

The Highland Council
No. 5 2020/2021

Minutes of Meeting of the **Highland Council** held **REMOTELY** on **Friday, 10 December 2021** at 10.35am.

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

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Chief Executive	Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance
Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place	Executive Chief Officer, Property & Housing
Executive Chief Officer, Health & Social Care	Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance
Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment	

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mrs D MacKay and Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair.

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

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

General – Mrs M Cockburn as a Council appointed Board Member of the Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau and Mr C MacLeod as a Director of the Skye & Lochalsh Citizens Advice Bureau (Both Non-Financial)

Item 5ii, 9, 10, 13, 17 & 18 – Mr A Christie (Financial)
Item 12 – Mr A Christie (Non-Financial)
Items 9, 10, 11 and 12 – Mr D Rixson (Non-Financial)
Item 10 – Mr C Munro (Non-Financial)
Item 13 - Mrs M Paterson (Non-Financial)
Item 13 – Mr T Heggie and Mr K Gowans (Non-Financial)
Item 17 – Ms L Munro (Financial)
Item 19 – Mr K Gowans and Ms L Munro (Non-Financial)

At this point in the meeting, and in light of the previous day's technical difficulties which had led to the postponement of this meeting until today, Mr K Rosie, seconded by Mr K Gowans, **MOVED** (in relation to Item 7 on the agenda – Question Time) the suspension of Standing Order 11 in order to allow any supplementary questions to be submitted in writing as opposed to being raised verbally at the meeting. If agreed, any supplementary questions and responses would be appended to the Minutes of this Meeting thereafter.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr S Mackie, moved that there should be no suspension of Standing Order 11 and that supplementary questions and responses should be dealt with in the normal manner.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 39 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 8 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been submitted as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr G Adam, Mr B Allan, Mrs J Barclay, Mr I Brown, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mr A Christie, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr C Fraser, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gray, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Ms E Knox, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs A MacLean, Mr C MacLeod, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr A Rhind, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie and Ms J Tilt.

For the Amendment

Mr R Balfour, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Macpherson, Mr S Mackie, Mr D MacKay, Mr J McGillivray and Mr P Sagers.

Abstention

Mr M Reiss

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

It was **NOTED** that, as a result of the By-Election for Ward 21 on 2 December, Ms S Fanet had been elected as a Member of the Council.

In this regard, Ms Fanet was welcomed to the Council and responded accordingly.

In respect of the resignation of Mr B Thompson (Ward 11), it was **NOTED** that, due to this having been received within six months of the date of the next Local Government Elections, a By-Election would not be held.

It was also **NOTED** that Ms P Hadley was to continue as a member of the Green Party on the Council but her status would not include reference to the Highland Matters Group in future.

On the basis of all of the above, membership of the Council was now as follows:-

Ind – 24/ SNP – 19/ Lib Dem – 11/ Cons – 10/ Lab – 3/ HM – 3/ Green – 1/
Sutherland Ind – 1/ Non-Aligned – 1/ Vacancy - 1

Membership of Strategic Committees now changed from 7/5/3/3 to 6/5/3/3/1 – with the final place tied between the Labour and Highland Matters Groups.

In that regard, the Council **AGREED** the following changes to membership of Strategic Committees:-

Corporate Resources Committee – Mr J Gray to continue on this Committee
Communities & Place Committee – Mr D Macpherson to come off and Ms M Smith to be added

Economy & Infrastructure Committee – Mr B Lobban to come off and Ms M Smith to be added

Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee – Mrs M Davidson to come off and Ms P Hadley to be added

Housing & Property Committee – Mr C MacLeod to be added

Education Committee – Mr L Fraser to come off and Mrs P Munro to be added

South Planning Applications Committee – Mr D Rixson to replace Mr B Thompson

Economy & Infrastructure Committee – Mr A Jarvie to replace Mr A Sinclair

The Council further **AGREED** the following appointments –

Vice Chair of the Housing & Property Committee – Mr M Finlayson

Vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee – Mr A Christie

4. **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 28 October as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately which were **APPROVED**.

5. **Minutes of Meetings of Committees** **Gèarr-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.

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

City of Inverness Area Committee, 18 November – Starred Item 6 – Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2 – **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on strategic matters and Officer recommended responses as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report which had now been considered by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, taking account of the City Committee’s view on these strategic matters.

Easter Ross Area Committee, 18 November – Starred Item 4 – Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2 – **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on strategic matters and Officer recommended responses both as detailed at Appendix 2 of the report which had now been considered by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

Also **NOTED** that any *material changes would be agreed in consultation and agreement with the Chair of the relevant Committee(s) prior to publication. **(should read as non-material changes).*

Sutherland County Committee, 22 November – Starred Item 5 – Golspie Associated School Group Overview – **AGREED** to accept the following amendment as put forward at the meeting –

That, as part of ongoing self-evaluation around ASL need and resource in Sutherland and across the whole of the Highlands, and in light of Covid-19/Omicron concerns and the additional pressures being placed on schools (including staff absence), the Council will reinstate (to the value of £177k in this school year) the allocation that was in place during the first term of the school session.

Isle of Skye & Raasay Committee, 29 November – Starred Item 6 – Storr Future Development – **AGREED** that a report should be presented to a future Corporate Resources Committee meeting seeking approval of the required set-up funding to deliver the installation on the retail module at Storr.

Nairnshire Committee, 1 December - Starred Item 4 – Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2 – **NOTED** the issues raised by respondents to the consultation on strategic matters and Officer recommended responses both as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report which had now been considered by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, taking account of the Local Committee’s view on these strategic matters.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 2 December

Starred Item 9 – Highland Coastal Community Fund - Update and Next Actions - **AGREED** that up to 7.5% of the £3m allocation should be ring fenced for investment into the administration of the fund to ensure appropriate and adequate resourcing of the scheme.

Starred Item 16 - Car Parking Roll Out Project - **AGREED** that the rebase of the Service budget for car parking income to reflect the long-term impact on changing patterns of car parking usage on income received from car park should come to the Council in March 2022 to be considered as part of the budget setting process.

Correction to the Economy & Infrastructure Committee Minutes – Item 11 (bullet point 4) – to clarify that “the increased use of solar panels was welcomed as was the small hydro scheme being constructed on the *Rover Ness*” should read as “River”.

Minutes not included in the Volume

(i) Investment Sub Committee – 17 September – **NOTED**

Declaration of Interest – Item (ii) – Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in the following item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland 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 his involvement.

(ii) Community Planning Board – 22 September – **NOTED**

(iii) Recruitment Panel – 11 November and 25 November – **NOTED**

(iv) Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Board – 29 November – **APPROVED**

6. Appointment of Chair of the Housing & Property Committee/Membership Ballarachd Chomataidhean, msaa

The Council **AGREED** to appoint Mr L Fraser as the new Chair of the Housing & Property Committee.

7. Question Time Am Ceiste

The following Questions had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance.

