

The Highland Council
No. 2 2023/2024

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 9 March 2023 at 10.35 am.

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

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Interim Chief Executive
Interim Depute Chief Executive
Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning
Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care
Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Preliminaries

The Convener highlighted that Young Carers Action Day was to take place on 15 March 2023 and this year's theme was "Make Time for Young Carers". He took this opportunity to thank young carers and young adult carers in Highland who supported friends and family with their care needs. He acknowledged that caring for someone could be very isolating, worrying and stressful. For young carers and young adult carers their caring role could negatively impact on their experiences and outcomes in education and have a long lasting effect on their life chances. He asked that the Council formally recognise all the organisations in Highland which supported young carers and young adult carers and to encourage these carers to apply for a Scottish Young Carers Grant.

The Council so **AGREED**.

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Baldrey and Mrs H Crawford.

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

The Council **NOTED** the following Declarations of Interest:-

Item 7 iv – Mr C Munro and Ms L Niven
Item 12 – Mr R Bremner
Item 20 – Mr D Louden

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

Item 5 – Mr A Christie and Mr Gregg
Item 7 iii – Mr L Fraser
Item 7 vii – Mr D Macpherson, Mr D Millar and Mrs M Reid
Item 11 – Mr K Gowans and Mrs J Hendry
Item 13 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
Item 14 – Mr A Christie, Mr K Gowans, Mr D Gregg and Mrs J Hendry
Item 20 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
Item 21 – Mrs M Reid

3. **Presentation - Director of Public Health – Annual Report Taisbeanadh – Stiùiriche Slàinte Phoblaich – Aithisg Bhliadhnail**

Dr Tim Allison, NHS Highland's Director of Public Health provided a presentation introducing his Annual Report (HC/2/23) dated 27 February 2023 (which had been circulated separately). The theme of this year's report highlighted the importance of preventative action to tackle health inequalities and how it could prevent the need for more intensive and expensive treatment.

He highlighted that prevention was better than cure and emphasised that preventative work could successfully impact on poor health outcomes whilst supporting sustainable health and social care services. The report demonstrated how wider issues such as environment, housing and employment could influence health and this highlighted the

importance that prevention was incorporated as part of future service planning. The report provided examples of how prevention protected and improved health outcomes and, as an example, he highlighted the great achievements in tackling lung cancer. Prevention also provided a return on investment and had potential to deliver long and short term savings. A number of case studies were also provided to showcase the local examples of how prevention could deliver savings and improve health outcomes.

The Council **NOTED** the presentation.

4. Confirmation of Minutes Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meetings of the Council held on 8 December 2022 and 2 March 2023 (Special Meeting) as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately.

Members' attention was drawn to Item 10 of the Minute of the Council held on 8 December 2022 regarding the appointment of a Member to the Highland Housing Alliance. However, it transpired that the vacancy was in fact for the Communities Housing Trust and the Council **AGREED** that this appointment be remitted back to the Housing and Property Committee.

The Council otherwise **APPROVED** the Minutes of Meetings of the Council held on 8 December 2022 and 2 March 2023.

5. Minutes of Meetings of Committees Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan Chomataidhean

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

**Mr A Christie - as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland
Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been submitted for confirmation as correct records, for information as regards delegated business and for approval as appropriate, the Minutes of Meetings of Committees as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately as undernoted:-

Easter Ross Area Committee	23 January 2023
Nairnshire Committee	23 January 2023
Lochaber Area Committee	24 January 2023
Sutherland County Committee	24 January 2023
Housing and Property Committee	26 January 2023
Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee	30 January 2023
Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee	30 January 2023
Black Isle Committee	31 January 2023
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	2 February 2023
Badenoch and Strathspey Committee	6 February 2023
*Caithness Committee	6 February 2023
*Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee	9 February 2023
Special Meeting of Badenoch and Strathspey Committee	13 February 2023
City of Inverness Area Committee	13 February 2023
Education Committee	15 February 2023
Pensions Committee	16 February 2023

Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee	20 February 2023
Corporate Resources Committee	22 February 2023
Communities and Place Committee	23 February 2023
Special Meeting of Isle of Skye and Rassay Committee	27 February 2023

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

***Caithness Committee: 6 February 2023**

Starred Item 8 – Area Roads Capital Programme 2023/24

Speaking in support of the proposal that the Council write to the Scottish Government highlighting the urgent need for additional Highland capital roads investment, particularly in Caithness, a number of Councillors highlighted the dangerous condition of the roads in the area and there were fears that they would deteriorate further. This was a matter of major concern to constituents, business, public services and, in terms of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, the Council had a duty to maintain roads but roads currently at risk were falling further down the priority list. To stop damage and compensation claims investment was vital.

