackie, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

**For the Amendment:**

Mr J Bruce, Mrs H Crawford, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr M Reiss, Mrs L Siggers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr J McGillivray

**Abstentions:**

Mr A Baxter, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Grafton, Dr M Gregson, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Smith.

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

As a first **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A Graham, moved that schedule AC1 through to AC13 be approved as changes to the recommendations and the necessary funding and financial adjustments be made in line with the summary sheet, as previously circulated to all Members.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 43 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 22 votes, with 8 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the Motion:**

Ms S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, 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 E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

**For the Amendment:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr S Mackie, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M Smith.

**Abstentions:**

Mr J Bruce, Mrs H Crawford, Dr M Gregson, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs L Siggers, Mr R Stewart, Mrs B Jarvie.

**Decision**

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the budget context, information, assumptions and risks, as set out within the report and provided by the Section 95 Officer;
- ii. **AGREED** the three-year package of new and additional budget saving proposals put forward by the Council Administration as set out at Annex 5 to the report;

- iii. **AGREED** the package of budget pressures and new burdens as set out on Annex 2 to the report;
- iv. **AGREED** the growth and investment funding proposed by the Council Administration as set out on Annex 4 to the report;
- v. **AGREED** to the Partner Funding arrangements relating to NHS Highland, High Life Highland and Early Learning and Childcare partners as set out in section 9 of the report;
- vi. **NOTED** the updated position relating to reserves and taking account of the budget proposals and recommendations within the report (Annex 6 of the report);
- vii. **AGREED** in relation to Council Tax, a 7% increase for 2025/26, represented by a 5% core increase to balance the budget for the year plus 2% earmarked for capital investment through the [Highland Investment Plan](#), with details of the resulting Council Tax as shown in Annex 7 to the report;
- viii. **NOTED** the indicative assumptions on Council Tax for 2026/27 and 2027/28 as per Annex 7 to the report, with these subject to future review and formal decision as part of annual budget setting; and
- ix. **AGREED** the proposed Revenue Budget for 2025/26 as set out within the report and on Annex 3 to the report.

The meeting ended at 2.10pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held **remotely** on Monday, 20 January 2025 at 10.00 am

### **Present:**

Mr R Gunn  
Mr A Jarvie  
Mr S Mackie  
Ms J McEwan

Mr M Reiss  
Mr K Rosie  
Mr W Mackay

### **In attendance:**

Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager  
Ms A Jansson, Interim Chief Officer Education, Early Years and Primary  
Mr J MacKay, Amenity Services Manager  
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager  
Mr E Marsh, Repairs Manager  
Mr C Sutherland, Principal Repairs Officer  
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager

### **Also in attendance:**

Station Commander G Cringles, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

**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 R Gunn in the Chair**

### **Business**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr R Bremner.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

Items 15: Ms J McEwan & Mr W Mackay (Transparency Statements)

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report  
Aithisg Dèanadail Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No CC/01/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Service be thanked for the good work undertaken in the area and on the open day event held in Thurso. The Station Commander confirmed he would follow up on the potential for a similar event to be held in Wick;

- further clarity was sought and provided on the Service's policy not to respond to unwanted fire alarm signals from commercial business and workplace premises unless a fire had been confirmed;
- the Service be commended on the number of home fire safety visits conducted in the area and highlighting the importance of this preventative work;
- an update was sought and provided on the level of cover Thurso Fire Station was providing to the north coast of Sutherland and the ongoing work around recruitment and joint mobilisation in this area; and
- an explanation was sought and provided on the Service's current position and requirements in relation to battery energy storage systems, highlighting there were a number of potential developments in the pipeline for Caithness. It was confirmed that any advice provided to developers was in line with the guidance issued by the National Fire Chiefs Council.

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

#### 4. **Scottish Government Play Park Funding** **Maoineachadh Phàircean-cluiche Riaghaltas na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No CC/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members provided an assurance to the public that there were no plans to close play parks in Caithness and welcomed the funding received from the Scottish Government and the refurbishment and upgrade proposals outlined in the report. Members also commended the staff for their work in maintaining play parks in the area and prompt responses to queries.

Thereafter, Members raised the following main points:

- the focus going forward should be on new design of equipment and engaging with communities on how to improve the offering across Caithness so these facilities were intergenerational;
- engagement with communities going forward should be as wide as possible and include community councils and groups, development trusts and other community organisations and seek to identify other sources of capital and revenue funding for investment in play parks;
- it was important to have discussions with communities on the lifespan of their play parks well in advance of this becoming an issue;
- the monthly meetings involving local Members and the Amenities Service were extremely helpful in understanding and responding to any issues around play parks;
- community benefit funding and the work of voluntary organisations in attracting match funding and through asset transfers had delivered excellent and sustainable facilities in the area; and
- the need for ongoing discussions on the future funding of play parks was recognised and a further update from officers would be arranged for a future meeting.

The Committee **AGREED** that in:

- i. Ward 2, the sum of £146,824 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at section 6.5 of the report; and



- ii. Ward 3, the sum of £145,338 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at section 6.6 of the report.

## 5. **Area Roads Capital Programme Update - 2024-25** **Cunntas mu Phrògram Calpa nan Rathaidean Sgìreil – 2024-25**

There had been circulated Report No CC/03/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- in response to a query, further clarity was provided on the variances in cost of works per square metre in terms of plant, labour and materials in comparison to previous years;
- concern at the significant reduction in the Strategic Timber Transport Fund and noting that confirmation had not yet been received as to which of the bids for schemes in Highland in 2025/26 had been successful. Members were advised to refer specific queries to the Council's Timber Transport Co-ordinator, contact details to be provided. Further information on the work of the Highland Timber Transport Group would also be shared with Members;
- a query as to whether the works at Primrose Avenue, Thurso had been completed. It was confirmed a response would be provided directly to Mr M Reiss on the matter;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the challenges in undertaking an analysis of the percentage of schemes completed per annum, noting that other factors had to be considered such as the percentage of roads mileage surfaced;
- it was important to recognise the recent significant increase in investment in roads in the area to over £3m in the current financial year and the improvements in machinery and equipment also delivered; and
- the above investment and work of the Roads Teams was making a difference in Caithness, however there was a lot more work to be done a need for a continued focus on increasing investment going forward.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the final budget allocation for Caithness area for 2024/25;
- ii. **NOTED** the works completed on the approved prioritised list to date;
- iii. **NOTED** the additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year; and
- iv. **APPROVED** the works still proposed for the 2024/25 financial year.

## 6. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2025-26** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2025-26**

There had been circulated Report No CC/04/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members advised that the regular monthly meetings held with Roads officials were extremely informative and highlighted that the condition of the road network was subject to change due to seasonal and other factors and that priorities had to be kept under continual review.

The Committee **APPROVED** the prioritised Area Roads Capital Programme for the Caithness Area.

**7. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2025/26  
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No CC/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** that a 8% rent increase be applied to Caithness Garages and Garage Sites in 2025/26.

**8. Housing Repairs Performance Report – 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024  
Aithisg Coileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais - 1 Giblean 2024 gu 30 Sultain 2024**

There had been circulated Report No CC/06/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In response to a query, it was explained there was an equipment and adaptations budget that was used to meet the assessed needs of individual tenants, for example to ensure bathrooms were fit for purpose. It was suggested there was a need for more forward planning and smarter working in relation to such works, concern being expressed at the time tenants had to wait for assessments and works to be completed and at the underspend on the budget at this stage of the financial year.

In response, Members were advised that officers would have further discussions in response to the concerns raised on this matter and confirmed the underspend on the budget could be carried forward to the next financial year.

Thereafter, confirmation was sought and provided that the Chair would be updated on the heating project due to commence in Thurso in the near future.

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

**9. Education Associated School Group Report  
Aithisg Foghlaim Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte**

There were circulated Report Nos CC/07/25 to CC/08/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

The Chair congratulated the staff and pupils at Miller Academy Primary School, Thurso on being ranked by the Press and Journal as one of the top scoring Highland primary schools based on Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels 2023-24 data published by the Scottish Government.

Thereafter, further clarity was sought and provided in relation to the significant improvement in pupil destinations for 16+ at Thurso High School. It was explained the data presented a historical picture and more current data for both ASGs would be brought to Members in the near future. A further point was raised in relation to leaver destinations and links being made with industry such as Dounreay and the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport.

Following further discussion, Members indicated that they were content for the above matters to be brought to an Area Business Meeting and for the Head Teachers of Thurso and Wick High Schools to be invited to attend.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the reports.

**10. Caithness Place Based Initiative Fund Update  
Cunntas mu Mhaoin Iomairt Stèidhichte air Àite Ghallaibh**

There had been circulated Report No CC/09/25 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing.

In discussion, the importance of progress reports of this nature being on the Caithness Committee's agenda was highlighted, reference being made to the time lapse between Members approval of funding and that required to deliver projects on the ground.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** progress made on PBI supported projects in the current financial year; and
- ii. **HOMOLOGATED** re-purposing of £1,556 underspend of Ward 3 PBI funding to support Wick town centre regeneration projects.

**11. Wick Common Good Fund – 2023/24 Annual Accounts and Final Monitoring, 2024/25 Quarter Three Monitoring Report and 2025/26 Proposed Budget  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige – Cunntasan Bliadhnail agus Sgrùdadh Deireannach 2023/24, Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ràith Trì 2024/25 agus Buidseat a Thathar a' Moladh airson 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No CC/10/25 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Head of Corporate Finance.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Wick Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 2),
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Wick Common Good Fund, as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement (Appendix 3) against budget for 2024/25, and
- iii. **APPROVED** the Wick Common Good Fund Annual Budget for 2025/26 (Appendix 4).

**12. Thurso Common Good Fund – 2023/24 Annual Accounts, 2025/26 Budget  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Theòrsa – Cunntasan Bliadhnail 2023/24, Buidseat 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No CC/11/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, officers were thanked for their work in relation to the Fund and the fact standardised reports could now be brought to the Committee. It was important to recognise this was the first step towards a strategy being put in place to try to maximise the Common Good for the benefit of the people of Thurso. In particular, it was important that opportunities for income generation be explored.

The Committee **AGREED** the:

- i. Thurso Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts for 2023/24. (Appendix 1); and
- ii. Thurso Common Good Fund Annual Budget for 2025/26 (Appendix 2).

### 13. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Ward Discretionary Budget applications were approved for the period to 31 December 2024.

#### Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024

Community Food Initiatives North East – Fareshare in Highland	£1,690.00
Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Pentland Firth Yacht Club – Replacement Windows	£1,450.00
Highlife Highland – Active School Coaching & Equipment	£1,500.00
Sidh Chailleann Art – “Industrial Caithness” Exhibition	£1,000.00
Thurso Youth Club SCIO – Holiday Activities	£1,000.00
Thurso Community Council – Thurso Town Centre initiative 2024	£400.00
Association of Caithness Community Councils – Village Officer	£3,200.00
Connecting Carers Caithness	£1,916.00
Total Spend to Date	£12,656.00
<b>Current Available Balance</b>	<b>£1,744.00</b>

#### Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024

Community Food Initiatives North East – Fareshare in Highland	£2,763.00
Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Highlife Highland – Youth Session Resources	£999.00
Argyll Square Area Association – Replacement Litter Bin	£561.60
Association of Caithness Community Councils – Village Officer	£5,300.00
Total Spend to Date	£10,123.60
<b>Current Available Balance</b>	<b>£4,276.40</b>

### 14. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 11 November 2024 which were approved by the Council on 12 December 2024.

### 15. Caithness Disability Access Panel Pannal Ruigsinneachd Ciorramachd Ghallaibh

**Transparency Statements: Ms J McEwan and Mr W Mackay made Transparency Statements in respect of this item on the grounds they were members of the Caithness Disability Access Panel. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the item and any personal connection, they did not consider they had an interest to declare.**

Members were advised that Disability Access Panels were made up of people of all ages and abilities who share a passion for the issues faced by disabled people. With the help of Disability Equality Scotland as the national umbrella body, Disability Access Panels support their communities to become as accessible as possible, particularly in relation to the built environment, healthcare, employment, education, and transport. By raising awareness they can also help to change attitudes among the general public about the need for inclusive access.

The Highland Council has a protocol with Disability Access panels across Highland and consults them on proposals for public buildings e.g. schools or libraries etc. In addition to this Disability Access panels can receive and review weekly Planning lists and can request a consultation or make comment on a particular application.

The Caithness Disability Access Panel is an active group who meet approximately once a month to discuss local access issues, disability legislation and general matters relating to disabled access, both in buildings and on public transport. They also highlighted examples of both good and poor practice to service providers and may comment on a variety of issues, reflecting issues relating to accessibility within Caithness, for example the standard of specific disabled toilets, or the frequency of accessible public buses. They are also compiling a Caithness Public Services Access Guide (after receiving access audit training) which aims to list the accessibility status of all local businesses. They are currently working very hard to develop a project to provide disabled access on to a local beach for wheelchair users.

The Committee acknowledged and **NOTED** the work of the Caithness Disability Access Panel.

The meeting concluded at 12.10pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely on 20 January 2025 at 11am.

### **Present:**

Dr C Birt                      Ms L Kraft  
Mrs I Campbell      Mr P Logue

### **In attendance:**

Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing  
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager  
Ms M Macdonald, Area Education & Learning Manager  
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager  
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager  
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Chief Inspector Mr C Smith, Police Scotland (Item 3)  
General Manager Ms N Hutchison, Wester Ross UNESCO Biosphere (Item 4)

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

**Mrs I Campbell in the Chair**

### **Business**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

#### **3. Police – Area Performance Report Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Coileanaidh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/01/25 by the Chief Inspector - Area Commander.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, regarding the significantly higher statistics for Drink/Drug Driving Offences in North Highland compared to South Highland;
- Members welcomed the creation of the Highland-wide Harm Prevention Officer (HPO) post. In this regard it was confirmed that the post was fully

funded by NHS Highland via the Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership (HADP);

- it was queried if Police Scotland had statistical evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the HPO post, as this would also serve to secure additional funding to maintain the post;
- Members highlighted an issue raised by Mr McGinty, Trading Standards Officer that fraudsters had been attempting to scam residents regarding home and energy improvement Government initiatives. In this regard Police Scotland would seek to link in with the officer to liaise with community councils to raise further awareness of this issue;
- it was felt that there were likely many telephone and internet scam incidents which were not being reported to Police Scotland;
- it was queried if there had been organised fraud crime based within the local wards; and
- it was confirmed that in relation to organised drug crime, on the whole there was no issue within the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh areas.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 01 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

#### **4. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Place Plan Plana Àite Sgìre Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In amplification of the report Ms N Hutchison, General Manager of the Wester Ross UNESCO Biosphere, delivered a presentation updating the progress of the Area Place Plan (APP). She provided an overview of the engagement process and emphasised key aspects of the plan, including the unique regional challenges and strategies to address them. The APP was structured around three core themes: People, Prosperity, and Place, which form the foundation of its framework. The overall goal of the Plan was to support community empowerment and regenerative development. The next phase would prioritise building partnerships within and across sectors to mobilise resources and transform plans into action. Practical steps included supporting community-led initiatives, achieving quick wins, focusing on medium and long term goals, and maintaining ongoing reviews to adapt to emerging needs.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was queried if all communities in the area had engaged with the Area Place Plan process. In this regard it was felt that Lochcarron community had not engaged fully, and this might have been down to losing some key personnel in the community;
- thanks were expressed for the place plan presentation which had demonstrated some changes and improvements. Members recognised the challenges faced by communities;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the reasons for the anticipated population growth;

- Members welcomed the emphasis placed on the need for new housing developments within the area and expected that in time this could be developed to be more location specific;
- concern was raised regarding the lack of available funding to support local groups who want to progress their place plans;
- it was queried if community groups were satisfied with the skills available for young persons within the areas. In this regard, Members supported young people remaining in local areas and being able to develop their skills;
- innovative thinking was required to balance available schooling and housing options to encourage people to stay, or move into the area;
- it was felt that some work tasks risked duplication by groups working in silos and this required to be addressed; and
- it was crucial to establish sustainability of funding to ensure the continuation of area place plans and the people who are employed to work on the projects.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to adopt the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Place Plan;
- ii. **AGREED** to support and promote the Area Place Plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other plans and strategies across or impacting the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh area; and
- iii. **NOTED** that to progress the work and aspirations set out in the Plan future steps would include creation of detailed action plans.

## 5. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/03/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the capital roads programme as it addressed the worst road areas;
- it was suggested that the Roads Unit update Members in spring as the winter period had not yet finished and might impact on the capital programme;
- the allocated budget of £714,558 for Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area was confirmed to be proportionate of the total budget which included the additional resources, but minus of overheads and overspend;
- regarding the road between Sheildaig and Applecross, it was queried if these repairs works would be included within the programme of works. In this regard any adjustment to the capital programme could be discussed at an Ward Business Meeting (WBM) later in the year; and
- it was clarified that the roads budget allocation was based on road mileage within each Ward.



The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area.

**6. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2025/2026**  
**Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2025/2026**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/04/25 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

The Committee **AGREED** an 8% rent increase be applied to Wester Ross Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Garages and Garage Sites.

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

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- despite performance being a mean average of response time, Members confirmed they had received some complaints from tenants regarding the length of time taken to complete repairs;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the Ord Terrace re-roofing project as it was expected to be over budget;
- regarding Voids performance, it was queried why the turnaround times had been so challenging in the Ward; and
- it was queried if the installation of ASHP (air source heat pumps) formed part of the housing capital budget expenditure. In this regard, it was confirmed that Members would receive an update at a future WBM regarding energy efficiency measures, including the installation of ASHP at rated properties.

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

**8. Associated School Group Attainment Overview**  
**Foir-shealladh air Buileachadh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/06/25, WRSL/07/25, and WRSL/08/25 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- clarification was provided regarding the report's author as it should have been from the Assistant Chief Executive - People;
- suggestion was made that the Gairloch Headteacher could attend an WBM to discuss and answer Member questions regarding ASG related issues;
- Members welcomed the Gairloch ASG report and were encouraged by the figures for feeder schools;

- regarding the Education Scotland report for Plockton, Members invited the Headteacher and Deputy Head to attend a future WBM to discuss the report;
- Members welcomed the report data for their oversight, and were encouraged by the number of children attending the schools; and
- Members welcomed the listening and talking figures as it was felt that this underpinned the building blocks of everything we did in Highland.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the reports related to Gairloch, Plockton and Ullapool.

## 9. **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat fo Ughdarras Uàird Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Fund applications had been approved since 11 November 2024:-

- Dornie and District Community Trust - Community Growing at Dornie Community Hub: £528.00
- Strathpeffer Community Council -Various Improvements in the Square: £800.00
- Dornie and District Community Trust - Community shop and café: £796.79
- Achmore Community Hall Association - Hall energy efficiency measure: £750.00
- Contin Community Council - Local Place Plan – printing & engagement: £224.26
- Aultbea Community Council - Public Access External Defibrillators Project: £800.00
- Contin Community Trust - Seniors festive lunch and kids Christmas parties: £700.00
- Strathpeffer Community Council - Repairs to gazebo fascia boards in the square: £190.80

## 10. **Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 11 November 2024 which were approved by the Council on 12 December 2024.

The meeting concluded at 12:35pm

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday 27 January 2025, at 10.00 am.

### Present:

Sarah Atkin  
Sinclair Coghill  
Tamala Collier  
Laura Dundas  
John Edmondson

Lyndsey Johnston  
Derek Louden  
Morven-May MacCallum  
Maureen Ross  
Maxine Smtih

### Participating Officials:

Ms A Jansson, Chief Officer Education (Primary)  
Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager  
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager  
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager  
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance  
Mr G Ralph, Housing Investment Officer  
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

**Also in Attendance:** Chief Inspector Calum Smith, Police Scotland

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

### Ms L Johnston in the Chair

#### 1. **Apologies for Absence** **Leisgeulan**

There were none.

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

There were none.

#### 3. **Police – Area Performance Report** **Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No BIER/1/25 by the Area Commander (North Highland Area Command).

Following a summary of the report, the following issues were raised by Members:

- Police officers were thanked for their work, with reference being made to particular incidents;

- further explanation was sought and provided on the following:
  - the figures for the 3 and 5 year averages in the report;
  - the difference between reported and detected crimes;
  - the No Knives, Better Lives initiative;
  - the rise in the reported levels of missing care experienced young people;
  - resources available for tackling drink and drug related driving offences;
  - the new approach for the police to interact with community councils, noting the need for community councils to have up to date contact information for appropriate police officers;
  - Police interaction with the Council and other Housing services;
  - national improvements to the process for tackling sexual crimes, and work being undertaken with the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership;
  - the use of AI to assist with policing;
  - procedures for dealing with cuckooing and monitoring vulnerable people; and
  - work being undertaken with license holders and licensed premises on crime prevention and detection;
- concern was expressed at the amount of speeding on the Arabella road and Members requested that this be monitored;
- the Harm Prevention Officers had a significant geographical area to cover;
- the rising number of assaults on emergency service workers was of concern; and
- concern was expressed at ongoing issues and anecdotal reports of harm being caused to animals in woods, possibly by snares / traps, and this would be further considered outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

#### **4. Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No. BIER/2/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members thanked the roads officers for their work, especially during the periods of severe winter weather;
- with reference to the strategic allocation of £1,349,000 which was awarded each year to a different committee area within Ross and Cromarty, this coming year being Easter Ross and Black Isle, Members felt consideration should be given to allocating it according to the condition of the roads in each of the three areas, rather than on a rotating basis. The poor state of the roads in Easter Ross and Black Isle was emphasised;
- it was disappointing that the strategic timber funding, which had previously provided funding for surface dressing, was coming to an end;

- it was hoped that as a result of the strategic funding, the red line on the Roads Programme 2025/26, as shown in appendix 3 of the report, could be moved down and additional projects undertaken; and
- attention was drawn to specific area in the wards which required attention.

The Committee:

- APPROVED** the proposed 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for Black Isle and Easter Ross Area;
- AGREED** that, in relation to the strategic allocation of £1,349,000, consideration be given to the whole of the road network and priority be given to the worst roads; and
- AGREED** that investigation be undertaken into various issues raised by Members including the potholes on the Arabella Road (Please insert the correct road name) and an area of road deterioration on the Nigg Road (please insert the correct road name).

## 5. HRA Garage Rents 2025/26 Màil Gharaidsean Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No BIER/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the definition of a void rent was sought and provided;
- it was clarified that reference in the report to Caithness was an error;
- some Members felt that an 8% rise was appropriate as this is what the tenants had voted for, while others pointed out that the financial difference between an 8% and 9% rise was a relatively small amount of money, and that rental income was essential to facilitate maintenance of the garages. It was suggested that the wording on future consultations could be clearer on the reasons for the increases and the need for investment funding, as well as including the amounts in sterling as opposed to only including the percentage increases;
- concern was expressed that the garage rental rates were higher in Ward 9 than in Wards 6 and 7, and that these should be equalised. Information was sought and provided by officers on the means of achieving this;
- a summary was sought and provided on the work being undertaken to bring void garages up to a lettable standard; and
- many of the garages were too small for modern cars and were being used for storage, and the future uses of the garages should be discussed at ward business meetings in the first instance.

The Committee **AGREED**:

- a 9% rise in garage rents for wards 6 & 7, and a 5.6% rise in ward 9, to bring the rent levels in all 3 wards into alignment the Service Lead Housing; and
- the Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance be invited to a ward 6&7 business meeting to discuss the future use of garages in the wards.

## 6. Housing Repairs Càraidhean Thaighean

There had been circulated Report No BIER/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- with reference to the catch-up period for housing repairs, there was an ongoing impact from previous years but it was hoped the benefits from the programme would be noticeable over the coming two quarters;
- the importance of ensuring people's houses were up to standard and appropriately adapted to help reduce delays in residents returning to their homes from hospital was highlighted and a summary was provided of the housing needs and occupational health assessment referral processes;
- the importance of tackling pavements in addition to roads was referenced, with particular examples provided;
- it was queried whether the reported underspend was a budget reporting timing issue;
- it was clarified that environmental improvements was a ward-based budget in consultation with local Members;
- clarity was sought on the apparent £1m capital underspend and, following an explanation that this was a report on one year of a five-year budget, it was suggested that further consideration be given to the presentation of these figures in future;
- information was sought and provided on maintenance and improvement measures being undertaken, including energy efficiency and investment, to reduce the average re-let time period; and
- a 10-30 year maintenance and replacement cycle would be useful.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024 and **AGREED** to review how the 3 and 5 year capital budgets were reported to the Committee.

## 7. Education Attainment Reports Aithisgean Buileachadh Foghlaim

### 7a Attainment Report – Fortrose Aithisg Bhuileachaidh – A' Chananaich

There had been circulated Report No BIER/5/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- it was disappointing that the data was from 2022 and largely irrelevant to the current situation;
- Pan-ASG data would be useful;
- some schools waited a significant amount of time before being inspected;
- specific concerns could be addressed outwith the meeting;

- it was not considered acceptable that 15-20% of secondary pupils were not achieving the expected standard;
- some of the terms used, eg 'good' were insufficiently descriptive; and
- a summary was provided of performance indicators, themes, and evidence, and the possibility of inviting Headteachers to future meetings was suggested.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

**7b Attainment Report – Tain  
Aithisg Bhuileachaidh – Baile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No BIER/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, Members pointed out that the results for Craighill Primary School had been impressive. Disappointment was expressed that the reports were so out of date and emphasised the need for more up to date data to facilitate proper scrutiny. Particular reference was made to Tain Royal Academy in this regard. Concern was expressed in relation to teacher recruitment challenges.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

**8. Common Good Funds  
Maoin Maith Choitchinn**

**a. Cromarty Common Good Fund  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Chromba**

There had been circulated Report No BIER/7/25 by the Chief Officer Housing & Communities and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, information was sought and provided on the situation with East Church Hall.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Cromarty Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1a) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 1b); and
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Cromarty Common Good Fund as shown in the 2024/25 Quarter Three monitoring statement at Appendix 2; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 3.

**b. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund  
Maoin Math Coitcheann na Cananaich agus Ros Maircnidh**

There had been circulated Report No BIER/8/25 by the Chief Officer Housing & Communities and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, in relation to coastal erosion, information was sought and provided on the situation with the gabion baskets, the recent cost of

investing in their repair, and the challenges associated with predicting the potential impact of coastal erosion.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Fortrose & Rosemarkie Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1a) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 1b);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Fortrose & Rosemarkie Common Good Fund as shown in the 2024/25 Quarter Three monitoring statement at Appendix 2;
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 3; and
- iv. **AGREED** to delegate to the Community Support and Engagement Team power to approve expenditure up to £10,000 in relation to Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good within the annually set budget and following consultation with relevant Ward Members. This delegated power will be reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.

**c. Invergordon Common Good Fund  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There had been circulated Report No BIER/9/25 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing, and the Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, an update on progress with the sale of the Bouchardon Bust was sought and provided. Notable progress would be reported to the Committee on an ongoing basis. In relation to Invergordon Town Hall, a rent review would be undertaken when required. A list of Common Good Fund assets could be provided outwith the meeting.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the Invergordon Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 2);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Invergordon Common Good Fund as shown in the 2024/25 Quarter Three monitoring statement at Appendix 3;
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 4; and
- iv. **AGREED** a Common Good Fund asset list be provided to Members

**d. Tain Common Good Fund  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No BIER/10/25 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing, and the Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

Concerns were expressed about the ownership of the Blarliath Industrial Estate, which had been raised at several Area Committee meetings. The matter was subject to ongoing discussions, but was not yet resolved due to pressure of work on the Common Good Fund Officer.



Members:

- i. **AGREED** the Tain Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 2);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Tain Common Good Fund as shown in the 2024/25 Quarter Three monitoring statement at Appendix 3; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix; and
- iv. **NOTED** the ongoing concern expressed by Mr Louden and Ms Ross about the issue of landownership between the Council and the CGF for land at Blarliath Industrial Estate.

**9. Ward Discretionary Awards**  
**Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

There had been circulated and was **NOTED**, details of the Discretionary Budget applications that have been approved.

**10. Minutes**  
**Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee held on 4 November 2024, which had been approved by the Council on 12 December 2024.

The meeting ended at 2.10pm

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held remotely on **Monday, 27 January 2025 at 10.30 a.m.**

### Present:

Mr A Baxter  
Mr J C Grafton  
Ms S Fanet

Mr T MacLennan  
Ms L Siggers

### Officials in Attendance:

Ms D Sutton, Strategic Lead - Community Operations & Logistics  
Ms M Macdonald, Area Education and Learning Manager  
Ms K MacLeod, Roads Operations Manager - Lochaber  
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry  
Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry)  
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager  
Ms J Young, Community Support Officer  
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager  
Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer  
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services

### Also in attendance:-

Mr C Scott, Station Commander, Lochaber District, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service (Item 3 only)

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

**Mr J C Grafton in the Chair**

### BUSINESS

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Baldrey and Ms K Willis.

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

Item 10ii – Mr A Baxter (Transparency statement)

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Local Committee Performance Report  
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No LA/1/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Following a summary of the report by the Station Commander, the following points were raised:-

- it would be checked if a breakdown of information could be provided to Members on the proportion of road traffic incidents in the Lochaber area involving tourists and locals. This information would be useful, as if there was a high proportion of tourists involved in road incidents, it would highlight the need to educate tourists about driving in this area. Information was available for tourists in hotels, B&Bs, visitor centres etc. about driving in this country, i.e. Keep Left stickers; different road traffic regulations, and the Service would continue to work educating tourists so that they were prepared when visiting the area.
- The SFRS was taking proactive action to support the process of carrying out inspections of short term lets that require fire safety checks.
- In relation to the recent fire raising incidents and vandalism in Fort William, SFRS personnel were highly trained and recognised the potential for incidents to escalate and identify trends. The service liaised closely with Police Scotland colleagues on this matter. The Police had increased their patrols in the area to reassure local businesses and residents. The service did receive referrals from the Police and Social services for individuals to join the service's fire skills and fire service intervention programmes.
- There was a wildfire strategy which included a three tier response to wildfires across Highland.
- Recruitment to the service remained an ongoing issue across Highland and efforts to recruit to the service were highlighted.

The Committee **NOTED** the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service area performance report.

#### 4. **Lochaber Area Place Plan Plana Àite Sgìre Loch Abar**

There was circulated Report No. LA/2/25 by the Chief Officer Housing and Communities.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Concern raised that this was another Highland Council plan to go alongside plans produced in the past. The difficulty was in implementing the aspirations in the plan and obtaining the funding for them. Without support from the Administration of the Council for many of these projects, it was unlikely a large number of them would proceed. Also, it was queried what leverage the plan would have in gaining support from external organisation such as Transport Scotland to take action on long term community aspirations. It was advised that there was a commitment to have Area Place Plans in place by the Council and the Highland Community Planning Partnership. In terms of delivery of the plans, the Council had been upfront with communities that having projects did not automatically mean resources would be available. However, potential funders of projects would know that the projects had been through a robust consultation process and that there was broad support for the projects. External parties had been engaged in the process of developing area place plans and were aware of the priorities of the community. If the plan was adopted then the next steps as detailed in the report would be taken forward to fulfil these priorities.

