

The Highland Council
No. 4 2017/2018

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 7 September 2017 at 10.35am.

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

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr D Louden
Mr B Allan	Mrs L MacDonald
Mr R Balfour	Mr R MacDonald
Mrs J Barclay	Mrs D Mackay
Mr A Baxter	Mr D Mackay
Mr R Bremner	Mr W MacKay (via VC)
Mr I Brown	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr J Bruce	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs C Caddick	Mr S Mackie
Mrs I Campbell	Mr A Mackinnon
Miss J Campbell	Ms A MacLean
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr C MacLeod
Mr A Christie	Mr D MacLeod
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr G Cruickshank	Mrs B McAllister
Ms K Currie	Mr J McGillivray
Mrs M Davidson	Mr N McLean (via VC)
Mr J Finlayson	Mr H Morrison
Mr M Finlayson	Ms L Munro
Mr C Fraser	Mrs M Paterson
Mr L Fraser	Mr M Reiss
Mr R Gale	Mrs F Robertson
Mr J Gordon	Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Mr K Rosie
Mr A Graham	Mr G Ross
Mr J Gray	Mr P Saggars
Mr T Heggie	Mr A Sinclair
Mr A Henderson	Ms N Sinclair
Mr A Jarvie	Mr C Smith
Ms E Knox	Ms M Smith
Mr R Laird	Mrs K Stephen
Mr B Lobban	Mr B Thompson (via VC)

In Attendance:

Chief Executive	Director of Finance
Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development	Director of Community Services
Director of Development & Infrastructure	

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs P Hadley, Mr W MacLachlan, Ms P Munro, Mr I Ramon and Mrs C Wilson.

2. **Declarations of Interest** **Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

The Council **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 16 – Mr I Brown and Mrs D Mackay (both financial)

Item 22 – Ms L Munro, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Louden, Mr D Macpherson and Mrs M Paterson (all non-financial)

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Convener, on behalf the Council, congratulated Ms Michelle Morris, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development, on her appointment as Managing Director of Blaenau-Gwent Council and wished her well in her new role. In this regard, tribute was paid by all the Group Leaders to Ms Morris and specifically to her extensive contribution to the work of the Council over recent years.

The Convener also introduced the new Youth Convener Ms Maria Roberts, who was attending her first meeting of the Council in her new role.

Further, and in accordance with Standing Order 18, it was **AGREED** that Items 18 and 19 on the agenda would be taken following the lunch break.

At this point, Mr R Laird, seconded by Ms M Smith, **MOVED** that the order of the agenda should also be changed to allow Item 25 (Notices of Motion) to be taken after Item 14 in view of the importance of the issues contained within the Notices of Motion.

As an **AMENDMENT**, the Convener, seconded by Mr A Christie, moved that the order of the agenda should remain unchanged – other than for the items which would be taken after the lunch break as already agreed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 17 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 48 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:-

Mr B Allan, Mr I Brown, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms K Currie, Mr R Bremner, Mr C Fraser, Mr E Knox, Mr R Laird, Mr D Louden, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr C MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr N McLean, Mr K Rosie, Ms M Smith

For the Amendment:-

Mr G Adam, Mr R Balfour, Mrs J Barclay, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mr G Cruickshank, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr J Gordon, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr A Jarvie, Mr B Lobban, Mr J McGillivray, Mr R MacDonald, Mrs D Mackay, Mr W MacKay, Mr D Mackay, Mr S Mackie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D MacLeod, Mrs B McAllister, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Mr P Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Ms N Sinclair, Mr C Smith, Mrs K Stephen, Mr B Thompson

Abstention:-

Mr K Gowans

3. Membership of the Council Ballrachd na Comhairle

It was **NOTED** that, following his election as the Member of Parliament for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, Mr Jamie Stone had confirmed his resignation as a Member of the Council with effect from 17 July 2017.

On that basis, a By-Election for Ward 7 (Tain and Easter Ross) had now been arranged and would be held on Thursday, 28 September 2017.

4. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

It was **NOTED** that the recess powers granted at the meeting on 29 June 2017 had not required to be used in relation to the full Council.

5. 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 29 June 2017 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED**.

6. 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:-

Ross & Cromarty Committee, 15 August
Places Committee, 16 August
Lochaber Committee, 22 August
People Committee, 23 August
Caithness Committee, 29 August
Corporate Resources Committee, 30 August
Pensions Committee, 31 August

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

People Committee, 23 August

***Starred Item: Item 12: PP. 204: Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise**

AGREED that the catchment boundary between Lundavra Primary School and Inverloch Primary School be changed.

***Starred Item: Item 25: PP.211-212: Membership of Sub Committees**

AGREED that Mrs M Davidson (non-Member of the Committee) should replace Mr G Ross on the Adult Services Development and Scrutiny Sub Committee.

**7. Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board
Co-Bhòrd Luachaidh na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean Siar**

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Valuation Joint Board held on 2 February 2017 (approved by the Board on 27 June 2017) which were **NOTED**.

**8. Membership of Committees, etc
Ballrachd na Comhairle**

It was **NOTED** that Mr K Gowans had now left the SNP Group and had joined the Independent Group and on that basis the political make-up of the Council was now as follows:-

Ind – 29/SNP – 21/Cons – 10/Lib Dem – 9/Labour 3 – Green -1

It was also **NOTED** that the formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committee had now changed to 10/7/4/3/1.

In this regard, the Council **AGREED** revised Committee membership lists as tabled at the meeting

**9. Question Time
Am Ceiste**

The following Questions had been received by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development in terms of Standing Order 42 –

(i) Ms M Smith

To the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee/Budget Leader

“In answer to my question to you at the last full Council highlighting the £115,000 fees paid to a Consultant over a 6 month period engaged at Highland Council in ICT in the position of Head of Digital Transformation, you said that you would get back to me and the Council with an explanation. I am still waiting so I would like to ask you for that report please?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, Ms Smith queried as to whether this was the only post of this type being remunerated on a temporary basis at such a high rate.