AGREED that the Council write to the Scottish Government highlighting the urgent need for additional Highland capital roads investment, but particularly in Caithness.

***Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee: 9 February 2023**

Starred Item 5 – Appointment to Adult Protection Committee

AGREED Mr B Boyd be appointed to serve on the Adult Protection Committee.

At this stage, in relation to Item 12 of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 2 February 2023, a Point of Order was raised regarding the governance arrangements for the variation of the existing tariff for the charging of Electrical Vehicles. The Committee had agreed to delegate this authorisation to the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Economy and Environment in consultation with the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Economy and Infrastructure and Climate Change Committees and it was contended this was in conflict with the Scheme of Delegation where such decisions should be taken by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee as a whole. However, having reviewed the decision process, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that officers were confident that due process had been followed and the decision was valid and competent.

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

- i. **NOTED** - Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 23 September 2022;
- ii. **NOTED** Community Planning Board held on 7 October 2022;
- iii. **NOTED** Recruitment Panel: Interim Chief Executive held on 11 January 2023 and **APPROVED** Minutes of the Recruitment Panel: Interim Chief Executive held on 19 January 2023; and
- iv. **NOTED** Recruitment Panel: Chief Executive held on 23 January 2023 and **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Recruitment Panel: Chief Executive held on 16 February 2023.

6. Question Time
Àm Ceiste

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

Member Questions

(1) Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

“Please could the Leader of the Council detail all correspondence he has entered into since 1st November 2022 with the Scottish Government to hasten the long overdue announcement of the Learning Estate Investment Programme funding decision with regard to Beauly Primary, Dunvegan Primary, Tornagrain Primary, Park Primary and St Clements School including a summary of any replies received?”

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if the last formal letter sent four months ago was a satisfactory action for the pupils, parents and staff of the schools involved.

In response, assurance was given that informal discussions had taken place to try and move this matter along but the information had not been forthcoming.

(2) Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

“In September 2022 the Council agreed the Workforce and People Strategy which indicated that there was a requirement to remove 500 posts from the establishment. The Budget papers on 2nd March make reference to the work being ongoing. Please could the Leader list in detail the posts examined as part of the process to date and the decision on whether the post should be deleted?”

In terms of a supplementary question it was asked if the necessary information could be made available to all Members on a confidential basis.

In response, confirmation was provided that this information would be shared on a restricted internal site to ensure confidentiality.

(3) Mr D Gregg

To the Leader of the Council

“In June 2022, the Council agreed 2 papers on short term lets. Could the Council give details of how it has engaged with stakeholders in the local short term let sector to make them aware of how these papers will affect them?”

In terms of a supplementary question, further press releases concerning this matter were requested to help increase public awareness.

In response, it was confirmed that this would be further considered and discussed with the relevant strategic chair to determine the feasibility of this.

(4) Mr A MacDonald

To the Leader of the Council

“Ten weeks ago, at the Council meeting on the 8th December the Council accepted my Motion that the Highland Council policy for Onshore Wind Turbine Development be reviewed as a matter of urgency, that the Council would ask the Scottish Government to increase guidance from £5000 (plus inflation) per MW to 5% of gross revenue and with a useful amendment from Karl Rosie to consider other renewable energy opportunities at the same time.

May I ask the Leader to inform the Chamber of all the activity, meetings and other details that have taken place to further this remarkable opportunity for the Communities of the Highlands.”

In terms of a supplementary question an update on the Council’s policy on onshore wind turbines was requested.

In response, it was agreed that an update could be provided.

(5) Mr R Mackintosh

To the Chair of Housing and Property Committee

“There are parts of Head Quarters building which cannot be adequately heated, there are areas where the heating cannot be turned off, and there are radiators which are left on in empty rooms.

Given the need to ensure that all our staff work in appropriate conditions, and the urgent need to reduce energy consumption across the Council estate, what is the Administration doing to maximise energy efficiency here, in HQ?”

There was no supplementary question.

(6) Ms K Willis

To the Chair of Housing and Property Committee

“A comprehensive Council land ownership record will enable an assessment of land available for Council owned renewable energy development and inform carbon sequestration opportunities, to help Council meet its net zero and biodiversity targets and to access funding.