(1) Public Question – Ms C Nichols

To the Chair of the Education Committee

The voluntary youth sector has a rich and diverse range of organisations that work with a variety of young people and offering services ranging from community based universal youth work to specialist issue-based support services. The Voluntary Youth Network was launched in January 2017 and has developed an effective improvement plan underpinned by professional ethics, values and principles and delivering to local, regional and National priorities.

The plan has enabled the sector to attract support from National funders and stakeholders and the sector is worth between £7 million and £10 million pounds per year to the local economy.

Would the Highland Council agree to meet with young people, youth workers and volunteers from the voluntary youth sector to agree action to improve representation of voluntary youth sector at relevant committees and decision-making forums?

The response had been circulated.

Supplementary Question –

The Voluntary Youth Sector welcomes the commitment for key officers and members to meet with young people, youth workers and volunteers from the sector to further develop engagement in the Highland Council decision making processes.

Since the budget consultation in 2014, voluntary youth clubs across the region have received no funding from the Highland Council and this has led to a lack of communication or recognition of the work taking place in these facilities.

This lack of communication has led to a perception by voluntary sector practitioners that their inclusion in strategic discussions have felt tokenistic and their concerns disregarded or ignored.

The sector welcomes the opportunities now created by the Youth Work Development Group with representatives of the VYN taking their places at the first meeting next week.

However there remains much more that can be achieved.

We hope for more meaningful engagement with the Youth Convener, HLH and THC officers and members to ensure such developments are capitalised on and real progress towards true partnership approaches are developed.

What actions can we expect to enable these commitments and lead to a more effective partnership enabling best outcomes for young people in Highland through youth work?

Supplementary Response –

I agree that actions have to be moved forward and the encouraging thing is that we are seeing positive progress even at this time- for example:

- The current Youth work strategy was codesigned with children and young people including those on the VYN.*
- The new arrangements for CLD governance in Highland, including the establishment of a Youth Work Development Group, sets out to improve communication and provide new opportunities for the direct participation of a wider group of stakeholders in the planning processes. The Youth Work Development Group will provide a platform for all partners to work constructively and collaboratively to improve outcomes for young people in Highland.*
- THE VYN will have 5 representatives on the Youth Work Development group along with representatives from THC, Education Scotland and HLH, and the inaugural meeting will take place next week.*
- The Highland Youth Convener is also a member of this group and I know, Anja would welcome any opportunity for meaningful engagement with young people and those working on their behalf and I would encourage you and others to contact her directly or through HLH who provide support to that role. I will also update her at a meeting I have with her next week.*
- THC is committed to working with our partners and we look forward to receiving the first progress report mid 2022 detailing progress on the CLD plan including those delivering youth work.*
- Finally, I will ensure that relevant council officers and HLH officers are updated of your keenness to touch base with them to further develop partnership working.*

Member Questions

(1) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

Which member of Council Staff will be tasked with answering this question on your behalf?

The response had been circulated.

(2) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

As Leader of the Council, following my question at a previous Council meeting, can you assure me there is no coalition agreement with the SNP Group?

The response had been circulated.

(3) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

As Leader of the Council, how does your personal view of a Council proposal contradict your view as Leader of the Council?

The response had been circulated.

(4) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

How many Highland residents (as individuals, not organisations) have emailed or made representations to you in support of the Spaces for People in the City Centre, as Leader of the Council?

The response had been circulated.

(5) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

How many Highland residents (as individuals, not organisations) have emailed or made representations to you in opposition to the Spaces for People in the City Centre, as Leader of the Council?

The response had been circulated.

(6) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

As Leader of the Council, what discussion have you had with other Council Leaders of larger cities who have either significantly scaled back or entirely removed their Spaces for People interventions?

The response had been circulated.

(7) Mr A Jarvie

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Do you remain confident that the whole budget allocation for road repairs and maintenance will be spent in this financial year?

The response had been circulated.

(8) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

Why do the public continue to remain in the dark about the details of how this Council spent their money on the Inverness City Arts Programme?

The response had been circulated.

(9) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

When will the public find out how much was paid to 'artists' to design a concrete slab?

The response had been circulated.

(10) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

As Leader of the Council, do you find it acceptable that an artwork which cost the public purse nearly £400,000 is not fully accessible to disabled people as was promised?

The response had been circulated.

(11) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

With six months left of your tenure, as Leader of the Council, what is your proudest achievement you initiated, led on and pursued to completion?

The response had been circulated.

(12) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

As Leader of the Council, can you list any examples where the Council has suffered the often touted "reputational damage" as a result of Councillors undertaking their elected role in scrutinising the Council and what the material impact was?

The response had been circulated.

(13) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

As Leader of the Council do you believe the £360,000 spent on the Gathering Place in Inverness represents good use of public funds?

The response had been circulated.

(14) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

When did you last visit Lochaber in your capacity as Leader of the Council, and which community groups did you meet during this visit?

The response had been circulated.

(15) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

What is the total FTE headcount for non-education staff employed by the Highland Council as of 30th November 2021?

The response had been circulated.

(16) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

What was the total FTE headcount for non-education staff employed by the Highland Council in each of the last 10 financial years? What was the total employment costs for those posts in each financial year?

The response had been circulated.

(17) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

What was the Statutory Performance Indicator for the condition of roads in the Highland Council area when you took over as Leader of the Council?

The response had been circulated.

(18) Mr K Gowans

To the Leader of the Council

Further to my successful motion in December 2020 when Members agreed to support "The Highland Council undertakes to achieve "Living Wage" designation status for the Highland Council Area to provide benefit and support for lower paid

employees”, an update was provided to the Council in May. Since then, there have been no further updates on this very important initiative. What tangible evidence is there that any further progress has been made to date?

The response had been circulated.

(19) Mr R MacWilliam

To the Leader of the Council

Which Highland Council budget will meet the additional costs arising as a result of unauthorised spending beyond the agreed Inverness City Arts budget?

The response had been circulated.

(20) Mr R MacWilliam

To the Leader of the Council

When will a detailed breakdown of the ICArts programme expenditure become available for public scrutiny?

The response had been circulated.

(21) Mr R MacWilliam

To the Leader of the Council

What measures are Highland Council taking to support the community food growing strategy?

The response had been circulated.

(22) Mr R MacWilliam

To the Leader of the Council

What measures are in place to consult communities on the sale of ‘common good’ assets?

The response had been circulated.

(23) Mr A Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

Do you have absolute assurance that HR has sufficient staffing and procedures to address the concerns highlighted by members of staff in the press regarding the culture in the Council?

The response had been circulated.

(24) Mr A Baxter

To the Leader of the Council

Following the admission of liability by Borders Council and their subsequent failure to investigate the actions of teacher Linda McCall, what action as Leader of the Council have you taken to prevent such a cover up ever happening at Highland Council?

The response had been circulated.

(25) Mr D Macpherson

To the Chair of the Housing & Property Committee

How many people are currently waiting patiently on the Highland Council's Housing List for an available council house or housing association house, and how does Highland Council correspond with these people to update them on their status and place in the housing queue?

The response had been circulated.

**8. Notices of Motion
Brathan Glusaid**

The following Notices of Motion had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance –

(i)The Council believes that the regionalisation of Councils has been a failed experiment and a singular unitary authority for the Highland region does not, and has not, served the people of the Highlands effectively and fairly.