- Once Local Place Plans were created they would be included in the Area Place Plan document.
- There was a need to ensure that the Council when making decisions affecting communities, considers the Area Place Plan, given that the plan sets out the aspirations for communities.
- In terms of the delivery of the plan and next steps, stakeholders involved in the creation of the plan, would continue to be involved in the delivery of the plan. An action plan would be created for each of the priorities and some work was already happening on this.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to adopt the Lochaber Area Place Plan, using it as a tool to inform and support decision making about Lochaber;
- ii. **AGREED** to support and promote the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other Plans, Strategies, Development, and Funding opportunities across or impacting the Lochaber area; and
- iii. **NOTED** the next steps for progressing the work set out in the plan.

## 5. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2025/26**

There was circulated Report No. LA/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following a summary of the report by the Roads Operations Manager, the following correction to the capital programme was highlighted:- Appendix 1, line 2, should read A861 (and not B8007).

Further, information would be provided to Councillor A Baxter on the reason for the substantial increase in cost this year compared to last year, for repairs to the B863 North Ballachulish to Kinlochleven Low Road; and information would be provided to Councillor S Fanet on whether pavement access works at Ballachulish would be met from capital programme or revenue funding.

It was highlighted that there was about an £8m backlog in road repairs identified in the capital programme for 2025/26, compared to £6.3m backlog in repairs in 2024/25. It was advised that the plan was continually updated with new roads being added and roads that had works completed, taken off the plan. It was difficult to set a fixed programme of works and realistically the programme would be added to each year as some roads deteriorated quicker than others.

It was difficult to get a comparison over the years as to whether the Council was addressing the road repairs needed or because of resource limitations, the Council was not addressing repairs which stored up problems for the future. Therefore, Mr A Baxter, seconded by Mr T MacLennan, Moved that the Committee approve the Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26 and in addition:-

“the Committee:-

- requests confirmation of the total amount of capital expenditure required to address all Lochaber road repairs and structures for each of the last five years.

- suggests, for comparative purposes, that the same information is provided for every Area Committee within the Highland Council region. This information will be provided for discussion at the next Area Business Meeting and published as an addendum to the minutes of this Area Committee meeting.
- notes with concern that the total amount of capital expenditure required to fix the Lochaber road network is increasing year-on-year, and the Council is failing to address this backlog of repairs.
- invites the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee and appropriate officers to attend the Lochaber Committee on Monday, 12th May 2025, to explain how the Council addresses the Committee's concerns."

The Committee was supportive of this Motion.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed prioritised 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for Lochaber Area; and
- ii. **AGREED** to:-
  - request confirmation of the total amount of capital expenditure required to address all Lochaber road repairs and structures for each of the last five years.
  - suggest, for comparative purposes, that the same information is provided for every Area Committee within the Highland Council region. This information will be provided for discussion at the next Area Business Meeting and published as an addendum to the minutes of this Area Committee meeting (**see appendix**).
  - note with concern that the total amount of capital expenditure required to fix the Lochaber road network is increasing year-on-year, and the Council is failing to address this backlog of repairs.
  - invite the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee and appropriate officers to attend the Lochaber Committee on Monday, 12th May 2025, to explain how the Council addresses the Committee's concerns.

**6. Community Asset Transfer Requests  
Glusad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd**

**i. Land adjacent to the Spean Bridge Community Centre**

There was circulated Report No. LA/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the following Community Asset Transfer request:

Transfer of ownership of circa 2.3 acres of land adjacent to the Spean Bridge Community Centre for £1, based upon the terms set out in the report, subject to Scottish Government Minister approval as the land is on Housing Revenue Account.

ii. **Lease of Unit 9a, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William**

There was circulated Report No. LA/5/25 by the Chief Officer – Housing and Communities.

The Committee **AGREED** the following Community Asset Transfer request:

Lease of Unit 9a, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William, PH33 7PT for £2,750 per annum over 5 years to Fort William Men's Shed SCIO, in line with the terms outlined at section 8 and on the basis no objections are received during the statutory consultation period which closes on 31 January 2025.

7. **Station Brae Public Conveniences  
Tairghean-beaga Bruthach an Stèisein**

There was circulated Report No. LA/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, it was requested that there should be a break clause in the lease of the site, as it was a valuable strategic site and there may be some other future use of the site that would be of greater benefit to the community.

It was queried if the new tenant would be charging for the use of the toilets. It was advised that once the site had been marketed and notes of interest received this would be asked. As part of the Comfort Scheme the new tenant would be permitted to charge up to the same amount the Council charged for its public conveniences, currently 50p.

It was important that the public were reassured that this was not a closure of the public convenience, but the Council were trying to reopen the facilities, but operated by an external party.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the closure of the Station Brae public convenience from 31 March 2025;
- ii. leasing of the site on a 25-year lease with provision of at least two unisex accessible facilities made available for public use;
- iii. the lease to include a break clause at the same time as rent reviews, to allow early termination of the contract if required; and
- iv. support a Comfort Scheme with the lease holder for the Station Brae public convenience from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

8. **Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2025/2026  
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Tairgheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2025/2026**

There was circulated Report No. LA/7/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, which detailed examples of possible rent increases for Members to choose from for the garage estate in Lochaber. It was up to Members to choose a level of rent increase. Last years rent increase was 7.95%.

It was advised that only a small proportion of the total amount collected from garage and garage site rents went on repairs and the rest of the money went into the Housing Revenue Account. There was concern expressed that the total income raised from garage rents in Lochaber was not being spent in Lochaber.

Further, it would be up to Members if they wanted to spend some of the rental from garages to bring void garages up to standard for rental again. A point was made that one of the criticisms often from tenants was that they were paying the rent, it was increasing each year and they were not seeing any benefit from this. Also, with the cost of living at the moment, it was not felt that the various options for increases could be justified. It was therefore proposed that the Committee apply a 5% increase to the garage estate for 2025/26 and in addition a report be submitted to the next meeting outlining how the garage estate could be improved using the total budget available from the collection of rents.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. a 5% increase to apply to Lochaber Garages and Garage Sites for 2025/26; and
- ii. a report to come to the next Lochaber Committee outlining how the garage estate can be improved using the total budget available from the collection of rents.

**9. Housing Performance Report**  
**Aithisg Choileanaidh Càraidhean Thaisghean**

There was circulated Report No. LA/8/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

There was a summary of the report by the Principal Repairs Officer. In response to a query regarding adaptations for disabled use and access, it was advised that in the capital spend there was a budget for equipment and adaptations in Council houses and the annual budget this year was circa £96k.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

**10. Education Attainment Reports**

- i. **Ardnamurchan High School Associated School Group Overview**  
**Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-Sgoil Àird nam Murchan**

There was circulated Report No. LA/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People which provided key information in relation to the schools within the Ardnamurchan High School Associated School Group.

Following a summary of the report by the Area Education Manager, the Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

ii. **Kinlochleven High School Associated School Group Overview  
Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-  
Sgoil Cheann Loch Liobhann**

**Transparency Statement - Mr A Baxter declared a transparency statement in relation to this item as he had children that attended Kinlochleven High School. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There was circulated Report No. LA/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **AGREED** that this report be **DEFERRED** this report until the next Lochaber Committee meeting by which time Members would have had the opportunity to read an Education Scotland inspection report on Kinlochleven High School, that was due to be published on 28 January 2025.

iii. **Mallaig High School Associated School Group Overview  
Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-  
Sgoil Mhalaig**

There was circulated Report No. LA/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People which provided key information in relation to the schools within the Mallaig High School Associated School Group.

In particular, it was noted that a new Head Teacher had been appointed to Mallaig High School. The Head Teacher would be invited to an Area Business meeting at which attainment data for Mallaig High School Associated School Group would be provided.

It was highlighted that there had been coverage in the press on the issue of children who did not appear on school rolls and were not in education. There were suggestions the numbers of children in this situation were quite high. In this respect, information would be provided to Members on the process to be undertaken for parents wanting their children to be home schooled and the number of home schooled children in the Lochaber area.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

11. **Corran Ferry Update  
Cunntas air Aiseag a' Chorrain**

There was circulated Report No. LA/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Commentary on the report was provided by the Operations Manager, Corran Ferry. In response to queries, it was highlighted that the MV Corran should be back in operation in February following maintenance on the vessel. However, this was dependant on a 3<sup>rd</sup> party providing parts for the vessel and then sea trials being carried out satisfactorily to regain the passenger licence. The internal ferry grant request to Transport Scotland for £1.5m had only been considered at Officer level as yet. There had been no recommendation to the



Council's Administration on ferry fares and the presumption would be an inflation based increase. There was a national smart ticketing advisory board ongoing with Transport Scotland and smart ticketing was an ongoing project for the Corran Ferry. Members were reassured that it was intended to undertake marshalling on both sides of the Corran Ferry and would be trialled during busy periods.

It would be checked with CMAL and the naval architects if there were any health and safety risks from electric magnetic fields on the new electric Corran Ferry vessel. Information on this would be provided to Councillor T MacIennan.

Issue raised by Ardgour Community Council and stakeholders about parking at the ferry needed to be addressed. Further, there should be greater promotion of the Web camera at the ferry so that the public were able to see how busy it was when making their travel arrangements.

It was requested that consideration be given to paper tickets being sold in books of 40 tickets rather than 30, which would make it easier for regular commuters to budget for one book of tickets a month.

It was highlighted that there was £58m available for a new vessel and infrastructure at the Corran Ferry site and officers great efforts on this project was recognised and commended. It was hoped that all interested parties would work together to deliver the project as soon as possible.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Corran Ferry Operations update;
- ii. the Corran Ferry Infrastructure and Vessel Replacement Project update; and
- iii. that a report be submitted to a future Area business meeting on the outcome of a review of live ticketing, the review to also incorporate the suggestion of paper tickets being sold in books of 40 tickets.

**12. Ward Discretionary Fund  
Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund grant awards since the last Committee meeting:-

Ward 11

Knoydart Tree Nursery - Electricity Connection £1250

Ward 21

Nether Lochaber Village Hall Committee SCIO – Transfer of title legal costs £1,320

Nether Lochaber Community Council – Transfer of title legal costs £930

**13. Minutes  
Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 12 November 2024 which were approved by the Council on 12 December 2024, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

Also, **AGREED** that an update on the following action point from the minute of the last meeting be provided to the next Area business meeting:-

“Agreed, for full transparency, clarification was sought as to the division of Highland Council/ Fort William Common Good Fund land in relation to the West End car park as well as other assets in future, and also the share of responsibility for costs of major repairs to the sea wall containing the West End car park.

The meeting ended at 1.00 p.m.

- requested confirmation of the total amount of capital expenditure required to address all Lochaber Road repairs and structures for each of the last five years. Figures will be brought to the ward business meeting for the capital expenditure for the last 5 years for Lochaber Roads, Structures.
- **Lochaber Roads:** - Links below holds the agenda, reports and committee papers for total amount of capital expenditure for Lochaber roads for each of the last five years.
  - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2020-2021
  - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2021-2022
  - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2022-2023
  - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2023 – 2024
  - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2024 – 2025
  - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2025 - 2026
- **Structures Roads:** - Links below holds the agenda, reports and committee papers for total amount of capital expenditure for Structures for each of the last five years.
  - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 4 November 2020
  - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 2 December 2021
  - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 10 November 2022
  - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 16 November 2023
  - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 24 November 2024
- Scheme estimation prices on the wish-list/below the line have increased due to now including road marking lines, traffic management, contractor & material price increases.
- Footpath works will be under capital expenditure.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Wednesday 29 January 2025** at 9.55am.

### Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr R Mackintosh
Mr B Boyd (Remote)	Ms A MacLean
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Macpherson
Mr I Brown	Mr D McDonald
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Ms J McEwan
Mr L Fraser	Mr C Munro
Mr A Graham	Ms M Reid (substitute)
Mr M Gregson	Mr R Stewart
Mrs I Mackenzie	

### Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (Remote)	Ms L Johnston (Remote)
Mr A Baxter (Remote)	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Dr C Birt	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Mr A Christie	Mr D Millar
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mr P Oldham (Remote)
Mr R Gale (Remote)	Mrs M Paterson (Remote)
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)	Mrs T Robertson (Remote)
Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)	Ms M Ross (Remote)

### Tenant Representatives in Attendance:

Ms L Richardson, Tenant Representative  
Mr A Dick, Tenant Representative

### Officials in Attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities  
Mr F MacDonald, Chief Officer – Property and Assets  
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead - Housing & Building Maintenance  
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning & Estate Strategy  
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead Finance (Place)  
Ms H Cameron, Housing Development Manager  
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates Management)  
Mr R MacDonald, Energy Manager  
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager  
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

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

**Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair in the Chair**

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Jones and Ms L Niven.

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

The Committee **NOTED** that there were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

## 3. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

It was confirmed that a response would be provided to Mrs A MacLean outwith the meeting regarding the policy of de-centralisation and the locating of staff across local communities.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

## 4. **Housing Revenue Account Estimates 2025/26** **Tuairmsean Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No HP/01/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, some Members spoke in favour of an 8% rise in rent, with reference to the need for investment in order to maintain and improve the housing stock, particularly with regard to energy efficiency measures such as improved insulation, and new doors and windows, all of which would reduce tenants' energy bills. It was recalled that two years earlier, when inflation had been significantly higher, the Council had maintained the rent increase at 4%, but now it was vital to raise investment and lower costs in the longer term, protecting tenants and their homes.

Other Members supported a lower increase, with reference to the high costs facing many people, including those in receipt of benefits such as Universal Credit and Housing Benefit, and those working in lower paid jobs, whose salaries were unlikely to rise by 8% and the impact. It was suggested that an 8% rise would be an irresponsible and unreasonable burden on people along with reference being made to the impact of this on their wellbeing. Many people remained affected by the cost of living crisis and fuel poverty and, although inflation had reduced in the previous two years, it remained a significant impact, with many people relying on foodbanks and unable to properly heat their homes. It was proposed that a lower rent rise of 5.96% was crucial to tenants facing challenging times, and the cost of this could be met by removing £1.3m of energy efficiency works, affecting around 130 properties, this being less than 1% of the housing stock. Approximately 61% of Council tenants were in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit and would not receive an 8% rise in these benefits. It was also pointed out that while 48% of the responses to the Tenant Participation survey had favoured the 8% rise, this was likely because it was the lowest option, with no lower alternative, and around 30% of respondents had picked the 'none of the above' option.

Other issues raised included ongoing concern at the high level of historic housing debt and the resultant loan charges that the Council faced, this being around 43% of the total housing budget. An explanation was sought and provided for some of the figures in the report, and clarification that the 3% consultation response in paragraph 9.6 of the report should say 30%. It would be helpful if the void turnaround rate could be improved.

The Tenant Representative made reference to the government financial assistance that tenants had been receiving two years earlier which was not the case any longer. While supporting the need for investment in the housing stock, particularly with regard to energy efficient measures which would reduce fuel bills, she pointed out the challenges being faced by many Council tenants, and that tenants should not be financially responsible for energy efficiency and improvement measures to the housing stock and that this was, in fact, a Human Rights Issue. In support of her position, she quoted several organisations including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and also pointed out that housing debt was a serious problem for all Scottish Local Authorities.

Mrs G Cambell-Sinclair, seconded by Ms S Atkin, **moved** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr A Graham, seconded by Mr M Gregson, moved as an **amendment** to delete the expenditure line for Capital Investment Funded from Current Revenue £1.346 million relating to “additional funding for capital investment in energy efficiency and external fabric from rent increase”, and make corresponding reduction in House Rents Income to £69.717 million. Reducing the rent increase for 25/26 to approximately 6%.

On a vote being taken there were 9 votes for the motion, 6 votes for the amendment and 2 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

**For the Motion:**

Mrs S Atkin, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs Campbell-Sinclair, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Mackintosh, Mr C Munro, Mrs M Reid

**For the Amendment:**

Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mrs A MacLean, Ms J McEwan, Mr R Stewart

**Abstentions:**

Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald

**Decision**

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the requirements to achieve a balanced budget and associated budget pressures for the Housing Revenue Account for 2025/26;
- ii. **NOTED** the feedback received from tenants through the annual rent consultation;
- iii. **AGREED** an 8% rent increase for 2025/26 and how this increase be allocated, which was detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- iv. **NOTED** how this would impact upon rents across the Council house estate and how this compared with rents across Scotland as detailed in section 5 of the report;
- v. **NOTED** the above rent increase would be applied to all residential HRA rents and service charges, to Gypsy/Traveller site pitches and to non-HRA rents for leased properties (subject to lease agreements); and

- vi. **NOTED** that in line with the Council's Housing Challenge, work was ongoing to develop a detailed action plan and that this would include the development of a long term rent strategy to enable the expansion of the social rented housing stock alongside maintenance and improvement of the existing HRA estate.

**5. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Non-HRA Budget Monitoring Statement to 31 December 2024**

**Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais agus Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Neo-thaigheadais gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2024**

There had been circulated Report No HP/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account and Non-Housing Revenue Account 2024/25 for the period to 31 December 2024.

**6. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report Monitoring Report to 31 December 2024**

**Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2024**

There had been circulated Report No HP/03/25 by the by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, an explanation was sought and provided on the main reasons for previous and projected underspends on heating/energy efficiency and external fabric, concern being expressed that tenants' rents were being increased to meet expenditure that the Council had not been able to fulfil. It was further explained that these works should be considered and seen as part of the whole five year capital programme agreed and that projects would be accelerated where there was the contractual ability to do so.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2024/25 to 31 December 2024.

**7. Property & Facilities Management Services Revenue Monitoring Statement to 31 December 2024**

**Aithris Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Sheirbheisean Rianachd Cuid-seilbh & Ghoireasan gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2024**

There had been circulated Report No HP/04/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- information was sought and provided on how the projected overspend of £2m would be managed, which would be from the general fund account;
- the proposed changes to the Wick campus reception were welcomed and information was sought on measures being undertaken to tackle the shortage of cleaning staff, with reference to there being robot hoovers deployed but the cleaning of areas other than the floor was queried;

- concern was expressed at the level of vacancies in cleaning, catering and facilities staff, with particular reference to lack of cleanliness in some offices and schools;
- it was vital the Responsible Premises Officers were in place and that all essential safety checks and drills were being undertaken;
- the context for the reduction in the number of non-domestic rates properties being eligible for rates relief was sought;
- it was suggested that asset rationalisation projects would at times benefit from improved communication between services, as well as specified outcomes and timeframes;
- an overspend on materials was queried and this would be further discussed outwith the meeting, as would reports on issues with some school bookings for which some electrical appliances were centrally controlled, and efforts to tackle the climate crisis through providing appropriate equipment such as Electric Vehicle charging points in Council homes;
- with regard to the 54 fee-earning job vacancies, information was sought and provided on efforts being made to fill these posts, which included graduate training schemes; and
- information was sought and provided on efforts to tackle rising costs and procurement issues for building projects, while also continuing to use local Highland contractors as much as possible.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the budget position for the third quarter of the 2024/25 financial year, and the predicted year-end position;
- ii. **NOTED** that the budget gap might change positively or negatively depending on the application of expenditure and recruitment controls, filling fee earning posts in an extremely challenging job market, adjusting services to meet previously agreed budget savings; in-year income recovery, and identifying new income and procurement opportunities; and
- iii. **NOTED** the progress update provided in relation to corporate budget savings delivery.

## 8. Property Revenue Maintenance Programme 2024-25 Report Aithisg Prògram Gleidhidh Teachd-a-steach Seilbhe 2024-25

There had been circulated Report No HP/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, confirmation was sought and provided that Members would be provided with a breakdown by Service on the costs of vandal damage as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report. In response to a query, it was explained the costs of repairs to public toilets was balanced between the Property Service and the Amenities Service.

The Committee **APPROVED** the:-

- i. budget categories for the Property Revenue Maintenance budget;
- ii. budget position for the third quarter of the 2024/25 financial year; and
- iii. year end balanced budget, being forecast.

It was also **NOTED** that Members would be provided with a breakdown by Service on the costs of vandal damage detailed in Appendix 1.



## 9. Property Capital Monitoring Statement and Progress Update Aithris Sgrùdaidh Calpa Seilbhe agus Cunntas às Ùr air Adhartas

There had been circulated Report No HP/06/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- with reference to the extensive remedial works that had been undertaken at Charleston Academy, partly as a result of RAAC concrete issues, it was hoped that the complete replacement of the school building, as detailed in the Highland Investment Plan, would be progressed by the Council at its meeting on 6 March 2025;
- disappointment was expressed at the slow pace of progress of the planning permission for the new Broadford Primary School, which had been submitted in June 2024 and had not yet been approved. It was queried whether it was acceptable that the project had been considered ‘shovel-ready’ given this had slipped to October 2026 and it was suggested this was disappointing to pupils and staff. However, in contrast, other Members indicated that the community was pleased with the progress being made, as evidenced at a recent stakeholder meeting about the school, and a recent HMIE report on the school had been excellent; and
- information was sought and provided on phasing for the new housing being built at the Travelling People Sites on the Longman area of Inverness.

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

- i. capital monitoring position at the end of the third quarter of the 2024/25 financial year, the estimated year-end position, and the main financial variances outlined in the report;
- ii. current position regarding the delivery of the works programmes, the individual projects referred to in the report, and the work underway to identify the priorities for 2025/26 and the subsequent years; and
- iii. progress on the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete remedial works at Charleston Academy and Nairn Academy.

## 10. Community Asset Transfers (CAT) Glusad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd

### a. Black Isle Education Centre Ionad-Foghlaim an Eilein Duibh

There had been circulated Report No HP/07/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members indicated that the proposal had been subject to thorough assessment, was aligned with the aims of the Community Empowerment Act and approval would enable Raddery House Ltd to seek funding to purchase the site. The Group’s work, tenacity, ambition and commitment to the project was highlighted and the project would deliver benefits for the local area and wider Highlands as a centre of excellence.

The Committee **AGREED** to the sale of the land and property comprising the Raddery Wood and the Former Black Isle Education Centre, Raddery, The Black Isle, to Raddery House Ltd. for £325,500, based upon the terms of transfer as set out at paragraph 6.1 of the report.

## **b. Elphin Community Hall Talla Ailbhinn**

There had been circulated Report No HP/08/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, support was expressed for the application and the benefits that it would bring to the community. Reference was made to the economic development burden that some organisations had experienced with CAT, and further information was sought and provided on the steps that could be taken by the Council to have conditions reconsidered to help support communities as much as possible whilst protecting the Council's and public's interests.

The Committee **AGREED** the sale of Elphin Community Hall (former Assynt Primary School) and surrounding land (0.4ha) to Elphin, Ledmore, and Knockan Community Association Ltd (ELKCAL) for £1 based upon the terms of transfer as set out at paragraph 7.1 of the report.

## **11. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail**

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, that the public be excluded from the meeting for Items 12, 13, and 14 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

## **12. Foul Sewer Servitude Request Iarrtas Seirbheiseachd Saidhbheir Shalaich**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/09/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

## **13. Housing Development Initiatives Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

## **14. Property Transactions Monitoring Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

**15. Service Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 3 2024/25**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanadh Seirbheis Cairteil 3 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No HP/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the rise in applications for housing from serving and ex-armed forces personnel was queried and was thought to be largely the result of changes in the terms of the application form. The support provided to armed services personnel was summarised;
- information was sought and provided on the reduction from 2021 to 2024 in tenant satisfaction levels in relation to opportunities and decision making. This had been observed across Scotland and might relate to economic challenges or post-pandemic issues. Members pointed out that significantly higher levels of customer satisfaction were being reported by Albyn Housing in Caithness and the Council Leader offered to raise the matter with the Chief Executive of Albyn Housing at a forthcoming meeting to determine if there were any learning opportunities that could be gleaned. It was pointed out that some Housing Associations had very active tenant members with a higher 'on the ground' presence than the Council and this helped to increase tenant satisfaction levels; and
- it was understood that the management of many areas of housing and property work was a balancing act, using limited resources to tackle many challenges, with decisions in one area often impacting on other areas. The excellent work undertaken by the housing staff was welcomed and gratitude for their efforts expressed.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

**16. Housing Performance Report 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024**  
**Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2024 – 31 An Dubhlachd 2024**

There had been circulated Report No HP/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Housing service staff were thanked for their work to reduce debt and to tackle homelessness, voids, and anti-social behaviour; and
- an explanation for the re-let / void times lengthening was sought and provided, with many details included in the report. It was suggested by officers that a future Committee might wish to reconsider the budget for tackling voids. It was proposed that this decision could be devolved to Area Committees as the causes and solutions to void properties varied according to locality and a request was made for officers to consider this.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the information provided on Housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 to 31 December 2024; and
- ii. that consideration would be given to the balance of investment in re-letting works at an area level, and recommendations brought to a future Committee on the approach to re-let times.

## **17. Delivery Plan Update** **Fios às Ùr mun Phlana Libhrigidh**

There had been circulated Report No HP/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- with reference to the Housing Void-Plus Policy, the Council Leader requested that a report be submitted to the Caithness Committee giving an update on the area pilot project;
- information was sought and provided on how energy efficiency performance targets could be improved;
- it was welcomed that 18 houses in Caithness were being leased to Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks for refitting and were likely to meet net zero aims;
- the current situation with regard to Solar PV generation was summarised, it was queried whether Torvean Quarry, Inverness could be utilised as a possible site for Solar PV, alongside the planned battery energy storage and solar generation. Confirmation was provided that a more detailed response would be provided to Mr A Graham on the feasibility of this but assurance was provided that a number of different options were evaluated with a view to maximising energy opportunities; and
- information was sought and would be provided outwith the meeting to all Members on how much feed-in tariff each Solar PV site had generated in the years since their installation.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the implementation of the new Void-Plus Policy which was designed to assist the re-letting of void Council houses in Caithness;
- ii. the progress provided in the Energy Estate Programme and Project updates in the report; and
- iii. that Members would be provided with information on the feed in tariff revenue generated by each of the Solar PV sites in each of the years since their installation.

The meeting was closed at 12.35pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 29 January 2025 at 2.00 pm.

### **Present:**

Ms S Atkin  
Mr J Bruce  
Ms S Fanet (Chair)  
Mr J Grafton  
Mr A Graham  
Dr M Gregson

Mr P Logue  
Mr D Louden  
Mr R MacKintosh  
Ms M Ross (remote)  
Ms K Willis (Vice Chair)

### **Non-Members also present:**

Mr M Baird (remote)  
Mr C Ballance (remote)  
Dr C Birt  
Mr B Boyd (remote)  
Mr S Coghill (remote)  
Ms M Hutchison (remote)

Ms E Knox (remote)  
Ms K MacLean (remote)  
Mr D Macpherson (remote)  
Mr P Oldham (remote)  
Mrs T Robertson (remote)  
Mr R Stewart

### **In attendance:**

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager  
Ms F Daschofsky, Project Manager  
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations  
Ms F Conti, Category Manager – Procurement  
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager  
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead – Transport and Logistics  
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer  
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

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

**Ms S Fanet 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 Mrs I Campbell and Ms L Niven.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

### 3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Chair informed the Committee of the following items of good news:-

- the Council's Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme had won the Outstanding Project Award at the Scottish Green Energy Awards which had taken place in December. The project had significantly reduced energy consumption through fabric improvements, ensuring homes were better insulated, warmer, and more efficient. The Council was committed to expanding on the success of the scheme and addressing the challenges Highland faced, with an estimated 33% of households currently experiencing fuel poverty;
- the Council had been named winner of the Best Local Authority EV Charging Scheme at the Transport and Energy Awards which had been held in November. There had been further success for the Council with Rachael Anderson from the Climate Change and Energy Team named the Rising Star in the clean transport and energy industry for the project management work undertaken to deliver the Council's EV infrastructure network;
- Diane Connolly-Philip had graduated with First-Class honours in Construction and the Built Environment. Diane had joined the Council in January 2020, following 16 years in the motor trade. Since joining the Council through the Graduate Apprenticeship scheme, she had been promoted twice and was currently a Project Officer delivering the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme supporting two projects in Caol and Balintore;
- following a successful recruitment campaign, a Programme Manager and three Project Managers had recently joined the Council, with the Climate Change and Energy Team now fully resourced to lead on the Investment and Innovation workstreams of the Net Zero, Energy, and Innovation Portfolio within the Council's Operational Delivery Plan;
- the Council, in collaboration with Raasay Development Trust, had been successful in obtaining funding from the Carbon Neutral Islands Fund for two projects:
  - 1) Transforming three vacant properties into affordable rental homes with zero direct emission heating systems; and
  - 2) Restoring habitats on the island through the removal of invasive species.