Does Highland Council have a register of Council owned land, including unused or derelict land and property, and garage estate, and if so, please can you share it with us?”

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if it was possible for Members to have access to further information maintained on Council systems.

In response, it was confirmed that Members could be given links to the appropriate systems and that Housing and Property staff could help them with accessing this information.

(7) Mr C Ballance

To the Leader of the Council

“In other areas of Scotland, local authorities have committed to using Shared Prosperity Funding to replace European Social Funds. Highland Council have not, as yet made any commitment to using this or other funds, or to commit to any level of budget.

Third Sector organisations offering Employability Services prior to Dec 2022 have been added to the Employability services framework. However, levels of service and categories of service have been allocated to providers without any consultation or agreement. Some services believe they could and have been working in different categories but have been unable to have any alterations made. Additionally, the number of hours of service have been restricted. It appears that no-one else can be added to the framework nor can changes be made by those on the framework.

Most damaging of all, the Council have moved from a grant funded service to a spot purchase service. This means services will only be paid for, for hours delivered to a client who is referred from the Council Employability Team. However, it is not possible for third sector organisations to employ staff on this basis, other than through zero hour contracts.

The Council organised two forums for employability service providers last year and various options were proposed. However there seems to have been no movement.

Will you commit to meeting with representatives of the Highland Third Sector Interface this month to seek an urgent resolution to this problem?”

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if the Leader of the Council would commit to meeting with the Highland Third Sector Interface that month.

In response, the Leader indicated that he could meet with Mr Ballance to determine how the work of Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI), which was hugely valued by the Council and communities, could be evaluated. The Leader of the Council commended the HTSI for the important work they did and stated that he would consider whether a meeting that month was feasible and respond to Mr Ballance.

(8) Mr M Baird

To the Leader of the Council

“If there is sufficient staff to handle the Licencing and Energy Performing Certification available when this requirement of Short Term Lets resume later this year.”

There was no supplementary question.

(9) Mr A Graham

To the Leader of the Council

“Please provide a schedule of all articles which are under consideration for removal from Inverness Town House, including but not restricted to portraits, photographs, wall plaques, shields, statues, busts, furniture, chairs, tables, and other articles.”

There was no supplementary question.

(10) Ms M Nolan

To the Leader of the Council

“To detail the responsibilities of the Senior Strategic Chairs, excluding those responsibilities undertaken in their capacities as Strategic Committee Chairs.”

In terms of a supplementary question, examples of where Strategic Committee Chairs had led on cross-cutting directorate themes were requested.

In response, it was clarified that this information was not immediately available and the matter would need to be taken up after the meeting.

**7. Notices of Motion
Brathan Glusaid**

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

- (i) With the drive to net zero very prominent in our minds it was disappointing to learn that at the E&I committee it was agreed that the electricity charges for EV charging would increase from £0.30p to £0.70p per unit. This increase equates to a rise of 130%.

It is therefore not surprising that this has resulted in an outcry by EV users across the Highlands and serves as a significant disincentive to promote the use and indeed the purchase of electric vehicles in favour of fossil fuel powered vehicles, going against the ethos of promoting the use of green transport and the green agenda. That being the case this council commits to overturning that decision and instead imposing an increase in line with inflation of 10%.

Signed: Mr R Gale, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs A MacLean

The Convener explained that the purpose of this motion was to overturn a decision made by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee but the correct mechanism to challenge this decision would have been to submit a Notice of Amendment (Standing Order 13). Therefore, as the correct process had not been followed and in accordance with Standing Order 12, he ruled that the motion was not competent.

Mr R Gale, seconded by Mr A Christie, **MOVED** to suspend Standing Orders to permit debate of this motion.

Mr B Lobban, seconded by Mr R Bremner, moved as an **AMENDMENT** not to suspend Standing Orders.

On a vote being taken, the motion received 28 votes and the amendment received 36 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Nolan, Ms S Rawlings, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis

For the amendment: Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie

Decision:

The Council **NOTED** that this motion had been ruled not competent by the Convener in accordance with Standing Order 12.

- (ii) The horrendous spate of accidents and resultant fatalities on the single carriageway sections of the A9 has brought misery to families from across the country and beyond our Council area. Additionally, the failure to upgrade this vital transport link has a huge, negative, economic impact to the economy of the whole Highlands.