In response, the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee confirmed that this was the case and that the ICT Executive Board had previously agreed the arrangements in respect of the Digital Transformation post.

(ii) Ms M Smith

To the Leader of the Council

“You have expressed several times that the new Council needs to be more business-like and commercial and in fact this was a finding of the Re-Design Board. To this end, you have promised to form a cross-party Commercial Board. This has not yet been done and no meetings are scheduled. Please will you give me a date for the first meeting so that this Council has a chance of surviving future cuts by becoming more self-sufficient?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, Ms Smith queried as to when the first meeting of the Commercial Board would be held.

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that now that the membership had been agreed (with the exception of the external reps who were still to be appointed) there would be an initial preliminary meeting followed by the first formal meeting of the Board before the end of September.

(iii) Mr C Fraser

To the Chair of the Places Committee

“How many claims have Highland Council had for damage to cars and vehicles in the past year due to road defects and of this number how many have the Council settled and how much has been paid out?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, Mr Fraser queried as to what had been meant by the term ‘desk top study’ in recent press reports on this issue.

In response, the Chair of the Places Committee confirmed that the written answer had clarified the current position and assurance was given that all claims were being dealt with satisfactorily by the Insurance Team within the Council.

(iv) Mr A Graham

To the Leader of the Council

“Further to the Motion on broadband agreed by the Highland Council on 27 October 2016, could you give an update on the rollout of fibre broadband in the Highlands and what the Council is doing to progress it?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, Mr Graham queried as to whether regular updates could be given to the Council on the rollout of broadband across the Highlands.

In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that regular updates would be provided and that a Seminar for Members had been arranged for 8 November. In the meantime, all Members were welcome to raise local issues with her and the Director of Development & Infrastructure as and when necessary.

10. Corporate Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Chorporra Bhliadhnaidh

There had been circulated Report No. HC/26/17 dated 19 August 2017 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- this was a generally positive report and thanks were conveyed to the

Corporate Audit & Performance Manager and her team for the collation of the data;

- whilst the delivery of a number of projects was welcomed, it was noted that there was still work to be undertaken in relation to scrutiny and performance and this would be given a priority in the coming months;
- the implementation of the new Local Committees across the Highland area, the City/Region Deal, the West Link and the Town House Refurbishment were just some of the successful projects which had been/were being delivered;
- reduction in the spend on road maintenance had now been halted and this was welcomed, along with the new investment programme which was already in place;
- protection of the spend on winter maintenance had been a high priority and this was now being delivered;
- it had to be noted that delivery of priorities was being undertaken at a difficult time of reducing budgets;
- the Council's profile had been raised nationally and good working relationships were currently in place with Highlands & Islands leaders and this was beneficial for the whole Highland area;
- work on issues relating to Welfare Reform had been brought forward and this would be combined with new work on Poverty Prevention;
- two areas which required re-focus were educational attainment and Looked After Children and this work would be taken forward as a priority with the aim of improving performance;
- thanks should be conveyed to all Members of the Council for the level of collaborative working which had been undertaken;
- there was a need to monitor progress on this report, not least in terms of improving the current performance indicators in relation to Commitment 42 (attainment rates for children from deprived backgrounds or those Looked After had fallen) and Commitment 51 (the time taken between a Looked After Child being accommodated and a permanency decision had increased);
- there had to be a renewed focus on the rollout of smart meters across Council buildings and schools as this was currently behind target;
- in terms of the level of information which had been provided, the recent external report on 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' should be circulated to all Members;
- consideration should be given to including the following on future Committee agendas – devolvement to a local level of issues pertaining to the Crown Estates, the separation of affordable housing to local levels in the first instance followed by the lobbying of the UK Government for write-off or re-scheduling of the housing debt on that basis and more focus of activity in smaller towns and centres as part of the City/Region deal;
- the progress with regard to the previous commitments on Gaelic was welcomed;
- there were real problems with completion of complicated LEADER application forms and it would be helpful if advice could be sought on how to make this an easier process for applicants;
- in terms of the condition of the roads network, and specifically Commitment 36 (use of new and innovative patching techniques), a re-evaluation of the current patching techniques being used had been sought;
- there was a need for further clarification on how many Council assets had been transferred in 2016/17;
- as part of the redesign process, it would be helpful if more detail could be provided on which partner organisations had been involved in meetings;
- further detail was required in terms of how issues in relation to Strengthening Local Democracy, Empowering Communities and Enhancing Town Centres

would be taken forward;

- whilst it was accepted that there was a need to improve the current situation in relation to Looked After Children, it had to be noted that, when dealing with a small number of people, any slight change could have a significant impact on the statistics. In this regard, a further more detailed report would be submitted to the next meeting of the People Committee to provide additional information;
- in recognising the links between poverty and attainment, and in order to enable continuous improvement across all areas, it was essential to build on the current successes with literacy and numeracy;
- in terms of the home care costs for the elderly in Highland as compared with the Scottish average, it was noted that further information could be obtained from NHS Highland, specifically through arrangements to access the weekly 'walk through' of the Performance Wall;
- it would be helpful if further information could be provided in relation to Commitment 17 (Contracts and Procurement) with particular reference being made to recent snagging issues at Inverness Royal Academy; and
- in relation to Commitment 6 (Transport), it was noted that there had been problems with Community Transport provision in Sutherland recently and that this could be raised with the Director of Community Services following the meeting.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the good progress being made with delivery of the Council's Programme for the period from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 and that a further report on Statutory Performance Indicators and the Local Government Benchmarking Framework would be presented no later than March 2018.

11. Programme for the Highland Council Prògram airson Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Motion from the Administration – the Leader and Depute Leader **MOVED** the Programme for the Council which set out the Administration's priorities and would form the basis of the Council's Corporate and Service Plans.