The projects would assist in the journey to Net Zero as well as capacity development.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

### 4. Net Zero Programme Prògram Neoni Lom

#### i. Net Zero Programme Update Fios às Ùr mu Phrògram Neoni Lom

There had been circulated Report No CCC/1/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the report and appendices, which included a lot of useful information;
- in relation to the Light Fleet – Optimal Utilisation project, it was possible that some light fleet vehicles were not being used as much as would have been expected. Equally, there might be instances of people using their own vehicles when there was a case for them having a light fleet vehicle. The project would provide a clear indication of the need, or otherwise, for light fleet vehicles, and Members looked forward to seeing the outcome. On the point being raised, it was confirmed that a high-level report could be brought to the Climate Change Committee in May 2025;
- information was sought, and provided, on the composition of the Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Board;
- limitations in terms of staff resource was a common theme throughout the report, and it was important this issue was resolved. In relation to the Solar PV Council Estate project in particular, confirmation was sought that staffing was now back up to the required number;
- the progress being made on the Built Estate and Energy projects was welcomed;
- it would be good if the work taking place in Balintore in terms of retrofitting Council houses could be extended to cover areas such as Milnafua, which was a high SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) area, and it was hoped that officers would look again at any funding that might be available;
- with regard to the Waste Thematic Group, thanks were expressed to the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations for his efforts and the scale of success he had had;
- in relation to Scope 3 emissions reporting, it was queried how many suppliers Oxygen were checking, and what impact the introduction of mandatory reporting for Local Authorities would have on the Climate Change and Energy Team;
- in response to a question, it was explained that the approach to embedding Net Zero in the Capital Programme had been the subject of a report to the Council in March 2024, and a copy of the report would be provided to Ms S Atkin;
- with reference to the Kingussie Flood Prevention project, the increasing number of extreme weather events and the vulnerability of Highland were highlighted;
- attention was drawn to the risk, set out in section 3.3 of the report, of severe widespread impacts if Scotland's Councils did not respond quickly enough to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience. Its inclusion in the report was welcomed and it was suggested it was necessary to increase the amount of emphasis placed on it as there was a danger of the Council focusing on economic objectives;
- community groups could benefit from office furniture or equipment no longer required by the Council, and it was queried whether they were informed, through Community Development Managers or Community Councils, when such items were available. It was confirmed this would be fed into the pilot project looking at the reuse of furniture;
- in relation to the introduction of twin-stream recycling systems across the Council estate, it was queried what steps were being taken in terms of education to convey the importance of recycling and how it worked;
- it was welcomed that the Net Zero Programme had been added to the Council's Corporate Risk Register. In response to a question, it was explained that the risk sat with the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager as a temporary measure until such time as a Chief Officer had been appointed;

- with regard to the Elected Member Travel project, the need for Member involvement was emphasised and it was queried how champions would be identified;
- reference was made to the significant number of skips across the Council's estate, and it was queried if information was available as to what was going into them, what was being reused and what was being sent to landfill. In response, it was explained that a cost analysis exercise was being carried out to understand what was happening in terms of skip hire across the organisation, and information in that regard could be circulated to Members or brought to the next meeting of the Committee;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that the Council had targets in respect of its own emissions but had not yet got targets for area-wide emissions;
- in relation to the Council's Ecology Strategy and the target of 10 Council estate greening projects delivered annually, it was queried whether the greening projects had been identified and suggested that consideration be given to a project in Inverness Central ward where there was very little green space. It was confirmed this would be fed back to the Environment team and a response would be circulated to Dr M Gregson;
- it having been queried what flood prevention work was envisaged in the vicinity of Ladies Walk, Inverness, it was confirmed this would be followed up with the Resilience team;
- disagreement was expressed in relation to earlier remarks regarding the risk in section 3.3 of the report, and it was commented that the UK contributed less than 1% to global emissions. The Council could spend its entire annual budget on reducing emissions and it would have a negligible impact on worldwide emissions, and it was necessary to be pragmatic. It was acknowledged there was a lot of good work that could be done in terms of improving amenity spaces and flood prevention and mitigation. The workstreams associated with waste recycling were driven by cost avoidance and should be done from a financial prudence perspective. Concern was expressed regarding some of risks set out in the project update in Appendix 1 of the report, and it was suggested it was necessary to consider how the Council could make a positive contribution to the lives of Highland residents whilst also taking cognisance of the significant and worsening budgetary challenge. In responding to the points raised, the Chair commented that looking at it from the perspective of the UK's contribution to global emissions was not how the Net Zero challenge should be faced. It was not only about emissions: economies were changing, and countries, regions and organisations that did not embrace the journey towards Net Zero would deprive themselves of funding and local investment;
- active travel was not possible for many people in remote and rural communities, and the active travel agenda perpetuated further rural-urban inequalities. It was suggested that references to implementing active travel should be moderated by stating "where possible"; and
- with regard to the conversion of fossil fuel heating systems, it was understood that air source heat pumps were not effective in low outside temperatures, and reference was made to complaints from tenants that air source systems were not adequate. It having been queried whether consideration had been given to ground source systems, it was confirmed that the options appraisals included an assessment of all available low carbon technologies, namely, air source, ground source and biomass.

The Committee:-



- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** progress to date as outlined in the report and Appendix 1 of the report; and
- \* ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval of the project brief templates in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

**ii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Waste  
Fios às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Lom – Sgudal**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/2/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- reference was made to the food waste associated with the provision of Members' catering for Committee meetings, and it was queried whether there was scope for a project in that regard whereby an ordering system could be implemented and Members could lead by example. The Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations confirmed that he would welcome the opportunity, in conjunction with relevant officers, to take forward such a project;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the Waste Aware team was feeding into the Net Zero Audit Surveys that were the subject of item 9 on the agenda;
- an update having been requested on the Food in Schools project, it was explained that this was now being reported to the Redesign Board. An update would be requested for circulation to Climate Change Committee Members or presentation to the next meeting;
- Members received a lot of requests from Community Councils for information, and it was queried whether educational content developed for schools could be incorporated into a presentation for Community Councils to raise awareness. The Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations confirmed that could be taken forward;
- the need for more education and clear communication with the public, whether on social media or by other means, was emphasised. It was necessary to go back to basics and clarify how, for example, Christmas wrapping paper and cardboard pizza boxes should be disposed of;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how Waste Transfer Stations contributed to waste, emission and travel reduction.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Waste Thematic Group.

**iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Procurement and Community Wealth Building  
Fios às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Lom – Solarachadh agus  
Togail Saidhbhreas Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the work being progressed by the Procurement and Community Wealth Building Thematic Group was welcomed;
- the benefits of local procurement, not only in terms of reducing emissions but in terms of community wealth building, were emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether emission reductions and supporting the local economy would be given priority over cost in future procurement decisions; whether procurement rules and regulations needed to be changed to allow Scope 3 emissions to be considered in the procurement process; and whether there was currently enough good data to inform and monitor Scope 3 emissions going forward;
- venison was an environmentally friendly, sustainable and healthy meat, and there were many venison larders in Highland. Schools on Islay and Jura had become the first in the UK to include venison in their school meals, and it was queried whether there was scope to follow suit with some schools in Highland. The Category Manager – Procurement spoke to the framework and processes to be followed, and confirmed she would be happy to have a discussion with Ms K Willis as to how the matter could be progressed. The Project Manager added that discussions were at an early stage regarding a pilot project for the provision of venison to schools in the Cairngorms area, and looked forward to continuing the conversation outwith the meeting;
- surprise was expressed that the number of suppliers was so low, and it was suggested that was something that could be looked at in future;
- small contracts, eg for an individual school, should not be subject to the same rules as large contracts, and it was suggested a de minimis level should be put place;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that sustainability requirements had formed part of the tendering process for a number of years; and
- in relation to food procurement, the importance of quality was emphasised. It was added that the latest dietary guidelines indicated that it was necessary to eat less meat, not only for climate change reasons but for health reasons.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Procurement and Community Wealth Building Thematic Group.

## 5. Energy Benchmarking of Property Estate A' Dèanamh Tomhas-measaidh air an Oighreachd Sheilbhe

There had been circulated Report No CCC/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for the significant increase in water consumption and utility costs, and how unmetered usage was calculated. In relation to water consumption, the Energy Manager undertook to provide additional analysis, perhaps narrowing usage down to individual sites, and this was welcomed;
- the Council had an opportunity to produce electricity at a lower cost than it was currently being charged, and the faster that programme was accelerated the better the result would be for the Council's finances;
- facilities such as sports centres, which were not within the Council's control, appeared to be the most expensive in terms of heat and electricity usage, and it was questioned whether this needed to be explored with High Life Highland. In

particular, information was sought regarding the 78% increase in electricity consumption in respect of Sport Centre – Dry, and the Energy Manager undertook to revert to Dr M Gregson with an explanation;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that two fiscal years of energy benchmarking data was currently available. Whilst there was some older data, and totals and trends could be provided, the fine detail was not available;
- in relation to the tables at sections 6.4 and 6.5 of the report, information was sought, and provided, on why and how the performance variations had occurred; what Industrial Type Activities and Shop referred to; and, with regard to heat performance, the reasons for the significant increase in respect of Recycling/Landfill Centre and Shop;
- it having been commented that it would be helpful, for scrutiny purposes, if there was a way of comparing like with like, it was explained that it was only possible to report absolute figures. However, there was a commentary box in the report card in the Energy Benchmarking Tool, and efforts had been made to provide context where there were any anomalies – for example, if a building had closed down partway through the year;
- the electricity usage in respect of Shop having been queried, the Energy Manager undertook to investigate and clarify the heating type and any other contributing factors; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether properties that had been the subject of a Community Asset Transfer were still included in the data.

The Committee **AGREED** the refreshed Energy Benchmarking Tool, which now incorporated 2023/24 data.

## 6. Solar PV Non-Domestic Estate Update Fios às Ùr mu Oighreachd Neo-dhachaigheil PV Grèine

There had been circulated Report No CCC/5/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and the time spent and progress made in terms of rectifying issues and bringing Solar PV systems back into operation;
- in relation to battery storage systems, concern was raised regarding an apparent lack of awareness and detail about fire safety consequences and the type of gas used. Assurances were offered in that regard and it was confirmed that, as the Council looked to introduce further battery systems or other means of storing energy, specifications would be brought to Members for consideration;
- regarding section 7.3 of the report, it was queried if Inverness Common Good had been notified regarding the proposals for solar arrays at Longman Waste Transfer Station as they were the site owner, and whether consideration had been given to the installation of ground level Solar PV at the site. It was also queried if Torvean Quarry would be considered for Solar PV installation as it had been considered as a battery storage site and it would be advantageous to generate and store electricity at the same site. It was confirmed that officers were looking at the development of solar at the Longman and exploring options at Torvean Quarry, and Members' comments would be taken on board;
- regarding section 5.2 of the report, Members were keen to see the development of the 2025/26 maintenance, inspection and servicing programme to prevent

equipment from going off-line without prior knowledge. It was also emphasised that adequate resources were required to support the maintenance programme; and

- regarding section 5.1 of the report, it was clarified that the 78% referred to the percentage of energy generation rather than the percentage of systems.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the current status of Solar PV generation assets on the Council's non-domestic estate; and
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed development of new and proposed installations.

## 7. **Net Zero – Building Technical Standards Solar PV and Metering** **Neoni Lom – PV Grèine agus Meatairigeadh Inbhean Teicnigeach Thogalaichean**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the technical specifications were important in terms of preventing some of the issues that had been experienced to date, and appreciation was expressed for the report;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether there was any guidance on the appropriate orientation of solar panels on roofs, especially on listed buildings; and
- listed building rules had been relaxed, and it was hoped that some listed buildings in Highland that had previously not been eligible for permission to install solar panels might now be reconsidered.

The Committee **AGREED** the technical specifications set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report.

## 8. **Performance Monitoring Report – Q3 2024/25** **Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R3 Bliadhna Ionmhasail 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/7/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the importance of monitoring and reporting remedial and maintenance actions for renewable energy generation assets was emphasised;
- an update was sought on the red RAG rating in respect of Carbon Literacy training, including what the feedback had been from those who had participated and whether there had been a change in mindset. It was confirmed that the first online training modules were currently being evaluated by the Learning and Development Team. With regard to the training that had been delivered to the extended Corporate Management Team, evaluation was ongoing and an update could be provided at the next meeting of the Committee; and
- in response to a question regarding training for Members, it was confirmed that a series of workshops would be delivered throughout 2025/26. Members were

encouraged to get in touch with officers if there were any particular areas they wished to be included in the programme.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the performance information for the Climate Change function.

**9. Net Zero Audit Surveys Update**  
**Fios às Ùr mu Shuirbhidhean Sgrùdaidh Neoni Lom**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/8/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in relation to behavioural change measures and developing projects in schools to get students and teachers on board, Members reiterated the need to tie in with other teams, such as the Waste Aware team;
- with regard to the formatting of the Audit Report, which showed the annual saving and capital costs, it would be useful to see the revenue cost of the capital;
- investing in new equipment could be advantageous in terms of reduced maintenance costs; and
- Members commended the positive and comprehensive Audit Report, and the practical and achievable measures contained therein, and expressed thanks to officers for the hard work taking place.

The Committee **NOTED** progress to date.

The meeting concluded at 16.40 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 30 January 2025 at 9.30 am.

### **Present:**

Mr L Fraser	Mr S Mackie
Mr A Graham	Ms K MacLean
Mr R Gunn	Mr D Millar
Mrs J Hendry	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair) (remote)
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)	Mrs M Reid (substitute)
Ms M MacCallum	Mr M Reiss
Mr W MacKay (remote)	Ms M Smith
Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)	Ms K Willis (substitute)

### **Non-Members also present:**

Mr A Baxter	Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Dr C Birt (remote)	Mr B Lobban (remote)
Mr S Coghill (remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr R Gale	Ms K McEwan (remote)
Mr J Grafton (remote)	Mr R Stewart
Dr M Gregson (remote)	

### **In attendance:**

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities  
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations  
Ms D Sutton, Strategic Lead - Community Operations and Logistics  
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services  
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead – Finance  
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Project Manager  
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer  
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Chief Superintendent R Shepherd, Divisional Commander, Police Scotland

**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 G MacKenzie 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 Baldrey, Mr J Bruce, Ms T Collier and Mr M Green.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 4: Mr D Millar and Mrs M Reid

Item 8: Mr S Mackie

**3. Good News  
Naidheachdan Matha**

The Chair informed the Committee of the following items of good news:-

- the development of the extension to Croy cemetery had progressed well, with the contractor having installed strip foundations for 87 new lairs. Landscaping of the area would be completed in March 2025. This phase of the extension would provide over 30 years increased capacity at the cemetery;
- all Mechanics and Team Leaders in the service were now IRTEC accredited mechanics. IRTEC was an independent accreditation and validated the competence of technicians working to maintain commercial vehicles, trailers and passenger carrying industries. An IRTEC licence was valid for five years and tested both the knowledge and practical level of an individual's competence.
- congratulations were extended to Kevin Gordon who, following a mini reorganisation in Ross and Cromarty and Skye, had been appointed as the new Amenity Officer for Skye and Lochalsh. Kevin was a longstanding and valued member of the Amenities team on Skye and brought an extensive knowledge of the full range of operations carried out by Amenity Services.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

**4. Police Performance Report  
Aithisg Coileanaidh a' Phoileis**

**Transparency Statements: Mr D Millar and Mrs M Reid declared a connection to this item on the basis that a close relative was an officer within Police Scotland but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No CP/1/25 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

Chief Superintendent Shepherd highlighted the main themes of the report and provided updates on a recent seizure of 40kg of cannabis worth £600,000, the rollout of body-worn video equipment, the number of drink and drug driving offences detected over the Christmas period, the safety of Elected Members, and the 2025/26 budget allocation from Police Scotland.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in relation to incidents involving reckless conduct with firearms, reference was

made to the tragic shootings that had taken place in Skye and Dornie in 2022, and concern was expressed regarding the time it would take for the Armed Response Unit, based in Inverness, to respond to an incident in a remote and rural part of Highland. Further discussion ensued, during which information was sought, and provided, on the issuing and revocation of firearms certificates in Highland, whether it was possible to review how the firearms response was delivered, and whether the Council needed to contact Police Scotland to further explain the unique situation in Highland and ask for additional funding for firearms trained officers to protect Highland communities appropriately. Chief Superintendent Shepherd explained that an investigation into Police Scotland's response to the shootings in Skye and Dornie was ongoing, and he undertook to find out the timeline for the outcome. Members having praised two of the officers involved for their bravery, it was confirmed they would be honoured locally with Divisional Commander commendations;

- high-profile drug seizures were welcomed;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether the reduction in the number of missing children was linked to the Council's Home to Highland programme, the reasons for the improved shoplifting detection rate, the low detection rate for fraud offenses, methods of detecting mobile phone use while driving, the recording of statistics on road traffic accidents, the plans for the future use of the Police Station and Police House at Dunvegan, the steps taken to mitigate assaults on Police Officers, the recruitment of Special Constables, the training needed to gain entry to buildings, and whether it was considered there were sufficient numbers of Police Officers in Highland;
- concern having been expressed regarding the increase in the number of sexual assaults, it was confirmed that, while some of the reports were historic and the increase might be due to increased confidence in the Police, this was being investigated. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on the support in place for victims, and whether there were any initiatives, similar to Operation Protector, focusing on sexual assault;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Armed Response Officers participated in regular Police duties and were mainly used to support other officers so they could still be available to attend firearms incidents if needed;
- the collaboration between Police Scotland and NHS Highland on drug and alcohol issues was commended;
- it was queried whether Operation Close Pass for bicycles could be extended to horses;
- concern was expressed regarding the increase in "road rage";
- it was disappointing to see an increase in public disorder offences; and
- the recent County Lines awareness sessions had been very helpful.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

**5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Q3 and Service Performance Reporting for Q3 1 September 2024 to 31 December 2024**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdadh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach agus Coileanadh Seirbheis**

There had been circulated Report No CP/2/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.



During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to whether it was anticipated that the £0.7m overspend in respect of the Service General budget could be reduced in Quarter 4;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that absence management information for Quarter 3 would be available the following week and could be circulated to Members;
- concern was expressed at the pattern of overspends across several Committees, the overspend in respect of Communities and Place being the largest, and it was queried what impact this would have on next year's budget and what lessons had been learned;
- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for the increase in staff absences, whether any savings were expected from the new waste and recycling collection arrangements, the Council's unallocated reserves, the costs involved in transferring the Council's fleet to electric vehicles; and the latest position on how waste would be transported from Seater Landfill Site;
- concern was expressed that not all invoices had been paid within 30 days as there were often penalties for paying late or discounts for paying early; and
- it was queried whether embedding Net Zero into Council activities would help to reduce costs in terms of waste and fleet, and whether it would be useful to report on carbon emission savings in future.

The Committee:-

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

## 6. Capital Monitoring Report Q3 2024/25 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Calpa

There had been circulated Report No CP/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that there was no capital funding set aside for playparks other than the allocated funding from the Scottish Government.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED**:-

- i. the forecasted capital outturn for the Communities and Place Service for 2024/25 as at Quarter 3; and
- ii. the current forecast for the major project for the Communities and Place Service for 2024/25.

## 7. Bereavement Services Update Aithisg Ùrachaidh Seirbheisean Caoidh

There had been circulated Report No CP/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the progress made in terms of reporting on burial grounds, both at the Communities and Place Committee and Area Committees, was welcomed;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the installation of new equipment in Inverness Crematorium was expected to be completed in early 2026, and the cremators would be replaced one at a time to minimise disruption to services;
- now that the issue of the availability of cemetery space was well on the way to being addressed, it was necessary to focus on the management and maintenance of burial grounds;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the public would be able to purchase lairs at Thurso Cemetery once the extension had been completed;
- concern was expressed regarding damage to cemeteries in Caithness as a result of heavy rain;
- information was sought, and provided, on the maintenance of burial grounds, including how the unusable lower terraces in Thurso cemetery would be maintained, and the availability of amenities staff in Skye;
- in relation to the changes to burial legislation, some Members welcomed the new approach to lair purchase. However, other Members expressed concern regarding the 25-year term, and information was sought, and provided, as to what would happen at the end of that period. The importance of people being able to be buried in the community they came from was highlighted, and the need for flexibility was emphasised. In terms of how the 25-year term had been decided, the Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to provide Ms M MacCallum with the documents from the consultation that had led to the decision. It was confirmed that the 25-year rule would not be applied retrospectively;
- the improvements to Canisbay Cemetery were welcomed; and
- in response to a request, the Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to provide an update on the burial grounds in Portree and Skeabost to Ward 10 Members.

The Committee:-

- scrutinised and **NOTED** the progress of current projects on burial ground extensions; and
- NOTED** the changes to burial legislation.

## 8. **Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging** **Dleastanas Leudaichte air Solaraichean a Thaobh Pacadh**

**Transparency Statement: Mr S Mackie declared a connection to this item as the owner of a company that was being levied for the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging. Having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare but elected to leave the meeting for the duration of the item.**

There had been circulated Report No CP/5/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in relation to the estimated Extended Producer Responsibility payment to the Council for financial year 2025/26, information was sought, and provided, on how

the figure of £9.5m had been calculated. It was confirmed that the £9.5m would be general income, and the waste and recycling service change had resulted in savings for the Council;

- the importance of education around recycling was emphasised;
- with regard to the rollout of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements, the need for clear, concise information was emphasised, and the provision of labels to indicate what went into which bin was welcomed; on the point being raised, an update was provided on glass recycling collections. It was clarified that glass banks were Council property and therefore the Council was responsible for their maintenance; and
- in response to a question, it was explained that bad weather and missed collections over Christmas had affected food waste collections, and funding had been requested for an additional food waste collection vehicle.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the purpose of the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging Regulations;
- ii. the estimated 2025/26 financial impact; and
- iii. the importance for demonstrating waste service efficiency and effectiveness.

## **9. Membership of Waste Strategy Working Group Ballrachd de Bhuidheann-obrach na Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr R Gunn would replace Mr R Gale on the Waste Strategy Working Group.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 am.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on 3 February 2025 at 10.00am.

### **Present:**

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

### **In attendance:**

Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager  
Mr E McIntosh, Project Manager (Area Place Planning)  
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager  
Mr S Grant, Roads Operations Manager  
Mr M Gemmell, Principal Repairs Officer  
Mr L MacDonald, Repairs Manager  
Ms F Shearer, Area Education & Learning Manager  
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager  
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Chief Inspector D Wilson, Police Scotland

**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 in the Chair**

## **Business**

### **Preliminaries**

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Chair referred to the Committee's decision that a report be brought to this meeting on the maintenance of amenity areas. He advised a Highland wide report on amenities was being prepared and that in the meantime it was proposed a Members briefing be held to discuss issues in the Inverness area. He confirmed that following the briefing a report would be brought to the Committee on this matter.

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs H Crawford, Mr D Gregg and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Items 4, 5, 10.b, 10.c and 10.d – Mr A Christie

## 3. New Years Honours Urraman na Bliadhn' Ùire

The Committee **NOTED** that the following individuals had been recognised in the New Year's Honours List: -

- Elizabeth Devlin McClurg (BEM)
- David Matthews (MBE)
- Karla Stevenson (KFSM)

## 4. Police – Area Performance Report Poileas – Geàrr-aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil

**Mr A Christie made Transparency Statements 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/01/25 by the Inverness Area Commander.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the plan to deploy officers to the City Centre be welcomed and the potential for additional resources to be made available to other communities in Inverness. In particular, reference was made to incidents of vandalism at Culloden Woods and speeding at the airport junction;
- further information was sought and provided on the nature of hate aggravated conduct in the area and the strong and robust approach being taken by the Police to such crimes;
- the potential for Police Scotland to work with the Council's Education Service to ensure hate crime had no place in Highland;
- in relation to the increase in shoplifting, it was confirmed a profile of crimes was being developed and the focus was on prevention, diversion and support through a multi-agency approach;
- in response to a query, it was explained the rise in sexual crimes reflected the strong messaging in public domain around reporting inappropriate behaviour and as a result there was more confidence in doing so;
- an assurance was sought and provided that the importance of police officers on the beat engaging and making eye contact with pedestrians would be reinforced to officers;
- the number of assaults on emergency workers was unacceptable and Members fully supported any action being taken by Police Scotland to reduce that number and provide support to those affected;

- the potential to improve the digital and non-digital mechanisms for the public and communities to report issues to Police Scotland and have these recorded, and the circumstances by which calls to the 999 were justified;
- further clarity was sought and provided on the role of the Police in relation to incidents of vandalism to chrome books outwith the control of schools if there was criminality involved. The importance of the focus being on education, diversion and support was highlighted;
- confirmation that the Chief Inspector would seek further clarity on the remit of Police Scotland in relation to the problems caused by the anti-social behaviour of gulls in the City; and
- the potential for the Council to increase investment in CCTV digital technology on the basis this would support the Police by saving time and resources in securing convictions.

During further discussion, the Chief Inspector advised that he would be content to meet with Members at regular ward briefings to consider specific ward challenges and issues.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2023 – 31 December 2024; and
- ii. the change in format necessitated by a reduction in back-office capacity to prepare additional area committee reports.

## **5. Inverness Strategy Update** **Fios às Ùr mu Ro-innleachd Inbhir Nis**

**Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non - Executive Director of Inverness BID. 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/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, clarification was sought and provided on progress with the high level outcome of a green and healthy City, the potential to include the Chapel Yard site in future plans and how this outcome linked with projects to provide more hotel accommodation in the City Centre. In addition, an explanation was provided in relation to the priorities and opportunities to deliver more affordable housing and quality green space in the City Centre. Members were advised that the Strategy consolidated priorities from a range of existing national, regional and local plans and strategies and was a tool for communicating and coordinating delivery of priority development and investment. There were a series of high-level priority outcomes as criteria for future development to be delivered through current and future projects to promote Inverness as a brand and enhance it as a place to live, work and visit.

During further discussion, Members commented that the Strategy identified a number of ways in which the Council in conjunction with stakeholders and partners had and could improve the quality of life, success and prosperity of Inverness. In relation to plans for vacant retail units in the City Centre, it was explained there was uncertainty about the viability of introducing more public services and community facilities into vacant units due to lack of resources. However, by charting out opportunities and showing how these could deliver on priorities it was hoped this would attract the necessary funding. There was a need for sustained engagement with retail sector and the Victorian Market demonstrated how small retail businesses could be successful.

Thereafter, it was suggested that all large city or town centres were undergoing transformation, and the Council should reconsider how it dispersed its staff and functions and provided more opportunities for the public to contact key services within the City Centre. A more aggressive and innovative approach be considered in relation to absentee private landlords to bring vacant premises back into use more quickly. Further clarification was then sought and provided on how the Strategy sat with the Council's place-based plans and it was confirmed while there was not a specific resource to evaluate the Strategy, it was hoped to report to Members on a similar basis in future.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Inverness Strategy as a tool for communicating and coordinating delivery of priority development and investment for the city and area;
- ii. the vision and priority outcomes derived from a consolidation of existing national, regional and local plans and strategies, adopting these as a set of expectations and qualities for future development and investment to be delivered through current and future projects; and
- iii. that delivery of the projects, priorities and vision identified within the Strategy would rest upon targeted use of existing tools and a collaborative approach to cross-sector partnership working.

## **6. Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/03/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members welcomed the investment in works to footpaths in the area as set out in the Programme.

During further discussion, concern was expressed at the delay in a permanent repair being carried out to a pothole on Culloden Road, Inverness, resulting in vehicle damage and complaints, and the potential for such repairs to be undertaken more rapidly going forward. In response, Members were advised that there were challenges in undertaking permanent repairs over the winter months due to weather conditions, low temperatures and traffic volumes. New thermal patcher technology was being trialled so that permanent repairs could be undertaken in low temperatures, and it was hoped this technology could be deployed in the area going forward.

It was requested that consideration be given to the potential for a proportion of the capital budget to be allocated towards improving drainage by investing in works to culverts and other infrastructure as more extreme weather events were experienced. It was confirmed that officers would have further discussions on the potential for strategic capital funding to be identified for such works.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for the City of Inverness and Area.

## **7. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2025/26 Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/04/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, it was suggested that a proliferation of storage containers was being observed in Inverness and whether there was a need to invest in more garage sites. In this regard, confirmation was sought and provided on current occupancy levels of Council garages and garage sites by ward and the numbers being rented by tenants and non-tenants.

Thereafter, it was suggested that if the Council was serious about localism, then one of the most important decisions that should be taken by the City of Inverness Area Committee was in relation to Council house rents. This would allow local Members to feedback with better knowledge of appropriate rent levels across the area.

In response, it was suggested the above proposal was premature given that discussions were currently ongoing on improving and increasing the powers of Area Committees.

Mr I Brown seconded by Mr C Ballance **moved** that an 8% rent increase be applied to Inverness Garages and Garage Sites in 2025/26.

As an **amendment**, Mr A Christie seconded by Mrs T Robertson moved that a 8% rent increase be applied to Inverness Garages and Garage Sites in 2025/26 and that from 2026/27, the Committee believe Council House Rents be determined by the City of Inverness Area Committee for property within that area.

On a vote being taken, there were **eleven** votes for the **motion** and **eight** votes for the **amendment**, with no abstentions. The **motion** was therefore **carried**, the votes having been cast as follows:

### **Motion:**

Mr C Ballance, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mr D Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms E Knox, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K Maclean, Mrs M Reid

### **Amendment:**

Mr A Christie, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr D McDonald, Mrs T Robertson



## Decision

The Committee **AGREED** that an 8% rent increase be applied to Inverness Garages and Garage Sites in 2025/26.

### 8. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2024 gu 30 Sultain 2024

There had been circulated Report No CIA/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, clarification was sought and provided on the reasons for the underspend on the heating/energy efficiency budget. It was explained this reflected the time required to set up projects and that any slippage would be carried forward to the next financial year.

During further discussion, it was suggested performance reporting should revert to the previous arrangement whereby housing management and repairs performance was presented to the Committee in a combined report on a quarterly basis to ensure the information was made available to Members timeously.

Following on from the above, concern was expressed at the need for more focus on improving performance on re-let times given the amount of rent loss to the Council over the period due to voids.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

### 9. Associated School Group Attainment Overview Foir-shealladh air Buileachadh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

There had been circulated Report No CIA/06/25, No CIA/07/25, and No CIA/08/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

The Chair advised that, if required, three separate briefings would be held on each of the Associated School Groups (ASGs) covered by the report and Members invited to attend those linked to their ward. A report on the other ASGs in the area would be brought to the Committee at its next meeting on 19 May 2025.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:

- a query in relation to the calculation of school rolls and how a significant increase in pupil numbers would be accommodated, reference being made to Culloden Academy ASG's forecasted roll given there was significant new housing development planned for the area. It was confirmed the Team responsible for calculating the school roll data would be asked to respond to Mrs M Reid directly on this matter;
- a query as to the purpose of including school roll forecasts in the report on the basis information on the actual pupil numbers in schools would be more relevant for Members;

- confirmation was sought and provided that absences in respect of non-attenders were recorded separately and measures put in place to engage with those young people and their families around improving their attendance;
- whether the number of S4 leavers at Culloden Academy this year would be a continuing trend due to there being more modern apprenticeship and employment opportunities and noting the Head Teacher would be able to give more insight on this issue;
- in relation to school capacity, separate figures be provided for school infrastructure and modular units/temporary classrooms to show the pressure on space at Culloden Academy. It was confirmed this point would be fed back to the relevant officers;
- an explanation was sought and provided on Culloden Academy's own standard and quality gradings and the work undertaken by officers, Head Teacher and staff in response to any concerns and deliver improvements;
- it would be helpful for local Members to be kept informed of any issues arising within the ASGs and on the plans to address those issues;
- an update was sought and provided on the Head Teacher position at Inverness Royal Academy and the engagement undertaken with the parent council and parents. It was confirmed the recruitment process was currently ongoing and it was hoped to make an appointment in the near future; and
- a point as to the connection between the forecasted decrease in school roll and capacity in respect of Millburn Academy and the stagnation of the housing market in the City Centre. It was noted that while the data was subject to change any under capacity would help ease pressure on placing requests.

During further discussion, it was suggested the capacity figures across the ASGs had to factor in the large number of jobs that would be created by the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and associated families.

Thereafter, it was queried why the average total tariff score for leavers was below the virtual comparator for all three schools and the action being taken to improve performance to the level of or above the comparator. It would be helpful for direct discussions to be held with Head Teachers on this matter once the most current data was available.