As a result, this Council deplores the decision of the Scottish Government to delay the dualling of the A9 between Inverness and Perth and asks that the Transport Minister immediately publishes a revised timetable for the completion of the works.

Signed: Mr B Lobban, Mr R Jones

Mr B Lobban, seconded by Mr C Aitken, **MOVED** that motions (ii) and (v) be amalgamated as follows:

The horrendous spate of accidents and resultant fatalities on the single carriageway sections of the A9 has brought misery to families from across the country and beyond our Council area. Additionally, the failure to upgrade this vital transport link has a huge, negative, economic impact to the economy of the whole Highlands.

As a result, this Council deplores the decision of the Scottish Government to delay the dualling of the A9 between Inverness and Perth and asks that the Transport Minister immediately publishes a revised timetable for the completion of the works.

Council agrees with SNP MSP Fergus Ewing that the Scottish Government's failure to dual the A9 by 2025 amounts to "a betrayal of the Highlands," and supports his call for a parliamentary enquiry into the handling of the A9 improvement programme.

A summary of the motion was provided during which reference was made to the appalling death rate on the A9 over the last 12 months as well as the economic impact of the road, as a key transportation infrastructure route, relied upon by the whole of the Highlands. Reference was also made to the importance of a parliamentary enquiry. It was suggested that there was a need for urgency and this should be achieved by focussing on implementing small immediate safety improvements following engagement with local communities to determine black spot areas. However, it was indicated that it was anticipated that the revised timetable would include planned safety improvement works.

A request was made for a further revision to the Motion but this was not accepted.

Mr C Ballance, seconded by Mr R MacIntosh, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, to amalgamate motions (ii) and (v) and to add the following sentence to the amalgamated motion: 'the Council calls on the Scottish Government to initiate local safety measures as soon as possible'.

On a vote being taken, the motion received 63 votes, and the amendment 3 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr C Aitken, Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr P Logue, Mr D Louden, Mr A MacDonald, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr C Munro, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Ms M Nolan, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Ms S Rawlings, Mrs M Reid, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart

For the amendment: Mr C Ballance, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K Willis

Decision:

The Council **AGREED** to amalgamate Motions (ii) and (v) as follows:

The horrendous spate of accidents and resultant fatalities on the single carriageway sections of the A9 has brought misery to families from across the country and beyond our Council area. Additionally, the failure to upgrade this vital transport link has a huge, negative, economic impact to the economy of the whole Highlands.

As a result, this Council deplores the decision of the Scottish Government to delay the dualling of the A9 between Inverness and Perth and asks that the Transport Minister immediately publishes a revised timetable for the completion of the works.

Council agrees with SNP MSP Fergus Ewing that the Scottish Government's failure to dual the A9 by 2025 amounts to "a betrayal of the Highlands," and supports his call for a parliamentary enquiry into the handling of the A9 improvement programme.

(iii) Local contracts for local Contractors

Transparency Statement: Mr L Fraser made Transparency Statement in respect of this item as an electrical contractor, not involved in the renewable sector. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

Noting the anticipated increase in installing renewable generation, both by public and private bodies, and noting the requirements of Community Wealth Building that as much procurement spend should be directed locally as possible,

This Council asks the Convener of Economy and Infrastructure Committee to set up a series of meetings between the relevant officers from the Council, UHI and HIE to investigate ways of enabling Highland-based construction companies, including sole traders, to bid for renewable installation contracts, including by training in renewable installation, overcoming the financial barriers to getting MCS accreditation, and secondly to make it easier for Highland based construction businesses to tender for public body renewable contracts in the Highlands.

Signed: Mr R Mackintosh, Ms K Willis

During discussion, it was pointed out that some contractors did not have credit with suppliers to fulfil large contracts, and that it was important to be mindful of the size of some local companies and any resultant impediments they might face when bidding for contracts.

Mr R Bremner proposed amended wording, and this was accepted by Mr MacIntosh, as detailed below.

Decision:

The Council **AGREED** the following amended wording:

Local Contracts for Local Contractors

Noting the anticipated increase in installing renewable generation, both by public and private bodies, and noting the requirements of Community Wealth Building that as much procurement spend should be directed locally as possible, we recognise that the Council's programme commits to a community wealth building strategy and this is also a part of the improved net zero strategy. Furthermore, we note that the Council is second out of 32 Local Authorities in Scotland for the percentage of procurement spend for local enterprises. The Council asks the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to set up a series of meetings between the relevant officers from the Council, UHI and HIE to investigate ways of enabling Highland-based construction companies, including sole traders, to bid for renewable installation contracts, including by training in renewable installation, overcoming the financial barriers to getting MCS accreditation, and secondly to make it easier for Highland based construction businesses to tender for public body renewable contracts in the Highlands.