In this regard, the Programme for the Council had been circulated separately.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Programme was currently in draft form and would be reviewed over time as necessary to incorporate issues such as the Gaelic translation of titles/wording, Plain English, etc;
- this was a high level document with key priorities which was to be the subject of extensive consultation and input from all Members of the Council was welcomed, not least at the Seminar which had been arranged for 12 September;
- a number of contributions had already been received and these were welcomed, including a more focused approach to working with tenants;
- in addition to specific consultation with Local Committees, the Programme would be made available online for communities and business across the Highland area;
- one of the main themes was the moving of power to local areas and in this regard consideration would also be given to the final report from the Commission on Highland Democracy;

- it would be essential to consider the potentially far reaching implications for the Highlands from Brexit;
- a clear anti-poverty focus was essential throughout all future discussions on the Programme;
- workforce planning within the Council was also a priority and it was suggested that examples of good practice in this regard should be shared wherever possible with other organisations;
- a number of priorities (34) had been identified and it would be essential to highlight which outcomes were the most important in terms of delivery of the Programme;
- in terms of the need to provide a higher priority for the promotion of the Gaelic language, specifically in terms of cultural identity and social cohesion, the proposal for the formation of a cross-party Gaelic Strategy and Implementation Group which would report directly to the Corporate Resources Committee was welcomed;
- the building of social housing was especially important, particularly in rural areas, and should be progressed whenever and wherever possible;
- the revised thematic format was welcomed but it would be important to ensure that implementation of the proposed specific actions was widely published in order that the Council could be judged on the delivery of the Programme;
- in regard to Section 4 – Key Risks and Challenges – and specifically the reference to the Council ‘having a strong track record’ in delivering high quality education to children and young people of all abilities and backgrounds” – it was suggested that this wording needed to be amended as it was felt that this did not in fact reflect current circumstances;
- there was a need for information to be made available on policy changes which would be undertaken in future, particularly at a local level;
- reference to protecting and enhancing Highland’s influence and reputation nationally and internationally was welcomed and it was stressed that continued high level promotion of the Highland area was imperative;
- this was a ‘living document’ and as such would be subject to review and updating over time;
- the Programme had to focus on improving lives across the Highland area, with a particular emphasis on anti-poverty measures;
- there would be different priorities in different areas and the Programme would have to be flexible enough to encompass these priorities; and
- the involvement of external organisations across the Highland in the key aims of the Programme would be vital in terms of meeting goals and aspirations.

Decision

The Programme for the Council was **AGREED** on the basis that it could be amended to incorporate any changes to the content if necessary and that the final document would be reviewed to ensure that it met the Council’s corporate publication standards including Gaelic, accessibility and plain English.

It was also **NOTED** that the proposed Performance Framework would be taken to a future meeting.

12. The Chief Executive’s Proposals for the Highland Council Management Structure

Molaidhean an Àrd-Oifigeir airson Structar Rianachd Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. HC/27/17 dated 29 August 2017 by the Chief

Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the recommendations within the report addressed the outstanding recommendation from the Redesign Board in that it presented a proposal for a leaner management structure of 4 Directorates and also a number of adjustments to the leadership and management of specific functions;
- it was essential that that the new structure was both flexible and responsive in order to deal with the anticipated future challenges, both locally and nationally;
- this item linked with other agenda items on Corporate Performance, the Programme for the Council, the Redesign Board's Proposed Remit and Work Plan and the Financial Approach for 2018-2023 and as such it was important that these work strands were combined wherever possible;
- there was a need for the Council to be in a position to deliver localism and these proposals would support that aim;
- there was a need to review the considerable number of staffing tiers/levels of management across the Council;
- the objective should be to ensure that more Managers were based at a local level with wider responsibilities in terms of remit but within a smaller geographical area; and
- following reference to the specific arrangements within Ward 14 (whereby the City Manager also covered the role of Ward Manager), it was suggested that this should be included in any future discussion where appropriate.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** the criteria at Paragraph 2.4 of the report and the contextual factors at Paragraph 3.1 which framed the proposals for the Highland Council management structure;
- (ii) **NOTED** that Highland Council currently had the leanest senior management structure among Scottish rural Councils;
- (iii) **AGREED** to amend the management structure from 5 Directorates to 4 comprising Corporate Resources, Community Services, Development & Infrastructure and Care & Learning;
- (iv) **AGREED** to the changes in organisation and responsibilities as set out in Section 5.6;
- (v) **AGREED** to Member involvement (1 Member from each Group) in a short term Working Group to review Ward Manager roles and how these would drive the shift to localism;
- (vi) **AGREED** to appoint a Director to the additional role of Depute Chief Executive and to reduce the additional remuneration for these duties to £5,000 per annum;
- (vii) **AGREED** to the changes to the allocation of statutory roles as set out in Section 5.8;
- (viii) **NOTED** that the Chief Executive would consult with Heads of Service on the staff-side suggestion that Head of Service posts should have generic job descriptions;
- (ix) **AGREED** to delete 2 posts as detailed in Section 8.1 of the report; and
- (x) **NOTED** the risk implications, specifically that the deletion of 2 posts from corporate functions would increase the risk of Senior Managers being unable to fully meet the expectations of Members and the Highland public.

13. The Redesign Board's Proposed Remit and Work Plan Raon-ùghdarras agus Plana Obrach a Thathar a' Moladh airson a' Bhùird Ath-dhealbhadh

There had been circulated (pp.53-66) Report No. HC/28/17 dated 23 August 2017 by the Chief Executive.