The local authority is often tasked with delivering objectives that may present opposing outcomes for Highland constituents. Within housing, school estates and road infrastructure; the growth of the City of Inverness and the surrounding commuting areas calls for an expansion of current provision. However, in most of our rural areas, local representatives fight for the mere retention of such services and seek to reverse the trend of population decline.

Although the matter was raised directly at Holyrood in the context of a dedicated local authority for the City of Inverness, this Council believes that a holistic review of the local authority area is required to create representative and effective Councils for all areas of the Highland region.

Whilst some thirteen local government areas maintained their Councils, such as Clackmannan and Moray who both have smaller populations than our own, the current arrangement for the Highlands is neither equitable nor sustainable.

The Council therefore asks the Scottish Government and the Minister for Local Government to review the existing Highland Council area, with the view to returning local authorities to their most localised form possible.

Signed: Mr S Mackie Mr J McGillivray Mr A Baxter

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- some Members had been elected in 2017 after standing on a clear platform of

localism with the aim of ensuring the implementation of local democracy, with the Highland Council being an effective vehicle for change and a bridge between communities and local government. However, it was the case that they now felt that this had not been the case over recent years and as such the Motion had been carefully worded in relation to desired outcomes for local democracy across the whole Highland area;

- it was suggested that the Council was in what was perceived to be an 'impossible situation' in relation to addressing depopulation, diversification of local economies and the retention of lifeline services, particularly as different parts of the Highlands had different needs and priorities;
- it was however very much the case that many areas often felt disconnected and left out of initiatives taking place elsewhere and particularly in Inverness;
- it was felt that the Motion had to be considered as being complementary to any wider review of local governance being undertaken by the Scottish Government because substantive and radical change was now needed;
- it was suggested that the regionalisation of Councils in the Highland area had been a failed experiment and there was a very strong need for Local Authorities to be truly representative of the communities that they served in the future;
- whilst not disagreeing with the principles of the Motion, an amendment would be put forward at the appropriate time in the following terms – that the Council should engage with the wider public in the Highlands, staff and Unions, and other relevant stakeholders to consider on what basis the existing Highland Council area could be adjusted to improve local democracy. To this end, a review should be conducted which covered strategic, operational and community desired outcomes. This review should also seek to establish a strategy to ensure an equitable allocation of local government funding came to Highland and take factors such as rurality, poverty, economic development etc into account. The aim would also be to promote more place-based decision making supported by necessary resources with the view to establishing the most localised form of democracy possible;
- it was suggested that a Seminar should be arranged for all Members of the Council on the subject of local democracy to allow all views to be expressed and shared;
- it should be acknowledged that the Highland Council identity as a whole was extremely important in terms of accessing opportunities across all sectors and this had to be maintained;
- in any review of local democracy within the Council, the views of staff and local people should be included;
- it was the case that strong objections had been made in respect of the proposal to move from three to two constituencies in the Highlands and it was suggested that the same objections applied to retaining only one Council as opposed to reviewing that position;
- it was considered that smaller Council would be best placed to meet the needs of their own localities and this would be beneficial for the Highlands;
- there was a lot of resentment currently in relation to centralisation and as such it was imperative the Council engaged with and listened to local communities;
- it was essential that the public were fully informed about the potential implications of any change to the current arrangements;
- it had be recognised that economies of scale were often of vital importance and this was especially the case for the Highlands;
- it was confirmed that the mover of the Motion would be content to accept the following amendment to the wording - delete "that the regionalisation of Councils has been a failed experiment and" and leave out from "Although the matter....." and insert: "The Council therefore asks the Scottish Government

and the Minister for Parliamentary Business to review the existing Highland Council area, with the view to returning to more localised authority areas, and to conduct research into how a form of municipal government, such as those present elsewhere in Europe, could work for the Highlands and Scotland in future."

- it was suggested that the Council should perhaps look at devolving more powers to Local Committees in the first instance as this could be done a lot more quickly than any wider review of local government across the Highland area; and
- it was of vital importance that all parts of the Highlands did not lose out through any future changes to the current arrangements, not least in terms of economies of scale.

Thereafter, Mr S Mackie, seconded by Mr J McGillivray, **MOVED** the terms of the Notice of Motion – subject to acceptance of the amended wording which had been put forward at the meeting as detailed above.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr C Munro, seconded by Mr J Finlayson, moved that the Council should engage with the wider public in the Highlands, staff and unions, and other relevant stakeholders to consider on what basis the existing Highland Council area could be adjusted to improve local democracy. To this end, a review would be conducted which covered strategic, operational and community desired outcomes. This review would also seek to establish a strategy to ensure an equitable allocation of local government came to Highland and which take factors such as rurality, poverty, economic development etc into account. The aim would also be to promote more place-based decision making supported by necessary resources with the view to establishing the most localised form of democracy possible.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 22 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 26 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr B Allan, Mr R Bremner, Mr I I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Dr I Cockburn, Ms S Fanet, Mr C Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr A Graham, Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox, Mr D Louden, Mr A MacInnes, Mr D MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs F Robertson, Mr K Rosie and Mr P Sagers.

For the Amendment

Mr G Adam, Mr C Aitken, Mrs J Barclay, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr J Gordon, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr B Lobban, Mr A MacKinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D Macpherson, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr D Rixson, Mrs T Robertson and Ms J Tilt.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** to engage with the wider public in the Highlands, staff and unions, and other relevant stakeholders to consider on what basis the existing Highland Council area could be adjusted to improve local democracy. To this end, a review would be conducted which covered strategic, operational and community desired outcomes. This review would also seek to establish a strategy to ensure an equitable allocation of local government funding came to Highland and which would take factors such as rurality, poverty, economic development etc. into account. The aim would also be to promote more place-based decision making supported by

necessary resources with the view to establishing the most localised form of democracy possible.

(ii) Older People's Champion

Council recognises and values the contributions that older people play in our society.

We are therefore seeking Council support for Age Scotland and the Scottish Older People's Assembly's (SOPA) campaign for every local authority in Scotland to establish the role of Older People's Champion and to appoint three Councillors to the position across Highlands.

An Older People's Champion is a Councillor who acts as a link between the Council and older people in the local area. Age Scotland and SOPA also want to see a network of Older People's Champions from across Scotland, who will be a voice for older people at local and national level, work together on shared challenges and collectively influence for change. It would be beneficial if our area were represented.

With a growing older population, it is vital that local decision-making meets the needs of older people and that Councillors have a better understanding of these. Local authorities, health and social care partnerships and the Third Sector are responsible for providing and supporting so many services upon which older people rely – such as public transport, social care provision, housing, planning, and communities. As many local authority budgets are under pressure, older people need someone specifically tasked with representing and supporting their interests and finding out what they need from local decisionmakers. There is no budgetary implication attached to this role.

We believe the impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's older people has only strengthened the need for an Older People's Champion here.