(iv) Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT)

Declarations of Interest: Mr C Munro and Ms L Niven declared interests in this as a Chair of a local community trust which owned a small piece of land which could potentially come under any future legislation and as a Director of Garbh Alt Community Initiative which owned land in Sutherland respectively and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, they left the meeting for this item.

This Council notes that:

Scotland's land should be a net carbon sink, removing millions of tonnes more greenhouse gases than it produces. Instead, because of the way it is used and managed, our land is a net polluter, emitting almost 8 million tonnes more CO₂ equivalent per year into the atmosphere than it removes.

Even when farming is excluded, Scotland's vast land area of moorland, mountains and peatlands is a net emitter of 500,000 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent annually.

Restoring 75% of Scotland's degraded peatland and allowing native woodland restoration to reach 20% of its maximum potential expansion in Scotland's could reduce our climate emissions by 6 MtCO₂ annually – more than is produced today by all the country's cars.

Taking bold action now to restore peatlands at scale and enable the natural expansion of native woodlands, is critical to reach Scotland's climate targets.

The Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT) proposed by environmental NGOs, is a powerful tool to accelerate changes in land management practices and encourage practices that maximise natural carbon capture, by enabling Councils to tax large landowners based on their estimated positive or negative land carbon emissions.

A CELT will also bring in much-needed additional revenue for rural Councils, which could be used to fund local carbon reduction and nature restoration projects.

Changes in land management practices will also improve biodiversity and habitat diversity, help to mitigate flood risks, improve water quality and public health, and create many local rural jobs strengthening local communities and diversifying their economies.

This Council therefore:

1. Supports the principle of a Carbon Emissions Land Tax and recognises it as a valuable policy to create positive land management changes at pace and scale across rural Scotland.
2. Calls on the Scottish Government to include a Carbon Emissions Land Tax in the Land Reform Bill so that Scotland's land can play its full part in combatting the climate and ecological crises.
3. Agrees to become a member of the Carbon Emissions Land Tax Coalition.

Signed: Mrs T Robertson, Ms K Willis, Dr C Birt, Mrs A MacLean

A summary of the motion was provided, and it was emphasised that the motion only sought an expression of support, with the details of any policy to be developed and consulted on by the Scottish Government.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- support was voiced for the core aims of the land reform bill, and the importance of recognising public and private investment in land;
- concern was expressed about the possible burdens this tax might place on community landowners;
- it was suggested that a report be brought to the Climate Change Committee in the first instance to enable a fully informed recommendation by the full Council. As it might not be possible to prepare a report in time for the next meeting of the Committee, it was proposed that a special meeting could be convened if required;
- concern was expressed that the Council was being asked not only to endorse a principle but to also join a coalition, with insufficient detail on the responsibilities this would entail;
- the importance of tackling climate change as a priority was emphasised;
- there could be unintentional consequences, for example forcing landowners into bankruptcy, or failing to protect communities, as a result of the proposed tax. Full engagement with communities on this was vital;
- the motion provoked useful discussion and research and would benefit from further consideration prior to being agreed;
- consideration should be given to the use of planning conditions to increase the amount of tree planting beneath windfarm turbines;
- the Council was reminded that, at this stage, it was being asked to consider the principle rather than the detail of the proposal;
- the biggest landowners should pay the biggest penalties, and tax should apply equally to community and private landowners; and
- it was important to seek the cooperation of landowners on this issue.

Mrs T Robertson, seconded by Ms K Willis, **MOVED** the motion as detailed above.

Mr K Rosie, seconded by Mr D Louden, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, that Highland Council noted the core aims of the land reform Bill that were set out clearly in the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, these being: to increase diversity of landownership; to bring about changes in land use; and to create more opportunities for communities to engage in decision making about the land around them, and share in the benefits it brings. Therefore, a report would be brought to the Climate Change Committee to enable a fully informed recommendation by the full Council.