Following on from the above, the steady improvement in attainment at primary level across the ASGs was highlighted and the schools be congratulated in this regard. An explanation was sought and provided on the main reasons including the increased focus on improvement through the collaborative improvement framework and hard work and commitment of Head Teachers, staff and lead officers.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the content of the reports related to Culloden Academy, Inverness Royal Academy and Millburn Academy and that Ward Member Briefings based on Schools Clusters would be held in respect of any local issues as required.

**10. Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF)  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis**

**a) Inverness Common Good Fund - 2023/24 Annual Accounts and Final Monitoring  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis – 2023/24 Cunntasan Bliadhna agus Sgrùdadh Deireannach**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/09/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In response to a query, Members were advised that it was understood the solar panels at the Victorian Market had been switched on over the period of the last ten years.

In discussion, it was suggested the solar panels had been generating for some of the time over the period and the relevant officer had been asked for details of the generation of solar PV generation across the Council's estate since 2012.

The Committee **NOTED** the final monitoring report (Appendix 1) and Statement of Accounts (Appendix 2) for the Inverness Common Good Fund for the year ended 31 March 2024.

**b) Financial Monitoring  
Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail**

**Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non - Executive Director of Inverness BID. 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/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the financial monitoring report to 31 December 2024 and that overall expenditure is within agreed budgets excepting estimated outturns detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report.

**c) Inverness Common Good Fund Budget Setting for 2025/2026  
Suidheachadh Buidseit Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis airson 2025/26**

**Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non - Executive Director of Inverness BID. 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/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, it was requested that a report be brought to a future Committee on the potential to increase investment in CCTV in light of the number of assaults on emergency responders as reported by Police Scotland. Members were advised that the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee had agreed to repurpose funds towards CCTV improvements within the City Centre and a report would be brought forward as requested.

Thereafter, an explanation was sought and provided on the element of the budget allocated to poverty and inequalities, reference being made to the recommendation from the Members briefing that a proportion (70%) of the ICGF grants budget be ringfenced for this purpose.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Common Good Fund budget for 2025/2026 as detailed within the report and appendices of the report.

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

**Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non - Executive Director of Inverness BID. 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/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the terms of the Inverness Common Good Fund Budget for 2025/26 and **AGREED**:

i. the applications in Booklet A for funding from the 2025/26 budget as follows:

- a. Wider City of Inverness Annual Floral Displays 2025 - £22,872;
- b. Operation Respect Easter/Summer/Autumn 2025 – £14,804;
- c. Safe Inverness Project 2025/26 - £10,750;
- d. Coach & Visitor Ambassador Project 2025 - £23,847

**e. The City of Inverness Annual Floral Displays 2025**

During discussion, concern was expressed at the need to allocate more funding towards poverty and inequalities. It was suggested that a Members workshop be held in August 2025 to consider future funding for floral displays, potential means of reducing costs and more effective and sustainable alternatives to promote the City Centre whilst continuing to support the Grow Project. In particular, funding should be used to support the floral clock and other areas around Inverness Castle.

Thereafter, the importance of the annual floral displays in promoting and attracting tourists to the City Centre was highlighted. In allocating scarce resources, it was important to balance the benefits, including the tourist spend that supported social enterprises in the City, against needs around poverty and inequalities. This process should be open and transparent and the partners involved in the project invited to participate in the workshop.

Following on from the above, an amendment to the application was proposed to keep the existing number of baskets (403) and move six of the baskets from Bridge Street (opposite Primark) to the Victorian Market. All City Members be encouraged to attend the briefing in August 2025 to discuss next year's floral arrangements.

At this point, it was confirmed that a site visit to Bught Nurseries was being arranged in May 2025 and this would help inform Members on the points raised and that arrangements would be made for a workshop to be held in August 2025 as requested.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the application in Booklet A for The City of Inverness Annual Floral Displays 2025 for the sum of £54,272 based on an amended proposal to keep the existing number of baskets (403) and move six of the baskets from Bridge Street (opposite Primark) to the Victorian Market. All City Members be encouraged to attend the briefing in August 2025 to discuss next year's floral arrangements.

## Booklet B: Inverness Gull Project 2025

In summary, Members raised the following key points:

- despite a declining gull population, the indications were that anti-social behaviour by gulls in the City was a growing problem. This suggested that egg and nest removal was not working and the need to consider new and innovative approaches;
- human behaviour had inadvertently created an environment for aggressive gull behaviour in public spaces, outdoor seating areas and playgrounds. The public continued to discard takeaways and feed gulls and businesses and food outlets continued to leave refuse outside;
- concern that licence applications to NatureScot for egg and nest removal would continue to fail due to a lack of real data as to the extent of the problem. Inverness BID's Gull Incident Reporting portal was welcomed in this regard and it was hoped the portal would be used by the public;
- initiatives be considered that focused on educational programmes for the public, encouraged businesses to have proper waste management, and considered the design of bins to prevent the overflow of waste;
- the aim should be to ensure gulls had their own thriving habitats and this required collaboration with local and national governments, partners including NatureScot, businesses and the public;
- Inverness BID's proposal supported by discussions with Council officials and NatureScot included awareness raising through educational campaigns, events, and local partnerships, a range of preventative and non-lethal measures and plans to build up a stronger body of evidence to support licence applications;

- there were reputational, safety, public health and wellbeing issues for the City and the Council write to the Minister responsible to highlight the impact of the change in NatureScot's policy of limiting licences;
- reference to the success of East Ayrshire's gull management programme and the need to take action before the next breeding season;
- the progress being made with the provision of gull proof bins in Highland compared to other proactive local authorities;
- the removal of gull nests and eggs had resulted in a noticeable improvement being observed in the City Centre over the summer;
- the project was not the right approach for the public and visitors to Inverness and should be reconsidered with a focus on increased investment in nest and egg removal;
- NatureScot be asked to reconsider its licensing policy and invited to participate in a site visit to the City Centre to observe the extent of the problem; and
- whilst previous action had been effective, this was no longer an option in terms of the current licensing policy.

At this point, the Senior Community Development Manager advised that it was the view of all the parties involved that this inclusive gull programme would not be effective if the application was not agreed in its entirety. Members were advised that as the application involved an allocation of £9,663 to be paid from reserves, and given the agreed moratorium on applications to the 2024/25 grants budget as it had been fully allocated, this would require a suspension of Standing Orders.

On that basis, Mr I Brown, seconded by Dr M Gregson, **moved** to suspend Standing Order 34.

As an **amendment**, Mr C Balance, seconded by Mr R Mackintosh, moved not to suspend Standing Order 34.

On a vote being taken, there were fourteen votes for the **motion**, two votes for the **amendment**, and one abstention. The **motion** was therefore **carried**, the votes having been cast as follows:

**Motion:**

Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr A Christie, Mr D Fraser, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mrs J Hendry, Ms E Knox, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Ms K Maclean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs T Robertson

**Amendment:**

Mr C Ballance, R MacKintosh

**Abstention:**

Mr M Cameron

**Decision**

The Committee **AGREED** that Standing Order 34 be suspended.

Mr I Brown, seconded by Dr M Gregson, **moved** to award the 2025 Inverness Gull Project the full application sum of £27,050 on the basis that £6,803 of the grant approved in 2024 be repurposed towards the Gull Management Programme 2024/25 along with a further sum of £9,663 to be paid from reserves noting the Grants budget had been fully allocated, and to:

- acknowledge the commitments made by the Council, Inverness BID, and the city's population, to limit the problems caused by the growing and increasingly aggressive bird population.
- recognise the overall vulnerability of several natural bird species, the expectations placed on NatureScot in its conservation goals, and the consequent reduction in granting licence applications for egg and nest removal.
- support the range of preventative and non-lethal measures proposed, and would also seek to maintain egg and nest removal.
- urge NatureScot to expedite the licensing process, working closely with Inverness BID and local conservation groups.
- write to the Minister responsible to highlight the situation here with the purpose of creating more constructive relations with NatureScot
- seek to enhance community involvement, and to increase public awareness through educational campaigns, events, and local partnerships, highlighting the programme's environmental and community benefits.
- Implement with partners a regular monitoring system to track the programme's success, identifying the positive impacts for future support.

As an **amendment**, Mr C Balance, seconded by Mr R Mackintosh, moved to support this programme by awarding £12,229 towards the costs of dealing with gulls, as outlined in the BID application, except for the two items relating to egg and nest removal.

On a vote being taken, there were thirteen votes for the **motion**, two votes for the **amendment**, and one abstention. The **motion** was therefore **carried**, the votes having been cast as follows:

**Motion:**

Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr A Christie, Mr D Fraser, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mrs J Hendry, Ms E Knox, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs T Robertson

**Amendment:**

Mr C Ballance, R MacKintosh

**Abstentions:**

Ms K Maclean

**Decision**

The Committee **AGREED** to award the 2025 Inverness Gull Project the full application sum of £27,050 on the basis that £6,803 of the grant approved in 2024 be repurposed towards the Gull Management Programme 2024/25 along with a further sum of £9,663 to be paid from reserves, noting the Grants budget had been fully allocated, and to:

- acknowledge the commitments made by the Council, Inverness BID, and the city's population, to limit the problems caused by the growing and increasingly aggressive bird population.
- recognise the overall vulnerability of several natural bird species, the expectations placed on NatureScot in its conservation goals, and the consequent reduction in granting licence applications for egg and nest removal.
- support the range of preventative and non-lethal measures proposed, and would also seek to maintain egg and nest removal.

- urge NatureScot to expedite the licensing process, working closely with Inverness BID and local conservation groups.
- write to the Minister responsible to highlight the situation here with the purpose of creating more constructive relations with NatureScot
- seek to enhance community involvement, and to increase public awareness through educational campaigns, events, and local partnerships, highlighting the programme's environmental and community benefits.

## 11. Ward Discretionary Budget Applications Iarrtasán Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** that the following City of Inverness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 18 November 2024:-

### Ward 12

- Highland Schools Wind Orchestra (HLH): 2025 Tour to Augsburg Germany - £300
- Aird Community Trust: Kirkhill Community Centre Upgrades - £2,500
- Glenurquhart High School Parent Council: School uniform initiative - £750
- Beaulieu Community Trust: Sports Association Asset Transfer - £2,000

### Ward 13

- Highland Schools Wind Orchestra (HLH): 2025 Tour to Augsburg Germany - £300
- Old School Clachnaharry: Woodworking Enterprise Project - £911.23
- Torvean Avenue Legal Fee - £344

### Ward 14

- Trinity Life Church - TLC Community Hall Enhancement - £1,000
- Highland Print Studio: Wise Guys - £1,500

### Ward 15

- Inverness Foodstuff: Supporting Families at Christmas - £1,200

### Ward 16

- Highland Schools Wind Orchestra (HLH): 2025 Tour to Augsburg Germany - £300

### Ward 17

- Culloden - Balloch Baptist Church: Warm Space Project - £2,000

### Ward 19

- Highland Schools Wind Orchestra (HLH): 2025 Tour to Augsburg Germany - £300

## 12. Minutes

### Geàrr-chunntas

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

- i. City of Inverness Area Committee held on 18 November 2024 – **NOTED**;
- ii. Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 13 January 2025 - **APPROVED**; and
- iii. Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 20 January 2025 - **APPROVED**.

The meeting was closed at 2.09pm.



## The Highland Council

Minutes of the meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 5 February 2025 at 9.30am.

### Present:

Dr C Birt

Mrs M Cockburn

Mr D Fraser

Mr R Gale

Mr J Grafton

Mr R Gunn (remote)

Mrs B Jarvie (remote)

Ms L Johnston

Ms E Knox

Ms L Kraft

Mrs I Mackenzie

Mrs A MacLean (remote)

Mrs K MacLean

Mrs M Paterson (remote)

Mrs M Reid

Ms M Ross (remote)

Ms M Smith (remote)

### Non-Members present:

Mr R Bremner

Mr S Coghill (remote)

Mr J Edmondson

Mr J Finlayson (remote)

Mr M Gregson (remote)

Ms M Hutchison (remote)

Mr B Lobban (remote)

Mr T MacLennan (remote)

Mr J McGillivray (remote)

Mr C Munro

Mr M Reiss

Mrs T Robertson

Mr R Stewart

### NHS Highland representatives:

Dr T Allison, Director of Public Health

Ms R MacDonald, Depute Director of Adult Social Care

Mrs P Stott, Chief Officer

### Third sector representatives in attendance:

Dr G Rodger, Inspiring Young Voices

Ms R Hatfield, Inspiring Young Voices

### Participating Officials:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People

Ms F Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer Health and Social Care

Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer, Integrated People Services

Ms M McIntyre, Head of Children and Justice Social Work

Mr I Kyle, Lead Officer Strategy, Performance and Quality Assurance

Ms J Park, Strategic Lead Child Health

Ms C McLaughlan, Programme Manager (The Promise)

Mr J Maybee, Head of Criminal Justice, Social Work Services

Ms M Cano, Justice Service Manager, Social Work Services

Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager

Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

**Mr D Fraser in the Chair**

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A MacKintosh.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

## 3. **Service Achievements** **Coileanaidhean Seirbheis**

The Committee **NOTED** updates on the following topics:

- The forthcoming joint inspection of adult social care service, with a focus on mental health and unpaid carers;
- Keeping The Promise pilot project;
- The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment;
- Whole Family Wellbeing;
- New Improvement Approach;
- Unicef Baby Friendly Award, which the Chair highlighted as a significant achievement;
- Comraich (support for the separated, asylum-seeking young people)
- The Family Centre; and
- Scottish Association of Social Workers Mental Health Officer National Conference in February 2025.

## 4. **Revenue Budget and Performance Report – Quarter 3** **Slàinte is Cùram Sòisealta – Buidseat Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach agus** **Aithisg Coileanaidh – Ràith 3**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/01/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the shortage of independent care providers for people with complex needs, as reported in paragraph 5.1 of the report, was a national emergency being considered at a high level;
- clarification was sought and provided that reference to direct payments in the table in paragraph 7.1 of the report related to Self Directed Support, Option 1;
- further information was sought and provided on activities being undertaken to develop and deliver early healthcare protection, promotion, and prevention;
- while expressing concern that implementation of the Solihull approach remained red, the improving position was positive;
- clarification was sought and provided on the figures for the percentage of people over 65 with long term care needs, which was ragged red, and the development of strategic proposals to tackle this;
- with kinship care being preferable to foster care, reference was made to the poverty that sometimes faced kinship carers, and it was queried whether the number of residence orders were being increased;

- noting that ongoing vacancies were reducing the budget overspend, information was requested, and would be provided outwith the meeting, on what the overspend would have been, if the vacancies had been filled;
- attention was drawn to the ongoing challenges for delivering adult social care and it was queried whether Highland faced significant additional challenges as a result of the geography, demographics, and imminent change to the delivery model; and
- the recent addition of £20 million to assist in delivering change through the adult social care joint strategic plan was welcomed.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- APPROVED** the forecast revenue position as at Quarter 3 of the 2024/25 financial year;
- APPROVED** the progress update provided in relation to budget savings delivery; and
- APPROVED** the Service's performance and risk information; and
- AGREED** information be provided to the Committee on the impact of vacancies on the overspend and the extent of the overspend if the recurrent savings created by vacancies were removed.

## 5. The Draft Promise Plan An Dreachd Plana Geallaidh

There had been circulated Report No HCW/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- it was pointed out that remote and rural issues, as well as climate change, were significant concerns for young people and this should be reflected in the report's impact assessment;
- the draft Plan was welcomed as it demonstrated the seriousness with which the Council took its role as a corporate parent, and the voice of the child was represented throughout;
- it was important to also represent those who had lived through negative experiences, and to ensure children's rights and requests were taken seriously and actioned;
- the importance of including birth parents wherever possible and appropriate when dealing with children in kinship or foster care was highlighted;
- with reference to the high level of vacancies, it was queried what could be done to ensure the Plan was actioned. The risk to service delivery of the vacancy level was highlighted;
- it was vital that reports included lived experience and used language that was understandable to all;
- it was queried whether community councils had been consulted on the draft Plan, and the value of the local knowledge and information that could be provided by community councils was summarised;
- information was sought on progress with a new children's home in Thurso; and
- the high level of aspiration in the draft Plan was welcomed, with particular reference to the co-design and involvement of young people. It was important to consider the trauma and financial difficulties that might be faced by care experienced young people entering the workforce.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** and scrutinised the Draft Promise Plan; and
- ii. **AGREED** that an annual report of the progress of the Promise Plan be submitted to Committee for scrutiny and assurance of Highland's progress in achieving the aspirations of the Promise.

**6. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Report Update – Person Centred Solutions Portfolio**  
**Sgrùdadh Buidseat agus Aithisg Adhartais a' Phlana Libhrigidh – Raon-ùghdarras Fuasglaidhean Stèidhichte air an Neach**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/03/25 by the by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chief Officer, Integrated People Services, explained that, in relation to paragraph 3.1 of the report which stated there were no resource implications, this was not accurate and the implications were detailed in the narrative.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the value of daycare facilities and community hubs was highlighted, and could be more adequately referenced in the report;
- the third sector was considered the glue in the mechanics between the Council and NHS Highland, and it was of concern that funding to many third sector organisations was being reduced or cut;
- it was of concern that increasing numbers of people were isolated in their homes, relying on technology and, in this respect, attention was drawn to the benefits of taking a longer-term view to develop age friendly communities, to provide a varied range of housing types and sizes, and to provide services such as the handyman service, and shopmobility, with further information on the latter being sought on this outwith the meeting;
- in relation to agency staff and unpaid family carers staying in short term accommodation, the proposed visitor levy might have a detrimental impact;
- information was sought on the contracting of third sector organisations and on support for unpaid care workers. The need for longer-term contracts to allow third sector organisations to plan for more than one year was highlighted;
- assurance was sought in relation to housing that a broad long-term plan was being considered, especially for rural areas, and it was queried whether rural GP training hubs were part of a longer term vision;
- the need for the development of frailty units to reduce the number of elderly people going into hospital was queried, and a brief summary was provided by the NHS Chief Officer;
- the vital role played by unpaid carers was emphasised and support for them urged, noting the financial burden that would be faced if not for their unpaid work;
- attention was drawn to the value of intergenerational support; and
- community councils could be a vital and important source of information and assistance in the planning of local care plans and in keeping communities fully informed. Early engagement with them was urged.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the updates provided for Projects/Programmes in the report.

**7. Justice Service Highland Council Update (including annual reports)  
Fios às Ùr mu Sheirbheis Ceartais Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd (a' gabhail a-steach aithisgean bliadhna)**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/04/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the importance of education and rehabilitation for prisoners was emphasised, with reference to the low rate of imprisonment in Norway, compared with Scotland's relatively high rate. A summary was provided of some of the policies being pursued in Scotland, and some of the challenges being faced. Particular focus was given to the availability of rehabilitation services for prisoners on longer sentences, and that community-based sentences were often more effective than short-term prison stays. Further publicity on this, and on the usefulness of community payback schemes, would be beneficial;
- with reference to the doubled capacity of the new prison in Inverness, the current location of registered sex offenders was queried;
- information was sought and provided on the Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill, as summarised in paragraph 5.1 of the report;
- the level of investment in staffing for police and justice support was queried and summarised, as was the use being made of current funding;
- noting the number of people in prison experiencing trauma and mental health issues, information was sought and provided on the resources available to provide appropriate support;
- information was sought and would be provided outwith the meeting on Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements;
- the impact on the CPS of the early prison release scheme was queried;
- it was disappointing if funding for restorative justice was reduced;
- an advantage of prison stays for some people with addiction and / or medical problems was that they were less likely to miss appointments and treatment; and
- the gap between public perception and the reality of the outcomes of research and experience of some areas of justice could be significant.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

**8. Highland Children and Young People Participation Strategy  
Ro-innleachd Com-pàirteachais Chloinne agus Dhaoine Òga na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the level of engagement with children and young people was unprecedented and welcomed, and information was sought on how this had been achieved. It was disappointing that this participation was not always viewed as a core element of professional practice across all areas of work;
- the importance of children and young people enjoying the participation process was pointed out; and
- the Youth Convener should be invited to future Committee meetings.

The Committee **NOTED** the Children and Young People's Participation Strategy and **AGREED** to invite the Youth Convener to future Committee meetings.

**9. Minutes**

**Geàrr-chunntas**

The following Minutes had been circulated and were **NOTED**:-

- i. Highland Council / NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee held on 25 September 2024; and
- ii. Child Protection Committee held on 5 September 2024.

**10. National Care Service and Model of Integration Update**

**Fios às Ùr mun t-Seirbheis Chùrain Nàiseanta agus mun Mhodail Amalachaidh**

**With the agreement of the Chair, this item had been added to the agenda as an urgent item following the announcement by the Scottish Government on the proposed National Care Service legislation due to the potential implications of this to the application of the future model of integration**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/06/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, assurance was sought and provided that regular updates would be provided to the full Council and to the NHS Highland Board, and that any queries on impact to service delivery could be discussed outwith the meeting, but were not anticipated. The steering group composition would be included in the report to the Council and assurance was provided that implementation of the Adult Social Care Strategic Plan and the use of the additional £20 million of funding for ASC would run parallel to the forthcoming changes to the model of integration.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the current position in relation to the National Care Service Bill set out by the Scottish Government on 23 January 2025;
- ii. the current position in relation to the review the model of governance in place in Highland as considered by the Council on 12 December 2024; and
- iii. that further updates providing clarity on the legal, financial and governance implications would come forward to future meetings of the Council.

And further **AGREED** the need to proceed at pace with the identified work in terms of the consideration of the care and governance model given the announcements made last week by the Minister.

The meeting ended at 12.25pm

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## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 5 February 2025 at 2.00 pm.

### **Present:**

Mr M Baird	Mrs J McEwan (remote)
Mr C Ballance (remote)	Mr P Oldham
Mr B Boyd	Mrs T Robertson
Mr L Fraser	Mrs M Ross (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie	Mr R Stewart
Mr D McDonald	

### **Non-Members also present:**

Ms E Knox (remote)	Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Mr P Logue	Mr C Munro
Mrs A MacLean (remote)	

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate  
Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive – Place  
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance  
Ms S Armstrong, Chief Officer – Revenues and Commercialisation  
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance  
Ms F Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer Health and Social Care  
Miss D Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit)  
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead (Environmental Health and Bereavement Services)  
Mr M Watters, Corporate Information Governance Manager  
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager  
Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Internal Audit  
Mr P Hankinson, Senior Auditor, Internal Audit  
Ms E Barrie, Head of People  
Ms J McGonagle, Strategic Lead – Finance (People)  
Mr G Munro, Revenues Manager  
Ms M Montaner, Principal Officer, Justice Services  
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Corporate  
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer, Corporate

### **Also in attendance:**

Ms E Scoburgh, Audit Scotland  
Ms C Gardiner, Audit Scotland

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

**Mrs T Robertson in the Chair**

### **Business**

## 1. **Apologies for Absence** **Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Jarvie, Mr R Jones and Mr A Sinclair.

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

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

## 3. **Audit Scotland Report – 2024/25 Annual Audit Plan** **Aithisg Sgrùdadh na h-Alba – Plana Sgrùdadh Bliadhna 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/01/25 by the Council's External Auditors, Audit Scotland providing an overview of the planned scope and timing of the 2024/25 audit of the Highland Council annual accounts. It outlined the audit work planned to meet the audit requirements set out in auditing standards and the Code of Audit Practice. Going forward, the Controller of Audit report was planned for June 2025 but there was a possibility to bring it forward to April 2025.

Disappointment was expressed that the target date set by the Accounts Commission would not be met again this year but it was hoped that timetabling would continue to improve.

The Committee **APPROVED** the 2024/25 Annual Audit Plan.

## 4. **Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report** **Ath-sgrùdaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/02/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

The update included copies of the following final reports issued:-

- a) People – Supervision of Community Payback Orders (Reasonable Assurance)

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, regarding risk assessment reports and the importance of carrying out a risk assessment timeously was highlighted. Due to a nationwide computer software issue, risk assessments had been recorded on paper for over a year and this had led to limitations on software reports;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding overwriting risk assessments;
- it was asked if there were plans to recruit further social workers and an explanation of how this might be funded was provided; and
- in terms of Action Plan Ref M2 Management Response in the report, it was asked what measures had been taken and a response was provided.

- b) Corporate – Review of Health and Safety Arrangements (Reasonable Assurance)



During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- a well established governance framework to support the implementation of health and safety policy was in place but it appeared this was not being adhered to and required actions were not being taken by managers. It was hoped these actions would be rectified timeously and that the low uptake of training would be improved;
  - concerns had been raised at the Central Safety Committee regarding the number of sites without Responsible Premises Officers and the little progress that had been made. It was suggested that a review of the present arrangements should be considered. In addition, it was suggested that the Senior Officer in the premises be given the responsibility, along with due credence for doing so;
  - the Council had a duty of care to its employees and there was concern that workplace inspections were not undertaken as often as they should. A request was made for the average time, by Service, that these inspections were taking place; and
  - there was no Health and Safety Risk Profile or Register for Education and Learning and this was imperative.
- c) Corporate – Efficiency of Debt Recovery Arrangements (Reasonable Assurance).

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Final Reports referred to in Section 5.1 of the report; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at sections 6 and 7, and the status of work in progress detailed at Appendix 1 of the report.

## 5. Action Tracking Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Thracadh Ghnìomhan

There had been circulated Report No. AC/03/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- the reduction in the number of revised action dates was commended and it was hoped this would continue. Services had to bear in mind these action dates were agreed and needed to be achieved on a more regular basis;
- imprest holders had been given a revised completion date from March 2024 to March 2025 and this was an example of where some revised dates appeared to be excessive. In this connection, it was queried if alternatives to imprest accounts had been identified. With only a 17% completion rate of the review of the use and control of imprests in Health and Social Care establishments, Members expected a significant improvement by the next Committee; and
- as the Council's in-house bus operation was now moving on from the pilot stage, there was an opportunity to deliver a high quality service and to expand the fleet. However, it was important to have an operating model in place. In providing reassurance, Members were assured that the development of a clear strategy would be provided by the revised target

date of 30 June 2025. Presently, the in-house service had been operating well with new services being added as opportunities arose and this was providing Best Value against private sector costs of delivery.

The Committee scrutinised, commented and **NOTED** the action tracking information provided, including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions.

## **6. Update on the Global Internal Audit Standards Cunntas às Ùr mu Inbhean In-Sgrùdaidh Cruinneil**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/04/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit and Performance) providing an Internal Audit Charter and Strategy.

Reference was made to a recent Audit Scotland report of an Aberdeen City Council employee who had been able to embezzle more than £1m over a 17 year period and assurances were sought that a similar fraud could not take place in Highland Council. In response it was stated that the Audit Scotland report had made five recommendations and key action points for all Councils to consider. These would be examined as part of an audit review with the intent to report to the next Audit Committee meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the revised Internal Audit Charter, which included the Mandate and the new Internal Audit Strategy; and
- ii. **NOTED** that these would come into effect from 1 April 2025 in order to conform with the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector.

## **7. Review of Corporate Risks Ath-Sgrùdadh air Cunnartan Corporra**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/05/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, why the Risk Type for HCR9 (Net Zero Targets) had been described as Financial and not also as Legal and Reputational;
- the Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for HCR9 had been changed to the Climate Change Manager. However, as this post had no responsibility for budget setting, it was suggested that it should be a more senior officer;
- it was hoped the two mitigating actions relating to HCR9 that were RAG'd as Red would be included in the audit of the Climate Change Strategy. At this stage, however, this could not be guaranteed as, under the Global Internal Audit Standards, a full risk assessment process was required for each audit;
- whilst supporting the drive toward Net Zero, caution was expressed that this should not divert funds from other core services provided by the Council; and
- in relation to HRC3 (Sustainable and Adaptable Workforce) every effort needed to be made to make Highland Council the employer of choice. This

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could be done by looking at best and worst practice elsewhere and reviewing how the Council recruited staff.

The Committee:-

- i. having scrutinised, **NOTED** the Corporate Risk Register provided at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. having considered, **NOTED** the risk profile at Appendix 2 of the report.

### 8. **Audit Committee Training Plan 2025/26** **Plana Trèanaidh na Comataidh Sgrùdaidh 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/06/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

The Committee considered and **AGREED** the training programme, and approach set out in section 5.3 of the report.

The meeting ended at 3.05 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in **The Courthouse, 36 High Street, Kingussie / Remotely** on 10 February 2025 at 9.30 am.

**Present:**

Mr J Bruce

Mr R Jones (in the Chair)

Ms M Cockburn

Mr B Lobban

**In attendance:**

Ms A Jansson, Chief Officer, Education (Primary)

Mr S Grant, Senior Engineer

**Also in attendance:** Inspector R McCartney. Police Scotland

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

**1. Apologies for Absence**  
**Leisgeulan**

There were none.

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

There were none.

**At the request of the Chair, due to the late arrival of the Police representative, Item 4 was considered before Item 3.**

**4. Area Roads Capital Programme 2025-26**  
**Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2025-26**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- attention was drawn to specific roads that required attention and would be dealt with outwith the meeting;
- assurance was sought that wherever possible external funding contribution to roads repair and maintenance was sought, and disappointment expressed that the Scottish Government Strategic Timber Fund was coming to an end; and
- it was requested that timber lorries using the bridge on the B970 road be reminded not to cross it in convoy.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed 2025-26 Area Roads Capital Programme for Badenoch and Strathspey.

### 3. Police Area Performance Report Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/01/25 by the Area Commander (South Highland Area Command), Police Scotland.  
Second

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the layout and clarity of the report was welcomed;
- information was sought and provided on the following topics:
  - whether drink and drug offences were counted separately, despite being reported together;
  - assurance that equitable support was being provided in Badenoch and Strathspey for the range of sexual offences being recorded;
- Members expressed discontent at the national policy not to enforce the 20mph speed limit zones in town and village centres and asked that their concern be passed on within Police Scotland; and
- Police attendance at Community Council meetings varied considerably and it was suggested that if an officer was unable to attend, given staffing pressures, a brief note of area activity be provided to Community Councils, or a separate brief, informal meeting take place with the Chair. Efforts to ensure Police liaison officer contact details were up to date were summarised.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 01 April 2024 – 31 December 2024; and
- ii. the change in format necessitate by a reduction in back-office capacity to prepare additional area committee reports

### 4. Education Associated School Group Report Aithisg Foghlaim Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

During discussion of both reports, 5a and 5b, the following issues were raised:

- with reference to the reducing roll at both schools, and the poor state of repair of the school buildings, a ten year plan was suggested, with a view to the replacement of both schools with one new building. Information on the school estate and on the number of placement requests being processed between the two schools was requested, and it was pointed out that other social and economic issues required consideration in relation to any building rationalisation; and
- information was sought and provided on the reducing numbers of exclusions and alternative practices.

#### a. Grantown Grammar Associated School Group

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/03/25 by the Executive Chief Officer - Education and Learning.

## **b. Kingussie High Associated School Group**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/04/25 by the Executive Chief Officer - Education and Learning.

