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**The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held remotely on Thursday 10 June 2021 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Mr B Allan	Mr A Jarvie
Miss J Barclay	Mrs B McAllister
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Mackay
Miss J Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mrs L Munro
Mr M Finlayson	Mrs F Robertson
Mr C Fraser	Ms E Roddick
Mr L Fraser	Mr P Saggars
Mr A Graham	Mr B Thompson

**Non-Members also present:**

Mr K Gowans	Mr C Munro
Mr A Henderson	Mr I Ramon
Mr D Macpherson	Mr D Rixson
Mr J McGillivray	Mrs T Robertson

**Officials in Attendance:**

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property  
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Housing and Property  
Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property and Facilities Management, Housing and Property  
Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy and Investment Manager, Housing and Property  
Mr R Campbell, Estates Strategy Manager, Housing and Property  
Mr A Byrne, Housing Policy Officer, Housing and Property  
Mr L Hannah, Housing & Homeless Service Manager, Housing and Property  
Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager, Resources and Finance  
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance  
Ms O Bayon, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

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

**Mr B Thompson in the Chair**

**BUSINESS**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

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

Item 5: Mr A Jarvie, Ms L Munro (non-financial)  
Item 8: Mr A Jarvie, Ms L Munro and Mr B Thomson (non-financial)

**Declarations of Interest: Mr R Bremner** declared a non-financial interest in items 3,4,5,6,7 and 8 below as a **Board Member of Albyn Housing Society Ltd** but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the **Councillors' Code of Conduct**, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

**Mr L Fraser** declared a financial interest in items 3,4,5,6,7 and 8 below on the grounds he undertook work for the **Housing Service in Nairn** but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the **Councillors' Code of Conduct**, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion on the basis this work was so remote and minor it would not impinge on his work on the **Committee**.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following good news updates:-

- **Junior Warden Schemes:** the Tenant Participation team had restarted their work with young people through the Junior Warden Scheme. These schemes were designed to raise awareness in the young people of issues affecting communities and the role of the Housing Service and other statutory bodies in addressing these issues. The schemes were delivered in partnership with Youth Development Officers and the school. Junior Warden Schemes were due to commence with S1 children from Invergordon Academy and Dingwall Academy, P7 children from Cromarty Primary School and with other schemes planned for later in the year for Inverness and Lochaber;
- **Rate your Place:** the Tenant Participation Team had developed an online survey tool called Rate your Place. It was based on the Place Standard, which was a tool that was used to assess the quality of a place. It gave a holistic picture of how people felt about living in a specific area and helped officers and residents to identify priorities for improvement. A pilot survey had just been completed in Windsor Place, Conon Bridge and the results were being analysed to identify next steps. A copy of the survey report is available from the Tenant Participation Team and would be provided to Ward Members and placed on the Members Bulletin;
- **North of Scotland Regional Network:** A Highland Council tenant, Liz Richardson, had just been elected to represent tenants in Highland on the North of Scotland Regional Network (Region 1); and
- **Item 8 - Capital Programme – Update on Education and Property Projects** - the Corporate Communications Team had developed an interactive map which would effectively be an online map of the Appendix to the report. This would be publicly available and a press release was to be issued in this regard.

### 4. **Housing and Property Directorate Service Plan** **Plana Seirbheis Buidheann-stiùiridh an Taigheadais is na Seilbhe**

There had been circulated Report No HP/08/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- regular update reports on progress with the Corporate asset rationalisation project be submitted to the Committee, reference being made to the importance of Members being at the forefront of this process;
- stressing the need for more rapid progress to be made towards asset rationalisation and for material outcomes to be delivered in the current financial year;
- the importance also of Members supporting the ongoing work of the Redesign Board in leading on the asset rationalisation programme in conjunction with new ways of working and workforce planning;
- the disposal of Council leased buildings in the first instance would achieve early savings for the Council; and
- the Chair advised that he discuss the issues raised with the Executive Chief Officer and the Chair of the Redesign Board outwith the meeting.

The Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property provided an overview of the current status of the project and the work currently being undertaken to fill the significant data gaps which existed so that the business case for each building could be properly assessed. He confirmed that regular progress reports would be submitted to the Committee.