On a vote being taken, there were 18 votes for the motion, and 42 votes for the amendment, with 4 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Nolan, Ms S Rawlings, Mrs T Robertson, Ms K Willis

For the amendment: Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr P Logue, Mr D Louden, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms P Munro, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair

Abstentions: Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr M Reiss, Mr R Stewart

Decision:

Carbon Emissions Land Tax (CELT)

Highland Council **NOTED** the core aims of the land reform Bill that were set out clearly in the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, these being: to increase diversity of landownership; to bring about changes in land use; and to create more opportunities for communities to engage in decision making about the land around them, and share in the benefits it brings. Therefore, **AGREED** a report be brought to the Climate Change Committee to enable a fully informed recommendation by the full Council.

- (v) Council agrees with SNP MSP Fergus Ewing that the Scottish Government's failure to dual the A9 by 2025 amounts to "a betrayal of the Highlands," and supports his call for a parliamentary enquiry into the mishandling of the A9 improvement programme by the SNP/Green government.

Signed: Mr C Aitken, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr A MacDonald, Ms M Nolan, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs A MacLean, Ms M MacCallum

The Council **NOTED** this Motion had been amalgamated into Motion (ii).

(vi) No such Thing As Waste

Noting the decision of Communities and Place to aim to implement measures to reduce the amount of residual household waste being collected;

Noting also that every kilo diverted from the waste stream saves the Council money;

Council resolves to form a stakeholder group consisting of members from the third sector repair, and reuse network, the Highland commercial reuse sector, Council officials and Circular Communities Scotland, to agree what is needed to grow the sector and increase repair and reuse in the Highlands, reporting back on progress and recommendations to the Communities and Place Committee;

And further, Council resolves to increase its communications on what can be reused, repaired or recycled, where, with an information campaign aimed at householders, including, but not limited to, increasing uptake of the Inverness food waste collection service.

Signed: Mr C Ballance, Ms K Willis

Following a summary of the Motion, it was explained that the Council at its recent budget meeting on 2 March 2023 had agreed £275k to provide information to the public on waste minimisation and the Council also awaited the result of an application to the Recycling Improvement Fund which would inform the public of all the Council's recycling initiatives. It was therefore proposed that the Motion be amended with the last paragraph being deleted.

The proposer of the Motion was happy to agree to the amendment as it was helpful to focus the Motion on repair and reuse in order to reduce the amount of residual household waste being collected.

Reference was also made to a feasibility study that was out to tender to deliver a reuse, repurpose and recycling facility in Nairn. This would deliver green jobs and significant savings to the Council by reducing the amount of waste going to landfill. It was also intended to roll out this initiative to other sites throughout Highland and the Council's Waste team were commended for the efforts in producing the feasibility study.

Decision:-

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

Noting the decision of Communities and Place to aim to implement measures to reduce the amount of residual household waste being collected;

Noting also that every kilo diverted from the waste stream saves the Council money;

Council resolves to form a stakeholder group consisting of members from the third sector repair, and reuse network, the Highland commercial reuse sector, Council officials and Circular Communities Scotland, to agree what is needed to grow the sector and increase repair and reuse in the Highlands, reporting back on progress and recommendations to the Communities and Place Committee.

(vii) Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

**Mr D Macpherson – as a family member was a serving Road Traffic Police officer
Mr D Millar - as a family member was a serving Police officer but outwith Highland
Mrs M Reid - as a family member was a serving Police officer**

Council notes:-

- That the number of police officers in the Highlands & Island Division is at the lowest ever since 2017 to just 624 full time officers.
- The number of officers in the dedicated national road policing unit which has bases at Fort William and Dingwall, has fallen from 596 in 2014/15 to 556 in 2021/22, recognises this coincides with a 64.3% increase in Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) between 1st April 2021 and 31st December 2022. In the Highland and Islands Division has the highest deaths on the A9 in two decades.
- That for the year ending September 2022 recorded crime in Scotland excluding Coronavirus related regulations, has increased by 6%.
- The centralisation of Police Scotland has deteriorated the visibility the visibility of local Policing provision in the Highland and Islands as a result in failing to meet the increasing needs of the public.

Council agrees that the Leader of Highland Council write to the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Justice requesting an urgent review of Police Scotland resources in the Highlands and in particular the need for 24/7 police station provision to avoid delays in 101 service to restore public confidence.