The Committee **NOTED** the reports and **AGREED** information on the area's school estate, and on the numbers of placement requests between the two schools, be provided to Members.

## **5. Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund – Revenue Reserves Update and 2025/26 Proposed Budget Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile nan Granddach**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place and Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

During discussion, Members made reference to the Common Good Fund being for the benefit of the residents of Grantown on Spey, and that it was not permitted to be used for any activity which the Council had a statutory duty to provide. Examples of its possible use included local charities, community events and community projects. It was important the Common Good Fund be given time to produce an income stream which would be used for funding.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the forecast 2024/25 year end position of the Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund revenue reserves of £910 as set out in the report; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in **Appendix 1**.

## **6. Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund application that had been approved since the last Committee:-

- Newtonmore Community Woodland & Development Trust NCWDT: Wildflower Panels, Wildcat Trail - £1,500

The remaining available Ward Discretionary Fund balance was £7,610.

## **7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** minutes of the meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 25 November 2024, which had been approved by the Council on 12 December 2024.

The meeting ended at 10.15am.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on Monday 10 February 2025 at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

Mr S Kennedy  
Mrs M Paterson  
Mrs A MacLean

### **In attendance:**

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager  
Ms L Bauermister, Community Development Manager  
Ms F Cameron, Community Regeneration Funding Programme Manager  
Ms M MacDonald, Area Education Manager  
Mr E Marsh, Housing Repairs Manager  
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager  
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Mr D Jack, Police Scotland

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

### **Mrs M Paterson in the Chair**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr G MacKenzie.

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

There were no Declarations of Interests/Transparency Statements.

#### **3. Police – Area Performance Summary Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/01/25 by the North Area Commander.

Members expressed various concerns regarding theft by shoplifting and requested information regarding engagement with those reporting the crimes. A large number of shoplifting incidents were at repeated locations. Particular examples were provided and a response was given.

The following further issues were discussed:-

- the availability of drugs via social media was worrying;
- it was asked if Police had received reports of the offer of drugs to children leaving youth clubs and it was confirmed that this had been the case. These reports were reviewed by the Divisional Intelligence Unit and Police liaised with partners including the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service and Procurator Fiscal Service;
- tenants living near to anti-social behaviour were suffering;
- speeding was on the increase;
- in terms of missing care-experienced young people, it was asked if it was the same individuals being reported or if there was an increased amount of incidents and a response was provided; and
- Members shared the frustrations felt by the community and welcomed the Safer Ross meetings which had recently been reinstated. It was felt that working partnerships were important.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, for the period covering 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

#### **4. Area Roads Capital Programme 2025-26 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2025-26**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the number of potholes was concerning, particularly those that had already been back filled;
- in terms of the Capital Programme 2025/26 in Appendix 3 of the report, further details were sought and a response was given;
- in terms of the impact assessment in the report, it was felt that there might be a socio-economic impact should damage occur to cars, or on tourism;
- the Roads Operations Manager would meet with Members in the Spring for site visits; and
- it was confirmed that the thermal machine tests were successful and the machines might be used in the future.

Thereafter, Members requested the total amount of Capital Expenditure required to address the Dingwall and Seaforth area road repairs and structures, for the last 5 years and for this financial year. The Roads Operations Manager confirmed that this would be provided to the next Ward Business Meeting.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for Dingwall and Seaforth Area.

#### **5. Education Associated School Group Report Aithisg Foghlaim Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte**



There had been circulated Report No DSA/03/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought regarding the progress of St Clements School as it was not included in the report. It was hoped that the Head Teacher might attend an upcoming Ward Business Meeting;
- the number of home schooled pupils was requested and it was confirmed that this would be provided outside of this meeting; and
- further information was sought regarding Positive Destinations and it was confirmed that this would be provided outside of this meeting.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the content of the report.

## **6. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/04/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- in terms of paragraph 6.7 of the report, it was asked where the Housing Service drew the line in determining whether a repair was an emergency or not. An example was provided and a response was given;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the carrying out of the backlog of low priority works;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the preparation of properties, including homeless accommodation, for re-letting;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the rewiring of properties;
- it was asked how the Environmental Improvements budget had been spent and it was confirmed that this would be provided after this meeting; and
- information was sought regarding Aids and Adaptations and it was confirmed that this budget was not used for general repairs.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

## **7. Housing Revenue Account Garage Rents 2025/26 Gharaidsean Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members raised various concerns regarding the garages in the Dingwall and Seaforth area, which included:-

- some of the garages were in a poor state of repair and some were not fit for purpose;
- assurances of repairs had been given in the past but the repairs did not appear to have happened;

- many garages were used for storage rather than cars;
- there were still a number of wooden garages; and
- it was asked how much income generated from garage rent went towards repairs.

Thereafter, it was felt that the proposed 8-10% increase in garage rent was too high.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- a 6% rent increase to apply to Dingwall and Seaforth Garages and Garage Sites; and
- a report be submitted at the next meeting confirming:-
  - the total amount of Dingwall and Seaforth garages rent received that was allocated to repairs; and
  - an outline of how the garage estate could be improved using that budget.

## 8. **Community Regeneration Funding (CRF)** **Maoineachadh Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/06/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, clarification was sought, and provided, regarding funding and Members welcomed the structural upgrade and restoration of Sir Hector MacDonald Memorial in Dingwall.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the risk of external grant conditions not being met; and
- ii. **AGREED by HOMOLOGATION** the Council investing £162,541.90 CRF grant in the restoration of Sir Hector MacDonald Memorial in Dingwall.

## 9. **Dingwall Common Good Fund** **Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Pheofharain**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/07/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Clarification was sought, and provided, regarding delegated powers.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Dingwall and Seaforth Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1a) and Q4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 1b).
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the position of the Dingwall and Seaforth Common Good Fund as shown in the 2024/25 Q3 monitoring statement at Appendix 2;

- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 3; and
- iv. **AGREED** to delegate to the Community Support and Engagement Team power to approve expenditure up to £10,000 in relation to Dingwall and Seaforth Common Good within the annually set budget and following consultation with Ward Members. This delegated power would be reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.

**10. Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary budget applications approved since last meeting**  
**Iarrtasan buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàrd Inbhir Pheofharain agus Shìophort air an aontachadh bho choinneamh mu dheireadh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since its last meeting, and that the remaining balance was £7,889.

- i. Highland Schools Wind Orchestra – 2025 tour to Augsburg, Germany: £300;
- ii. Maryburgh Amenities Company – Senior Citizens Christmas Lunch: £300
- iii. Conon Bridge Lunch Club – 2024 Christmas Lunch: £300
- iv. Muir of Ord Development Trust – OAP Christmas Lunch: £300
- v. Conon Bridge Community Council – Christmas 2024: £300
- vi. Maryburgh Community Council – Defibrillator Project: £400

**11. Minutes**  
**Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 11 November 2024 which were approved by the Council on 12 December 2024.

**12. Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/08/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members welcomed the Area Place Plan and thanked all involved in its production.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to adopt the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan (APP);
- ii. **AGREED** to support and promote the APP where possible in terms of its consideration within other Plans and Strategies across or impacting the Dingwall and Seaforth Area; and
- iii. **NOTED** that to progress the work and aspirations set out in the Plan future steps would include creation of detailed action plans.

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held Remotely on 10 February 2025 at 10am.

### **Present:**

Mr M Green  
Ms B Jarvie  
Mr L Fraser  
Mr P Oldham

### **Also in attendance:**

Chief Inspector R McCartney, Police Scotland

### **In Attendance:**

Mr M Greig, Community Development Manager  
Mr A Garrow, Project Officer  
Mr M Gemmell, Principal Repairs Team  
Mr L MacDonald, Repairs Manager  
Ms S Lamb, Project Officer, Community Regeneration  
Mr S Grant, Senior Engineer  
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager  
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

**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 M Green in the Chair**

#### **Business**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

#### **3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha**

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

- work had started at the putting green on Phase II of the Team Hamish project with the expected completion date of May 2025. The efforts that had been made by all were commended;
- progress continued with the development of the Nairnshire Community Newspaper with their first employee appointed and work was ongoing to recruit an Editor;

- several successful Burns Night events had been held and helped to raise funds for local charities which was welcomed. Attention was also drawn to the fundraiser held by the Queens Park Residents Group in the Legion Hall, which was an excellent space with good facilities and use of this resource was encouraged; and
- reference was made to the high public engagement in the food waste collection service which had excelled all expectations. Consequently, a request had been made to the Scottish Government for another food waste lorry, which was a specialist vehicle, to meet the high demand.

**4. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications  
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-bheothachadh na Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No NC/01/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- many people would benefit from the East Harbour path and this was welcomed;
- the benefits of the beach community having the ability to wash off sand particularly prior to using the splash pad. A request was made for a sign to be installed requesting that sand be washed off prior to entering the splash pad to help reduce maintenance and avoid short term closures of the facility. It was also clarified that the shower would be open seasonally in line with the splash pad but consideration would be given to keeping it open longer subject to appropriate infrastructure requirements being in place;
- praise was given to the diligent approach by officers to ensure that the funds were maximised; and
- the Chair advised that additional Community Regeneration funding of £12,882 had been awarded to the Team Hamish project for an extra road at Marine Road, Nairn. He further explained going forward the Community Regeneration Fund would predominately be the Coastal Community Fund and Nairn had received a £50,000 increase in funding making total funds available of £58,000 for 2025/26. However, this funding was allocated based on poverty and population, therefore on that basis Nairn should receive funding closer to £120,000 or £170,000 and work would continue to endeavour to achieve this.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** all of the applications presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:-

- East Harbour Path - £10,680
- Nairn Beach Shower - £9,101.28

**5. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2025/26  
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No NC/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- it was highlighted that the garages were effectively used for storage and thus the rental was not set at a commercial rate;
- it was proposed a 20% increase should be applied to garage rents noting this rate was still very low compared to the Highland average. Other Members indicated their support for a 20% increase; and
- consideration should be given to the Highland Council selling these properties due to the long term liability as well as their high value. It was suggested a consultation should be undertaken to explore selling the garages. However, although supportive of the consultation being undertaken, it was indicated some community groups needed affordable storage and demand for this should be explored.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** that a:-

- i. 20% rent increase be applied to Nairnshire Garages; and
- ii. report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee on the viability of the Council garages being sold.

## **6. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024 Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2024 – 31 Dùbhlachd 2024**

There had been circulated Report No NC/03/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion it was indicated that although the average time to complete emergency repairs was within target, it was still well below the Highland average. It was queried if there was a particular reason for this during which it was explained that this was mainly due to repairs predominantly being undertaken by private contractors, who often had competing demands and sometimes materials were also needed which meant a follow up visit was required. It was further highlighted some contractors had stopped working for Highland Council, while others were working in Inverness which also contributed to delays.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 30 December 2024.

## **7. Police Area Performance Report Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No NC/04/25 by the Area Commander (South Highland Area Command).

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- it was noted the report covered the south Highland area and it was queried whether it would be feasible to receive information more specific to Nairnshire. However, it was explained the report was as detailed as it could be;

- regarding the issue of drug supply, it was explained that members of the public could assist in reporting any such incidents using the Police 101 call handling service, online using the Contact Us form or anonymously through Crimestoppers as well as attending their local station or stopping officers in the street;
- it was difficult to interpret trends/crime levels as reporting had improved which was welcomed;
- it was clarified that the North Division covered the whole of the Highlands and Islands area;
- anecdotally it seemed shoplifting was on the increase, particularly in Inverness, but the report suggested this had reduced. It was clarified shoplifting in Nairn had been challenging but Police Scotland was taking a more holistic approach to this to ensure there was meaningful engagement with a view to ascertaining the root cause and reducing this activity;
- concerns were raised regarding increasing levels of antisocial behaviour and exploitation of vulnerable people. Confirmation was provided there would be early intervention on this with awareness sessions in schools but it was urged that any such incidents should be reported to the police;
- a request was made for CCTV at River Park, Nairn but it was indicated that this was a Highland Council issue;
- confirmation was provided that the use of Bodycams would be rolled out in May/June 2025;
- confirmation that advice would be sought from the Roads Policing Department regarding horse users and cyclists on closed paths to improve messaging on this; and
- concerns were raised on speeding, especially on rural roads, with particular reference to the increased use of the Cawdor road in a bid to avoid the current roadworks on the A96 west of Nairn. Confirmation was provided that speed detection equipment was used in these areas but this would also be raised with the Roads Policing Department for better visible patrols to reduce speeding.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024; and
- ii. change in format necessitated by a reduction in back-office capacity to prepare additional area committee reports.

## **8. Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No NC/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- confirmation was provided that overall, the Council had a positive relationship with Amey, Bear Scotland and Transport Scotland but the importance of having good communications was emphasised particularly in respect of temporary diversions onto Council road networks as a result of trunk road closures. The Roads Operations Manager was urged to report any specific concerns to the Chair who would raise them as part of his regular meetings with Amey and Transport Scotland;

- confirmation was provided that the table at the top of page 60 of the papers related to Nairnshire and not the City of Inverness Area as stated in the report;
- a number of complaints were being received regarding the traffic lights at Delnies but in addition to this temporary traffic lights had also twice been set up at the junction between the A96, Manse Road and Waverly Road, which were Highland Council roads, causing grid-lock across the whole of Nairn. Confirmation was provided that the traffic flow issues would be further investigated;
- responding to concerns raised regarding the extensive need for white and yellow lining around Nairn, confirmation was provided that the Council had made significant investment in road marking equipment and provision of an in-house team and this work would be undertaken in early March and late summer when the weather improved;
- it was clarified the Clephanton to Croy Road was within the Ardersier boundary. It was further confirmed the Council had good specialist IT boundary technology; and
- reference was made to the work carried out by Scottish and Southern Energy prior to Christmas without prior notice being given to residents. Although these important upgrade works were welcomed, reference was made to ensuring that communications were issued to the local community to ensure they received adequate advance warning prior to the commencement of the works taking place. Further checks would be made ascertain whether any further works were scheduled and Members would be notified accordingly.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the proposed 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for Nairn and Cawdor.

**9. Nairn Common Good Fund – 2023/24 Audited Accounts. 2024/2025 December Monitoring and General Update, Proposed Budget 2025/26**  
 Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Cunntasan Sgrùdaichte 2023–24 Sgrùdadh na Dùbhlachd agus Cunntas Coitcheann 2024–25, Buidseat ga Mholadh 2025–26

There had been circulated Report No NC/06/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- disappointment was expressed at the level of return on investment being received by Adam & Co. Their performance would be further examined by the Investment Sub Committee;
- it was indicated that Common Good Funds with liquid assets were charged and paid for Council services but those with assets but no cash did not and concerns were raised at the lack of parity. Confirmation was provided that Common Good charges was currently under review and that the outcome of this would be reported to a future meeting of the Committee. A plea was made for progress of this as quickly as possible with a report back ideally within the next three months;
- the new Charging Framework, which was clear and transparent, was welcomed. There was a need to clarify the costs with the Nairn Highland Games Committee; and



- The Links was now available for organisations/individuals to host events and it was hoped that the Common Good facilities would be utilised which would benefit the whole community. The importance of promoting The Links and other Common Good areas, such as a notice board showing up and coming events, was emphasised. Confirmation was provided that discussions were being held with BID on promoting the framework and forthcoming events.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- AGREED** the Nairn Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 at Appendix 1a of the report and the final 23/24 Monitoring Statement at Appendix 1b of the report;
- NOTED** the position of the Nairn Common Good Fund and 2024/25 outturn as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement against the budget presented at Appendices 2a and 2b of the report;
- AGREED** the Nairn Common Good Fund budget for 2025/26 detailed at Appendix 3 of the report; and
- subject to consideration of the 2025/26 budget, **AGREED** the revised Nairn Common Good Fund Lets Charging Framework at Appendix 4 to the report for implementation from 1 April 2025.

#### 10. Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

Responding to a question, the Community Development Manager confirmed that he would provide Mr Oldham with a note of the funds remaining.

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund payments that had been approved since the previous meeting of this Committee:-

SGA19240	Green Hive, Trike Nairn	£1,516.00
SGA19418	Brent Centre Highlands, Sport & Thought Highlands	£1,000.00
SGA19458	Nairn Community & Arts Centre, Support to replace Audio Visual equipment	£5,550.00
SGA19524	Highland Schools Wind Orchestra (Highlife Highland), Highland Schools Wind Orchestra 2025 tour	£300.00
SGA19603	Nairn BID, Town Centre Seagull Prevention	£6,000.00

#### 11. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of the Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 4 November 2024 which were approved by the Council on 12 December 2024.

The meeting was concluded at 11.24am.

## The Highland Council Pensions Committee and Pension Board

Minutes of Meeting of the **Pensions Committee and Pension Board** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Wednesday 12 February 2025 at 9.30 am.**

### Present:

#### **Pensions Committee**

Mr C Ballance  
Mr R Gale  
Mrs J Hendry  
Ms L Kraft (remote)  
Mr B Lobban  
Mr D Louden  
Mr T MacLennan (remote)  
Mr P Oldham  
Mrs M Paterson (remote)  
Mrs T Robertson

#### **Pension Board**

Mr G MacKenzie  
Ms E Johnston, GMB

### **Non Members in attendance:-**

Mr J Bruce (remote)  
Mr S Coghill (remote)  
Mr R Stewart

### **Officials in attendance:**

Mr B Porter, Chief Officer Corporate Finance, Corporate Service  
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer Legal and Governance (Scheme Manager's Joint Secretary)  
Mr J Gibson, Trade Unions' Joint Secretary  
Ms C Strachan, Pension Fund Manager, Corporate Service  
Ms L Harrison, Pensions Accountant, Corporate Service  
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager, Corporate Service  
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Corporate Service  
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

### **Also in attendance:**

Mr C Gardner, Senior Audit Manager, Audit Scotland  
Mr D MacDonald, Unison

**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 D Louden in the Chair**

### **Business**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A MacKintosh of the Pensions Committee and Mr C Munro, Mr N MacDonald and Mr R Fea of the Pension Board.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

**3. Service Plan 2025/26  
Plana Seirbheis 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No. PC/1/25 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

There was commentary on the report by the Pension Fund Manager. In response to a query relating to subscriptions to organisations contained in the pension fund budget, it was advised that the increase in budget provision for 2025/26 compared to last year was due to a subscription to the Local Government Association to employ a person to provide technical support to local government pension schemes in Scotland.

In terms of the budget heading 'other pension fund administrative costs' information would be provided outwith the meeting to Councillor J Hendry on what was included in this budget.

In relation to the rollout of the new Altair payroll system, it was confirmed that in the event anything should go wrong with the rollout, the contingency plan would be to use the Resource Link system to pay scheme members pensions.

In terms of the pension fund work plan (section 3.1 of the report), it was requested that this should include an annual review of the Pension Board constitution.

Thereafter, the Committee **Approved** the:-

- i. Pension Fund Service Plan 2025/26;
- ii. Service work plans (Section 7 and Appendix 1), subject to the inclusion of an annual review of the Pension Board constitution (section 3.1); and
- iii. Pension Fund budget for 2025/26 (Section 9 and Appendix 4).

**4. The Pension Regulator General Code of Compliance  
Còd Coitcheann Gàillidh Riaghladair nam Peinnsean**

There had been circulated Report No. PC/2/25 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Officers were commended for the work contained in the report. In terms of Appendix 1 to the report, this referred to appendices that had not been included. Given this was a public document, these appendices should also be included in the report and an undertaking was given that this would be done.

The Committee:-

- i. **Noted** the assessment of Fund compliance with The Pension Regulator (TPR) General Code of Practice (GCoP); and
- ii. **Approved** the action plan to implement improvements to ensure there was compliance with TPR GCoP.

**5. Highland Council Pension Fund Internal Audit Annual Plan 2025/26**

## Plana Bliadhna In-Sgrùdadh Maoin Peinnsein Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. PC/3/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit), which provided details of the audits contained within the Pension Fund's 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan.

Following consideration, the Committee **Approved** the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan as set out in section 5.3 of the report.

### 6. Risk Management Policy and Current Risk Update Fios às Ùr mu Phoileasaidh Rianachd Cunnairt agus Cunnart Làithreach

There had been circulated Report No. PC/4/25 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

It was highlighted that one of the main changes to the risk management policy was the introduction of a risk appetite statement, i.e. measuring our acceptance towards risk and what our risk tolerance was. It was proposed to schedule training for Members on risk management and on the Pension Regulator Code of Practice.

In terms of the risk register, it was noted that the Fund was cautious (low appetite) to any risks in the areas of technology information, security, cyber, data and also a cautious appetite to any risks that may have a negative effect on the health and safety, diversity and equality of its staff, elected members and members of the public. It was queried if any consideration had been given to being adverse to such risks rather than cautious. It was advised that this could be considered with Members during training on this matter to review the risk appetite for the Fund.

It was queried if there was any risk to the Fund arising from changes to government policy on pension funds, in light of the Mansion House reforms and changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme in England and Wales. It was advised that the risk register contained a risk on government policy. There were discussions happening nationally in relation to proposed changes to government policy on pension funds and Officers were alert to this and would continue to keep members updated on the progress of government reviews and ongoing developments. Currently the Scottish Government had not reached a position yet on proposed pension fund reforms in England and Wales. This could be reflected upon when reviewing the risk register.

It was noted that the Service Plan included costs for additional pensions administration staff on a fixed term basis. Historically there had been issues with recruiting staff to the pensions team and it was queried if consideration should be given to recruiting staff on a permanent basis and grow our own talent for the future, as this was a very specialised area of work. It was advised that some of the posts in the team had been advertised on a fixed term basis in view of the changes that were happening with technology in improving efficiency. This would be subject to continual review including the option of recruiting staff on a permanent basis.

The Committee:-

- i. **Approved** the Risk Management Policy (which includes the Risk Appetite Statement) (Appendix 2);
- ii. **Noted** the updated risk register extract (Appendix 3); and
- iii. **Noted** that training would be arranged for Members on risk management,

including a review of risk appetite for the Fund and on the Pension Regulator Code of Practice.

**7. Pension Fund Administration**  
**Rianachd Maoin Peinnsein**

There had been circulated Report No. PC/5/25 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance, which provided an update on matters relating to the administration of the Highland Council Pension Fund.

Following consideration, the Committee **Noted** the following:-

- i. update on the Member Self Service (Engage) and Altair Pensioner Payroll projects; (section 6);
- ii. action being taken by officers to review the Fund's compliance with the Pension Regular General Code of Practice (section 7); and
- iii. Mansion House reforms - consultation responses update (section 8).

**8. Investment Sub Committee: Minutes of Meeting**  
**Fo-chomataidh Tasgaidh: Geàrr-chunntas na Coinneimh**

The minutes of the meeting of the Investment Sub-Committee held on 29 November 2024 were circulated and **Approved**.

The meeting ended at 10.00 a.m.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 13 February 2025 at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

Mr A Baxter	Mr D Louden (Substitute)
Mr C Ballance (Substitute)	Mr W MacKay
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Macpherson
Mr M Cameron	Mr H Morrison
Mr J Edmondson	Ms L Niven
Mr K Gowans	Mr P Oldham
Mr R Jones	Mrs T Robertson
Mr P Logue	Mr R Stewart
Mr B Lobban (Substitute)	Ms M Smith

### **Non-Members also present:**

Mr M Baird	Ms L Kraft (Remote)
Dr C Birt (Remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Ms L Dundas (Remote)	Mr D McDonald
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mr J McGillivray
Mr D Fraser (Remote)	Mr D Millar
Dr M Gregson	Mr K Rosie

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive – Place  
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead-Environment Dev Active Travel  
Mr M Bailey, Programme Manager (City Region Deal)  
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager  
Ms J Cromarty, Team Leader (Sustainable Transport)  
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Manager  
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance & Governance  
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

### **Also in attendance:**

Ms S Mackenzie, Co-founder and CEO, Gro For You  
Mr R Jones, Co-Founder and Finance Director, Gro For You  
Ms A Ross, Centre Director, Gro For You

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

**Mr K Gowans in the Chair**

**Business**

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr I Brown, Mr M Green and Ms K Willis.

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

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

Item 14 – Mr J Edmondson

**3. Good News  
Naidheachdan Matha**

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

**Deal for Council to take over D&E Coaches completed**

The Council acquired full ownership of D&E Coaches Limited, making a significant investment in public and school transport. This decision was influenced by the in-house team success in providing cost-effective services. Thanks were conveyed to everyone who contributed to the huge amount of due diligence work that was required to get to this point.

**Stromeferry Rockworks - Phase 13**

The latest phase of the Stromeferry Bypass project was completed to improve road safety on the A890. A £400k contract to install active mesh protection and rock bolting was finished in January. The annual rope access survey of condition of the 4km section was scheduled for April 2025, with future works set to undergo risk assessment to identify high-priority areas.

**Naver Bridge**

Preparation work for the new Naver Bridge near Bettyhill in North Sutherland began under an £11m contract with Wills Brothers. The project planned for the bridge to open in 2025, with demolition and contract completion set for 2026.

**4. Presentation – Gro For You Project Tain  
Taisbeanadh – Pròiseact Gro For You Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

Ms S MacKenzie, Mr R Jones and Ms A Ross from Gro for You Community Innovation Campus, delivered a presentation about The Gro for You Project, a pioneering project set to open in the heart of Tain in Summer 2025. This transformative Community Innovation Campus, the first of its kind in the Highlands, focused on delivering triple impact in the following key areas:

Sustainability and Net Zero Technologies, Community Learning and Development and Health and Wellbeing.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members expressed strong appreciation for the dedication, passion and hard work of the Gro For You team and recognised their work in social innovation addressing various community challenges, including health and wellbeing, skills training, social isolation and environmental concerns;
- it was acknowledged that the project aligned with sustainable development goals, supporting community growth and problem-solving. In addition, the significant effort and personal investment put into the project over the years was also acknowledged;
- continued support from the Council to ensure the project's ongoing success was needed;
- Members welcomed Tain's new developments which were highlighted as key improvements for the community. These included the Tain 3-18 campus which was the first of its kind in the Highlands, the training café and pathway from Tain to the Glenmorangie Distillery;
- it was emphasised that the Tain projects were the result of five years of hard work and perseverance and represented some of the most significant social investments in the area within the past 40 years; and
- it was suggested that other communities could potentially replicate these initiatives across Highland and seek guidance from the project team.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

## **5. Quarterly Revenue and Performance Monitoring Report Q3 2024/25 Aithisg Ràitheil Teachd-a-steach agus Sgrùdadh Coileanadh R3 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/01/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- thanks were expressed for the thorough and honest report;
- regarding the major investment in renewables, particularly in relation to the expected uplift in planning fees towards the end of the year, it was queried whether this projection would be affected by recent announcements from major oil companies withdrawing from renewables and refocusing on oil and gas due to profitability;
- planning and building warrant fees were anticipated to come in £400,000 above target. However, there was an existing overspend of over £500,000 and clarification was sought on how this discrepancy would be managed;
- it was hoped that the bus operation overspend of £466,000 would be recoverable in the next financial year. However, concern was raised over whether part of this overspend was due to the initial purchase of buses without prior inspection and the additional expenses required to make them road-ready;



- concern was raised regarding the Inverness Rose Street car park floor surface potholes and it was queried whether the issues were structural. It was felt that the car park required remedial works to improve its condition, ensure its safety, and encourage people to use the facility and signage should be displayed to confirm remedial works were planned;
- the overspend on the Corran Ferry was acknowledged and it was recognised that the aging vessel was a primary contributing factor. It was confirmed that the vessel was due to return to service shortly but concern was expressed about the potential costs associated with its return. Additionally, as the Maid of Glencoul vessel was due to be repaired and refitted, it was queried what the associated costs would be for these works and other related costs to be incurred before the new vessels arrived;
- disappointment was expressed regarding the reduction of £200k from the Coastal Communities Fund as there were many projects being worked across Highland which needed this funding;
- it was queried what actions were being taken to encourage business startups, including whether and where advertisements were being placed;
- regarding bus operations, it was queried if the Council planned for bus leasing given the success of past collaborations;
- it was noted that the Quarter 3 monitoring report omitted staff sickness absence data and therefore it was requested that this be issued to Members to allow for ongoing monitoring;
- disappointment and concern were expressed regarding budget management, particularly in relation to climate change and energy spending. It was felt that despite the Council making difficult financial choices, agreed budgets set by Members were not being adhered to and this was deemed unacceptable. Therefore, stronger budgetary controls to ensure that financial allocations were accurate and achievable was called for. In response, assurance was provided that all council decisions were made based on the best available professional intelligence and with due diligence, and contingencies and reserves were in place for unforeseen challenges;
- while the acquisition of D&E Coaches was a positive development, concern was expressed regarding the timing and handling of the announcement. It had been released to the press at 8pm on a Wednesday, which was perceived as an unusual time for a positive announcement. In addition, concern was also raised regarding the due diligence process, as it appeared that the seller was under the impression that all checks had already been completed, despite the Council stating that these were only beginning;
- reference was made to a previous query regarding the financial viability of the in-house bus service, with a request for a profit and loss account to be shared as evidence of the savings it was generating. It was highlighted that this had not been produced despite Members requests. Members had a duty to scrutinise the work of the Council and required clear, evidence-based information to do so effectively;
- officers were currently working on a strategy to reduce the current financial pressures but concern was expressed about the level of outstanding debts and losses, especially with only six weeks remaining in the financial year;
- the surplus generated by the planning system was welcomed, with the expectation that progress would be made on mapping renewable energy

projects in the Highlands, as per the Council's decision on 30 September 2024;

- information was sought, and provided, regarding the poor investigation resolution rate, as the report indicated that only one inquiry had been successfully resolved within the 20-day timeframe, while 15 had not been completed within that period;
- explanation was sought regarding the £400,000 overspend on the car parking budget due to a loss of income. Whilst the overspend had been attributed to the Rose Street car park and arrangements with the Fort William Common Good Fund, it was confirmed that a detailed update would be provided to Members to identify the exact proportion of the overspend related to the West End (WE) car park in Fort William. In addition, concern was raised that liability for the WE car park might be unfairly shifted onto the Common Good Fund despite a lack of maintenance to the sea wall or the car park surface over a long period;
- regarding appendix 2 of the report, it was highlighted that the year-end car parking estimated income would be nearly £300k overbudget. In addition, clarification was sought why staff costs were estimated to be over £500k which was equated to a 35% overspend;
- further detail was requested on the fuel sales overspend as the income targets were considered to have been overly ambitious for some time; and
- regarding paragraph 8.4 of the report, information was sought, and provided, on the comparison between the poor roads network ratings for B, C, and U class roads and road maintenance staff costs being £923k underspent for the year-end. Clarification was also sought on the reason behind the underspend, along with its impact on the ability to carry out necessary road repairs.