We hope that Highland Council can support this campaign and will establish the role of an Older People's Champion for our Council. If Council agrees this motion, we propose that three Councillors are nominated after the next May 2022 Council Election as our Older Peoples Champions for the whole of Highlands.

Signed: Mrs I MacKenzie Mr D Fraser Mrs I Campbell Mrs C Caddick

During discussion, the mover of the Motion agreed to accept the following amended wording in respect of the final sentence – that a report be taken to the February 2022 meeting of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee where the number of appointments would be considered together with the role and remit and how the Older Peoples Champion(s) would engage across Highland Council services and also with partners in NHS Highland and the HTSi.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion – subject to the following amendment - that a report be taken to the February 2022 meeting of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee where the number of appointments would be considered together with the role and remit and how the Older Peoples Champion (s) would engage across Highland Council services and also with partners in NHS Highland and the HTSi.

(iii) The Highland Council area is now a net exporter of electricity to the national grid. In addition, all our energy is green hydro or wind generated. Due to the historic method of calculating transmission charges, households and business customers in the north pay some of the highest rates for electricity. Based on the standard tariffs and average daily use, this costs each household an extra £60/year compared with the central belt of Scotland.

Although Ofgem are undertaking a review of transmission charges they are not expecting to make any immediate changes.

We therefore ask that the Council write to Ofgem asking 1) that transmission charges for the north of Scotland are immediately brought into line with the south of Scotland 2) Future charges are lowered further to reflect that the Highlands are a net exporter of green energy.

We also ask that we seek support from the Scottish Government and that they also lobby for fair tariffs for the Highlands.

Signed: Mr D Fraser Mrs T Robertson Mr J Gray Mrs M Davidson

During detailed discussion, it was suggested that, in addition to what was proposed within the Motion, contact should be made with OFGEM to make the transformational change that would help to lift the Highlands out of fuel poverty and recognise the key role the Highlands played in delivering renewable energy.

In this regard, issues to be discussed would include fair access to the distribution grid to enable everyone to de-carbonise and save money from Solar PV and Solar Thermal installation, developing green technology and hydrogen storage systems in the Highlands, lowering energy prices by reviewing capital payback periods and enabling community investment in generation and to ensuring that users of prepayment meters were always on the lowest tariff level.

It was also suggested that a short-life Working Group should be established to focus on all aspects of this complex issue and that this should include discussion with MPs and MSPs wherever and whenever required.

Decision

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

It was also **AGREED** that detailed discussions should be held with OFGEM to make the transformational change to help lift the Highlands out of fuel poverty and recognise the key role that the Highlands played in delivering renewable energy. The items to be discussed should include fair access to the distribution grid to enable everyone to de-carbonise and save money from Solar PV and Solar Thermal installation, developing green technology and hydrogen storage systems in the Highlands, lowering energy prices by reviewing capital payback periods and enabling community investment in generation and ensuring that users of prepayment meters were always on the lowest tariff level.

(iv) This Council acknowledges the importance the existing pavement network has in encouraging the modal shift of people towards active travel as the key infrastructure both throughout our towns and villages and in linking homes with dedicated active travel infrastructure.

At the forthcoming budget, Council agrees to do all it can to increase the budget for maintaining pavement surfaces and kerbing to encourage more walking, wheeling and cycling. Thus, being consistent with the Council's declaration of a climate emergency.

Signed: Mr A Jarvie Mr D Macpherson

During discussion, and whilst accepting the principles of the Motion, it was suggested that it was perhaps setting a dangerous precedent to agree constraints in relation to the budget process through Notices of Motion on the Council agenda. In this regard, fully informed discussion through the appropriate Strategic Committee in the first instance was considered to be the correct way to take such matters forward.

It was however very much the case that this was a serious issue which had to be addressed, not least on the grounds of safety, and future discussions should also take account of the situation across all parts of the Highland area.

Decision

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

9. Medium Term Financial Plan – Capital Strategy and Capital Programme to 2036/37 Planadh Ionmhasail Meadhan-ùine

Declarations of Interest –

Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust 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 his involvement in the discussion.

Mr A Christie declared a financial interest as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/33/21 dated 26 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance which it was indicated would follow.

There had also been circulated Additional Recommendation to the report which confirmed that the Council remained committed to addressing roads condition issues in a sustainable way and ensuring sufficient resources were available to address the situation. The roads budget needed to focus on revenue solutions as well as capital. As part of finalising the Budget for 22/23, a full financial review with the aim of increasing revenue roads spending levels would therefore be presented to the Council as part of the budget process and this would take forward the points mentioned in Section 16.10 of the report.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was a need to thank the Officers for the comprehensive report which had been produced;
- there was some concern in relation to the proposed roads funding which was £26m for the first year, tapering to £8m in future years, which was felt to be insufficient. As such, it was suggested that £26m required to be embedded in the budget on an annual basis to prevent the road network deteriorating further and

to achieve this further consideration of revenue funding and the financial decisions being taken by the Council would be required;

- in contrast, the challenging capital position facing the Council was highlighted and the importance of considering projects in line with the issues associated with climate change was emphasised;
- the lack of plans for new sports facilities, other than in the east of Inverness, was a concern for many and in this regard attention was drawn to the list of capital projects for schools, many of which would include sports facilities to be used by the school and local community;
- there was disappointment that a replacement swimming pool had not been included in the plans for the new school campus at Tain;
- there was also concern that some major projects, such as the Corran Ferry and Strome Ferry Bypass, appeared to have been removed from the Capital P. However, in this regard, it was clarified that they had been put into a separate category of high-cost projects with strategic importance for which funding was being sought elsewhere and business plans drawn up;
- it was suggested that additional revenue funding was required to boost the roads budget and could cover issues such as drainage, verge maintenance, pothole repair and road operatives. Recurrent savings had to be identified in this respect as it was unsustainable to continue using reserves. In this regard, it was noted that the budget statement in February 2022 would have further detail;
- the emphasis on income generation and commercialisation in the report was welcomed and it would be vital to work with communities in that regard;
- on the basis that the Council already had the highest level of Local Authority debt in Scotland, and the likelihood of inflation rising in the coming years, caution was urged in relation to further borrowing, noting the high loan charges already being faced. In this respect, an impact assessment of loan charges was suggested;
- it was felt that the Housing and Property Committee should consider increasing the rent levels for affordable housing in areas where the private sector had significantly higher rents;
- the 'front loading' of the Capital Programme was of concern for future years and it was queried as to whether the quoted time period of 15 years for the Programme was in fact too long in terms of commitment;
- there was concern in relation to proposals to reduce the long term capital budget in relation to roads, the insufficiency of the long term capital budget generally and high level of debt and the removal of three large projects from the programme into a separate category (the Corran Ferry, the Strome Ferry Bypass and the Longman Energy from Waste Plant);
- the case for a higher settlement should be made to the Scottish Government as the current allocation formula was unfair on remote and rural areas. It was also pointed out that in relation to the Scottish Government's road funding allocation, multiple factors were taken into consideration, not only road length;
- the transparency of the budget was welcomed but it was also recognised that an impossible situation existed whereby £190m was required but only £50m was available at a time when costs were rising. Income generation would therefore be vital in balancing the budget in coming years and further support should be sought from both the UK and Scottish Governments in that regard;
- there was a need to draw attention to the work of the Redesign Board and the Corporate Resources Sub Committee and all Members were encouraged to attend and engage with these meetings whenever possible;
- all Members had to work together (and with partners) to identify additional funding solutions and monitor capital spend to ensure that best value returns on investment across the Highlands were optimised in the future;

- the work that had been ongoing for many years, including with partners, on some of the larger projects (such as the Corran Ferry and Stromeferry Bypass) was highlighted; and
- the high number of constituent concerns which had been expressed in relation to poor road maintenance across the Highland area had to be acknowledged and addressed.