In this regard, there had also been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Redesign Board held on 29 August 2017 which were **APPROVED**.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- with reference to the Work Plan for the Board, the importance of the Council being more open minded to new ways of delivering services and also being more commercially minded by adopting more efficient business practice was highlighted;
- it was extremely important that all Members of the Council were aware of and involved in the work of the Board, including the communication of the positive results/action arising from individual peer reviews for the general public across the Highland area;
- the Council had to move to being more community minded (which meant listening locally, involving people and groups more in decisions affecting them, supporting community bodies to do more in their communities and targeting support to particular people and places in most need) in order to change how services were delivered in future;
- the redesign of Council services represented both the biggest challenge and the biggest risk and as such it was imperative that positive results were achieved;
- there was a need to ensure that the work being undertaken by the Redesign Board was combined with the Programme for the Council and the budget planning for the future;
- it would be important to identify savings from the redesign work and for proposals to come forward to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy wherever possible; and
- it was suggested that Mr M Reiss should be appointed as Vice Chair of the Redesign Board.

Decision

The Council **AGREED**:-

- (i) the Board's criteria for identifying peer reviews as detailed at Appendix 1;
- (ii) delegated authority from the Council to the Board for its programme of reviews, noting that Members could propose service areas and functions for review to the Board;
- (iii) the remit, work plan and timeline as described in the report and set out at Appendices 2 and 3; and
- (iv) that the Board should report its progress to each meeting of the Council along with redesign recommendations and that this should inform the budget process as it was considered by the Council.

It was also **AGREED** to appoint Mr M Reiss as the Vice Chair of the Board.

14. Financial Approach 2018-2023 Sealladh Ionmhasail – Cunntas às Ùr 2018-2023

There had been circulated Report No. HC/29/17 dated 29 August 2017 by the Director of Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was hoped that the proposals for a multi-year approach to budget setting would be supported across the Chamber, not least in terms of the assumption that future years would continue to be challenging and the Council would require to be flexible in terms of responding to any last minute issues if and when they arose;
- Audit Scotland had also confirmed that they viewed long term financial plans as an essential tool in delivering a strategic plan;
- the budget approach would be based around five main themes and these had been presented in the report as follows – Prioritisation, Efficiency, Redesign, Commercial and Income;
- a key message coming from the budget process had to be that all options would be considered and nothing would be discounted;
- every opportunity would be taken to ensure the provision of a balanced budget but it had to be recognised that some current services could be reduced/ceased and some charges increased for future years;
- thanks should be conveyed to the Director of Finance and his team for the work undertaken to date on the budget process;
- in terms of Expenditure, and specifically Loan Charges, it was suggested that consideration should be given to making further representations in terms of the write-off of previous legacy borrowing;
- it was also suggested that consideration should be given as to whether there was a need to look again at the implications of current borrowing procedures, particularly in terms of the potential for future interest rate rises;
- further clarification was required in terms of the issues which had been raised in the Barclay Report, specifically in terms of the references to ‘cost neutral’ issues;
- in terms of Prioritisation, and specifically reference to the work stream to look at ensuring that the Council’s resources were appropriately directed towards the delivery of the ‘Council’s stated priorities’, this should be amended to read the ‘public’s stated priorities’;
- in terms of Income, and specifically consideration of other ways in which the Council could raise income through local taxation, the reference to tourist ‘tax’ should be changed to tourist ‘benefit’;
- it had been stated that any capital item which required urgent decision would be brought to the full Council in October but it was suggested that it might be more appropriate to consider the Capital Programme as a whole (as opposed to any specific item);
- in relation to pressures on the Council’s asset base, and specifically reference to the capacity in schools, this should be amended to also include the condition of schools;
- the five year scenario planning which had been done as part of the financial outlook had identified a potential budget gap of between £129m and £186m over the period from 2018 to 2023. In this regard, it was suggested that the higher figure (£186m) should perhaps be used in the approach to meet the budget gap (as opposed to a ‘middle’ figure of £159.2m which had been proposed within the report); and
- as well as consideration of representations being made to the UK

Government on the current level of austerity and its impact on Scotland as a whole, there should also be consideration of representations being made to the Scottish Government in terms of the potential use of tax raising powers as an alternative to further cuts to local government (and the resultant impact on the Highland area).

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the approach being taken to address the budget gap and **AGREED** to support the principle of multi-year budget setting.

It was also **AGREED** to reinstate the Council's non-earmarked reserve to a minimum level of 2% of the Council's annual Revenue Budget by 2023.

15. Highland Local Scrutiny Plan 2017/18 Plana Sgrùdaidh Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd 2017/18

There had been circulated Report No. HC/30/17 dated 15 August 2017 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, and with particular reference to taking scrutiny from a Highland to a local level, it was suggested that there was a need to measure performance against values and to assess risk and to closely examine the mechanism whereby this could best be achieved.

It was also suggested that a report should be submitted to the People Committee in regard to Scrutiny Risks (Paragraphs 9 and 10) – Scottish Housing Regulator, with particular reference to tenant participation and engagement.

Decision

The Council **NOTED**:-

- (i) the Local Scrutiny Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report which highlighted that no additional scrutiny of the Council was required for 2017/18;
- (ii) the positive comments made about the Council's approach to redesign, use of scrutiny activity as a driver to help improve services and a renewed drive for quality improvement in education;
- (iii) the areas where monitoring was planned as outlined in Paragraph 4.2; and
- (iv) the areas of scheduled audit and inspection activity identified contributing to national audit reports outlined at Paragraph 4.4 of the report.

It was also **AGREED** that a report should be submitted to the People Committee in regard to Scrutiny Risks (Paragraphs 9 and 10) - Scottish Housing Regulator, with particular reference to tenant participation and engagement.

16. North Highland Health and Social Care Partnership Annual Performance Report for 2016 Com-pàirteachas Slàinte agus Cùraim Shòisealta na Gàidhealtachd a Tuath Aithisg Choileanaidh Bhliadhnail 2016

Declarations of Interest –

Mr I Brown declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds of being an employee of NHS Highland and left the meeting during discussion of the item.