During further discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the potential for toilet facilities at Bught Park, Inverness to be opened to accommodate the significant numbers using the Park. It was confirmed this matter would be investigated further and a response provided directly to Mrs B McAllister;
- clarification was sought and provided that there was a presumption against undertaking small land sales unless there was a good business case in terms of the HRA;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the strategic review of the housing stock, including garages, and future investment needs would be brought forward for discussion to the Committee and at Area Committee level;
- the quality assurance processes in place to ensure the quality standards were achieved in Council properties and new build constructions;
- in terms of property and facility management, the opportunity to be more flexible in sharing properties with third sector partners;
- the work ongoing with suppliers to reduce the level of plastics used in food and drinks provision in schools and other key facilities be welcomed;
- confirmation was sought and provided that plans for all the Council's buildings was shared with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service;
- an update was sought and provided on the status of the upgrading of Beaully Primary School;
- the need to reappraise the issues around the ability to contact Service staff in the field, and to increase the supply of mobile phones;
- an explanation was provided on the challenges around imposing sanctions for breach of tenancy due to anti-social behaviour, including the reluctance of the courts to deprive people of the right to remain in a tenancy; and
- with regard to neighbour complaints about anti-social behaviour and also enquiries about small land sales, the Head of Housing confirmed he would contact Ward Members out with the meeting in relation to their specific queries.

The Committee **AGREED:-**

- i. the Directorate Service Plan for Housing & Property, noting the indicative budget at this time and that it was subject to review with any changes required to be reported back to Committee; and
- ii. that regular update reports be provided to the Committee on progress with asset rationalisation.

## 5. **Housing Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie and Ms L Munro as Directors of High Life Highland declared a non-financial interest in this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interest did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No HP/09/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- further information was sought and provided on the extent and nature of the fire safety issues on gypsy traveller sites and timeline for resolving these issues;
- an update was sought and provided on progress with addressing the backlog in non-emergency repairs accrued as a result of the pandemic and the additional sub-contractor resource being used in this regard;
- the average re-letting time reflected the impact of the pandemic over the past year;
- the potential pressure that would be placed on the Service in relation to the level of rent arrears and the lifting of the moratorium on evictions;
- the Service's staff be commended on their hard work in dealing with the challenges throughout the pandemic;
- there should be a focus on improving communication with regard to freedom of information requests;
- clarification was sought and provided on the potential to provide more gypsy / traveller sites in the Highlands on the basis this community had been displaced from some of their traditional stopping places due to new house building; and
- the continuing challenges with re-letting times in Caithness due to the changing nature of the housing profile and market in the area, and the potential for initiatives to be brought forward to address this issue. The Head of Housing confirmed he would arrange to meet with the Caithness Members to discuss this issue in more detail.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on the housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021.

## 6. **Annual Monitoring Report 2020/2021: Highland Housing Register (HHR) Allocations Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Bhliadhnail 2020/2021: Sònrachaidhean Clàr Taigheadais na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No HP/10/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- a report be submitted to the Committee on the issues in relation to the supply and demand for later life adaptive living properties given the age demographic for the Highlands and the need for the Council to be proactive in considering options on how to address this issue;
- in relation to future reporting, Members be provided with details of the fully wheelchair accessible ground-floor Council stock and type of wheelchair adapted property required by age and area;
- the need to engage with applicants and tenants who required wheelchair accessible properties on the standard design of new build properties to provide for more flexibility within the housing stock to meet demand;
- the potential pressures that would be placed on the Council and other social housing providers due to the impact of the pandemic in relation to the affordability of private sector rents;
- an assurance was sought and provided that the HHR Allocation Policy review would be subject to a full equalities impact assessment including on the 16 to 25 age range;
- an assurance was sought and provided that every effort was made to accommodate tenants/applicants with severe disabilities who may require alternative housing to move nearer family or professional support. Applicants also received care and support points in this situation;
- the potential for a more creative approach to be progressed across the Council and in partnership with communities in relation to investment in new housing to attract people into areas of Highland. It was noted that new social housing development was currently the remit of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the specific changes proposed to the Mutual Exchanges Policy were as detailed in the report;
- the potential to build more two bedroom as opposed to one bedroom properties in recognition that tenants circumstances change;
- some of the Council's new builds had the flexibility to be adjusted between one and two bedroom need; and
- in relation to future reporting on accessible housing, feedback be provided from the public/service users who required access to this type of social housing.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information contained in the Annual Monitoring Report on housing allocations which demonstrated that the policy was achieving its objectives;
- ii. **NOTED** the main issues being considered as part of the HHR Allocation Policy review which was still underway;
- iii. **APPROVED** changes to the Mutual Exchanges Policy as outlined in section 7.4 of the report; and
- iv. **AGREED** that a report be submitted to the Committee on the issues in relation to supply and demand for later life adaptive living properties.