Thereafter, Mr A Christie, seconded by Dr I Cockburn, **MOVED** both the recommendations as detailed in the report and the additional recommendation which had been submitted..

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr P Saggars, moved to reject the proposed Capital Plan due to its declining spend on road repairs and insufficient local infrastructure, such as the Corran Ferry, Stromeferry By-pass and other projects which would benefit the rural parts of the Highlands, and to reconvene for a Special Council Meeting to focus solely on this important item.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 46 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 6 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr G Adam, Mr C Aitken, Mr B Allan, Mr R Balfour, Mrs J Barclay, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael Mr A Christie, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms K Currie, Mrs M Davidson, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr C Fraser, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Ms E Knox, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Louden, Mr A MacInnes, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms A MacLean, Mr C MacLeod, Mr D Macpherson, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Mrs L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Ms J Tilt.

For the Amendment.

Mr J Bruce, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Mackay, Mr S Mackie, Mr J McGillivray and Mr P Saggars.

Abstention

Mr M Reiss.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **APPROVED** the strategic approach to capital investment as outlined in the report;
- (ii) **APPROVED** the 15-year capital investment programme to the value of £658.132m as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report;
- (iii) **NOTED** that this was in addition to the current approved programme of projects which totalled £281.762m, giving a combined programme value of £938,894m;
- (iv) **NOTED** the projects that currently sat outside the affordability envelope as set out in Appendix 5 and endorsed the ambition to seek ways in which these could be taken forward via alternative funding sources, including the development of a Capital Asset Partnering Plan;
- (v) **AGREED** an allocation of £0.450m from the Transformation Fund to commission external finance and asset advisors as well as enhance core staffing to augment the existing finance and Treasury work with the aim of maximising funds

management, identifying income generating opportunities, driving through asset rationalisation and chasing funds and grants to support the Council's strategic capital plan ambitions;

- (vi) **NOTED** that a report would come to the next meeting of the full Council which would set out enhanced governance arrangements for the Capital Programme, including the role of Council and its Strategic Committees and this would be reflected in the annual review of the Scheme of Delegation which would be brought to the same meeting; and
- (vii) **NOTED** that the Council remained committed to addressing roads condition issues in a sustainable way and ensuring sufficient resources were available to address the situation. The roads budget needed to focus on revenue solutions as well as capital. As part of finalising the Budget for 22/23, a full financial review with the aim of increasing revenue roads spending levels would be presented to the Council as part of the budget process and this would take forward the points mentioned in Section 16.10 of the report.

10. Future Highlands Strategic Partnership Priority 4: Place – Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities

Ro-innleachd Com-pàirteachas na Gàidhealtachd san Àm ri Teachd Cuspair 4: Planadh Stèidhichte air Àite agus Tasgadh ann an Coimhearsnachdan

Declarations of Interest –

Mr D Rixson declared non-financial interest in this item as the Council Representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and the Lochaber Environmental Group and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Trust but, having applied the test, concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Mr C Munro declared a non-financial interest as a Council appointed Director of the Skye & Lochalsh Council of Voluntary Organisations but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement.

Mr A Christie declared a financial interest as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/34/21 dated 26 November 2021 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was essential to note the links with both the Health & Prosperity Strategy and the Medium-Term Financial report and also the collaborative working with and within communities whereby evaluation, monitoring and learning from examples of best practice were being undertaken;
- it was envisaged that Resourcing Plans would be rolled out in the following year and this was welcomed;
- it was important to emphasise and highlight the line between economic prosperity and place-based initiatives and the continued involvement of Community Planning Partners was essential in this regard;
- thanks were conveyed to the Scottish Government for the continuing funding in respect of place-based investment and also for Officers (and Mr P Mascarenhas in particular) for the work which had been undertaken to date;
- it was the case that there could be marked differences between Community Planning Partnerships across the Highlands and Local Member involvement

in particular and it was hoped that improvements could be made where necessary;

- the support for hydrogen within the report was welcomed and in relation to connectivity it was hoped that the City Region Deal funding for the R100 could be fully allocated;
- there was concern that there had been very little mention of other organisations, such as Highlands & Enterprise, NHS Highland and High Life Highland, in the report and it was hoped that this would change in terms of future partnership/collaborative work and reports;
- a number of the issues which had been contained in the report were already happening in the Lochaber area, such as allocation of place-based investment, support for community groups, development of green space and help for young carers, but there was a need to embed formal structures and this should include natural and cultural heritage;
- it was essential to maintain the progress already made in respect of Community Planning Partnership levelling up across Highland areas and also important to recognise that it was often the third sector organisations who had led the Council in terms of the action needed within communities during the early stages of the pandemic;
- it was vital to maintain the levels of response/engagement which had been shown by third sector organisations and communities during the early stages of the pandemic in particular but the structures to enable this to happen were not currently in place and this needed to be progressed;
- there was a need for a focus on the relationship between Community Planning Partnerships and Local Committees in future, including the development of formal co-ordination and reporting arrangements;
- there had to be a strong focus on the creation of a future culture of interdependency across the area within an established Highland framework in order to be able to attract inward investment at all levels; and
- it was important to recognise the strong links between this report and the previous item on medium-term financial planning.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** progress made to develop the fourth strand of 'Future Highlands' which was 'place' and **AGREED** the Strategy for SPP4 at Appendix 1 of the report;
- (ii) **AGREED** the approach to SPP4, including the Place Based Framework, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- (iii) **NOTED** that this meant it would underpin the approach to Council service delivery, service planning and area reviews in the future;
- (iv) **AGREED** that Officers should seek Community Planning Partners' adoption of the Place Based Vision, Values and eight step process as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to transform how different organisations worked together for communities;
- (v) **NOTED** that this approach with Partners would build on the discussions with Members in the Member Seminar in May 2021 on supporting community ownership and the Member Seminar in August 2021 on improving community planning;
- (vi) **NOTED** the Partnership approach being adopted to lead on economic recovery, connectivity and visitor management and the actions and next steps outlined; and
- (vii) **NOTED** that further updates on all five Strategic Partnership Priorities would be brought to future Council meetings.