The Committee:-

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

## 6. Capital Monitoring Q3 2024/25 Sgrùdadh Calpa R3 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was queried what steps were being taken to find a permanent solution to the annual expenditure on rock face stabilisation at Stromeferry;
- information was sought, and provided, that restrictions on the Inverness Infirmary Bridge would be subject to engineering approval and health and safety considerations. In addition, it was highlighted that a full study should be undertaken to weigh up expensive repairs against rebuild costs to ensure best use of funds;
- it was queried whether the use of smaller vessels, rather than the originally planned ferries, would impact the loan repayment period for Uig Harbour due to lower revenue from dues;

- it was requested that the long-awaited road sign, which had been in storage for seven years, be installed as part of the planned major signage works at the B9006 at Croy;
- concerns were raised regarding outstanding payments for land acquisition at Invercoe Bridge. It was highlighted that local goodwill had allowed the project to proceed, yet payments to individuals remained unresolved since August of the previous year. It was requested that communications immediately improve and payments be processed promptly to resolve the matter;
- it was highlighted that local businesses and residents had raised concerns about damage to properties due to waves from the Uig Pier reconfiguration. In this regard it was requested that a meeting with Council officers and the Chair of the E&I Committee be held with local residents to discuss potential remedial measures;
- the Academy Street plan had resulted in a £139,000 deficit, with potential further legal costs and the risk of clawback of funding. Further clarification was sought regarding these additional costs; and
- it was queried whether funding for gully clearance and drainage maintenance fell under capital monitoring. In addition, the importance of ensuring adequate infrastructure investment in drainage maintenance was emphasised.

The Committee **NOTED** the financial position as at 31 December 2024 and the estimated year end forecast.

## 7. **Community Wealth Building Strategy** **Ro-innleachd Togail Saidhbhreas Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/03/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was highlighted that despite numerous locality plans, place plans and area action plans, there remained a lack of practical action addressing core community issues. It was felt that while housing development continued at a rapid pace, necessary infrastructure and services, such as GP facilities, had not kept up with the demand;
- concern was raised regarding patients at Raigmore Hospital who remained in care longer than necessary due to the absence of post-hospital care services and it was suggested that all partners be brought together to discuss how to address these pressing issues within limited resources;
- whilst the community wealth-building strategy aimed to increase socio-economic benefits through local procurement strategies, it was queried which strategy took precedence in cases of potential conflicts;
- it was highlighted that current legislation had hindered the adoption of hybrid childcare models, particularly in remote areas like the Ardnamurchan Peninsula. Concerns were raised about depopulation, with young families considering relocating due to the lack of childcare and potentially impacting local education services. Therefore, it was proposed to collectively lobby representatives in the Scottish Parliament for a legislative review, as the current childcare model was deemed unsuitable for the Highlands and

Islands. In this regard, it was suggested that the Ardnamurchan Peninsula could serve as a pilot project for testing innovative childcare solutions that better reflected local needs; and

- the importance of supporting community wealth-building initiatives was emphasised, particularly in addressing depopulation within the Highlands. In this regard concern was raised over the Highland Council's contract awards for piers used by Caledonian MacBrayne ferries. It was highlighted that a local construction company, based near Lochmaddy Pier, was overlooked despite its proven expertise. It was felt that greater scrutiny was required to ensure that public funds were spent in a way that supported local businesses and communities.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** updates on progress against the CWB action plan;
- ii. **NOTED** the updates; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a stand-alone Highland Social Value Charter update report be brought to the 29 May 2025 meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

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

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/04/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, it was stated that, while significant support existed for adult music initiatives, concern was raised for supporting music competitions in schools and the Inverness Music Festival (IMF) continued to struggle with financial sustainability. In this regard, it was suggested that further financial support be considered for school music programmes and the IMF. Additionally, information was sought on how many participants had attended the 500 adult numeracy training courses. It was confirmed that the number of participants would be provided to Members at the 29 May 2025 committee meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the UKSPF Delivery Plan progress update; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the proposals for projects to ensure the spend of the 2025/26 allocation of funds were brought for agreement to the May 2025 Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

#### 9. **Regional Economic Strategy – Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (HIRE)** **Ro-innleachd Eaconamach Roinneil – Com-pàirteachas Eaconamach Roinneil na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the Draft HIREP Draft Regional Economic Strategy; and
- ii. **AGREED** to endorse the Regional Economic Strategy attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

**10. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update – Q3 2024/25  
Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh – R3  
2024/25**

There had been circulated joint Report No. ECI/06/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place and Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress provided in the Programme and Project updates in this report.

**11. Highland Draft Local Transport Strategy  
Dreachd Ro-innleachd Còmhdhail Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/07/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was highlighted that the use of the term emissions in reports should be more precise, as emissions from vehicles included not only carbon dioxide but also unburnt hydrocarbons, water vapor, nitrous oxide and tire and brake wear;
- a request was made to include consideration of additional railway stations in the Highland Transport Strategy. It was felt that expanding rail access could help promote a lower-carbon economy;
- concern was raised that safety improvements on crossings had led to closures, or threats of closures, on certain rights of way in the Highlands, impacting access for hillwalkers. It was suggested that a more balanced approach should be taken, prioritising both safety and accessibility;
- it was highlighted that whilst improvements to mobile phone networks were essential, newer emergency phones were equipped with satellite communication capability to reduce the reliance on mobile coverage in remote areas. It was suggested that focus should shift toward serving communities with consistently poor mobile coverage rather than extremely remote locations;
- concern was raised regarding the Scottish Government's sustainable travel hierarchy, which was perceived as being anti-motorist. For many Highland residents, private vehicle use was a necessity, not a luxury, due to limited public transport services in rural areas. Therefore, it was proposed that the Council should advocate for rural considerations in Scottish transport policies,

ensuring that strategies developed for urban centres were not inappropriately applied to the Highlands;

- transportation strategies should better accommodate the aging population in the Highlands, particularly addressing accessibility issues for those using mobility aids;
- it was queried if the intent would be a reality to no longer purchase new petrol or diesel light good vehicles by the end of 2025;
- a suggestion was made to prioritise incentivising public transport use through positive measures rather than penalties, with examples such as discounted train fares encouraging a shift from car use;
- rural areas like Sutherland had successfully implemented local community car-sharing opportunities and had managed to secure 4 Corsa cars which were strategically placed to help residents access essential services. It was proposed that additional funding, potentially from the Coastal Regeneration Fund, be pursued to expand initiatives like this;
- concern was raised about contradictory elements in the transport strategy, such as promoting air travel while simultaneously seeking to reduce carbon emissions. It was suggested that efforts focus on realistic sustainability goals based on current technological limits;
- it was proposed that public transport campaigns emphasise safety, particularly for women and vulnerable groups, with calls for a reporting system similar to “Safe Cab” apps to address incidents quickly. In this regard, it was also suggested that timetables for public transport be coordinated to avoid long connection wait times; and
- praise and commendation was offered for the hard work and due diligence in producing the transport strategy report. Appreciation was especially expressed for the recognition of demographic and geographic challenges in the Highlands, as public transport had to be at the core of service provision for communities.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the Case for Change Report within Appendix 3 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the content of the Engagement Report within Appendix 4 of the report;
- iii. **APPROVED** the Draft Local Transport Strategy within Appendix 2 of the report; and
- iv. **AGREED** officers progress with the Delivery Plan and development of a Full Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.

## 12. National Speed Limit Review Consultation Co-chomhairleachadh mu Ath-sgrùdadh air Crìoch-astair Nàiseanta

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/08/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was observed that proposed speed limit changes in Scotland and those implemented in England and Wales differed as variances between car and HGVs (Heavy Goods Vehicles) speed limits remained in place in England and Wales. It was suggested that the Scottish proposal, which aligned speed limits for all vehicles, could have wider implications for traffic flow and safety;
- concerns were raised about the safety impact of increasing HGV speed limits, particularly on narrower and more challenging roads such as the A82. It was suggested that the proposal should consider the specific nature of rural roads, which were perhaps not built to the same standard as larger highways like the A9;
- it was highlighted that driver frustration often stemmed from vehicle type speed variances, leading to riskier overtaking. Therefore, aligning speed limits could reduce accidents caused by dangerous overtaking manoeuvres;
- questions were raised regarding the report's claims that changes in speed limits would have no impact on air quality, noise pollution or climate change. It was suggested that even minor changes in speed could have measurable effects on emissions;
- clarification and further information was sought on the uncertainty around the potential reduction in fatalities and serious injuries resulting from changes in speed limits;
- it was suggested that the Scottish Government's reduction in speed limits might be perceived as a cost-saving measure, avoiding necessary investments in road upgrades for key routes such as the A82. Therefore, it was hoped that priority would be given to upgrading infrastructure rather than simply reducing speed limits;
- praise was expressed for the Council's pragmatic supportive response to the consultation, particularly in recognising the unique transportation challenges in the Highlands and advocating for the needs of rural communities. Local communities were also encouraged to take part in the consultation;
- it was highlighted that any policy changes from Transport Scotland should weigh local authority responses more heavily due to their detailed understanding of regional transport issues;
- concerns were raised that reducing speed limits on rural roads could lead to driver frustration, road rage and an overall decrease in road safety; and
- it was acknowledged that professional HGV drivers were generally responsible and skilled, making the proposed increase from 40 mph to 50 mph for HGVs a reasonable adjustment.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** Highland Council's response to the National Speed Limit Review as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the deadline for consultation response submission is 5 March 2025; and
- iii. **AGREED** that should there be any amendments to the consultation response as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, due to timescales, sign off of the final Highland Council response is delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

**13. Council Response to Review of Ofgem – Call for Evidence  
Freagairt na Comhairle do dh’Ath-sgrùdadh Ofgem – Gairm airson Fianais**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/09/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- officers were thanked for the detailed and comprehensive response but a number of amendments were proposed to strengthen it, such a reduction in energy prices to reduce the number of people living in fuel poverty. In Highland there was a disproportionate number living in fuel poverty;
- there needed to be better regulation of Smart Meters by Ofgem to offer better consumer protection and that cheaper tariffs were available in Highland. Ideally, these Smart Meters should work via broadband and not mobile phone coverage;
- on 30 June 2025 the Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS) would be switched off, affecting homes and business that used RTS, and it was important that energy suppliers contacted their customers;
- without a Smart Meter there was no flexibility in offering different tariffs closer to renewable energy developments;
- transmission was increasingly becoming a matter of concern in Highland and a call was made for a review of alternative network technologies with a presumption in favour of underground transmission; and
- it was suggested that there was a degree of conflict between the responses concerning Regional Equity in Pricing and Infrastructure Investment. Apparently, the Council had advocated for reforms to location pricing mechanisms but the Scottish Government Energy Minister had stated that there was both positive and negative impacts of this. In addition, the concerns of the renewable energy industry in Scotland was that they might have to sell energy at very cheap or even negative rates and that would limit the incentive to invest in infrastructure.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the Highland Council’s formal response to the Ofgem review as in Appendix 1 of the report subject to the amendments outlined by Councillor Loudon and officers reflecting in the submission the discussion surrounding Smart Meters;
- ii. to endorse the Council’s recommendations for enhanced regional equity, improved consumer protections and streamlined regulatory processes; and
- iii. that continued engagement with Ofgem and other stakeholders is critical to addressing the systemic challenges faced by the Highlands in energy pricing and infrastructure development.

**14. Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited Annual Accounts 2023/24  
Cunntasan Bliadhnaid Coimhearsnachd Tuathanas-gaoithe na Beinne  
Tarsainn Earranta 2023/24**

**Declaration of Interest – Mr J Edmondson made a Declaration of Interest as he was a Reserve Director of Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Limited for the**



**period in question and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for this item.**

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was emphasised that whilst wind farm developers were beginning to invest in local communities, the financial contributions offered—such as £2,000 per megawatt—were deemed insufficient. It was suggested that these contributions should be significantly higher and be indexed to ensure their value did not diminish over the 25-year lifespan of such projects;
- it was suggested that developers be encouraged to sign up to the social value charter, ensuring they provided tangible community benefits beyond the minimal financial contributions currently offered;
- concern was raised about the management of community funds generated from renewable projects, with particular focus on the lack of interest accrued from these funds. It was suggested that funds should be managed more effectively, possibly through high interest accounts;
- it was noted that communities in the Highlands pay significantly more for electricity than those in other parts of the country, despite hosting much of the nation's renewable energy infrastructure. It was highlighted that local MPs had made efforts to ensure a fairer distribution of energy costs and benefits by raising the issues at both the UK and Scottish Parliamentary levels; and
- Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that strategic funds from renewable developments were distributed equitably across the Highlands, rather than being concentrated at specific postcode areas that directly hosted the infrastructure.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the activities of Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited; and
- AGREED** to accept, on behalf of Highland Council, the Financial Statement of Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited for year ending 31 March 2024.

## **15. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

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

- South PAC – 1 October 2024;
- North PAC – 29 October 2024;
- South PAC – 19 November 2024;
- North PAC – 4 December 2024;

and, also **APPROVED**:-

- v. Harbours Management Board held on 15 November 2024;
- vi. Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group held on the 3 December 2024;
- vii. City Region Deal Monitoring Group held on 4 February 2025.

The meeting concluded at 11:50 am

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drumbuie, Golspie on Monday 17 February 2025 at 10.00am.

**Present:**

Mr M Baird

Mr J McGillivray

Mr R Gale

Mr H Morrison

Ms M Hutchison

Ms L Niven

**In attendance:**

Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager

Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager

Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance

Ms A Jansson, Chief Officer Education (Primary)

Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Administrator

**Also in attendance:**

Chief Inspector C Smith, Police Scotland

**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 R Gale in the Chair**

**Business**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

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

There had been circulated Report No SCC/01/25 by the North Area Commander.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on the number of drink/drug driving detections for the North Area Command being higher than the Inverness area;
- it was encouraging that the public had more confidence in reporting sexual offences to the Police;
- highlighting that domestic and hate crime was a significant concern nationally and it would be helpful to have a local update on these issues at the earliest opportunity;
- the Committee's good wishes be conveyed to the outgoing police officers at Lochinver and Tongue and it was reassuring these posts would be filled, given the importance of rural stations to the area;

- the opportunity for Police Scotland to work with the Council to address issues of speeding in 20mph zones going forward. The Chief Inspector confirmed that he would liaise with the Council's road safety officers on the potential for a unified policy to be developed in response to this issue; and
- in regard to the above, it would also be helpful for Members to have discussions with Police Scotland on particular speeding hotspots in villages.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan.

#### 4. **Area Roads Capital Programme Update - 2024-25** **Cunntas mu Phrògram Calpa nan Rathaidean Sgìreil – 2024-25**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Arising from the report, Members welcomed the number of projects completed during the year.

The Committee **APPROVED** the:

- i. final budget allocation for Sutherland area for 2024/25;
- ii. works completed on the approved prioritised list to date;
- iii. additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year; and
- iv. works still proposed for the 2024/25 financial year.

#### 5. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2025-26** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2025-26**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/03/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, disappointment was expressed that the Cape Wrath road had slipped down the priority list, concern being expressed at the impact on the local community and viability of businesses. Further concerns were raised on the condition and priority status for the Ardmore Loop, Edderton and A836 Bogrow to Redburn, while recognising the challenges in prioritising schemes. Members were advised that while individual schemes had to be considered in the context of the whole road network in Sutherland, they could review priorities within the Programme at their area business meetings.

A point was then raised on the potential for works to be undertaken to upgrade the Lairg Road to Dornoch Road footpath in Bonar Bridge. After discussion, Members requested that a separate priority list for works to footpaths be brought to a future area business meeting.

Thereafter, Members were advised that operationally the ambition was for white lining at junctions to follow on from surface dressing and this would be actively considered. Centre lining was coordinated strategically across Highland and a list of Sutherland works had been fed into the process. Following on from this, the Chair requested that the issues around white lining be considered at an area business meeting.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed prioritised Area Roads Capital Programme for Sutherland Area.

**6. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2025/2026**  
**Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/04/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the Chair requested that details of spend on garages in Sutherland over the past 12 months be provided to an area business meeting, observing this appeared to have been minimal. It was noted that Council houses tended to have more priority over garages and the repairs budget had been subject to pressures over the period.

Following on from the above, it was suggested that given the recent 8% uplift in Council house rents and level of spend on garages over the past year, no increase in garage rents be applied for Council tenants. An 8% increase be applied for non-tenants on the basis rents would continue to be well below commercial rents for garages.

The Committee **AGREED** not to increase garage and garage sites rents for Council tenants and to apply an 8% increase for non-tenants in 2025/26.

**7. Housing Repairs Performance Report**  
**Aithisg Coileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion concern was expressed at the underspend on kitchen/bathroom replacements and rewiring and confirmation that a higher level of spend was anticipated by the end of Quarter 4 and a further update would be brought to an area business meeting at the appropriate time. In addition, this was a multi-year programme and as such spend was profiled across a five year cycle and work was ongoing to reflect this in future reports.

Thereafter, concern was expressed that there had been no spend on the Environmental Improvements Ward 1 and 4 budgets at this stage of the financial year. An assurance was provided that there had been spend on the budgets to date and further details would be brought to an area business meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

**8. Attainment Overviews – Kinlochbervie, Farr, Dornoch and Golspie**  
**Associated School Groups**  
**Foir-sheallaidhean Buileachaidh – Buidhnean Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte**  
**Cheann Loch Biorbhaidh, Farr, Dhòrnaich agus Ghoillspidh**

There had been circulated Report Nos SCC/06/25 to SCC/09/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

In relation to the Kinlochbervie High School ASG and Farr High School ASG, Members were advised that due to the small pupil cohort, some data could not be shared as children would be identifiable. It was confirmed that full data for both ASGs would be provided to an Area Business Meeting with the Head Teachers invited to attend to allow for more detailed discussion.

Thereafter, the following main points were raised:

- confirmation was sought and provided that the Early Learning Centre Commissioner would be asked to share with Members details of the numbers to be enrolled in ELC settings in August 2025, with a particular focus on Durness Primary School Nursery;
- the reports reflected that all schools within the ASGs offered a high quality educational environment, however it was important to highlight the fragile pupil numbers in many areas, reflecting issues of depopulation and threat it posed to communities;
- the increase in pupil numbers at Durness Primary School was encouraging; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Tain and Ullapool ASG reports and number of pupils attending from Sutherland would be shared with Members.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the reports.

**9. Realignment of the boundary between Creich and Ardgay and District Community Councils**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/10/25 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing.

The Committee **APPROVED** the realignment of the boundary between Creich and Ardgay & District Community Councils.

**10. Dornoch Common Good - Annual Report 2023/24, Proposed Budget 2025/26 and Quarterly Monitoring Statement 2024/25  
Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich – Aithisg Bhliadhnail 2022/23, Buidseat ga Mholadh airson 2024/25 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh Ràitheil 2023/24**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/11/25 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

In discussion, reference was made to the fact the Fund was in a healthy position and the opportunity to have discussions through the Investment Sub Committee on investments was a positive step forward. The Fund continued to support local projects whilst retaining a core balance for any major projects that may come forward and the Annual Budget for 2025/26 was encouraging.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the Dornoch Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 2);
- ii. the position of the Dornoch Common Good Fund, as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement (Appendix 3) against budget for 2024/25;
- iii. the Dornoch Common Good Fund Annual Budget for 2025/26 (Appendix 4); and

- iv. to delegate authority to the Community Development Manager to approve Dornoch Common Good grants up to £10,000, within the annually set budget and following consultation with Ward 4 Members.

## 11. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

### North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2024 – 3 February 2025

The Committee **NOTED** the following North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved 1 April 2024 to 3 February 2025:

Assynt Development Trust – Menopause Chats	£1,425.00
Community Food Initiatives North East – FareShare in Highland	£5,050.00
Bradbury Centre – Medical Bath Replacement	£500.00
North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust – First Aid Training	£500.00
Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust – Kyle Feeds	£500.00
Lairg & District Community Initiatives – Lairg War Memorial Upkeep	£400.00
North West Training Centre – Learning programme 24-25	£500.00

### East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1st April 2024 – 3 February 2025

The Committee **NOTED** the following East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved 1 April 2024 to 3 February 2025:

Community Food Initiatives North East – FareShare in Highland	£2,179.00
Embo Trust – Old School Transition – Final Step	£780.00
The Dornoch Area CIC – Dornoch Transport Project	£999.00
Bradbury Centre – Medical bath Replacement	£500.00
Dornoch Cricket Club – Practice Nets Extension	£1,000.00
Dornoch Youth Service Summer Programme	£1,000.00
Youth Highland – Golspie RESPECT Project	£900.00
Embo Football Club – Essential Works to Changing Rooms	£1,000.00
Engaging with Activity CIC – Hub Outings	£1,000.00
Timespan – Gutting Girls	£1,000.00
Rogart Community Council – Rogart Hub	£1,866.00
Timespan Title Check	£140.00
Brora Development Trust – Christmas outing for Brora Youth Room	£1,202.00
Helmsdale Primary School – A9 Crossing Hut	£238.00
Brora Development Trust – Food Provision for Youth Room*	£96.00

\*Please note that this is a part contribution to a total award of £1,440.00. The remainder was made up from contributions from the Cost of Living budget and Invitation to Pay budget.

## 12. Notices of Motion Brathan Glusaid

There was circulated the following Notice of Motion received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance:-

“Given the impact of overnight parking of camper vans in Council car parks leading to inappropriate waste disposal and other anti-social behaviour, the Sutherland County Committee agrees to impose a ban on all overnight camper van and motorhome parking in Council car parks in the County of Sutherland with signage being put in place to direct them to alternative parking options in the local area.

This motion to be a starred item for referral to full Council if necessary.”

Signed: Mr R Gale      Mr J McGillivray

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- the Motion had been motivated by the problems caused and number of complaints received in relation to camper van and motorhome parking in Council car parks across Sutherland;
- as a specific example, a considerable number of camper vans/motorhomes had been observed parking at Shore Street Car Park, Golspie, some in disabled bays, with incidents of aggression shown to members of the public when challenged. This was despite there being a campervan and motorhome parking site at the gateway to the village;
- the above situation was mirrored at Dornoch Beach car park where there was a no overnight parking sign in place and a designated site in close proximity;
- there were similar problems with an invitation to pay car park in Durness, adjacent to the campsite, particularly between April to October when the car park was full each night with no waste, toilet facilities or running water;
- concern that the Council was effectively using public monies to enter into unfair competition with private camping and caravan parks who had invested in providing attractive facilities for visitors;
- a precedent for the Motion existed at an invitation to pay car park in Carrbridge where it was clearly indicated that no camper vans and motorhomes were allowed to park between the hours of 2200hrs and 0800hrs the following morning;
- querying the assessed impact in terms of enforcement, the legal position in this regard and that if the Motion was approved then it was considered effective local enforcement would ensue;
- the impact assessment highlighted the potential for displaced campervans/motorhomes to park in laybys and therefore the opportunity for no parking signs to be installed at these locations; and
- the impacts associated with camper vans and motorhomes parking inappropriately in areas outwith Council car parks and designated sites.

Thereafter, it was confirmed that, if agreed, the Motion would be a starred item for referral to full Council due to its financial implications and the fact the decision was not within the delegated authority of the Committee.

\* The Committee **AGREED** the Motion.

### 13. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 12 November 2024, which were approved by the Council on 12 December 2024.

The meeting concluded at 11.45am.



**The Highland Council**

**Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held remotely on Monday, 17 February, 2025 at 10.30 am.**

**Present:**

Mr J Finlayson  
Mr D Millar

Mr C Munro  
Mr R Stewart

**Officials in attendance:**

Mr G Smith, Service Lead, Infrastructure, Place Service  
Mr M Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager, Place Service  
Ms M A Gray, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund, Place Service  
Mr E Marsh, Housing Repairs Manager, Place Service  
Ms M Macdonald, Area Education and Learning Manager, People Service  
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager  
Mr A Macleod, Policy Officer, Corporate Service  
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

**Also in attendance:**

Station Commander Stuart Fraser, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service  
Mr F Bertoldi, National Islands Plan Team Leader, Scottish Government  
Ms I MacDonald, Mr A McLeod, Mr N Campbell – Portree & Braes Community Trust

**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 J Finlayson in the Chair**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

There were none.

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

Item 8 – Mr C Munro (Transparency statement)

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report  
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus  
Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No SR/1/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- Information was sought and provided on recruitment and availability with particular reference to stations in Staffin and Uig; plans for any future skills days events for young people, the future locations of Fire stations in Portree

and Uig, and joint mobilisation. In particular, progress would continue to be reported on new Fire stations at Portree and Uig, and joint mobilisation data would be provided in the next report to Committee.

- following a successful fire safety event at a nursing home in the area, it was suggested that it would be good to have similar events at supported living facilities such as Tigh na Drochaid and Shulishader Beag in Portree. It was advised that premises of highest risk would be targeted for fire safety events.

Thereafter, the Committee **Noted** the report.

#### **4. National Islands Plan – Presentation Plana Nàiseanta nan Eilean – Taisbeanadh**

A representative from the Scottish Government's National Islands Team gave a presentation on the new National Islands Plan. The Plan's overarching objective was to improve outcomes for Islands communities.

In discussion, issues raised included – how the Council was prioritising the delivery of the outcome of the consultation process on the National Islands Plan; more national recognition about the importance of the plan; how the plan linked in with Area and Local Place Plans; mandatory direction from Government for fixed payments to communities from onshore and offshore wind farm companies to tackle fuel poverty; concern that the visitor levy was in direct conflict with the Islands (Scotland) Act and plan; accommodation being converted to short term lets which was changing communities on Skye and Raasay; the difficulty of attracting young people to fishing industry.

Continuing, population attention and attraction was key to this area as was culture and empowerment to communities. Community companies and trusts would play a key role in the plan and they should be supported in this role. The annual report on progress with the plan was reported to relevant Area Committees and given the importance of the National Plan and that it covered a wide range of areas, it was requested that progress on the plan should also be reported to full Council.

The Committee **Noted** the presentation and the request for the Annual report on the National Islands Plan to be submitted to full Council.

#### **5. Portree and Braes Community Trust (PBCT) – Presentation Urras Coimhearsnachd Phort Rìgh agus a' Bhràighe – Taisbeanadh**

Representatives from PBCT gave a presentation in relation to projects that the trust were delivering in the community.

Members acknowledged the good work taking place by the trust and the partnership working for the projects in the programme, including with the Highland Council. There was recognition of community regeneration funding and ward discretionary funding towards projects. In relation to issues raised with the old swimming pool site, this was an operational matter and officers would liaise with the trust on this. In relation to Bayfield car park, efforts were being made to resurface and reline the car park before the summer season.

The Committee **Noted** the presentation and congratulated the trust and all their volunteers for the work being undertaken on projects.

## **6. Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No. SR/2/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place which detailed the proposed 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for the Isle of Skye and Raasay.

Following commentary on the report by the Roads Operations Manager, it was highlighted that the master document for proposed road works would be updated and submitted to a future meeting, so that Members could see what the cost would be to bring all roads in the area up to an acceptable standard.

In discussion, items raised by Members included:- the substantial increase in roads maintenance funding for 2024/25 and 2025/26, around £3m in each of those years, was welcomed. However, the last estimate to bring all roads in this area up to an acceptable standard was £40m. The planned programme and long term priorities should reassure communities that progress was being made. There was a need for flexibility in the programme based on further deterioration of the road work.

Information was requested and provided on the staffing establishment of the local roads team; recruitment and retention of staff; better workforce planning to undertake the work required in the programme; costs associated with traffic management when road maintenance is being carried out; how the roads programme was created and an example breakdown of costs for a project; proposed revenue works i.e. passing places; and an update on white lining of roads was provided.

Given the amount of roads maintenance work to be undertaken, information would be provided to Members on work planned and scheduled to take place so that they could pass this information on to Community Councils.

There was not sufficient money for roads maintenance in Highland from the Government and there was a need for them to provide more given it was such a high priority for communities.

Thereafter, the Committee **Approved** the proposed 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee.

## **7. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd**

There was circulated Report No. SR/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place which detailed a funding request to the Isle of Skye and Raasay Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) allocation for discussion and decision by Members.

In terms of the application, the majority of members were in support of the application and therefore, the Committee **Agreed** the grant request for funding of £15,900.00 towards the John Muir Trust, Bla Bheinn Visitor Facilities project.

## 8. Portree High Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-Sgoil Phort Rìgh

**Transparency Statement – Mr C Munro declared a transparency statement in relation to this item as he had a close family member who works part-time in Portree High School Associated School Group and he also had children who attend schools in the Portree Associated School Group. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No. SR/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Portree High Associated School Group and provided updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

Commentary on the report was provided by the Area Education and Learning Manager and in particular all the information would be included in future reports on Primary attainment for schools. Current and projected school roll capacities predicted a downward trend in school rolls in some areas.

Information was sought and provided on the following issues:- in terms of the standards and quality reports, how were schools self-evaluations, evaluated; what engagement took place to check the self evaluation reflected what was happening in schools; a comparison be made of how self evaluations compared to Education Scotland inspection results; Knockbreak primary which was mothballed but still appeared in the tables in the report; school roll data on Bun-Sgoil Ghaidhlig Phort Rìgh; the context of destination of school leavers in this area; the attainment gap and what can be done to improve this. It was highlighted that closing the attainment gap was a priority and to ensure the curriculum is broad enough for all pupils.

The Committee **Noted** the report.

## 9. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No. SR/5/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, providing information on how the housing section performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 December, 2024.

In discussion, it was noted that the average response time to complete emergency repairs to properties was within the performance target of 12 hours. However, 2 work orders had skewed the data, thus showing a big increase in the average response time in quarter 3 compared to previous quarters. Also, the average re-let target was 35 days (and not 55.6 days stated in report) and there was continued strong performance against this target. Also, an update was provided to say that £20,000 had been spent to date on Environmental improvements.

The continued strong performance in re-let times was welcomed and houses were relet in a good condition in accordance with the Council's Empty Homes Standard specification. Works on houses in Portree, such as new windows being installed,

was also welcomed and tenants were pleased with the completed works. In terms of the houses known as the 'Swedish houses' it was queried if cladding energy efficiency works were to be undertaken on them. It was advised that there were a number of this type of house in the Council's housing estate and funding bids were being made to carry out this retrospective energy efficiency works. Information would be provided to Councillor Millar on any works planned to the 'Swedish houses' in Portree.

The Committee **Noted** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 to 31 December 2024.

#### **10. Portree Harbour Update Fios às Ùr mu Chaladh Phort Rìgh**

There had been circulated Report No. SR/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place which provided an update of progress for the planning of repairs to Portree Harbour.

The Service Lead, Infrastructure provided commentary on the report. An update to the report was provided to say that the contractor working on the Harbour project had been awarded other major projects and were no longer in a position to work on the harbour project. Therefore, a different contractor would be found through a tender process.

Information was sought and provided in relation to a programme for operational repairs to the harbour and the staff establishment at the harbour. There would be a traffic management plan while the works were being undertaken and there would be restrictions on access to the harbour during this period.