## 7. Homelessness and Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan Dìth Dachaigh agus Plana Eadar-ghluasaid Ath-thuineachaidh Luath

There had been circulated Report No HP/11/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

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- there was concern that some people would be at risk of homelessness because of the COVID pandemic consequences, such as being unable to pay their rent or mortgage and with the eviction process recommencing. The lack of available housing in Highland was a further concern and it was suggested that properties and closed business in the towns or city could perhaps be considered for investment to create additional housing stock;
  - an Empty Homes Officer had now been recruited (a co-funded post with SHELTER) and it was suggested that this Officer could perhaps liaise with Members to discuss/identify potential empty properties to be used for housing in Wards;
  - Members expressed thanks to the Income Maximisation and Housing teams for the excellent work undertaken throughout the pandemic;
  - information was sought and received in relation to the ongoing work involving different agencies in order to keep young people safe;
  - information was sought and provided in regard to the length of time that people were spending in temporary accommodation as it was recognised that this impacted mental health, especially during the pandemic; and
  - it would be important to focus on continued communication with Housing and Tenant Association groups in order to ensure that they were continually updated on new schemes or initiatives.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress on the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and actions undertaken to mitigate homelessness in Highland; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the Annual Update of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan attached as Appendix 1 to the report for submission to Scottish Government.

## 8. **Capital Programme – Update on Education and Property Projects** **Prògram Calpa – Fios às Ùr mu Phròiseactan Foghlaim is Seilbhe**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie, Ms L Munro and Mr B Thomson as Directors of High Life Highland declared a non-financial interest in this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interest did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No HP/12/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was noted that the financial papers were not part of this report due to the timing of the meeting, however, they would be presented at the next meeting;
- Officers were thanked for their hard work regarding the large number of Education and Property capital projects progressed during the current financial year;
- there was concern regarding the accuracy of some detail on the status of Schools in Appendix 1 as specific Schools had known delays but these had not been clearly identified;
- further financial details were requested regarding projects which were either 5% overspent or underspent and whether any underspend had been allocated to other projects;
- attention was drawn to the list of significant listed buildings within the portfolio and it was queried as to how these would be brought up to the listed buildings standard;

- information was sought on the start date of the Nairn Academy synthetic pitch resurfacing works and in this respect it was confirmed that an update would be provided for Ward Members once the start date had been confirmed by the contractors;
- there was concern that the Culloden Academy project had insufficient budget allocation for completion and further clarification was therefore needed in this regard. In response, it was confirmed that this issue would be taken to the full Council for further discussion in the first instance;
- it was felt that improved communication between Members and Officers was needed in regard to oversight of capital projects (including the meeting of targets, budget management and updates on on-site progress) and in this regard the Chair confirmed that he would welcome suggestions from Members on how this could be taken forward;
- it was queried as to whether the refurbishment of the Invergordon Academy toilets would be completed before pupils returned;
- clarification was sought as to whether Invergordon Town Hall, as a local iconic building, could receive funding from the Scottish Government to avoid further deterioration and also preserve its heritage;
- it had to be recognised that local businesses could also benefit from Capital Programme investments;
- it was suggested that an interim report should be submitted to a future meeting to review project management, identify methodologies and practises for clarity/transparency and provide improved oversight for each project;
- an update was requested regarding the sale of land at Milton of Leys to build a new nursery;
- it was stressed that the extensive period of time which had been taken in terms of progress in relation to St Clements School was unacceptable; and
- clarification was sought and provided regarding the means of capital project management within the Council.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the progress made with the Education and Property projects in the Council's Capital Programme as detailed.

The meeting was closed at 3.00pm.

**The Highland Council  
Tourism Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Tourism Committee held remotely on Wednesday, 16 June 2021 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Mr G Adam	Mr A MacInnes
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Macpherson
Mr J Bruce	Mr H Morrison
Dr I Cockburn	Mrs M Paterson
Mr C Fraser	Mr D Rixson
Mr J Gordon	Ms M Smith
Mr A Henderson	

**Non-Members also Present:**

Mrs I Campbell	Mr N McLean
Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs T Robertson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr K Rosie
Mr D MacKay	Mr P Saggars

**Officials participating:**

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment  
 Mr C Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film, Infrastructure & Environment  
 Mr P Waite, Countryside Team Leader, Infrastructure & Environment  
 Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer  
 Ms N Wallace, Environment Manager  
 Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

**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 Gordon Adam in the Chair**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

There were none.