11. COP26 and Net Zero Update Gluasad air Gnàth-shìde às dèidh COP 26

Declaration of Interests – Mr D Rixson declared non-financial interests in this item as the Council Representative on both the Lochaber Environmental Group and the Lochaber Housing Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/35/21 dated 22 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in relation to the action currently being undertaken by the Council which focused on ‘reduce, reuse and recycle’, this now had to also include ‘react’;
- the Council already had ambitious targets in place but it was essential now to ensure that Action Plans were developed and adapted where necessary and that all opportunities were recognised and pursued in future;
- new technology was already in place and waiting to be trialled, including hydrogen production and decarbonisation of the heavy fleet, and it would be essential to also focus on replacement heating schemes across the Highland area;
- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers concerned for the production of this report;
- it was most definitely the case that Local Government would be seen as the ‘implementers’ in future and this role could not be overstated;
- it would be imperative to align current local action with national targets as what was happening in the Highlands would be of vital importance to both Scotland and the wider UK;
- the setting of ‘milestones’ within a clear Action Plan and the adoption of a project management approach would be key to future successes;
- there was a vital need for increased communication and engagement with communities, and especially young people, across a range of issues;
- a further meeting of the Climate Change Working Group would be held in January and it was anticipated that a report would be submitted to the full Council thereafter;
- onshore wind investment had the potential for significant change in terms of revenue and capital gains so it was imperative that all opportunities in that respect were pursued;
- it was inevitable that prices would rise sharply as reserves from oil and gas fields were depleted so there had to be a redoubling of efforts to avoid the worst consequences of fuel poverty and this would include supporting the switch to hydrogen as quickly as possible and the phasing out of carbon based fuels from Council housing;
- a managed transition, with adequate resources, would be key and there had to be a strong focus on learning from the best examples within other countries;
- in terms of nature based solutions, there was a need to take account of the Scottish Government’s Pollinator Strategy;
- planning guidance in relation to aquaculture had to be enhanced and/or strengthened whenever and wherever possible;
- Local Authorities now had the opportunity to take advantage of the current low interest rate position in terms of accessing funding for retrospective work

required on older properties and also in terms of ensuring that future house building encompassed all aspects of new requirements from the outset, such as the inclusion of solar panels;

- in relation to the current statutory obligation on Local Authorities to reach net zero, assurances were sought that the current Administration would not seek reductions or efficiencies in staff numbers as part of reaching that target;
- it had to be recognised that there would be significant initial costs in terms of managing a joint transition;
- in terms of climate messaging, there was a need to achieve a more balanced Highland landscape in respect of woodland;
- it would be crucial to engage with young people on climate change issues, including through teaching in schools where possible;
- there was concern about older people who often found the potential scale of the changes needed very confusing and as such it would be vital to be clear about what exactly was needed and the associated timescales;
- joint working with communities and other organisations/partners would be crucial in terms of future action to be taken;
- it was suggested that the main considerations should centre on what would happen if action was not taken now;
- in terms of carbon capture, there had to be a strong and detailed focus on restoring/rewilding the seabed with seagrass;
- it would be imperative to listen to the solutions as well as the problems and to aim for 'zero' as opposed to 'net zero'; and
- in response to the issue which had been raised in relation to staff numbers, it was highlighted that the Administration continued to preserve jobs and avoid compulsory redundancies across the Council.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** the outcomes arising from COP26;
- (ii) **AGREED** the recommended approach to the development of a net zero strategy and action plan, including clear targets and performance indicators, as set out in section 6 and Appendix 2 of the report;
- (iii) **AGREED** that the Climate Change Action Plan would be brought back to Council for approval;
- (iv) **AGREED** that a programme management approach would be taken to delivering the Action Plan with the high-level programme overseen by Council and the detail of individual thematic workstreams reported to the Climate Change Working Group and approved at the relevant strategic committees and Boards, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report;
- (v) **NOTED** the intention to develop a structured and pro-active communications strategy and plan to support the Council's Climate Action activity and roll out carbon literacy training and a series of seminars for staff and Members in 2022;
- (vi) **AGREED** the Transformation Fund should continue to be used to ensure resources in the Climate Change team were sufficient to provide the strategic leadership required as well as to support delivery against the identified themes; and
- (vii) **AGREED** that additional external funding was also required in order to fully deliver the Council's duties and endorse Cosla's statement for additional funding to tackle the climate emergency.

12. Discretionary Fuel Support Fund

There had been circulated Report No. HC/36/21 dated 25 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

Declarations of Interest –

Mr D Rixson and Mr A Christie declared non-financial interests in this item as the Council Representative on the Lochaber Housing Association and the General Manager of the Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau 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 their involvement.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the potential implications of the expected rise in energy prices (including forecasts that gas bills in particular could be expected to double in the Spring) were truly shocking and the Council had to do all that it could to help mitigate the worst effects of this situation wherever and whenever possible;
- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers in the outstanding Benefits Team within the Council for the work which continued to be undertaken in this regard;
- the Council had to address issues in relation to retrofitting and insulation within its houses as a priority and there was also an urgent need to commence lobbying activity with both the UK and Scottish Governments as this situation would also apply to private homes;
- it was important to acknowledge the funding of £1m for the Highland area which had come from the Scottish Government already and to welcome the £2m from Council reserves which would be used to tackle these issues in such extraordinary circumstances;
- the expected removal of the cap on energy prices in the Spring would only make this situation even worse and this was extremely worrying;
- a strong focus on alternative ways to power Council buildings in future, including a study of energy efficiency and how energy was currently used, was imperative and had to now be prioritised;
- it was known already that there were problems associated with the National Grid and they would have to be addressed in a relatively short time if any improvements were to be put in place;
- the harsh reality was that many people across the Highlands were already having to make decisions on whether they could 'heat or eat' and it had to be recognised that this was having a severe impact on young children within these households which had been exacerbated by the pandemic;
- it should be noted that those who were currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Allowance could make a decision to pass this on to their local Citizens' Advice Bureau so that it could be transferred to those in most need;
- the terms of the report which had been presented was an excellent example of joint working between organisations and as such was warmly welcomed;
- it had been proved that the worry caused by increased debt and fuel poverty had a resultant and detrimental effect on both physical and mental health;
- it was anticipated that Council, NHS Highland and Third Sector services would be impacted in the coming months as a result of the consequences of this situation;
- it was imperative that no-one in need was 'left behind' as a result of fuel poverty as it was considered to be a basic right that everyone was able to

- have enough heat for their home;
- everyone had a responsibility to encourage those who needed help to come forward to access the appropriate services; and
- in view of the levels of energy produced in Scotland, it was completely unacceptable and shocking that any resident should find themselves facing the current levels of fuel poverty.