Mrs D MacKay declared a financial interest on the grounds of being a Board Member of NHS Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Joint Report No. HC/31/17 dated 28 August 2017 from the Chief Executive, Highland Council and the Chief Executive, NHS Highland.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in terms of key achievements over the course of 2016/17, the reference to the NHS Highland, Albyn Housing and Carbon Dynamic collaboration on 'Fit Homes' was welcomed and it was highlighted that significant contributions had also been received from the Council and through the City/Region Deal which presented real opportunities for future improvements;
- it was imperative that carers were supported wherever possible in relation to the invaluable services which they provided;
- the Lochbroom Care Home had recently been cited as an example of best practice in terms of delivery of care and it was hoped that this could now be recognised and rolled out across the Highland area;
- in regard to the Care at Home tariff, there was a need to recognise the significant cost of transport in delivering care at home in rural areas of the Highlands;
- in terms of care for the elderly, the current Scottish average for delayed discharge from hospital was 912 days per 1000 population whereas the figure for the Highland area was 1585 days and this was a real concern, along with the shortage of care at home services and a shortage of beds in Care Homes;
- more detail was needed from NHS Highland in terms of the current bed review in the Caithness area and specifically proposals for removal of beds;
- there appeared to be very drastic reductions in Community Hospital beds generally across the Highland area with no apparent strategy for their replacement and this meant that elderly people were often having to move to other locations (away from their families) which was clearly not acceptable;
- the Highland Partnership had now been in place for over five years and as such it was considered that a review should now be undertaken, with a Seminar being arranged in the first instance at which all Members of the Council could put forward views and suggestions on the way forward;
- there were a number of positive aspects of the current partnership arrangements but also areas where it was suggested that a fundamental review was required;
- the Highland area was well below the Scottish average in terms of self-directed supported and this had to be changed;
- more strategic planning and a degree of change was required by both organisations in regard to Care at Home services and not least to avoid significant numbers of elderly people being unable to return home; and
- as part of the proposed Seminar, further specific and detailed information was required in terms of a breakdown of the funding allocated to NHS Highland for the delivery of Adult Social Care services.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the Annual Performance Report as agreed by the Joint Monitoring Committee of the Highland Partnership and that this had been published on the NHS Highland and Highland Council Websites in line with the expectations of the legislation.

17. The Islands (Scotland) Bill – Draft Consultation Response Bile nan Eilean (Alba) – Fianais Sgrìobhte do Chomataidh an Eaconamaidh Dhùthchail agus a' Chomais-cheangail

There had been circulated Report No. HC/32/17 dated 28 August 2017 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to the Business Manager for the draft response which had been provided which gave the Council the opportunity to raise relevant issues as part of the consultation;
- the request for Local Authorities to have more control over marine activities was welcomed;
- there was also a need to ensure input in terms of the future management of the Crown Estate which was to be taken forward in separate legislation;
- isolated communities in general had to be protected wherever and whenever possible and there was a need to ensure equal treatment for coastal communities;
- there was a need to investigate the potential for introducing smaller Scottish Parliamentary constituencies in Highland;
- in terms of the importance of the Gaelic language and culture, it was suggested that it should be given more prominence in future reports and consultation responses; and
- the draft response should be amended to clarify that constituency boundaries should be retained on the basis of rurality as a weighting factor.

Decision

The Council **APPROVED** the draft response to the Islands (Scotland) Bill Consultation as circulated - subject to inclusion of the following –

- (i) that the legislation regarding the potential for introducing smaller Scottish Parliamentary constituencies in Highland be investigated;
- (ii) that the response be amended to clarify that constituency boundaries be retained on the basis of rurality as a weighting factor; and
- (iii) that the importance of Gaelic language and culture be reflected.

It was also **NOTED** that there would be further opportunities to engage during the passage of the Bill, including an oral evidence session in Edinburgh on 20 September 2017.

18. Highland Local Policing Plan Plana Ionadail nam Poileas

There had been circulated Report No. HC/33/17 dated 28 August 2017 by the Chief Superintendent which presented the proposed Highland Local Policing Plan for 2017-2020 which focused on five key areas, namely Protection, Prevention, Communities, Knowledge and Innovation.

In this regard, and during a presentation, specific and detailed information was provided on the identification of priorities and outcomes, local policing arrangements, performance, accountability and scrutiny and equalities.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was real frustration this Policing Plan was not representative of the local or wider Highland area but instead an example of the diminution of local policing across the Highlands;
- it was felt that local views and opinions were often not taken into account when specific issues were raised with Police Scotland and this was a concern;
- in relation to trunk roads, and despite promises which had previously been made, it was now clear that there was to be no Road Accident Unit (with specialist equipment) for Fort William and there was therefore the potential for the A82 road to continue to be closed for long periods of time after accidents which was not acceptable;
- the transportation of seriously wide loads through the Lochaber area (which often led to significant delays for road traffic) was also a concern and it was felt that this could be avoided with local policing input and knowledge of the area;
- community safety had to be paramount and local Police Officers were commended for the work which they undertook on a day-to-day basis;
- there had been a number of instances of anti-social behaviour in the City Centre over recent weeks and months and it was queried as to whether it would be possible to ban the people committing these offences from the Centre for any period of time;
- it would be helpful if local Police Officers could attend Community Council meetings whenever possible although it was noted that they submitted reports regularly (with or without attendance);
- there was a need for a higher level of partnership working if possible amongst all agencies, specifically in terms of those persons presenting as homeless and those at risk of suicide;
- whilst it was accepted that Police Officers now had a much more varied role than had previously been the case, some of the issues being raised were political and as such could not be addressed at a policing level;
- centralised Call Centres did not always have the required level of local knowledge and this was a major concern, most especially in terms of the despatch of emergency services, and it was hoped that this could be raised with Police Scotland.