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

**The following Members declared interests relating to all items on the agenda 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 their involvement in the discussion:**

**Financial interests:**

Mr Gordon Adam - part owner of two self-catering units  
 Mr John Gordon – Air BnB provider  
 Mr Allan Henderson – B&B provider  
 Mr Hugh Morrison – Hotel owner



Mr Raymond Bremner - provider of AirBnB

Ms Maxine Smith – director of Thistle Excursion (not trading this year)

**Non-financial interests:**

Mr Gordon Adam – Director of a glamping business

Mr John Gordon – Council Representative of Skye Connect

Mr Denis Rixson - Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre

**3. Visitor Management Plan  
Plana Stiùiridh Luchd-tadhail**

There had been circulated TC/05/21 dated 26 May 2021 the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

A progress update on the Visitor Management Plan (VMP) was provided on several issues including roads projects, seasonal ranger activity, motorhomes, wild-fires, waste disposal, public toilet issues, and engagement with various local groups and partners.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- progress with the VPM was welcomed and the tourism team were thanked for their work. Some frustration was expressed at the slow progress in some areas, with particular reference to the need to feed local information back to Area Committees and communities. In this regard, it was hoped the seasonal rangers would be able to feed the data they were gathering to Area Committees, Ward Business Meetings and Community Councils. That data would prove useful for planning for future years;
- improved signage was required, especially in relation to the parking of motorhomes, and this would be considered further at Item 4;
- concerns were raised in relation to some specific geographic areas including Battery Park, Lochcarron, Skye, Shiel Bridge and Plockton. Members were urged to contact the relevant official outwith the meeting with specific concerns;
- information was sought and provided on enforcement issues, especially in relation to the seasonal rangers if they were tackling inappropriate behaviour. The rangers did not have parking enforcement powers;
- there was insufficient data on motorhome visits to the Highlands in previous years to allow comparison with this year, but it was hoped more data would be gathered this year to allow a baseline to be developed;
- ownership of the VMP was queried, noting that it covered cross-service and cross-partner issues, and further consideration of this, including in relation to Area Committees, was required;
- in response to a query about the complexity of requirements for people to establish a temporary motorhome stopover sites, it was explained that the process had been made as straightforward as possible and any suggestions from Members on how to improve the guidance would be welcomed;
- it was suggested that motorhome stopover sites for 3-5 vehicles would be of limited help in reducing inappropriate parking, as sites for 40-50 were required in some busy areas;
- concern was expressed that some landowners were placing obstacles

such as boulders close to roads to prevent roadside parking and it was confirmed that this was not permitted within 3m of a road and that the Council was removing such obstacle as promptly as possible, as this was a statutory enforcement issue. A corporate response in relation to this should be considered;

- the positive impact of the rangers' communication with visitors was welcomed;
- good bus services were vital to help relieve parking issues, especially in popular tourist locations;
- in relation to concerns about congestion in Plockton, a community participation meeting was taking place that evening; and
- electronic variable message signs were required at Munloch and at Nigg to warn of any Cromarty Ferry closures.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided by each Service on progress to date on delivering the Visitor Management Plan actions as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- ii. **AGREED** the Principal Traffic Officer discuss issues relating to Battery Park, Lochcarron, with Mr A MacInnes outwith the meeting;
- iii. **AGREED** to consider issuing a corporate response in relation to road-side obstructions;
- iv. **AGREED** to share data gathered by the seasonal rangers with relevant Community Councils; and
- v. **AGREED** to work towards identifying budgets for electronic 'temporary variation' signs at Nigg and at Munloch to warn about Cromarty Ferry closures

#### 4. **Motorhome Parking Parcadh airson Dhachaighean-motair**

There had been circulated TC/06/21 dated 28 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed about motorhomes parking in single track road passing places and in cemetery and memorial site car parks. Signage was required to prevent overnight parking but to still permit people in motorhomes to use those car parks for an appropriate length of time to visit the site. It was explained there were manufacturing and installation delays in relation to signage and it was likely that for the most part additional signage could not be put in place until 2022. It was acknowledged that some car parks required local bespoke solutions;
- the list of action points at paragraph 7.1 of the report should also state that views be sought from community councils and that Area Committees review the proposals, this to be administered as required. The statutory process for consulting on traffic amendments was summarised and included community councils and others. It was pointed out that some sites might require consultation with additional groups or stakeholders;
- the use of generators in car parks or stopover sites had to be addressed. It was confirmed they were not permitted but enforcement, especially in the evening or during the night, was problematic;