The Committee **Noted**:-

- i. the funding position in respect of the Portree Harbour; and
- ii. the draft delivery programme.

#### **11. Portree Link Road – Design/Tender Programme Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Rathad-ceangail Phort Rìgh**

There had been circulated Report No. SR/7/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place which provided an update on progress for the design and construction programme for Portree Link Road project.

The Service Lead, Infrastructure provided a summary of the report. The tender for the contract would be issued at the end of February, 2025 and contract award in May and construction thereafter. It was anticipated that the project would be completed by the end of 2025.

The Committee **Noted** the updated position in respect of the Portree Link Road.

#### **12. Skye and Raasay Future (SARF) - Presentation Àm ri Teachd an Eilein Sgitheanaich is Ratharsair**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

**13. Community Payback Service – Presentation**  
**Seirbheis Ath-Phàigheadh Coimhearsnachd – Taisbeanadh**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

**14. Ward Discretionary Budget**  
**Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **Noted** the following Ward 10 Discretionary Fund Grant awarded since the last meeting of the Committee:-

Braes Village Hall - External wall repairs £1,500

**15. Minutes**  
**Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 25 November, 2024 which were approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 12 December, 2024. The terms of the minute were **Noted**.

**Councillor Calum Munro** –The Chair on behalf of the Committee and constituents in the Ward, extended their best wishes to Calum who would be leaving the Council at the end of March. Calum was thanked for his contributions to Ward business and his engagement with community members was particularly highlighted. In response, Calum very much valued his time with the Council over the last 5 years, working with the other members in Ward and that it had been an honour to be a Councillor for the Isle of Skye and Raasay area.

The meeting ended at 1.20 p.m.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 26 February 2025 at 9.35 am.

### **Present:**

Ms S Atkin	Mr R Gale
Mr A Baxter (substitute) (remote)	Ms M Hutchison
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Ms L Johnston
Mr A Christie	Ms L Kraft
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms M MacCallum
Ms H Crawford	Mr D Macpherson
Ms L Dundas	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Ms S Fanet	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr R Stewart

### **Religious Representatives (non-voting):**

Rev C Caley  
Ms S Lamont

### **Youth Convener (non-voting):**

Ms L McKittrick

### **Non-Members also present:**

Mr M Baird	Mrs I MacKenzie (remote)
Mr J Edmondson	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mr D McDonald (remote)
Mr J Grafton	Ms J McEwan (remote)
Mr A Graham	Mr C Munro
Dr M Gregson	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)	Mrs M Reid
Mr P Logue	Mrs T Robertson
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)	Ms M Ross

### **In attendance:**

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People  
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education  
Ms A Jansson, Interim Chief Officer – Early Years and Primary Education  
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services  
Ms C Macklin, Head of Education, Lifelong Learning and Gaelic Services  
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead – Resources  
Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years  
Ms F Shearer, Area Education and Learning Manager (South)  
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer  
Mr R Campbell, Strategic Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy  
Ms F Dalgetty, Chief Executive, Fèis Rois (Third Sector)  
Ms G Rodger, Chief Officer, Inspiring Young Voices (Third Sector)  
Ms M Chemonges, Highland Parent Council Partnership  
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer  
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

**Also in attendance:**

Ms J MacDonald, Centre Manager, Family Centre Inverness

**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 J Finlayson in the Chair**

**Business**

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr D Gregg.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

The following Members made general Transparency Statements but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr J McGillivray, on the basis that he was still registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, and as a retired member and former Highland District Secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association.

Mr A Baxter on the basis that he had two children that attended a High School in the Highland Council area.

Mr D Macpherson, on the basis that a close family member was a Primary School Teacher.

The Committee **NOTED** the position.

**3. Presentation: Family Centre Inverness  
Taisbeanadh: Ionad Teaghlaich Inbhir Nis**

Jennifer MacDonald, Centre Manager, Family Centre Inverness, gave a presentation showcasing the work of the Centre, what it was like to be a two-year-old and a day in their life whilst at nursery.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Ms MacDonald and all staff at Family Centre Inverness for the positive work they did with families and young people. He encouraged Members to contact Ms MacDonald directly if they had any questions, and to arrange to visit the Centre.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.



#### 4. Revenue Budget Monitoring and Service Performance Reporting for Quarter 3 Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach agus Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson Ràith 3

There had been circulated Report No EDU/1/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was explained that the underspend in respect of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) was not solely a result of unfilled vacancies but a better than anticipated position in terms of income relating to the Council's childcare offering;
- given the high number of absences in respect of non-teaching staff, it was queried what steps had been taken to resolve issues using Occupational Health, and how many scheduled appointments had been missed. The Strategic Lead – Resources undertook to revert to Mr R Gale in that regard;
- information was sought on the response time from when a complaint was received at the call centre, how complaints were processed, and what had caused the spike in numbers in some quarters. In addition, examples were requested of complaints that might take 5 or 20 days to resolve;
- information was sought, and provided, on the costs associated with processing Freedom of Information (FOI) requests as well as the time it took for staff to process such requests and how that impacted on the service;
- in relation to teaching staff absences, information was sought, and provided, on whether adequate support was being provided during periods of absence, the support available to Head Teachers in terms of absence management, and how the figures for Highland compared to the national position;
- section 5.2 of the report referred to a reduction in Devolved School Management (DSM) spend due to falling school rolls being a factor in service underspends, and it was questioned how that had arisen given school roll projections should enable DSM budgets to be set fairly accurately. In response, it was confirmed this was something officers had been looking at and, in future years, budgets would be set at the beginning of the year based on anticipated school rolls;
- attention was drawn to the underspend of £1.808m on staff costs, and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that there had been no feedback from schools that the time taken to recruit to vacant posts was having a detrimental impact on children and young people. The Chair added that there were recruitment challenges in some secondary subjects and areas such as Gaelic Medium Education, and this was something the service was very conscious of;
- with regard to the Performance Indicators in section 7 of the report, it was queried whether school attendance rates for Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) referred to all CEYP or those who were currently Care Experienced, and it was confirmed it was the latter. It was also queried whether absence rates for Young Carers were recorded as that could be an important indicator linking into the Whole Family Wellbeing Team. In relation to the percentage of the Highland population with a *highlife* card, it was questioned why the RAG rating was Red for 22/23 and Green for 23/24 when the percentage figure was the same. The Strategic Lead – Resources undertook to seek clarification from High Life Highland in that regard and revert to Ms L Johnston;
- concern was expressed regarding the rate of staff turnover within schools and its affect on performance. It was questioned why teachers were leaving, and it was

suggested that independent exit surveys be carried out to understand what could be done to support teaching staff. Parents were concerned that, without specialist teachers for key subjects, they were unable to develop their children's ability to their full potential, which was a right in terms of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was important to do as much as possible to support young learners and staff, and there was a lot that could be done to ensure the Council was an employer of choice. As a Committee, it was necessary to better understand what was going on within schools, and it was proposed that the quarterly monitoring report should include data on the rate of staff turnover within the service and the length of time posts remained vacant, broken down by grade. All Members wanted what was best for schools and communities, and having this information available would allow work and scrutiny to be focused on where the biggest difference could be made to the lives of young people in Highland. The Chair confirmed that officers would explore whether it was possible to provide the data requested;

- the number of FOI requests indicated that information was not being made readily available. Members were increasingly submitting FOI requests as information was not forthcoming, and it was suggested that there was not the same appetite to share information within the Highland Council as there was in neighbouring Councils such as Argyll and Bute and Moray. Other Members added that FOI requests had become the first resort rather than the last, and that the information was often available although it was sometimes hard to find;
- it was understood that 24% of Highland Council Chromebooks came back damaged compared to 4% in Lothian, and it was questioned why this had not been shared with Members. However, other Members commented that this had been discussed previously at a Committee;
- reference was made to instances of Members writing to officers with a question and receiving a response thanking them for their FOI request. However, it was explained that should not be the case unless the request was marked as an FOI. The Chair added that both he and the Assistant Chief Executive - People would wish to be informed if Members were not receiving answers to their questions;
- information was sought, as provided, as to whether officers considered that the absence statistics masked the detrimental impact any extended period of absence was having in smaller rural High Schools. An example was cited, and it was suggested that the support being provided in such circumstances was inadequate and letting down Head Teachers, teaching staff and pupils;
- further to earlier comments regarding staff turnover, concern was expressed regarding the loss of teaching staff early in the academic year, particularly in the senior phase of secondary schools as it disrupted the learning process at a key stage, and it was queried how this could be reviewed; and
- information was sought, and provided, as to what support was available to Head Teachers when recruitment was required on an urgent basis. It was suggested that, in such circumstances, there should be a "fast-track" procedure whereby adverts could be issued immediately rather than having to wait for the next recruitment window as every week was important when pupils were preparing for their exams. It was confirmed that fast-tracking had taken place but the recruitment challenges being experienced, not only across Highland but nationally, meant that sometimes there were no applicants.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the Service's revenue monitoring position;

- ii. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the Service's performance and risk information;
- iii. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the Service's update on outstanding audit action; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the possibility of including data on the rate of staff turnover within the service and the length of time posts remained vacant, broken down by grade, in future monitoring reports be explored.

## 5. Draft Learning Estate Strategy Ro-innleachd Oighreachd Ionnsachaidh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/2/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the Council's Learning Estate Strategy had been developed using the guiding principles of the government's approach but with a Highland-specific focus, as well as consideration of the unique geography and challenges in Highland and the Council's ambitious plans which were part of the Highland Investment Plan.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- with reference to section 7.4 of the Strategy, it was queried how much had been spent on maintenance of Beauly, Dunvegan and Park Primary Schools and St Clement's Special School since the Capital Programme had been agreed in September 2023. The Strategic Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy undertook to revert to Mr R Gale in that regard. In terms of progress with the potential new build for St Clement's School, this would form part of the report to Full Council in March;
- information was sought on the current thinking in terms of enhanced provision and whether, if there was good provision in one secondary school, other schools would be able to access it;
- 10 schools in Highland were over 90% capacity and, more concerningly, 5 schools were over 100% capacity which meant that over 2000 pupils were in overcrowded facilities. Section 4.8 of the Strategy stated that the optimum occupancy level was around 90% capacity, which meant that in excess of 4000 children in Highland were learning in sub-optimal conditions;
- with reference to section 3.5 of the Strategy, disappointment was expressed that Category D and Category C schools had been listed together. It was necessary to recognise the extent of the challenge to make the strongest case possible, at a national level, for additional investment in the Council's learning estate, and not listing the Category D schools, which were some of the worst in the country, separately did a disservice to the children and school communities concerned;
- section 6.8 of the Strategy referred to GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) and the fact that children and young people should be treated with dignity and respect. That being the case, it was queried whether all schools in Highland had adequate provision of single-sex spaces to ensure the safety, privacy and dignity of women and girls in the care of the Council. This was particularly important following advice from the Equalities Commission to NHS Fife and recent worrying events across Scotland including hidden cameras being placed in mixed-sex spaces. It was added that feedback from parents was that they were not in favour of mixed-sex toilets in schools, and it was questioned on whose directive they were being implemented. It was also hoped toilet designs in new schools would not be subject to cutbacks. Other Members commented that young people were more concerned about sharing with different age-groups as toilets were a place where

bullying could happen. In responding to the points raised, the Strategic Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy confirmed that there would be an appropriate level of toilet provision in schools for both single-sex use or other use, and that officers worked closely with Education colleagues and Head Teachers to ensure that provision in new build or refurbished schools met legislative requirements for all pupils;

- concern was expressed regarding the way in which school capacity was measured. Section 4.1 of the Strategy stated that planning capacity was a measure of the number of pupils that could be accommodated in a school, and it was suggested it should be based on the substantive school building before any temporary accommodation had been added. Basing it on the school building plus any temporary accommodation was misleading and didn't take the capacity of infrastructure such as canteen and toilet facilities into account. With reference to earlier comments regarding 90% capacity being optimal, Culloden Academy was at 90% capacity but if the numerous temporary classrooms were taken out of the equation the figure would be much higher. There were several schools in the City of Inverness area that were over 90% capacity, and children were being done a disservice. It was necessary to be cautious and not be overly optimistic as had happened in the past, and it was proposed that the Strategy be revised to take account of the point raised and brought back to a future meeting of the Committee. The Chair confirmed that the point raised would be considered as the Highland Investment Plan progressed. The Strategic Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy, explained that where modular accommodation had been purchased and installed in a school, and was being used effectively as good quality classroom accommodation, it was treated as permanent. The impact on other elements of the school, such as toilets, came under suitability which was assessed separately from condition and capacity. Whilst 90% capacity was optimal, one size did not fit all, and the position in respect of Culloden Academy could be reviewed;
- when looking at school populations, it would be helpful to know, for each school, how many pupils came from within the catchment area, how many were there as a result of a placing request, and where any placing requests had come from;
- it was encouraging to see the framework for the new Nairn Academy building being constructed, and that the new nursery at Charleston Academy was coming on at pace;
- it was understood that Daviot Primary School was to be mothballed, and it was queried how quickly the new demountable unit at the school would be brought into use elsewhere;
- reference was made to instances of pupils eating lunch on stairwells, in corridors and outside due to there being insufficient canteen facilities, and it was necessary to address that;
- in relation to the design and build of learning support bases, information was sought, and provided, as to whether consideration had been given to things that could cause sensory overload, such as noisy fans, ticking clocks, heating that could not be adjusted etc;
- it was queried whether energy efficiency measures could have a positive impact on school budgets due to funding not being spent on heating;
- it was understood that in the region of £50k had been spent on maintaining the former Strontian Primary School building which had lain vacant since 2018. The need for a much clearer process as to how any redundant school buildings would be dealt with was emphasised, and it was confirmed that would be picked up, not only through the Learning Estate Strategy but through the Highland Investment Plan and the Strategic Asset Management Plan;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that no impact assessment had been carried out on toilet provision in schools specifically. It could potentially be looked at on a project-by-project basis;
- a request was made that a meeting of the Nairn Academy Stakeholder Group be arranged;
- it was hoped that a substantive decision would be made in respect of Charleston Academy in the near future. It was highlighted that Inverness High School was also in need of urgent work, the games hall currently being closed for health and safety reasons;
- the guiding principles in section 2.3 of the Strategy were commended. However, it was suggested there was a slight gap in number 8 in terms of keeping parents informed, and it was requested that be looked at going forward; and
- further to earlier comments regarding Culloden Academy, serious concern was expressed about the fact that the modular accommodation at the school was being classed as permanent. Parents had given up a lengthy fight and accepted that there would be an 11-year delay on the extension that had been promised, and it was questioned if there would now be an even longer delay.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Integrated Impact Assessment Screening in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- APPROVED** the Learning Estate Strategy included in Appendix 2 of the report.

**6. Statutory Consultation: Creation of new Primary School for Tornagrain – Final Report**  
**Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Cruthachadh Bun-sgoil Ùir airson Tòrr na Grèine – Aithisg Dheireannach**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Local Members expressed support for the proposal, commenting that Tornagrain had already established itself as a good community and the new school would help it to gel further. The decision to retain Croy Primary School was welcomed, as were the proposed measures to mitigate any adverse effects in terms of existing friendships and to enable siblings to attend the same school;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that there was an error in section 3.2 of the report and no closure was proposed; and
- Inverness was expanding, and Members looked forward to future investment in school buildings in the area. The need to be cognisant of infrastructure requirements, not only in terms of education but in terms of health services etc, when considering planning applications for new housing developments was emphasised.

- \* The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Highland Council establish a new primary school to serve the Tornagrain housing development and amend the delineated area (catchment area) of the current Croy Primary School in order to create the catchment area for the new school.

## 7. Statutory Consultation: Closure of Duror Primary School – Final Report Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Dùnadh Bun-sgoil Dhùrair – Aithisg Dheireannach

There had been circulated Report No EDU/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Chair stated that he would like to make a change from the recommendation by officials to discontinue the provision of education at Duror Primary School. The school was part of a management cluster with three other schools, and in recent weeks he had been engaging with the community personally. The building was being used by a local playgroup as well as for nurture activities offered to pupils across the four-school cluster. Most significantly, since the report had been written, representations had been received about a possible increase in the roll in future years. Having reviewed these representations, he considered that the Committee should not approve the recommendation to discontinue education at the school and that Duror Primary School should remain open. He therefore moved that the Highland Council does not discontinue education at Duror Primary School, and this was unanimously supported;
- thanks were expressed to officers for the work that had gone into the report, and to the Chair for the engagement he had had with the local community;
- with regard to interaction with other children, Local Members shared a typical week at Duror Primary School which included the Stay and Play playgroup, visitors for art activities, ski lessons in Glencoe with children from other schools, visitors from other schools in the cluster as part of confidence-building sessions for children who needed time in different environments, and visits to St Bride's Primary School for assembly and PE;
- in terms of the impact on the community, the school was the last remaining employer in the village, and there would be an economic impact if it was closed. The Local Place Plan mentioned the need for the expansion of childcare in the village, and there had been discussions regarding extending the role of the school beyond the current weekly playgroup. That would attract families into the village, and the toddlers who attended the playgroup would be future pupils for the school. The playgroup was also attended by parents, and mothers experiencing postnatal depression would be adversely affected by the loss of interaction if the school closed;
- the school had enormous potential for a vibrant future. In that regard, it was highlighted that a local marine and coastal conservation group, MaCCOLL, was close to the stage of employing staff and planned to include the school as a key partner, turning it into a unique marine and coastal education and learning hub. The Scottish Association of Marine Science (SAMS), based in Oban, had already started working with the school, details of which were provided. SAMS employed a STEM officer and was currently recruiting another as STEM funding capacity was growing. This was part of a new initiative to provide hands-on activities and inspire a future generation of scientists. Duror Primary School was the first school passed when driving into Highland from Argyll and Bute and would be turned into a hub that would benefit children from other schools. SAMS needed Duror Primary School, which was in a unique location with privileged access to the beach in Cuil Bay. Members of the community were training to become snorkel guides to enhance provision of water-based activities to the children of Lochaber. Duror

Primary School would be more than just a school – it would be a stepping stone into other schools in Lochaber and beyond. Closing the school would be a huge mistake, and it was asked that the Council keep it open. However, business as usual was not enough, and Members were encouraged to engage with MaCCOLL and SAMS to explore and maximise the potential of the school. Members added their thanks to Ms S Fanet for her role in the marine environment work;

- the Education Scotland report appended to the report stated that children currently attending Duror Primary School had a very positive learning experience, and staff and the school community should be commended in that regard;
- in recent years, the Duror community had experienced loss of services, employment, and the local Post Office and shop, and the Primary School was cherished as a result;
- the proposal for closure had been set in motion over a decade ago when funding for the Care and Learning Alliance-operated nursery school had been withdrawn and children had been moved elsewhere. The mothballing of the nursery had been resisted by the community, who had warned that it would lead to permanent closure which would, in turn, possibly lead to the closure of the primary school as the school roll declined;
- thanks were expressed to Duror and Kentallen Community Council who had consistently taken an active interest in education provision in their area. Members commended their dedication, hard work, experience and hands-on approach, and drew attention to their analysis of the consultation report which refuted the argument for closure. The Chair endorsed the comments made, adding that his engagement with the Community Council and members of the community had been carried out in a respectful and informed way;
- primary schools were not just educational institutes but part of the social fabric of rural communities, and it was necessary to take that into account when having difficult discussions about school closures;
- the Duror community had overwhelmingly opposed the proposed closure, and it was good to see that they had been listened to;
- past experience showed that when schools closed in rural communities, families with young children would stop settling there;
- in recent years, remote working had increased the appeal of living in more remote and rural communities, and families were prioritising local schools when choosing where to settle. It was necessary to do more to keep rural schools open to encourage families to move to the area and keep communities alive;
- closing rural schools went against the Council's stated aim of reversing rural depopulation, and it was necessary to take a holistic approach and work with colleagues in the Housing Services and other areas of the Council to look at what could be done to support small and fragile communities to become sustainable in the long term;
- it was hoped today's decision would be a precursor to lending more support to small rural communities where schools were at risk. Particular reference was made to Edderton Primary School and Gledfield Nursery in Sutherland;
- the Rural Services Network had stated that the closure of a school caused a domino effect leading to diminished community resources; and
- it was hoped that the perspective that bigger schools were better could be changed.

\* The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Highland Council does not discontinue education at Duror Primary School.

**8. Statutory Consultation: Closure of Badcaul Primary School – Final Report  
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Dùnadh Bun-sgoil a’ Bhaid Choill – Aithisg  
Dheireannach**

The Committee **NOTED** that this item had been withdrawn to allow additional engagement to be carried out and would be brought to the Committee on 4 June 2025.

**9. Workforce for the Future Portfolio Board Update: Delivery Plan Budget  
Monitoring & Progress  
Cunntas às Ùr bho Bhòrd Cùraim-roinne Feachd-obrach airson an Ama ri  
Teachd: Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Adhartas a’ Phlana Libhrigidh**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in relation to digital learning, it was disappointing that the online offering would not be expanded until the matters raised within the dispute tabled by the Teachers’ Panel had been resolved. In response to a question in that regard, it was confirmed it had been indicated that a national agreement needed to be reached on teachers’ terms and conditions around the delivery of online learning. However, engagement was still taking place at a local level with a view to achieving a local outcome. Other Members added that the potential of the digital school was huge, and it was hoped a resolution could be found. It was also queried whether there was any way of involving other stakeholders in endeavouring to move matters forward;
- information was sought, and provided, as to what discussions had taken place with other employability organisations across Highland with a view to developing a more coordinated approach;
- it was questioned whether the “Amber” RAG status in respect of the Employability Toolkit and Tailored Employment Support was too optimistic given there were still a number of vacant posts, and an update was sought, and provided, on what recruitment had taken place since the report had been written;
- the current report format was confusing, and Members endorsed reviewing it to make it easier to read;
- it was understood that pupils in the digital school could attain higher marks than those in a conventional school setting, and it was queried whether this good news could be shared with other Members and if a piece of work could be undertaken to find out why. It was important to take a data-driven approach, and if it was understood what factors had led to the higher performance they could be emulated as part of the journey of raising attainment across Highland. The Chief Officer – Secondary Education confirmed that information on the subjects presented at the digital school could be provided in the attainment report to the September Committee;
- it was encouraging that a lot of flexibility had been built in as a “one size fits all” approach did not work in Highland;
- positive destinations were not the same for everyone. Not all young people went on to further and higher education, some preferring to go to work or get an apprenticeship, and it was important to take cognisance of that and work with the strengths of individual pupils;



- digital learning provided opportunities in terms of subject choice that pupils, particularly those in small rural schools, might otherwise not get;
- in response to a question, it was explained that the DSM saving of £1.5m referred to in the financial summary had already been achieved as it had been a surplus rather than a cut, and it was not anticipated that a saving would be made through digital activities or employability;
- whilst the alternative method of learning the digital school provided was welcomed, it was still necessary to address teachers leaving and to offer bigger incentives to encourage teachers to move to Highland; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the range of young people being taught digitally. In particular, it was queried whether home-schooled children had access to the digital school, whether those with Additional Support Needs found it easier or more difficult to learn digitally, and what happened when pupils disengaged.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report.

**10. Person Centred Solutions Portfolio Board Update – Early Learning and Childcare Progress**  
**Cunntas às Ùr bho Bhòrd Cùraim-roinne Freagairtean Stèidhichte air an Neach – Adhartas Tràth-ionnsachaidh is Cùraim-chloinne**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/7/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was exciting to learn how much work was going on to create flexible and sustainable early learning and childcare (ELC) provision to match the needs of all communities, and thanks were expressed for the positive report;
- funding from the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan had allowed for research into the needs and aspirations of families who lived, and might live in the future, in some of the most fragile communities in Highland, and more partnership and multi-service working were welcome elements of this vitally important project;
- section 5.7 of the report referred to a milestone, in March 2025, relating to engaging with Members and communities to agree next steps and solutions for settings under pressure due to falling roles, and it was questioned whether it was first necessary to do more work to identify and pilot flexible models of childcare. Part of the Northwest 2045 addressing depopulation work was to explore the creation of new “rural childcare practitioner” or “childminder without domestic premises” versions of childminding, both of which were mentioned in Appendix 3 of the report. Feedback from rural communities was that even a subsidised childminder model was unattractive unless barriers, such as those set out in section 1.1 of the Project Brief appended to the report, were removed. Such changes would require revised legislation which would take time, and assurance was sought that due time and consideration would be given to all the information and feedback gathered, including the outcomes of the recent consultation in the Northwest 2045 area, before any actions were taken forward, even if that meant moving the milestone in section 5.7 back;
- an invitation was extended to the Chair, Vice Chair and officers to visit the community in Strontian, where Local Members had met with parents and consultants appointed by Highlands and Islands Enterprise to discuss the issues surrounding ELC provision on the various peninsulas in Ward 21. The Strontian

community had built a new primary school, and had the talent, expertise and willingness to take a new and innovative approach to ELC provision. The consultants' report on provision and alternative models was due to be published within a few weeks, and a plan could be ready to be implemented that could be an example, not only to the Highland Council area but to the Scottish Government, of how to support ELC provision in remote rural areas that were facing the challenges of depopulation. The Chair accepted the invitation and requested sight of the consultants' report when it was available;

- the use of the word “remote” was often frowned upon because it suggested, as stated in the Scottish Government’s Addressing Depopulation Action Plan, that people needed to “get out to get on” and portrayed areas as lacking in people, culture and enterprise. On the other hand, large areas of Highland met the Scottish Government definition of “remote rural” and “very remote rural” areas, and it was suggested it was necessary to be mindful of the language used when discussing and promoting the more rural areas in Highland, and how to address the contradictory messaging going forward;
- clarification having been sought regarding the £7.9m savings referred to in section 5.8 of the report, it was explained that this was against the whole Person Centred Solutions Portfolio and related to the delivery of adult social care. The ELC workstream was not anticipated to deliver any savings in the current financial year; and
- the intention to increase the number of childminders, particularly in remote and rural areas, was welcomed, and it was suggested consideration should be given to employing childminders and supporting them to work through the Care Commission’s many rules and regulations which were a barrier to potential childminders.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report, including progress to date and next steps.

#### **11. Attainment Update – Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuileachadh – Coileanadh Ìrean a’ Churraicealaim airson Sàr-mhathais**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/8/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report covered the latest ACEL data for Highland schools. As had previously been stated, the Council was on a journey of improvement and, while there was still a way to go, the data indicated a trend of improvement. As had been requested by Committee Members, additional measures were being brought in and consolidated, in association with schools, to continue to improve year on year.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Scotland’s attainment performance had deteriorated further compared to previous years and the other home nations. Whilst the improving position in Highland was to be welcomed, it was a fragile situation and the Council needed to double its efforts, both because attainment in Highland impacted on the national position and to continue to close the gap with other Scottish local authorities who would also be seeking to improve;

- the next steps set out in section 8 of the report, such as the establishment of 8 operational areas, were innovative and key to the methodology around improving attainment. It was disappointing that more information had not been appended to the report and it was hoped it would come to a future meeting;
- concern was expressed that primary attainment was reported to one meeting of the Committee and secondary attainment to another, and it would be useful to have an agenda item that took a holistic view of attainment from 3-18;
- there was a lot to take comfort from in the report. However, it would be good to see more pace and urgency coming through, and there was a need for more frequent attainment items on the Committee's agendas;
- national benchmarking was essential, and it was queried why this was the first time the Scottish Government's Broad General Education Benchmarking Tool had been used to measure improvement;
- in responding to the above points, the Chair explained that it had not been possible to include more information on the new structure in the report as engagement with staff members was ongoing. He proposed that, once the engagement process had concluded, a Members' briefing session be arranged. This could also include a more in-depth discussion on attainment from 3-18. In terms of more attainment papers coming to the Committee, Members needed to understand not only the attainment figures but the programmes and strategies being implemented and the impact they were having, and that would be taken forward;
- getting attainment right in the early years was the foundation for everything that came after;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether it was known which schools were moving forward and which were struggling and, in relation to the latter, whether any contributing factors had been identified;
- the aim was for attainment in Highland to be above average, and it would be helpful to set out, in future reports, how Highland compared to the top performing local authorities and what could be learned from them. The Assistant Chief Executive – People confirmed this could be looked at. It was added that attainment reports to Area Committees presented an opportunity for Members to interrogate the data in respect of schools in their wards/areas;
- the dedication and hard work of teachers and school staff and the forbearance of parents and pupils was recognised;
- it was reassuring to hear the improvements that had been made and the acknowledgement that the Council was on a journey in terms of attainment. However, it was also necessary to recognise the bad news and use it as a stepping stone from which to improve;
- the proposed Members' briefing was welcomed, and it was suggested it should be extended to include input from parents, teachers and other interested stakeholders who could bring valuable insight to the table. Parents had suggested it was necessary to start with the basics such as the condition of school buildings, which were the fabric of schools and communities. They had also commented that disruptive behaviour in classrooms made it difficult for pupils to learn. In that regard, reference was made to a recent press article regarding the worrying increase in violence and aggression in schools, and it was commented that it was understood there was a violent incident in Highland schools every half an hour, which was surely impacting on the attainment of young people. In response, the Chair drew attention to the Vision 30 Improvement Programme, referred to in section 8 of the report, which covered some of the points raised. He concurred regarding the importance of the Capital Programme and ensuring new school buildings were provided where needed. Behaviour in schools was an ongoing

issue that efforts were being made to address. In terms of engagement with parents, he and the Assistant Chief Executive – People were scheduled to meet with representatives of the Highland Parent Forum the following week, and the points raised would be taken on board;

- consistency for teachers had been established in terms of moderation and assessment processes and it was queried whether, as part of the Vision 30 Improvement Programme, similar consistency would be established in programmes of learning for literacy and numeracy across primary schools from the point of view of equity and supporting teachers in shared goals. It was added that this could accelerate attainment for deprived children and those who were struggling;
- the clarity of approach to learning and delivery of the curriculum and the opportunities for development and support were welcomed;
- the link with the early years was welcomed, and it would be good to see some pioneering work in that regard in smaller communities;
- it was necessary to recognise some of the good things taking place in Highland. In that regard, it was highlighted that Highland was one of the few local authorities where all schools had access to advanced qualified school nurses;
- it was important to be ambitious for young people in Highland, that they were happy and able to go forward in whatever they wished to do, and that they wanted to come back to Highland or encourage other people to come to Highland;
- further to earlier comments regarding engaging with parents, teachers and other stakeholders, it was also necessary to open up a conversation with pupils, some of whom had an experience that was not as engaged and positive as Members and officers would like. It was highlighted that a Gaelic conference was scheduled to take place at Eden Court, and it was questioned why a similar event could not be arranged in respect of attainment. This would enable all stakeholders to share their thoughts on the various issues, consensus to be built, and the Council to go forward constructively and positively. In relation to parental engagement, the Chair emphasised that schools were the first port of call for discussions about attainment and any other issues pertaining to the education of a child. There was a Parental Engagement Strategy as well as a Pupil Engagement Strategy, and the Assistant Chief Executive - People confirmed it was intended to bring a review of the Parental Engagement Strategy to the Committee in June 2025;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that an offer to extend the proposed Members' briefing session could be extended to Parent Council representatives and Trade Unions; and
- an update having been sought on the rollout of the SEEMiS Progress and Achievement Module, it was confirmed it was being used to support attainment analysis at school level and was working well. In terms of the rollout of the latest version of SEEMiS, the Vice Chair confirmed it was progressing slowly. Concerns had been raised and assurance had been provided at the last SEEMiS Board meeting that target dates would be met. The next Board meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 6 March and an update could be provided to Mr A Graham thereafter.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Council's commitment to improving attainment and achievement at all stages through strategic initiatives developed in collaboration with school staff;

- ii. **NOTED** the accelerated improvement in Achievement of a Curriculum for Excellence Level in Literacy and Numeracy at key learner stages in comparison to previous years;
- iii. **NOTED** full implementation in primary schools of a tracking and reporting system module on SEEMiS with supporting analysis data dashboard tool for all;
- iv. **NOTED** implementation of Attainment Boards to drive improvement in secondary schools;
- v. **NOTED** that attainment meetings take place in January/February 2025 with targets for improvement agreed with Headteachers and monitored thereafter;
- vi. **NOTED** the impact of target setting, tracking and resources and interventions used by schools to raise attainment and address learner attainment gaps at school, Associated School Group and local authority level;
- vii. **NOTED** the next steps outlined in section 8 of the report; and
- viii. **AGREED** that, following the conclusion of the engagement process, a Members' briefing session be arranged on the next steps set out in the report, and on attainment from 3-18.