Decision

The Council scrutinised and **NOTED** the proposed Highland Local Policing Plan for 2017-2020 as circulated.

19. Draft Local Fire and Rescue Plan 2017-2020 Plana Ionadail Smàlaidh 2017-2020

There had been circulated Report No. HC/34/17 dated 28 August 2017 by the Local Senior Officer which focused on both the National and Local Context.

In this regard, and during a presentation, specific and detailed information was provided on local priorities, non-fire emergencies, deliberate fire setting, non-domestic fire setting, unwanted fire alarm signals and operational resilience and preparedness.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in terms of prevention, it was suggested that there should be increased

promotion of fire sprinklers which only activated separately in order to minimise damage and that this should be extended to include all buildings wherever possible;

- in regard to recruitment, it was essential that all Fire Stations across the Highland area were fully staffed in order to be able to fully deliver all aspects of the Plan;
- increased promotion of the Fire Service in rural areas could be very helpful in terms of future recruitment;
- the presence of local Fire Stations provided a high level of comfort and security for local communities and this was extremely important;
- promotion of the Service within Schools was also important in terms of highlighting future career opportunities for pupils and the confirmation that the reintroduction of cadets was being considered was welcomed;
- further detail within the Plan on rapid response measures in relation to wildfires would be beneficial;
- there was concern about the lanterns which were set alight and released into surrounding areas and consideration of a Highland wide policy to address this should be considered, not least in terms of the potential risks; and
- there should be an increased focus on the implementation of home visits, most especially for the elderly and vulnerable across the area, as this could help to prevent future incidents.

Decision

The Council scrutinised and **NOTED** the draft Local Fire and Rescue Plan for 2017-2020 as circulated.

20. Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (Part 2) - Highland Outcome Improvement Plan - Consultation Achd Cumhachdachadh nan Coimhearsnachdan (Alba) 2015 – Plana Leasachadh Toraidh na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. HC/35/17 dated 18 August 2017 by the Acting Head of Policy.

During discussion, and in terms of Infrastructure, it was imperative that all Community Planning Partners, including Council Officers, focused on ensuring that proposals in relation to improved transport were progressed in order to ensure that fewer people in Highland experienced transport as a barrier to accessing opportunities as was often the case at present in some Highland locations.

Also, the reference to Mental Health & Mental Wellbeing was particularly welcomed as issues in this regard affected many people across the Highland area and it was important to address this as a priority.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the draft Highland Outcome Improvement Plan as part of the Community Planning Partnership's consultation process.

21. Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 - Part 8 – Common Good Property
Achd Cumhachdachadh nan Coimhearsnachdan (Alba) 2015 – Pàirt 8 – Cuid-seilbh Math Choitichinn

There had been circulated Report No. HC/36/17 dated 28 August 2017 by the Director of Finance.

During discussion, the reference to the publication of Common Good Registers as soon as practicable after the end of the initial eight week period (and in any case within six months of the end of the consultation) was welcomed and the importance of this being implemented was highlighted.

It was also suggested that any future clarification in relation to the Tain Common Good Fund should be provided for the Local Committee in the first instance and that consideration should be given to consultation on the process relating to the disposal and use of Common Good property, specifically to ensure that this related only to substantial issues in order to avoid the need to 'micro manage' in this regard.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the content of the consultation on the draft guidance relating to Common Good Property under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Council also **APPROVED** the response to the consultation as contained in Appendix 2 to the report.

22. High Life Highland – Amendment to Articles of Association
High Life na Gàidhealtachd – Ath-shuidheachadh Stiùirichean Neo-eisimeileach agus Atharrachaidhean do Mheòrachan agus Artaigilean Co-cheangailte

Declarations of Interest – Mrs L Munro, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie and Mr D Macpherson declared non-financial interests in this item on the basis of being Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

Mr D Louden and Mrs Paterson declared non-financial interests in this item on the basis of connections to Tain & District Museum and the Highland Football Academy respectively but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/37/17 dated 25 August 2017 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** to amend Articles 61 and 112.1 respectively of the Company's Memorandum and Articles as detailed in the report.

23. Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings
Gnath-riaghailtean co-cheangailte ri GiulainChoinneamhan

There had been circulated Report No. HC/38/17 dated 29 August 2017 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development.

In this regard, it was noted that annual review of Standing Orders was a requirement of the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

During discussion, it was **AGREED** that the name of the Places Committee should now be changed to the 'Environment, Development & Infrastructure' Committee.

Thereafter, Ms M Smith, seconded by Mr R Laird, **MOVED** that the name of the People Committee should now be changed to the 'Care, Learning & Housing' Committee.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by the Leader, moved that the name of the People Committee should remain unchanged.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 27 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 30 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:-

Mr B Allan, Mr I Brown, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr G Cruickshank, Ms K Currie, Mr R Bremner, Mr C Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr A Graham, Mr A Jarvie, Mr E Knox, Mr R Laird, Mr D Louden, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr C MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr N McLean, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mr G Ross, Mr P Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr C Smith, Ms M Smith

For the Amendment:-

Mr G Adam, Mrs J Barclay, Mr A Baxter, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr B Lobban, Mr R MacDonald, Mrs D Mackay, Mr D Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mrs F Robertson, Ms N Sinclair, Mrs K Stephen

Abstention:-

Mr K Gowans

Following further discussion, Mr R Laird, seconded by Ms M Smith, **MOVED** that there should be a change to the current Standing Orders to allow local Notices of Motion to be submitted to Local Committees in future.