Decision

The Council **NOTED**:-

- (i) that the Scottish Government had made available £25m flexible funding to local authorities for the purposes of providing support for residents in respect of winter 2021/22. The Council's allocation from the Scottish Government was confirmed at £1.019m. Further information about the Scottish Government's Winter Support Fund was provided in Section 7 of the report;
- (ii) local authorities were being guided to adopt intersectional and wellbeing approaches when deciding how to support residents this winter. This included helping to alleviate overlapping disadvantage and to support marginalised groups, those experiencing homelessness – including those with no recourse to public funds, assistance with housing costs and other essential items;
- (iii) local authorities should consider cash-first approaches but had discretion to consider other appropriate methods of provision. A cash-first approach meant making payments of money to eligible residents by bank transfer and other means;
- (iv) the Scottish Government's guidance included that local authorities may want to consider providing financial assistance to households at risk of self-disconnecting due to financial hardship, ie when a household stopped using gas/electricity/energy entirely due to affordability. This may apply where a household paid in advance for energy – such as pre-payment meter users and those reliant on physical fuel deliveries, eg oil and LPG users. Consideration should also be given to households who were at risk of self-rationing their energy due to financial hardship, ie limiting energy use to less than was required to meet their needs in an effort to save money or prevent unmanageable debt. This may apply regardless of fuel type or payment method; and
- (v) it was anticipated that £0.020m would be required from this fund for the provision of housing for those with no recourse to public funds.

And, **AGREED**:

- (i) to make a one-off non-repayable payment of £180 per household to all Highland residents in receipt of means-tested council tax reduction as at 30 November 2021. At the time of writing this report, 16,440 council taxpayers were receiving council tax reduction and while there would be some movement in the number of households that would be eligible as at 30 November 2021, it was not anticipated to be significant;
- (ii) that a budget of £2.960m be provided for this purpose comprising £0.999m from the Winter Support Fund, with the required balance being drawn from the Council's reserves;
- (iii) for payments to be made to those eligible for a discretionary fuel support payment by March 2022; and
- (iv) that £0.020m be allocated from the £1.019m Winter Support Fund in anticipation of the costs associated with housing those with no recourse to public funds.

Additional Items

'Scotland Loves Local' Awards - at this point in the meeting, the congratulations of the Council were conveyed to Nairn BID, Nairn Community & Arts Centre, Green Hive and Nairn Bowling Club who had been awarded first place in the Climate Town Category of the first 'Scotland Loves Local' Awards for the work which had been undertaken in relation to driving down CO2 emissions.

Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place – it was noted that Mrs Carron McDiarmid was shortly to leave the Council and in this regard the grateful thanks of all Members were conveyed to her in respect of the contribution that she had made to the work of the Council over many years.

13. **Redesign Board – Property Asset Rationalisation Cuibhreannachadh So-mhaoin Seilbhe**

Declarations of Interest – the following Members declared non-financial interests 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 interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion – Mrs M Paterson (Director of both the Puffin Pool and the Highland Football Academy), Mr T Heggie (Director of High Life Highland) and Mr K Gowans (on the basis that a close family member was employed by High Life Highland).

Mr A Christie declared a financial interest as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/37/21 dated 9 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Property and Housing.

In this regard, there had also been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Redesign Board held on 8 November 2021 which were **APPROVED**.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it should be noted that this report represented the next stage of the property asset rationalisation process which would see the Council move forward with a slimmer property portfolio. As such, Appendix 1 was a starting point but it was assumed that all Council buildings would be under consideration, including the Headquarters building, and that there would be full property reviews before final proposals were presented to the full Council for approval;
- it was the case that there were already too many buildings in Council ownership and this had to change, not least in line with the anticipated new ways of working in future following the pandemic;
- it was felt that there had been no consideration within the report of place based impacts and this would be crucial in terms of identifying suitable buildings for closure. In particular, the benefits of closing the Tain Service Point and the Tain Social Work Office were questionable in relation to operational efficiencies;
- further detail was needed on the seven new Manager posts which had been created to oversee this process/manage savings, specifically in terms of how this would be taken forward;
- in respect of the Dingwall buildings which had been listed in the report, it was suggested that future proposals in this respect should be considered on a holistic basis as opposed to single issues;

- the fact that Council buildings were now being catalogued and aligned to the 'net zero' target was welcomed but it was reiterated that the Headquarters building needed to be added to the current list as it was one of the most energy intense buildings on the Council estate and represented the opportunity for significant revenue to be achieved through sale/development of the site;
- the proposal to close the High Life Highland building on Ardross Street and relocate staff to the Town House was questioned, not least because it appeared to be in contrast to other proposals in respect of the Town House;
- there was concern as to the relocation of the significant number of staff in Dingwall and as such there was a need for a detailed plan to be in place prior to any action being taken in this regard;
- it had to be clarified that there were no proposals for any change to be made to the civic area of the Town House;
- confirmation was needed that there would be a Service Point in Tain as it was an extremely important and much valued part of the Service Point network across the Highlands;
- Thurso Burgh Chambers had now been confirmed as a Common Good building so it was expected that it would now be treated in the same way as the Inverness Town House;
- there was concern in relation to the staffing proposals for the Town House, particularly in view of its importance to the City Centre; and
- for a number of reasons, including the potential for redevelopment of the site and the associated savings and also the fact that it was one of the largest and most energy intensive buildings, the Council Headquarters Building should be added to the list in scope for review along with the other offices which had been identified within Appendix 1 of the report.

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

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr P Saggars, moved that, in addition to the recommendations, the Council Headquarters Building should be added to the list set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 45 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 6 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr G Adam, Mr C Aitken, Mr B Allan, Mr R Balfour, Mrs J Barclay, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs M Davidson, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr C Fraser, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr J Gordon, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Ms E Knox, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr A MacInnes, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr C Macleod, Mr D Macpherson, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie and Ms J Tilt.

For the Amendment

Mr J Bruce, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D MacKay, Mr S Mackie, Mr J McGillivray and Mr P Saggars.

Decision

The Council **APPROVED**:-

- (i) the list of offices in scope for review and potential rationalisation as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- (ii) the strategic approach to the review and rationalisation of the Council's Office Portfolio as set out in the report.

14. Highland Council Local Government Elections – 5 May 2022 Taghadh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd 2022

There had been circulated Report No. HC/38/21 dated 21 November 2021 by the Chief Executive/Returning Officer.

Decision

The Council **AGREED**:-

- (i) the resources required by the Returning Officer to run the Local Government Election 2022 for Highland Council;
- (ii) to budget for the Local Government Elections in 2027 on an annual recurring basis and to hold this in earmarked reserves as had been the case in previous years; and
- (iii) that the Returning Officer should continue to be entitled to make amendments to polling places of the Council approved Polling Scheme of 2019 outside the compulsory review period.

15. Review of UK Parliamentary Constituencies: Initial Proposals Co-chomhairle mu Ath-sgrùdadh air Crìochan Roinnean-taghaidh Pàrlamaideach na RA

There had been circulated Report No. HC/39/21 dated 9 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** to delegate the submission of a response to the Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance, in the following terms:-

The Highland Council rejects the proposals and seeks special status in line with the Scottish Islands in order to reflect the unique geography and demography of the Highlands.

Specifically, to make reference to the following issues raised at the meeting -

- the Highland area was the same size as Belgium;
- Skye and Raasay in particular should be treated the same as other Scottish Islands;
- the Ardnamurchan Peninsula should stay within the Highland area (not Argyll);
- there was no relationship between the majority of the Badenoch & Strathspey area and Elgin;
- there was similarly no relationship between the Culloden & Ardersier Ward and Elgin; and
- there should be no change to the Wester Ross area/boundary.