Signed: Ms J McEwan, Mrs T Robertson

Following a summary of the Motion, it was highlighted that this was an important Motion given proposed changes in Police expenditure. As a result of centralisation, Police Scotland's ability to provide mutual aid across Scotland had improved as had its armed operations and counter terrorism activities. However, basic Police visibility in Highland communities had not improved to the detriment of the service provided. Police Officers were first responders to incidents/accidents and in particular the importance of traffic officers in prevention of crime and acting as a deterrent was emphasised. It was highlighted that the 101 call service was not working well and cost more money in officers time who were not familiar with the local area.

It was highlighted that the figures quoted in the Motion were not accurate as there were currently 595 officers in the Division with 17 vacancies. However, this number did not include officers who were based locally but managed centrally. Also the numbers of Police Officers involved in local policing had not changed over this period. What had changed was the way Officers were deployed locally and managed centrally. Police Scotland were undertaking a local policing strategic demand review. The Council's response to the consultation on this highlighted that it was essential that there was sufficient resource within the local policing team to be able to effectively police across the area. It was noted that the Communities and Place Committee scrutinised Police activity every six months and the next meeting of that Committee would consider a local policing plan. An Amendment to the Motion was proposed as follows:-

Council notes:-

- That the number of police officers in the Highlands & Island Division is at the lowest ever since 2017 to just 624 full time officers.
- The number of officers in the dedicated national road policing unit which has bases at Fort William and Dingwall, has fallen from 596 in 2014/15 to 556 in 2021/22, recognises this coincides with a 64.3% increase in Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) between 1st April 2021 and 31st December 2022. In the Highland and Islands Division has the highest death s on the A9 in two decades.
- That for the year ending September 2022 recorded crime in Scotland excluding Coronavirus related regulations, has increased by 6%.

- The centralisation of Police Scotland has deteriorated the visibility the visibility of local Policing provision in the Highland and Islands as a result in failing to meet the increasing needs of the public.

Council agrees that the Leader of Highland Council write to the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Justice requesting an urgent review of Police Scotland resources in the Highlands.

Other points raised in discussion were as follows:-

- the centralisation of the Police service was not working and was not providing the same level of service to local areas as it used to. In emphasising this, reference was made to speeding fines on the A9 being issued late and therefore were not enforceable and the lack of Police officers attending Community Council meetings;
- of most concern to the public was that they could not get hold of Police officers when needed and difficulty in contacting Police to report crime, given the deficiencies in the 101 call system;
- Policing had changed over the years and officers were now dealing with more mental health related incidents, suicides, missing persons. Also the number of civilian support staff in Police Scotland had reduced. There was a need for sufficient staffing in the Service and a view was expressed that Police call centres should not have been centralised;
- it was highlighted that IT and mobile technology massively increased the activity and efficiency of officers and the time taken to answer calls to the 101 call system was acceptable as was the speedy response to 999 calls;
- in terms of officer numbers, 320 officers had recently completed training and 5 probationer officers had been deployed locally. There was also 190 probationer officers due to start at the Police Scotland national training centre;
- it was emphasised that the Motion was asking for more resources for the Police and it was not a criticism of the work of the Police Service; and
- insufficient resources for the Police was a national issue.

Thereafter, Mrs J McEwan, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, **MOVED** the motion as detailed above.

Mr G MacKenzie, seconded by Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, moved an **AMENDMENT** as detailed above.

On a vote being taken, there were 27 votes for the motion, and 36 votes for the amendment, with 1 abstention, and the **AMENDMENT** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr C Aitken, Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Ms M Nolan, Ms S Rawlings, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis

For the amendment: Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr M Green, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T

MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms P Munro, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie.

Abstention: Mr R Gale

Decision:-

Council notes:-

- That the number of police officers in the Highlands & Island Division is at the lowest ever since 2017 to just 624 full time officers.
- The number of officers in the dedicated national road policing unit which has bases at Fort William and Dingwall, has fallen from 596 in 2014/15 to 556 in 2021/22, recognises this coincides with a 64.3% increase in Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) between 1st April 2021 and 31st December 2022. In the Highland and Islands Division has the highest deaths on the A9 in two decades.
- That for the year ending September 2022 recorded crime in Scotland excluding Coronavirus related regulations, has increased by 6%.
- The centralisation of Police Scotland has deteriorated the visibility the visibility of local Policing provision in the Highland and Islands as a result in failing to meet the increasing needs of the public.

Council agrees that the Leader of Highland Council write to the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Justice requesting an urgent review of Police Scotland resources in the Highlands.