## 12. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the following draft Minutes:-

- i. Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (Annual General Meeting) – 3 December 2024;
- ii. Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (Ordinary Meeting) – 3 December 2024; and
- iii. Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee – 16 December 2024.

## 13. High Life Highland – Appointment of Independent Directors High Life na Gaidhealtachd – Cur Stiùirichean Neo-eisimeileach an Dreuchd

The Committee was advised that recommendations had been received from the High Life Highland Nominations Committee in relation to the appointment of Independent Directors as follows:-

Mr Michael Boylan  
Ms Alli Vass

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

The meeting concluded at 12.45 pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 26 February 2025 at 2pm.

### **Present:**

Mr R Bremner (Remote)	Mr P Logue
Mr I Brown	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs I Campbell (Remote)	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Ms S Fanet	Mr D Millar
Mr J Grafton	Mr C Munro
Dr M Gregson	Mrs M Paterson

### **Non-Members also present:**

Mr S Coghill (Remote)	Mr W MacKay (Remote)
Mr A Graham	

### **In attendance:**

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People  
Ms A Jansson, Area Education and Learning Manager  
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager  
Ms M A MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer  
Ms E Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer  
Ms J MacDonald, Senior Gaelic Translation Officer  
Ms S Paterson, Community Learning and Development Officer  
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager  
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Mr A Cormack, Chief Executive Officer, Fèisean nan Gàidheal  
Mr C A Macmillan, Development Manager (Inverness), Fèisean nan Gàidheal  
Mrs S McLennan, Principal Teacher, and 3 pupils from Inverness Royal Academy

**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 C Munro in the Chair**

### **Business**

#### **1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement**

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

Item 4 – Mr C Munro

#### **3. Good News**

The Committee were provided with a short video highlighting various developments and initiatives as well as items of good news.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- strengthening the link with Cape Breton was welcomed;
- Members were reminded, in relation to the Mod Academy, that the Royal National Mod was taking place in Fort William in October and preparations were now getting under way;
- Seachdain Na Gàidhilig had been launched at Muirtown Primary School by Joy Dunlop and the Leader of Highland Council; and
- the Gaelic Café and Awareness Day at Mount Pleasant Primary was commended and it was hoped that the terrific work taking place would continue.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as presented.

#### 4. Blas 2024 Update

**Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a close family member performed at Blas and received a small payment. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No. G/1/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People, accompanied by a presentation by Blas. The presentation showed how Blas fitted in with Fèisean nan Gàidheal's wider work and its engagement with communities. A recap of Blas 2024 was provided together with what could be expected this year when Blas took place between 5-13 September.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- thanks were extended to Fèisean nan Gàidheal for running Blas. Not only did it help local economies but it provided immense joy and pleasure for those attending events;
- the brilliant sustained provision was commended and it was important the Council supported this;
- it was important to provide opportunities to get involved for those who did not speak the language so that they too could feel part of the Gaelic community and to feel included as part of that culture. Blas did this;
- the programme that Blas had provided had extended over the years;
- it was queried if there was scope of providing an avenue of learning Gaelic through Blas in Highland or if this was a duplication of what others were doing;
- it was important Blas provided an opportunity for engagement across Highland but it was recognised that this depended on budgets and the availability of promoters;
- the economic benefit of £8.4 million over 20 years demonstrated the economic benefit of investing in Gaelic;
- Blas events had an international audience; and
- Blas had put Gaelic into a cultural context and provided an opportunity to use the language outside schools.

The Committee **NOTED** the report and the associated appendix.

#### 5. Gaelic Education Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/2/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People. In amplification of this, a presentation was provided by Mrs McLennan, Principal Teacher at Inverness Royal Academy, accompanied by three pupils. As part of her Personal Development, Mrs McLennan had sought to develop the ethos of Gaelic throughout the school through subjects, pupils and staff. It had proved to be an important and positive initiative with the message being that Gaelic belonged to everyone in the school community. The various approaches encouraging all to engage were described, such as “Gaelvember,” and the positive reactions generated.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Mrs McLennan and the pupils were commended for their excellent presentation. The pupils were ambassadors for their school, Gaelic language learning and the wider community;
- it was encouraging that the staff had willingly engaged;
- it was important to recognise that pupils did not always need to pursue further education to find a job where they could use Gaelic;
- Gaelic was alive and well in the Highlands and investment had been well made;
- the use of Gaelic in the Council Chamber was commended;
- the excellent provision of Gaelic Medium Education was welcomed. This had not always been the case;
- it would be good for schools to come together as this would provide an opportunity for pupils to socialise and share their passion for Gaelic with fellow students of the same age. Spors Gàidhlig and Fèisean were examples of this
- developing a social media presence would enable a platform whereby what was happening with Gaelic could be shared with other pupils, including those non-Gaelic speaking pupils;
- the incorporation of Gaelic on signage in the school was welcomed; and
- staffing levels were an issue if the same level of service was to be maintained.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report;
- ii. **AGREED** to welcome the continued expansion of GME and GE education in Highland; and
- iii. **AGREED** to recognise the leadership shown at the IRA to grow interest and involvement in Gaelic across the school.

## 6. Strategic Funding Gaelic Language Plan

There had been circulated Report No. G/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was suggested that, with single year budgets for projects, if an arts/cultural strategy would provide a base for longer term sustainable visions for collaborative working. High Life Highland delivered the Council’s wider Gaelic outcomes but its cultural aspirations and strategic approach were also mapped out in the Cultural Language Plan; and
- information was sought as to the number of Gaelic speakers in Care Homes. In addition, an update was also sought, and provided, as to the current position



regarding the partnership between Gaelic Medium Education and Care Homes to ensure there was an intergenerational approach to Gaelic.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the current funding allocations for Gaelic organisations;
- ii. **NOTED** that modifications to the funding allocated to organisations would directly impact other organisations. The allocations were listed in paragraph 5.2 of the report;
- iii. **NOTED** that the organisations listed along with other Gaelic organisations were supported with yearly partnership funding but that this funding varied from year to year in alignment with the targets in the Gaelic Language Plan (GLP).

## 7. PRMS Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the report; and
- ii. the progress made in relation to GLP corporate service aims, as outlined in section 6 of the report.

## 8. CLD – GLP Strategic Priorities

There had been circulated Report No. G/5/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

A request was made for officers to gather evidence for Inverness to be considered as an area of special linguistic significance for Gaelic in terms of the current Scottish Languages Bill being considered by the Scottish Parliament given the number of successful initiatives for both young and old through education and the arts. Gaelic in Inverness was on the move and had much potential. In response, it was pointed out that during the renewal of the Council's Gaelic Language Plan cognisance was taken of the Scottish Language Bill and officers were working closely with the Scottish Government around the consultation on the Bill. This was ongoing as was the analysis of the impact of being identified as an area of linguistic significance would have on communities and Gaelic Medium Education.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

This was the last meeting of the Gaelic Committee over which the Chair would preside. On behalf of Committee Members, the Vice Chair paid tribute to his hard work, commitment and dedication since the Gaelic Committee had been re-established over the last 4½ years ago.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm.

## Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Geàrr-chunntas coinneamh **Comataidh na Gàidhlig** a chumadh ann an Seòmar na Comhairle, Prìomh Oifis na Comhairle, Rathad Ghlinn Urchadain, Inbhir Nis, air Diciadain, 26 Gearran 2025 aig 2f.

### An làthair:

Mgr R Bremner (air astar)

Mgr I MacIlleDhuinn

A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul (air astar)

A' Bh-uas S Fanet

Mgr I Grafton

Dr M Gregson

Mgr P Logue

Mgr A Mac an Tòisich

Mgr S MacIlleBhrath (air astar)

Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir

Mgr C Rothach

A' Bh-uas M NicPheadrais

### Neo-Bhuill an làthair:

Mgr S Coghill (air astar)

Mgr A Greumach

U MacAoidh (air astar)

### A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

A' Bh-uas K Lackie, Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine

A' Bh-uas A Jansson, Manaidsear Foghlaim agus Ionnsachaidh Sgìreil

A' Bh-uas L Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig

A' Bh-uas M A NicLeòid Mitchell, Oifigear Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig

A' Bh-uas E Rodgers, Oifigear Poileasaidh Gàidhlig

A' Bh-uas J NicDhòmhnaill, Prìomh Oifigear Eadar-theangachaidh

A' Bh-uas S NicPhàdraig, Oifigear Ionnsachadh is Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd

A' Bh-uas S NicIlleInnein, Manaidsear Cho-Sheirbheisean Deamocratach

A' Bh-uas G Nic a' Phearsain, Oifigear Comataidh

### Cuideachd an làthair:

Mgr A MacCarraig, Àrd-Oifigear, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Mgr C A Mac a' Mhaoilein, Manaidsear Leasachaidh (Inbhir Nis), Fèisean nan Gàidheal

A' Bh-uas S NicIlleInnein, Prìomh Thidsear, is triùir sgoilearan bho Acadamaidh Rìoghail Inbhir Nis

**Tha rionnag air iomall na duilleige a' comharrachadh moladh a thèid chun na Comhairle. Tha co-dhùnidhean gun chomharra fo ùghdarras na Comataidh.**

### Mgr C Rothach anns a' Chathair

#### Gnothach

#### 1. Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Cha robh leisgeulan ann.

#### 2. Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan Aithris Fhollaiseachd a leanas:-

Nì 4 – Mgr C Rothach

### 3. Naidheachdan Matha

Chaidh bhidio goirid a shealltainn dhan Chomataidh, a' toirt am follais grunn leasachaidhean, iomairtean agus naidheachdan matha.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingeon a leanas a thogail:-

- chaidh fàilte a chur air a bhith a' neartachadh a' cheangail le Ceap Breatainn;
- chaidh cur an cuimhne nam Ball, a thaobh Acadamaidh a' Mhòid, gum biodh am Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail air a chumail anns a' Ghearasdan anns an Dàmhair agus gun robh obair ullachaidh a' dol air adhart air a shon a-nis;
- bhathar air Seachdain na Gàidhlig a chur air bhog aig Bun-Sgoil Bhaile an Fhraoich le Joy Dunlop agus Ceannard Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd; agus
- chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air a' Chafaidh Ghàidhlig agus air an Latha Togail Aire aig Bun-Sgoil Mount Pleasant agus bhathar an dòchas gun leanadh an obair sgoinneil seo air adhart.

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dha na naidheachdan matha a chaidh a thaisbeanadh.

### 4. Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhlas 2024

**Aithris Fhollaiseachd: dh'fhoillsich Mgr C Rothach Aithris Fhollaiseachd a thaobh an nì seo, seach gun robh ball-teaghaich dlùth air pàirt a ghabhail ann am Blas agus air sùim bheag fhaighinn mar phàigheadh. Ach, às dèidh dha an deuchainn a chur an gnìomh, cho-dhùin e nach robh com-pàirt aige ri fhoillseachadh.**

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/1/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine, agus bha taisbeanadh le Blas an cois seo. Sheall an taisbeanadh àite Blas taobh a-staigh obair nas fharsainge Fèisean nan Gàidheal agus an com-pàirteachas aig an fhèis le coimhearsnachdan. Chaidh geàrr-chunntas de Bhlas 2024 a thoirt seachad cuide ri fiosrachadh mu na nithean ris am biodh dùil am-bliadhna nuair a bhiodh Blas a' dol air adhart eadar 5–13 Sultain.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingeon a leanas a thogail:-

- chaidh taing a thoirt do dh'Fhèisean nan Gàidheal airson a bhith a' ruith Blas. Chan e a-mhàin gun robh Blas a' cuideachadh eaconamaidhean ionadail ach bha an fhèis a' toirt toileachas mòr dhaibhsan a bha a' frithealadh nan tachartasan;
- chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air an t-solar sgoinneil is leantainneach agus bha e cudromach gun robh a' Chomhairle a' cur taic ris a seo;
- bha e cudromach cothroman a thoirt dhaibhsan aig nach robh an cànan gus am b' urrainn dhaibh a bhith a' faireachdainn gun robh iad mar phàirt de choimhearsnachd na Gàidhlig agus a bhith a' faireachdainn gun robh iad air an gabhail a-steach mar phàirt dhen chultar sin. Bha Blas a' dèanamh seo;
- bha am prògram a bha Blas a' tabhann air leudachadh thar nam bliadhnaichean;
- chaidh faighneachd an robh slighe ann tro Bhlas airson a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig tro Bhlas sa Ghàidhealtachd no co-dhiù a bhiodh seo a' dùblachadh obair a bha feadhainn eile a' dèanamh;

- bha e cudromach gun robh Blas a' toirt cothrom seachad airson com-pàirteachas air feadh na Gàidhealtachd ach chaidh aithneachadh gun robh seo an crochadh air buidseatan agus air co-dhiù a bhiodh luchd-brosnachaidh rim faotainn;
- bha a' bhuannachd eaconamach de £8.4 millean thar 20 bliadhna a' sealltainn gun robh buannachd eaconamach an lùib a bhith a' tasgadh sa Ghàidhlig;
- bha luchd-èisteachd eadar-nàiseanta aig tachartasan Blas; agus
- bha Blas air a' Ghàidhlig a chur ann an co-theacsa cultarach agus air cothrom a thoirt seachad an cànan a chleachdadh taobh a-muigh sgoiltean.

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg agus dhan eàrr-ràdh a bha na cois.

## 5. Cunntas às Ùr mu Fhoghlam Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/2/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Thug A' Bh-uas NicIllinnein, Prìomh Thidsear aig Acadamaidh Rìoghail Inbhir Nis, agus triùir sgoilearan seachad taisbeanadh. Mar phàirt dhen leasachadh phearsanta aice, bha a' Bh-uas NicIllinnein air obair a dhèanamh gus spiorad na Gàidhlig a leasachadh air feadh na sgoile tro chuspairean, sgoilearan agus luchd-obrach. Bha an iomairt air a bhith cudromach is togarrach agus bha teachdaireachd na lùib gun robh a' Ghàidhlig leis a h-uile neach ann an coimhearsnachd na sgoile. Chaidh tuairisgeul a thoirt seachad mu na diofar dhòighean a chaidh a chleachdadh gus brosnachadh a thoirt dhan a h-uile duine com-pàirt a ghabhail, a leithid "Gaelvember," agus mar a chaidh gabhail ris a seo gu math.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingeon a leanas a thogail:-

- chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air a' Bh-uas NicIllinnein agus air na sgoilearan airson taisbeanadh sàr-mhath a thoirt seachad. Bha na sgoilearan nan tosgairean airson na sgoile aca, ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig, agus a' choimhearsnachd san fharsaingeachd;
- bha e na adhbhar misneachd gun robh an luchd-obrach air a bhith cho deònach com-pàirt a ghabhail;
- bha e cudromach aithneachadh nach fheumadh sgoilearan an-còmhnaidh a dhol an lùib foghlam adhartach gus obair fhaighinn far am b' urrainn dhaibh a' Ghàidhlig a chleachdadh;
- bha a' Ghàidhlig beò agus fallain sa Ghàidhealtachd agus bha an tasgadh a chaidh a dhèanamh sa chànan air a bhith math;
- chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air cleachdadh na Gàidhlig ann an Seòmar na Comhairle;
- chaidh fàilte a chur air an t-sàr sholar a thaobh Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig. Cha robh cùisean an-còmhnaidh air a bhith mar seo;
- bhiodh e math do sgoiltean tighinn còmhla seach gun toireadh seo cothrom do sgoilearan ùine shòisealta a chur seachad còmhla agus ùidh sa Ghàidhlig a cho-roinn le sgoilearan eile dhen aon aois. Bha Spòrs Gàidhlig agus Fèisean nan eisimpleirean dhen a seo;
- nan deigheadh làthaireachd air na meadhanan sòisealta a leasachadh bheireadh seo seachad ùrlar far am b' urrainnear na bha a' tachairt leis a' Ghàidhlig a cho-roinn le sgoilearan eile, a' gabhail a-steach sgoilearan aig nach robh a' Ghàidhlig;
- chaidh fàilte a chur air Gàidhlig air soidhnichean anns an sgoil; agus
- bha duilgheadas an lùib ìrean feachd-obrach ma bhathar gu bhith a' tabhann na h-aon ìre seirbheis.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg;
- ii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh fàilte a chur air an leudachadh leantainneach ann am Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig agus Foghlam Gàidhlig air a' Ghàidhealtachd; agus
- iii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh aithne a thoirt dhan cheannardas a tha Acadamaidh Rìoghail Inbhir Nis air a shealltainn gus ùidh is com-pàirteachas sa Ghàidhlig fhàs air feadh na sgoile.

## 6. Maoineachadh Ro-innleachdail Plana na Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/3/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingeann a leanas a thogail:-

- chaidh moladh, le buidseatan aon-bhliadhna airson phròiseactan, gum faodadh ro-innleachd ealain/cultair a bhith na bunait airson lèirsinnean fad-ùine is seasmhach airson co-obrachadh. Bha High Life na Gàidhealtachd a' lìbhrigeadh builean Gàidhlig nas fharsainge na Comhairle ach bha na miannan cultarach agus an dòigh-obrach ro-innleachdail cuideachd air am mapadh sa Phlana Cànan Chultarach; agus
- chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh mu àireamhan luchd-labhairt na Gàidhlig ann an dachannan cùraim. A bharrachd, chaidh fios às ùr a shireadh agus fhaotainn, mun t-suidheachadh làithreach a thaobh a' chom-pàirteachais eadar Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig agus dachannan cùraim airson dèanamh cinnteach gun robh dòigh-obrach eadar-ghinealaich ann a thaobh na Gàidhlig.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh mar a tha maoineachadh air a riarachadh airson buidhnean Gàidhlig;
- ii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** gun toir atharrachaidhean a thaobh mar a tha am maoineachadh air a riarachadh buaidh dhìreach air buidhnean eile. Tha na riarachaidhean seo air an liostadh ann an 5.2; agus
- iii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** gu bheil na buidhnean a tha air an liostadh còmhla ri buidhnean Gàidhlig eile a' faighinn taic tro mhaoineachadh com-pàirteach air stèidh bhliadhnail, ach gu bheil am maoineachadh seo ag atharrachadh bho bhliadhna gu bliadhna a rèir nan targaidean sa Phlana Ghàidhlig (PG).

## 7. Adhartas mu Choinneimh Plana Gàidhlig 2024–29

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/4/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

- i. dhan aithisg; agus
- ii. dhan adhartas a thathar air a dhèanamh le amasan seirbheis corporra a' Phlana Ghàidhlig, mar a thathar a' mìneachadh ann an earrainn 6.

## 8. Ionnsachadh agus Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd – Prìomhachasan Ro-innleachdail Plana na Gàidhlig

Chuartaichadh Aithisg Àir. G/5/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Chaidh iarrrtas a dhèanamh gun cruinnicheadh oifigearan fianais gus am b' urrainnear beachdachadh air Inbhir Nis mar sgìre shònraichte airson na Gàidhlig co-cheangailte ri Bile nan Cànanan Albannach air an robh Pàrlamaid na h-Alba a' beachdachadh, air sgàth na bh' ann de dh'iomairtean soirbheachail do shean is òg tro fhoghlam agus na h-ealain. Bha a' Ghàidhlig ann an Inbhir Nis a' gluasad agus bha mòran ann a ghabhadh dèanamh. Mar fhreagairt, chaidh innse gun deach ealla a ghabhail do Bhile nan Cànanan Albannach nuair a bhathar ag ùrachadh Plana Gàidhlig na Comhairle agus bha oifigearan ag obair gu dlùth le Riaghaltas na h-Alba mu thimcheall air co-chomhairleachadh mun Bhile. Bha an obair seo leantainneach, a bharrachd air a' mhion-sgrùdadh a bhathar a' dèanamh air a' bhuidh a bhiodh aig comharrachadh mar sgìre shònraichte air coimhearsnachdan agus Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig.

**THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg.

B' e seo a' choinneamh mu dheireadh de Chomataidh na Gàidhlig far am biodh an Cathraiche a' stiùireadh na coinneimh. Às leth Buill na Comataidh, rinn an t-Iar-Chathraiche moladh air an obair mhòr a bha e air a dhèanamh, agus cho dìcheallach, dealasach is dùrachdach 's a bha e air a bhith bhon a chaidh Comataidh na Gàidhlig ath-stèidheachadh o chionn còrr is ceithir bliadhna gu leth.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 3.55f.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday 20 March 2025 at 9.30am.

### Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr G MacKenzie
Dr C Birt (substitute)	Mr S Mackie
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Millar
Mr J Bruce (remote)	Mr C Munro
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr A Christie	Ms M Reid
Mr K Gowans	Mr M Reiss (remote)
Mr S Kennedy	Mrs T Robertson (substitute)
Mr B Lobban	Mr R Stewart
Mr D Louden	

### Non-Members also present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr T MacLennan
Mr J Finlayson	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs B Jarvie	Mr D McDonald
Mr P Logue	Mr J McGillivray
Mrs K MacLean	

### Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate  
Mrs S Armstrong, Chief Officer - Revenues and Commercialisation  
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance  
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer - Corporate Finance  
Mr J Shepherd, Chief Officer - Business Solutions  
Ms E Barrie, Head of People  
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead Finance (Place)  
Mr C Donaldson, Principal Project Manager  
Ms K MacDougall, Talent Manager  
Ms L McGunnigle, HR Manager  
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager  
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

### Mr D Louden in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Baxter, Mr G Mackenzie, and Mr A Jarvie.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest and the Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 5, 7, 8 & 11: Mr A Christie

**3. Good News  
Naidheachdan Matha**

The Committee **NOTED** the following good news stories:

- Corporate Finance and Business Solutions appointments; and
- Scottish Apprenticeship week, which had been held on 3-7 March 2025.

**4. Late Submission of Expenses Claims  
A' Cur A-steach airson Cosgaisean Anmoch**

It had previously been agreed by the Corporate Resources Committee that late submissions of Elected Members expenses claims would be presented to the Committee for approval.

Concern was expressed at the continuing late submission of expense claims, noting that this should only happen due to exceptional circumstances such as illness. It was suggested that consideration be given to addressing this at the next meeting.

The Committee **AGREED** that consideration be given to implementing a stricter policy in relation to the late submission of expense claims at the next meeting of the Committee and thereafter **APPROVED** the following claims:

- Mr Karl Rosie £477.00 for mileage in 2024;
- Mr Laurie Fraser £139.95 for mileage in September, October and November 2024; and
- Mr John Grafton £609.30 for mileage in August and October 2024.

**5. Corporate Revenue and Capital Monitoring Report to 31 December 20  
Aithisg Teachd-a-steach Corporra agus Sgrùdadh gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2024**

**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.**

**a. Corporate Revenue Monitoring to 31 December 2024  
Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2024**

There had been circulated Report No RES/01/25 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

The work undertaken by the corporate finance team to mitigate overspends in service areas was welcomed, and the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 31 December 2024 and the estimated year end forecast; and
- ii. status of delivery of budget savings in the year



**b. Corporate Capital Monitoring to 31 December 2024  
Sgrùdadh Calpa Corporra gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2024**

There had been circulated Report No RES/02/25 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. net spend to the end of Q3 2024/25, the forecast year end outturn and the funding profile; and
- ii. update provided regarding main project spend variances.

**6. Treasury Management – Summary of Transactions  
Rianachd Ionmhais - Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/03/25 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

During discussion, further explanation was sought and provided on the relationship between Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) and Temporary borrowing rates, and the Council's use of both borrowing mechanisms, as shown in section 6.9 of the report.

Thereafter the Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 October 2024 to 31 December 2024.

**7. Corporate Service – Revenue Budget and Performance Monitoring – Quarter 3 2024/25**

**Seirbheis Chorporra – Sgrùdadh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach agus Coileanadh – Ràith 3 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, General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau, and Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID Ltd. 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 RES/04/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, progress with actions relating to the Joint Procurement Strategy was welcomed, and thereafter the Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the revenue monitoring position for the Corporate Cluster; and
- ii. **NOTED** the performance and risk information for the Corporate Cluster.

**8. Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy 2025-2027: Action Plan Update  
Ro-innleachd Dealbhaidh Feachd-obrach Corporra 2025–2027: Cunntas às Ùr mun Phlana-ghnìomha**

**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 RES/05/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

Progress with the strategy was welcomed, as were the positive efforts to grow the Council's workforce and provide career opportunities to staff.

Thereafter the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the progress of the actions in the workforce action plan as contained in sections 6 -11 of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** bi-annual updates be brought to Committee to monitor progress against the action plan.

## 9. Talent Strategy Ro-innleachd Tàlaint

There had been circulated Report No RES/06/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the strategy was welcomed as a positive way ahead for the Council to establish an improved culture and range of employment opportunities. The new entrepreneurial approach would help to retain the existing workforce and attract new staff;
- it was clarified that the pilot being undertaken in the Corporate Cluster to work towards Investors in People accreditation was expected to take 12-18 months; and
- a summary was provided of the some of the policies and support available from the Council to armed forces, veterans and their families. A report on this was due to be considered by full Council and Members were urged to support the recommendations.

Thereafter the Committee **APPROVED** the Talent Strategy and Action Plan as supporting documents of the Highland Council's People Strategy.

## 10. Corporate Systems Update – Finance, HR/Payroll and Pensions Programme Cunntas às Ùr mu Shìostaman Corporra – Ionmhas, Goireasan Daonna/Rola-pàighidh agus Prògram Peinnsein

There had been circulated Report No RES/07/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the historical data archive work detailed in section 6.5.12 of the report was welcomed as it would provide access to past data without the need to keep the old system running; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that there was an ongoing support contract with the supplier of the new system.

Thereafter the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. updates regarding the Finance, HR/Payroll and Pensions Programme; and
- ii. updates regarding the Human Resources and Payroll, including the commencement of the HR Data & Process Enablement Project.

**11. Delivery Plan - Income Generation and Corporate Solutions Portfolios  
Update Plana Libhrigidh – Cunntas às Ùr mu Chùraman-roinne Togail Teachd-a-steach agus Fuasglaidhean Corporra**

**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.**

In relation to income generation, the Chair made reference to the need to be risk aware but not risk averse, and that the overall success of all projects should be considered.

**a. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update – Corporate Solutions  
Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Adhartas a’ Phlana Libhrigidh – Fuasglaidhean Corporra**

There had been circulated Report No RES/08/25 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** progress on the projects covered in the report.

**b. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update – Income Generation  
Cunntas às Ùr mu Sgrùdadh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach & Adhartais – Togail Teachd-a-steach**

There had been circulated Report No RES/09/25 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mr J Bruce, moved an amendment to add an additional recommendation to those detailed in the report, as follows:

- ii. Notes the Motorhome Scheme has failed to meet its intended goals, has undermined legitimate business, and has increased tension between tourists, residents and businesses and agrees to recommend to Council that the scheme is discontinued.

Following an adjournment to consider this amendment, the Chair declared it incompetent on the grounds that the amendment was an attempt to overturn the budget approved by Council on 6 March 2025. Mr R Stewart asked that his dissent be recorded.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- some Members referred to the reported income generate being below target of the Council’s Highland Campervan and Motorhome Scheme and suggested that discontinuation of it would be preferable, to ensure no further resources were allocated to it. Others recognised that while it was not generating as much income as had been hoped, it had started late in the 2024 tourist season, and that it would be preferable to give it a full season prior to making any decision on its continuation, noting that no further resources were required to support it, unless a small marketing budget was

committed. In addition, the scheme had been put in place not only to generate income, but to also reduce the number of vehicles behaving irresponsibly, to the detriment of local residents and the environment. It was clarified that original plans to provide vehicles using the scheme with a sticker had not been taken forward on the advice of industry experts. Some Members felt campervan and motorhomes should be directed to official campsites;

- concerns were raised by Mr Reiss about two issues, which the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance would contact him about outwith the meeting. The first was a fire safety concern in relation to the Council's arrangements for overnight parking , as raised in an email that had been sent to Members very recently which referred to a decision by Aberdeenshire Council not to implement overnight parking. The second was a concern raised by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in relation to the parking area at Dunnet Head, which was adjacent to a bird sanctuary, noting that young birds could be drawn to the lights of the vehicles, and because of the increased numbers of dogs in the vicinity.
- Members welcomed the continued success of The Storr project and praised the staff who had developed the project and who work on site. In addition to generating income, the project supported tourists, provided local employment, and supported the protection of the environment. It was suggested that the development of other similar visitor experience projects be expedited and suggestions for other locations were sought;
- in general, it was important to try a variety of income generation schemes, noting that some would be more successful than others. The overall long-term income generation targets for all projects were key; and
- clarity was provided to Members that Section 7 of the report detailed tourism infrastructure development, which was intended to help improve tourist behaviour.

Thereafter the Committee **NOTED** the progress of each of the Income Generation Projects.

## 12. Minutes of Meetings Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

The following Minutes of Meetings had been circulated and:

- i. **APPROVED** - Central Safety Committee held on 9 December 2024;
- ii. **APPROVED** - Employment Release Sub Committee held on 10 December 2024; and
- iii. **NOTED** – Staff Partnership Forum held on 20 February 2025.

The meeting closed at 11.20am.