- park and rides to service popular attractions were suggested;
- community partnerships should also be involved in the identification of key sites for off-street parking infrastructure;
- the vast majority of motorhome users behaved reasonably and it was only a small minority who behaved inappropriately;
- it would be interesting to know what the predicted motorhome pressures would be over the coming five or so years, and reference was made to discussions taking place in Applecross to possibly withdraw from the NC500 route;
- with regard to the creation of temporary motorhome stopovers, it was important not to disadvantage existing campsite businesses. It was pointed out that the proposals for stopover sites were temporary and as a result of Covid-19 restrictions;
- a signage budget or funding would be beneficial, as would Destination Management Plans for every area;
- information was sought and provided on contact between the Council and VisitScotland; and
- the value of the seasonal rangers in communicating with visitors and providing effective 'light touch' enforcement was highlighted.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the current position with parking legislation and in particular the position regarding overnight parking;
- ii. **APPROVED** the approach described to defining a Council policy on overnight parking of motorhomes and how consideration of the suitability of individual car parks for overnight parking by motorhomes might be undertaken;
- iii. **AGREED** the Principal Traffic Officer would draft appropriate wording in relation to signage to prevent overnight parking or inappropriate use by motorhomes of cemetery or war memorial car parks, possibly with a time limit on usage during the day; and
- iv. **AGREED** to add to the 5-point list at paragraph 7.1 of the report:
  - 6. Views be sought from community councils;
  - 7. Area Committees review the proposals.

## 5. Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Maoin Bun-structair Turasachd Dùthchail

There had been circulated TC/07/21 dated 25 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

It was explained that the fourth round of funding would close in September 2021, and that the closing date had passed for expressions of interest for the design grant, although for other expressions of interest the closing date was in mid-August 2021.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members referred to various local projects for which they required project design assistance to ensure proposals were 'shovel ready' in order to be submitted for funding, with some funding sources requiring an element of design and planning permission to have already been completed. There was a general perception that the officers in the Council's project design

team were too busy to take on this type of small-scale local project. Following discussion of this, Members were encouraged to develop a list of local tourism projects, to be reviewed and prioritised by the Tourism Committee with a view to informing future Council funding discussions. These projects should be submitted to the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment, in the first instance. Attention was also drawn to the work being undertaken on the Tourism Infrastructure Plan, which would be reported in due course to the Committee;

- it would be helpful to have a specific tourism budget;
- applicants should be encouraged where possible to include electric vehicle charging points with their proposals. Attention was drawn to the council's programme for the roll-out of charging points and the Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film, Infrastructure & Environment would check the expressions of interest to date to find out if any were suitable to include a charging point; and
- in response to a query about congestion in Portree harbour, it was being discussed as part of a levelling up funding bid, though this was not likely to happen until later in the year.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** current position with the Highland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund supported projects;
- ii. **NOTED** tourism infrastructure projects that were currently being considered as potential bids to the 4th funding round that closed in summer 2021; and
- iii. **AGREED** to develop a list of local tourism projects, with input from Members, to be reviewed and prioritised by the Committee with a view to informing future Council funding discussions.

The meeting ended at 1pm.

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit and Scrutiny Committee** held REMOTELY on Thursday, 17 June, 2021 at 10.30am.

### Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr R Balfour	Mr S Mackie
Mrs J Barclay	Mrs A MacLean
Mr B Boyd	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R Bremner	Mrs M Paterson
Dr I Cockburn	Mr P Saggars
Mrs M Davidson	Mr B Thompson

### Non-Member also present:

Mr D MacKay

### Officials in Attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance  
 Mr S Fraser, Head of Corporate Governance, Performance & Governance Service  
 Ms E Johnston, Corporate Audit & Performance Manager, Performance & Governance Service  
 Miss D Sutherland, Corporate Audit Manager, Performance & Governance Service  
 Mr S Carr, Corporate Performance Manager, Performance & Governance Service  
 Ms C Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources, Communities and Place  
 Mr M Watters, Freedom of Information and Data Protection Manager, Performance & Governance Service  
 Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Performance & Governance  
 Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance & Governance

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

### Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

#### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

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

Item 4 & 7 – Mr B Thompson (financial and non financial)