As an **AMENDMENT**, the Convener, seconded by the Leader, moved that this issue should be submitted to the Corporate Resources Policy Development Group for consideration following which a further report would be brought to the Council.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 18 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 38 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:-

Mr B Allan, Mr I Brown, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms K Currie, Mr R Bremner, Mr C Fraser, Mr E Knox, Mr R Laird, Mr D Louden, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr G

MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr C MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr N McLean, Mr K Rosie, Ms M Smith

For the Amendment:-

Mr G Adam, Mrs J Barclay, Mr A Baxter, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mr G Cruickshank, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr A Graham, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr A Jarvie, Mr B Lobban, Mr R MacDonald, Mrs D Mackay, Mr D Mackay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross, Mr P Sagers, Ms N Sinclair, Mr C Smith, Mrs K Stephen

Abstention:-

Mr K Gowans

Decision

The Council **AGREED:-**

- i. the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings as detailed – namely that, in future, notice of the place, date and time of a meeting of the Council and Committees (including agendas and reports) would be emailed to every Member and that the sederunt at Council meetings would be taken by electronic means;
- ii. to change the name of the Places Committee to the ‘Environment, Development & Infrastructure’ Committee; and
- iii. that the Corporate Resources Policy Development Group should give consideration to the submission of local Notices of Motion to Local Committees and report back to a future meeting of the Council.

24. Timetable of Meetings for 2018

Clàr-ama Choinneamhan airson na tha air fhàgail de 2018

There had been circulated proposed Timetable of Meetings for 2018.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the proposed Timetable for 2018 as circulated.

25. Notices of Motion

Brathan Gluasaid

The following Notices of Motion had been received in accordance with Standing Order 10.1 –

- (i) ‘School Estate Investment -

The Highland Council notes that the School Condition Survey currently categorises 78 Highland schools as being in ‘poor’ condition whilst the condition of only 24 is described as ‘good’ and further notes that 8 primary schools in Inverness are currently capped due to a lack of capacity.

The Council believes that a good physical environment is critical to a successful learning experience and therefore agrees to prioritise the condition and capacity of the Highland school estate when determining its upcoming capital budget’.

Signed: Ms M Smith, Dr I Cockburn, Mr D Louden, Ms E Knox, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs L MacDonald and Mrs P Munro.

Prior to discussion, an Amendment was tabled at the meeting from Mr A Christie which read as follows – ‘The Highland Council notes that the School Condition Survey currently categorises 78 Highland schools as being in ‘poor’ condition whilst the condition of only 24 is described as ‘good’ and further notes that 8 primary schools in Inverness are currently capped due to a lack of capacity.

The Council believes that a good physical environment is critical to a successful learning experience and therefore agrees to priorities the condition and capacity of the Highland school estate when determining its upcoming education capital budget.

Highland Council calls upon the Scottish Government to recognise the unique challenges facing the Highland Council in providing, maintaining and sustaining school buildings often in areas of sparse population, in villages and towns that are remote geographically as well as addressing capacity pressures in other schools. Recognition by the Scottish Government of these challenges through increasing our Capital Grant Allocation would allow the Council to start to build or renovate community schools immediately and allow us to meet the educational aspirations of our children, parents and staff. To this end, Council instructs the Chief Executive to arrange an early meeting with the relevant Scottish Government Ministers to discuss our demand for special recognition.’

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- specifically in relation to the Amendment which had been tabled, it was suggested that it was not appropriate to change the reference to the ‘upcoming capital budget’ to the ‘upcoming education capital budget’ as this was a strategic issue and should be discussed and debated as such;
- it was imperative that additional funds were directed towards the construction and maintenance of school buildings in the Highlands and in this regard it was again suggested that consideration should be given to modular units wherever possible;
- there was an urgent need to address issues connected to the condition of rural schools as a considerable number had been classified as being of a poor standard in terms of the fabric of buildings;
- the potential impact on the learning experiences of pupils across the Highland area on a daily basis was a matter of ongoing concern;
- ensuring the safety of pupils in school buildings had to be paramount in all future discussions on this issue;
- there was a need to recognise the vital links between new housing developments and schools in the Highlands;
- the tabled Amendment had proposed consideration as part of the upcoming education capital budget because it had been felt that this was the correct route for discussion prior to submission to the full Council as part of the wider budget process;
- whilst accepting that urgent action was required on this issue, it should also be noted that twelve new schools had already been delivered in the Highland area in recent years and a number of other buildings were currently undergoing renovation;
- a more appropriate way forward for the Council might be to seek further discussions with the Scottish Government on this issue, including reference to the unique circumstances across the Highlands and perhaps involving all

political Group Leaders, as this was likely to be more successful in the long term;

- whilst it was accepted that rural schools were in a poor condition, it had to be highlighted that this was not just a rural problem;
- there had been a consistent pattern across many years of not prioritising the school estate in the Highlands and this had led to many of the problems which were currently being encountered;
- discussion on the issues raised should also be undertaken with CoSLA (as well as the Scottish Government); and
- there was a need to change the tone and emphasis of the wording in the tabled Amendment (specifically by deleting the second sentence from within the third paragraph and also replacing the word 'demand' with 'request' in the last line) prior to discussions being undertaken with CoSLA and the Scottish Government.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the following amended Notice of Motion:-

The Highland Council notes that the School Condition Survey currently categorises 78 Highland schools as being in 'poor' condition whilst the condition of only 24 is described as 'good' and further notes that 8 primary schools in Inverness are currently capped due to a lack of capacity.

The Council believes that a good physical environment is critical to a successful learning experience and therefore agrees to prioritise the condition and capacity of the Highland school estate when determining its upcoming education capital budget.

Highland Council calls upon the Scottish Government to recognise the unique challenges facing the Highland Council in providing, maintaining and sustaining school buildings often in areas of sparse population, in villages and town that are remote geographically as well as addressing capacity pressures in other schools. To this end, the Council instructs the Chief Executive to arrange an early meeting with the relevant Scottish Government Ministers to discuss our request for special recognition.

(ii) 'Highland Council is appalled at the circumstances surrounding the future proposed closure of the Inverness Control Room, a facility that has stood the test of time and countless emergencies with distinction. The statement that all the jobs are secure is now in doubt and the promises to bring additional jobs to Highland in a National Database Enquiry Unit are proving false.