16. Scottish Government Education Reform Consultation – Highland Council Response
Co-chomhairle – Ath-sgrùdadh air Ùghdarras Theisteanasan na h-Alba agus Foghlam Alba

There had been circulated Report No. HC/40/21 dated 30 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, and in agreeing to homologate the response as detailed in the report, it was however highlighted that this one of the most important issues to face the Council, not least in terms of the delivery of local empowerment, and it was vital to get it correct for the long term.

As such, there was a need for future consultation to be undertaken on a much more widespread basis, involving as much representation as possible and including further input from Elected Members, Head Teachers and Teaching Unions in particular.

Decision

The Council:-

- (i) **NOTED** the approach taken to incorporate stakeholder input into the Council's response; and
- (ii) **AGREED** to homologate the Council's submission at Appendix 1 of the report.

17. Chief Social Work Officer Report: 2020/21
Aithisg Àrd-Oifigear Obrach Sòisealta

Declarations of Interest – Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland 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 his involvement.

Ms L Munro (as an employee of Carr Gomm Self Directed Support) also declared a financial interest but, having applied the test, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/41/21 dated 9 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers concerned for the report and the level of work undertaken to date;
- it had to be stated that Covid-19 had affected everyone in different ways across the Highlands and most especially those persons who were considered to be vulnerable;
- in terms of future challenges, including from the ongoing pandemic, there had to be a focus on delivering care in conjunction with local communities through locally based services which could be accessed by locally based families as and when needed;
- in respect of Residential Services, it had been stated within the report that 'whilst there was national guidance relating to adult residential settings, little focus was given on child settings' but it was queried as to whether this was accurate as it did appear that there was guidance online in this regard which

had been regularly updated. In this respect, further information was also sought on what specific issues had arisen in the Highland area in relation to child settings which required more guidance;

- with specific reference to Out of Care Placements, there was some disappointment at the emphasis on the financial position in particular as it was felt that the focus should be on the improvements and changes felt/experienced by young people themselves as this had been the key aim when the issue had been discussed/debated by the Council previously;
- it was important to reflect on all the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic and their families across the area;
- in terms of self-directed support/loss of respite care, it was hoped that the report which was to be submitted to the February meeting of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Committee would provide a focus on proposals which could restore respite for young carers in some way;
- with specific reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it was felt that integrating this and embedding the principles within other child protection measures could provide a reduction in adverse childhood experiences and have a chance of then reducing adverse adult experiences;
- thanks should be conveyed to the Care at Home staff across the Highlands for the work which had been undertaken during the pandemic in particular;
- it was hoped that the increase in the foster care approach could be sustained;
- a lot of work had been undertaken within local communities during the pandemic and it was suggested that the outcomes from such work should be taken forward as a priority in conjunction with wider community groups wherever possible, including the establishment of a Youth Worker Development Group which could benefit young carers in particular;
- further information was needed on whether there could be increased liaison with Housing Officers and Police Scotland in regard to early intervention in neighbour disputes which often currently led to people having to leave their homes;
- there was a need to work more closely generally with Third Sector Groups in the future, including in terms of addressing increasing mental health/wellbeing issues across the area; and
- the increase in domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic was extremely concerning, especially when young children were often involved, and there was a need for further information on what types of help and support were available in this regard.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the issues raised in the Officer Report and the implications for Social Work and Social Care services within Highland Council and NHS Highland as detailed in the report.

18. Highland Armed Forces Community Covenant Update Aithisg Bhliadhna – Com-pàirteachas Cùmhnant nam Feachdan Armaichte

Declaration of Interest - Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland 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 his involvement.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/42/21 dated 12 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- thanks should be conveyed to the Officers responsible for this extremely comprehensive, wide ranging and forward looking report;
- specific work undertaken in relation to both housing and education was also warmly welcomed;
- the excellent work which had resulted in the Council being awarded Gold Status in respect of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme reflected the thoroughly professional submission which had been made by Officers and was a huge achievement;
- it was felt that it would be appropriate for the Convener to write to the 5 Officers who had been involved in this work to specifically convey the thanks of all Members of the Council; and
- it was disappointing that the Poppy Scotland Office in Strothers Lane in Inverness had now been closed as the staff had been a point of contact not just for Poppy Scotland but for all service charities and as such the thanks of the Council was conveyed to them in this respect.

Decision

The Council **NOTED**:-

- (i) the considerable progress made with partners across a range of activities which supported the Armed Forces Community Covenant;
- (ii) the creation of a specific Council Armed Forces Reservist Policy;
- (iii) the Council's achievement in being awarded the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award;
- (iv) the introduction of external funding to help Community Planning Partnerships to strengthen their relationship with their Armed Forces communities; and
- (v) the introduction of the Armed Forces Bill which would establish the Covenant requirements in statute.

It was also **AGREED** that the Convener should send a letter of congratulations to the 5 Officers involved – Ms D Ferguson, Ms L Kinnear, Ms J Henderson, Mr J McCreath and Ms J Lenihan - for the outstanding work which had been undertaken on this matter.

19. High Life Highland High Life na Gàidhealtachd

Mr K Gowans declared a non-financial interest in this item on the basis that a close family member was employed by High Life Highland but, having applied the test in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement.

Ms L Munro declared a non-financial interest as a Director of High Life Highland but, having applied the test, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement.

Following the resignation of Mr B Thompson, the following nominations were put forward at the meeting in respect of the appointment of a new Director of High Life Highland –

Mr K Gowans
Mrs I Campbell

On a vote being taken, Mr Gowans received 12 votes and Mrs Campbell received 33 votes – with 1 abstention - the votes having been cast as follows:-

Votes for Mr Gowans

Mr B Allan, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Dr I Cockburn, Ms S Fanet, Mr C Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Ms E Knox, Mr D Louden, Mr A MacInnes, Mr G MacKenzie and Mr K Rosie.

Votes for Mrs Campbell

Mr G Adam, Mr C Aitken, Mr R Balfour, Mrs J Barclay, Mr J Bruce, Mrs C Caddick, Mrs I Campbell, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr M Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mr T Heggie, Mr A Henderson, Mr B Lobban, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKinnon, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Mr C Munro, Ms L Munro, Mrs M Paterson, Mr D Rixson, Mrs F Robertson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr P Saggors and Ms J Tilt.

Abstention

Mr A Jarvie

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the appointment of Mrs I Campbell as a Director of High Life Highland.

20. Timetable of Meetings 2022
Clàr-ama Choinneamhan 2022

The Council **AGREED** as follows:-

Sutherland County Committee – meeting to be changed from 21 February to 28 February 2022

Housing & Property Committee – additional meeting to be held on 20 January 2022

South Planning Applications Committee – meeting to be changed from 3 May to 28 April 2022

Gaelic Committee – meeting to be changed from 21 February to 2 March 2022

Badenoch & Strathspey Area Committee – additional meeting to be held on 21 December 2021.

21. 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 28 October 2021 was available on the Council's Website.

The meeting ended at 5.15pm.