### 3. **Internal Audit Plan 2021/22** **Plana In-Sgrùdaidh 2021/22**

There had been circulated Report No. AS/5/21 dated 3 June 2021 by the Corporate Audit Manager.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was confirmed that within the Performance & Governance Service Plan there was a planned improvement to include a timeline of planned audits and the Responsible Officer;
- in relation to the Audit planned on the review of Governance of Arms Length External Organisations and Partnerships, the main emphasis of this was to look at the role of High Life Highland and not Third Sector organisations. However, within the new planned audits, Ward Schemes were being looked at and this would include some of the money given to Third Sector organisations. Also, the review of commissioned children's services would look at provision of services provided by the Third Sector. Reference was made to the potential for duplication of grants given to different organisations and there may be scope for making savings in this respect;
- the recruitment process was progressing in terms of the vacant audit post within the Corporate Audit and Performance team;
- an audit was being brought forward in the plan that would look at resilience, approach and lessons learned to how the Council dealt with the Covid pandemic. This would include the involvement of the Third Sector which had been very important in the response to the pandemic;
- the review of workforce planning was scheduled to take place towards the end of the financial year, as requested by the Executive Leadership Team, and this would be co-ordinated with the redesign of the Council;
- the review of Fleet management arrangements was welcomed. There was potential risk in supply of vehicles given the currently volatility in the vehicle industry and legislation changes to the required standard of vehicles. It was advised that the Council was moving towards adding more electric vehicles and energy efficient vehicles to its Fleet. Fleet Management would have an awareness of what changes in supply or legislation might be forthcoming in the vehicle industry; and
- it was essential that the Council's climate change ambitions were embedded in everything the Council did and each Service would take account of this in their Service planning.

The Committee **APPROVED** the 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan.

### 4. **Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report** **Ath-sgrùdaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais**

**Declaration of Interest - Mr B Thompson declared a financial interest in terms of being a part owner of a business that had received business rates based grants but given the remoteness of the interest to the item under consideration and having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There was circulated Report No. AS/6/21 dated 7 June 2021 by the Corporate Audit Manager.

The Chairman highlighted that no internal audit review reports had been submitted to the Committee on this occasion and he recognised that this would be of concern to Members. The impact of Covid-19 on Officers' normal workload had been significant. This had resulted in challenges in engaging with the Internal Audit Team to ensure audits were started and completed in good time. However, the Covid situation had improved and it was now therefore critical that the Internal Audit Plan was delivered this year to avoid being in the position of reporting a limitation of scope in assurances again next year. It was important that the Internal Audit Team had Member support and reports on progress with the Plan would be submitted monthly to the Chair of the Committee leading up to the September meeting of the Committee. The Council's Executive Leadership team had given a commitment to support the important work of the Internal Audit team.

In particular, it was welcomed that performance against indicator targets had improved since the last meeting.

It was highlighted that the focus of the Council was changing into key priority areas such as transformation and climate change. In preparing for next year's audit plan there was a need to ensure this included areas of service delivery that were most important to the Council so there would be an assurance that they were working well. It was confirmed that if there was anything arising from changes within the Council, that there was flexibility in the Internal Audit Plan.

The Committee **NOTED** the current work of the Internal Audit Section and the final position of progress against the 2020/21 audit plan.

## **5. Action Tracking Report** **Aithisg a' Leantainn Gnìomhachd**

There was circulated Report No. AS/7/21 dated 3 June 2021 by the Corporate Audit Manager which highlighted that there was a requirement to establish a follow-up process to monitor and ensure that management actions had been effectively implemented or that senior management had accepted the risk of not taking action. Details of this process, called action tracking, was provided.

As was reported in the previous Action Tracking update, there were a greater number of revisions than normal due to a lack of action due to Officers dealing with the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this had improved since the last update report.

In particular, of the 83 audit recommendations, 64 had been satisfactorily implemented and 16 actions across 5 different audits where the actions had not been implemented and revised target dates agreed and 3 actions had been made redundant.

The Committee **NOTED** the action tracking information provided including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions.

## 6. **Internal Audit Annual Report 2020/2021** **Aithisg Bhliadhnaidh In-Sgrùdaidh 2020/2021**

There was circulated Report No. AS/8/21 dated 4 June 2021 by the Corporate Audit Manager which included an assessment of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control and the associated opinion which provided information for the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

In particular, the audit opinion was different this year as there was a limitation in scope of the audit. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy guidance had recognised the impact Covid-19 had on the Internal Audit teams. There was an opinion of reasonable assurance on the Council's framework of governance and risk management. However, no assurance could be given in terms of internal control because the internal audit activity had been affected by the impact of Covid-19. A number of actions had been set out in the report to avoid such limitation in scope occurring again this year.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and the audit opinion provided.

## 7. **Review of Corporate Risks** **Ath-Sgrùdaidh air Cunnartan Corporra**

**Declaration of Interest - Mr B Thompson declared a non-financial interest in terms of being a Director of High Life Highland but he applied the exemption as a Council appointee and having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There was circulated Report No. AS/9/21 dated 26 May 2021 by the Corporate Audit and Performance Manager relation to the Corporate Risk Register which identified the Council's key strategic risks and the actions being taken to mitigate these. It was reviewed by the Executive Leadership Team quarterly and presented to every Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- in relation to discussion at the last meeting regarding any potential financial consequences of Scottish Independence being included in the Corporate Risk Register, it was advised that this matter had been considered by the Executive Leadership Team and it had been agreed to monitor the situation and escalate it to the Risk Register when the time was appropriate. The Risk Register set out mitigating actions that the Council could take and there were too many unknowns regarding the possibility of Scottish Independence to take any action at present;
- the condition of roads and residual waste projects were two large risks to the Council and the relevant Strategic Committees had to address these;
- having seen the effects of cyber attacks on the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, this was an ongoing risk for the Council and it was welcomed that there was an Internal Audit review on cyber security. Cyber security was a main feature of all Services' business continuity plans and plans were being made for a resilience exercise on a cyber security incident. Therefore, the Council was as prepared as it could be against any cyber attacks;