The Council and the Highland public demands answers regarding when the decision to recommend to the Scottish Police Authority to remove jobs from Inverness to the Central Belt/Govan was made and by whom.

Repeated representations have proved futile so we ask that we now write to the First Minister and make clear how betrayed we feel with the ongoing centralisation of services away from Highland'.

Signed: Mrs M Davidson, Mr A Baxter

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- promises had been made in 2014 that additional jobs would be brought to the Highlands through the National Database Enquiry Unit but it was now

- understood that this would not happen and this was completely unacceptable;
- there was real concern about the potential loss of local knowledge and the fact that the Council had not been consulted on or involved in the decision to recommend the removal of jobs from Inverness to the Central Belt/Govan;
 - despite having asked for information on the Business Appraisal, the Leader of the Council had had to submit a Freedom of Information application to receive this information which again was considered unacceptable;
 - there was now no confidence in the decision making which had led to this situation;
 - the Leader of the Council had already written to all members of the Police Board and was now seeking the consent of the Council to write also to the First Minister to make clear the concerns over this situation;
 - as well as the broken promises to the Council, it was felt that this was another example of centralisation of Police Scotland which could potentially involve a risk to life as well as the issues of lack of local knowledge and the loss of local jobs in the future;
 - reference was made to the excellent service provided by the staff in the Inverness Control Room despite this team having had to operate with a vacancy rate of almost 25% over recent months;
 - the new proposals would see call handlers having to issue a much longer list of questions in future due to a lack of knowledge of local geography and this did not represent an improved quality of service; and
 - there was a need for full and detailed information on when and where the original business case from 2014 (which had promised that the National Database Enquiry Unit would be based in Inverness) had been changed.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

(iii) 'Highland Council acknowledges that congestion on the A82, as it passes through Fort William, has reached a point where it is causing unacceptable delays for all road users. Highland Council acknowledges that the economic impact and wider inconvenience caused by the current situation is unacceptable and needs urgent action.

Highland Council urges Transport Scotland to bring forward the proposed Strategic Transport Appraisal of the wider Fort William area. Highland Council will write to the Transport Minister to provide an update on the current position and urge that the appraisal is carried out as a priority.

Concurrent to the appraisal process, short term measures must be investigated and executed by Transport Scotland to bring immediate relief.

The involvement of Elected representatives from the Lochaber area, alongside officials from Transport Scotland and BEAR Scotland, are vital as part of this process'.

Signed: Mr N McLean, Mr A Baxter and Ms M Smith

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be recognised that there were many issues associated with congestion/gridlock on the A82 which were severely impacting those who lived and worked in Fort William and the surrounding area;

- the support of the Scottish Government Minister for Transport and the Islands on this issue, and particularly in relation to the Strategic Transport Appraisal, was welcomed and appreciated;
- all Lochaber Members were in support of the terms of this Notice of Motion which addressed a longstanding issue in the area;
- the current situation was also affecting local businesses in the area and this was a particular concern in terms of the potential impact on future investment in the area; and
- it was suggested that the wording of the Notice of Motion should be amended to read 'write *again*' to the Transport Minister to provide an update on the current position and urge that the appraisal be carried out as a priority.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion – with the amendment to the wording to read 'write *again*' to the Transport Minister as detailed.

(iv) 'Highland Mental Health Services -

The Highland Council notes with concern recent restrictions on admissions to New Craigs Hospital following "extreme staffing pressures" and further notes concerning feedback at the provision of emergency psychiatric services in the Highlands.

The Council agrees that the Leader invites representatives of NHS Highland, mental health support groups, and interested Members to meet to discuss the future of these vital mental health services'.

Signed: Mr R Laird, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms M Smith

In this regard, there had also been circulated Joint Letter dated 30 August 2017 from the General Manager and Associate Medical Director (Mental Health, NHS Highland.

At this point, Mr Laird shared his own experience and also the personal experiences of two other individuals which were both powerful and distressing in that they highlighted very concerning issues about the current provision of emergency psychiatric services in the Highlands.

Specifically, examples were given of individuals suffering from serious mental health issues who had been discharged from New Craigs Hospital and effectively left to their own devices and there was real concern in terms of how many other similar cases currently existed in the Highland area.

As such, it was imperative that a meeting was convened with representatives of NHS Highland to discuss this as a matter of urgency. Ultimately, the aim would be to ensure that in future mental health was treated on the same basis and with the same esteem as physical health.

During discussion, Members also raised the following issues:-

- there was currently a high level of anxiety and concern amongst both staff and patients at New Craigs Hospital in relation to the ongoing redesign of mental health services and this had to be brought to the attention of the NHS Highland Board;
- it was imperative that access to help and appropriate services was given the highest priority and made easier than at present for those individuals with mental health issues;

- in terms of the proposed meeting as detailed in the Notice of Motion, it was suggested that the Highland Users Group (HUG) should also be invited to attend in light of the importance of user experiences being highlighted;
- the sharing of personal experience was extremely powerful and the unanimous thanks of all Members in the Chamber was conveyed to Mr Laird for raising this issue;
- there were very many people who currently suffered in silence with mental health issues and by raising this issue at a public level it was hoped that they might now feel able to come forward to receive the help that they needed and deserved;
- this debate had highlighted that there were many people who had reached a 'point of crisis' before being able to access help and this was not acceptable; and
- in terms of the need to focus on intervention measures at a much earlier stage, there was a role for a number of agencies across the Highland area and this should be pursued whenever and wherever possible.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed – with the addition that representatives of the Highland Users Group (HUG) would also be invited to attend the meeting.

26. Deeds Executed Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

It was **NOTED** that a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 29 June 2017 was available in the Members' Library and on the Council's Website.

The meeting ended at 5.50pm.