- it was queried if there was an audit process to check if the Council had received all the European Economic Development Fund money promised. An undertaking was given to raise this issue with the Economy and Regeneration Manager;
- it was also queried if the risk of demographic change within Highland was being captured, given the financial risks associated with demographic shifts of people moving from rural to urban areas. It was confirmed that demographic change had been considered as part of the review, but the pace of change over a period of decades made it difficult to react to. The risks related to the potential costs of demographic change particularly in relation to an ageing population and one with more complex needs. The Executive Leadership team would be asked for their views on the point raised regarding demographic change, but Members were reassured that there was work ongoing on this issue and every Service had to adapt to changing needs such as in health and social care. There were additional resources for Communities and Place Service to do analysis relating to a poverty strategy and the Council would work with its Community Planning Partners to address inequalities. Any changes in policy to address the issues with demographic change would be submitted to Strategic Committees.
- The Scottish Government had a major project proposed through the Convention of the Highlands and Islands on depopulation. While depopulation was a gradual process, suddenly there would be impacts such as you could not set up businesses as there were no staff for them.
- It was queried to what extent this Committee were effective in directing allocation of resources, such as in Road maintenance. It was advised that the allocation of resources was not a role of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. Continuing, it was felt the Corporate Risk Register did inform the budget process and Members/Officers were encouraged to think about Corporate Risks when making decisions. Also, Corporate Risk had been built into Service planning process that went to every Strategic Committee. Whether this could be made clearer in the budget papers would be discussed with the Finance team.
- Adult Care was a significant risk given the big ageing population in Highland. Although the responsibility for this was with the NHS, the Council may have to make some preparations. It was advised that the Health and Social Care Service had recently reviewed their Service Risk Register and as part of the process it would be checked if adult care required to be escalated to the Corporate Risk Register.

The Committee **NOTED** the Corporate Risk Register provided at Appendix 1 and the risk profile at Appendix 2 of the report.

#### **8. Highland Council Whistleblowing Policy – Update on Engagement and Review Poileasaidh Innsireachd Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd – Fios às Ùr mu Chom- pàirteachadh is Ath-sgrùdadh**

There was circulated Report No. AS/10/21 dated 2 June 2021 by the Corporate Audit & Performance Manager.

Having been assured that all possible opportunities were being taken to communicate this Policy to all staff, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. that no changes were being recommended to the policy following engagement with Trade Unions and Staff;

- ii. the Staff Whistleblowing Policy was now managed by the Corporate Audit Team and annually reports would be made on the policy's use; and
- iii. that the first annual monitoring report was provided to this Audit & Scrutiny Committee in a separate report.

## 9. Code of Corporate Governance Còd Riaghladh Corpóra

There was circulated Report No. AS/11/21 dated 2 June 2021 by the Head of Corporate Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- a number of Members had been interviewed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in late 2019 as part of their study of Council performance and an update as to when a report would be produced was sought;
- it would be beneficial if the actions set out in the Code also included a timeline and a responsible officer;
- the public rightly held Elected Members to account in terms of its decision making process. Every Member had their own expertise and knowledge but it was important that, when serving on Committees, they were as well informed as possible to be an effective part of the governance of the Council. It was important training continued to be recorded and logged to demonstrate this accumulation of knowledge. Members' training had been stalled due to the pandemic and a lack of resources but, looking forward, it was hoped to bring forward a blended approach to deliver training both online and in person. With Council elections due to take place in May 2022, this was now an opportune time to consider what had worked well and what could be improved;
- newly elected Members were bombarded with information and this could be overwhelming. There were some areas such as Civic Licensing and Planning where, to sit on the relevant Committee, training was compulsory prior to sitting a test to establish competency but it was not the intention to roll out this form of testing further. It was important to recognise that if training was too onerous it might deter prospective candidates from standing;
- disappointment was expressed at the low number of Members who turned up for training sessions provided; and
- an index of acronyms used would allow greater understanding of subject matter to both Elected Members and the public.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress on delivering the 2020/21 Code of Corporate Governance;
- ii. **APPROVED** the 2012/22 Code of Corporate Governance; and
- iii. **AGREED** that Members be informed as to progress of the CIPFA report on Council Performance.

## 10. Commissioner For Ethical Standards in Public Life/Standard Commission: Councillors' Code of Conduct – Investigation into Complaints Coimiseanair airson Inbhean Beusail ann am Beatha Phoblaich/Coimisean nan Inbhean: Còd Giùlain nan Comhairlichean – Sgrùdadh Ghearanan

There was circulated Report No. AS/12/21 dated 2 June 2021 by the Head of Corporate Governance.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** that, in respect of any complaints of Highland Council Members up until 31 May 2021, the Ethical Standards in Public Life/Standard Commission had found there to have been no breaches of the Code of Conduct.

## 11. Annual Report on Corporate Complaints Performance Aithisg Pròiseas Ghearanan Corporra

There was circulated Report No. AS/13/21 dated 17 June 2021 by the ECO Communities & Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- in response to a Members' question, it was explained that the nature of complaints was wide and varied;
- Council Housing had remained in the top 2 reasons for complaints over the past five years and it took longer for these complaints to be resolved, a picture mirrored elsewhere in Scottish Local Authorities. However, the number of Council tenants, the length of waiting lists and the complex nature of housing complaints had to be borne in mind so it was unfair to draw comparisons with other Services. Reports on Complaints Performance would be considered at Strategic Committees and this would provide an opportunity for more detailed consideration of the factors involved;
- Members welcomed the resolution and improvement approach. Complaints were also an opportunity to improve services;
- compliments should also be reported;
- it was important to differentiate what was a complaint and what was a query;
- not all complaints were made directly to the Council, examples of unfounded criticism of the Council on social media being provided. In such circumstances, through no fault of the Council, there was a danger of reputational damage;
- often frustration was caused when information and advice was sought from officers who failed to respond from queries from individuals and community groups. This was not captured in the data before Members but it was important to also track these trends; and
- details were sought, and provided as to how the Members' Portal would operate in the new CRM system as opposed to the previous system which, at times, caused frustration and resulted in Members bypassing the system and going directly to the officers concerned. Furthermore, clarification was sought that if many complained about the same matter, if this was recorded as one complaint or many complaints. Whichever approach was adopted it was important that it was as efficient as possible. To assist with this a short briefing on the new CRM system explaining its functionality and the benefits for Members would be provided.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Council's performance for front line resolution (+4.56%) and complex investigation complaints (+14.5%) complaints;
- ii. the early indications of an increase in the Councils ability to manage complaints at the first point of contact through the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team (53% resolved at Frontline in Q4);
- iii. the timely implementation of the revised Model Complaint Handling Procedure as per SPSO requirement during the pandemic period;

- iv. officers' continued participation in the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network;
- v. the action plan to drive improved performance through a quality and customer centric focussed approach;
- vi. support encouraging constituents to use the correct channels available to ensure their complaint could be assessed and resolved in a timely manner;
- vii. that a more comprehensive Corporate Complaints Process Annual Report, covering a broader set of indicators, would be taken to this Committee in August before submission to the SPSO;

and **AGREED**:-

- viii. to provide a briefing to Members explaining the new CRM system and how complaints were recorded and categorised.

**12. Scottish Public Service Ombudsman Cases Received by the Council – Update Report**  
**Cùisean Ombudsman Sheirbheisean Poblach na h-Alba a Fhuairleadh leis a' Chomhairle – Aithisg às Ùr**

There was circulated Report No. AS/14/21 dated 28 May, 2021 by the ECO Performance & Governance.

Reflecting on the findings of the Ombudsman, it was important that a proactive approach was adopted to avoid reoccurrences and this was achieved through complying with the recommendations made by the Ombudsman in each case.

The Committee **NOTED** the outcomes of the SPSO cases and that the SPSO's recommendations have now been carried out.

**13. Review of The Internal Audit Charter**  
**Ath-sgrùdadh air Cairt an In-sgrùdaidh**

There had been circulated Report No AS/15/21 dated 1 June 2021 by the Corporate Audit and Performance Manager.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- confirmation was sought, and provided, as to when the purpose, authority and responsibility of the internal audit activity, as defined in the Internal Audit Charter, was reviewed; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to the nature of the Internal Audit work undertaken on behalf of High Life Highland, as provided for within the Service Level Agreement between High Life Highland and the Highland Council.

The Committee **APPROVED** the amendments to the Internal Audit Charter outlined in the report and contained in the revised Charter in Appendix 1 of the report.

The meeting ended at 12.40 pm.