8. Membership of Committees, etc Ballarachd Chomataidhean, msaa

The Council was advised that Mr A Jarvie had confirmed that he had now left the Scottish Conservative and Unionists Group. On that basis, the political make-up of the Council was now as follows:-

SNP 22/ Independent – 17/ Liberal Democrat – 15/ Scottish Conservatives – 9/ Green Party – 4/ Labour – 2/Caithness Independent - 1/Sutherland Independent – 1/Independent – 1/Inverness Independent – 1/ Non-Aligned 1

The formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees remains the same as 6/5/4/3

On that basis, the Council **AGREED** the following nominations from the Scottish Conservative and Unionists Group -

- Audit and Scrutiny Committee - Mr P Logue
- Education Committee – Mrs I MacKenzie
- Housing and Property Committee – Mr R Stewart
- Pensions Committee – Mr J Bruce
- Redesign Board – Mr P Logue

The Council also **AGREED** that Mr J Bruce replace Mrs H Crawford on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

**9. Appointment of Vice Chair of Audit and Scrutiny Committee
Cur Iar-Chathraiche an Dreuchd do Chomataidh an Sgrùdaidh**

The Council **AGREED** that Mr P Logue be appointed as Vice Chair of Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

**10. Executive Chief Officers - Recruitment
Àrd-Oifigearan Gnìomhach - Fastaidh**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/4/23 dated 25 February 2023 by the Interim Chief Executive.

The Council:-

- i. **AGREED** the composition for the recruitment panel for Depute Chief Executive and Executive Chief Officer posts; and
- ii. **NOTED** the appointment of the following interim positions: Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive and Head of Finance/Section 95 Officer as outlined in Section 5 of the report.

**11. High Life Highland – Appointment of Independent Directors
High Life na Gaidhealtachd – Cur Stiùirichean Neo-eisimeileach an Dreuchd**

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

**Mr K Gowans - as a close family member was an employee of High Life Highland
Mrs J Hendry - as a close family member was an employee of High Life Highland**

The Council was advised that recommendations had been received from the High Life Highland Nominations Committee in relation to the appointment of Independent Directors as follows –

Mr Roddy Henry
Ms Kerry Ross

The Council **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed.

**12. Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport
Saor-phort Uaine Inbhir Nis agus Linne Chromba**

Declaration of Interest: Mr R Bremner declared an interest in this as a Director of Inverness Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Limited and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for this item.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/5/23 dated 27 February 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

The Interim Depute Chief Executive gave a presentation in amplification of the report.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to the Interim Depute Chief Executive for his presentation and to all those involved in the Green Freeport bid for their efforts;

- Members welcomed the successful bid and spoke at length to the inspirational and transformational nature of the Freeport project and the opportunities it would provide in terms of inward investment, the economy, employment, community regeneration, tackling depopulation and rebalancing the age demographic of the population;
- Opportunity Cromarty Firth had the potential to shape the lives of every person who lived and worked in Highland and all Members had a vital role to play;
- winning the bid had been the result of a lot of endeavour, determination and persuasion and had been made possible by people with different business interests and political allegiances working together, with significant support from local media;
- the importance of having strong governance arrangements in place was emphasised, and the associated complexities and challenges were recognised;
- the Interim Depute Chief Executive had been at the forefront of the bid process and had a sound understanding of the associated challenges and opportunities, and it was proposed that he be the Council's representative on the Inverness and Cromarty Green Freeport Board. However, it was suggested that, in the future, there should be Elected Member representation on the Board;
- going forward, it would be necessary to develop a team to manage the various processes and support the Council's aspirations;
- it was critical to focus on maximising the benefits for every sector in Highland in the short, medium and long term, and to work closely and collaboratively with stakeholders including businesses, developers, planners, universities, training organisations, schools and communities;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the £1m grant funding from the UK Government would cover all the Council's set up costs and, going forward, whether the Council's costs as accountable body would be met from the consortium or be a budget pressure;
- the importance of consultation, rather than one-way communication, with communities was emphasised and, on the point being raised, it was confirmed that a community engagement workshop would be arranged to help people understand the impact of the Freeport;
- in relation to the proposed re-branding, Scottish Green Party Members commented that the Freeport was not a green initiative and requested that the word "green" not be used;
- the supply chain associated with the Freeport would be huge and would lead to an increase in activity in shops and service industry businesses throughout Highland;
- a long-term approach was essential to allow the necessary infrastructure to be put in place to ensure the Freeport project was a success, and a huge amount of investment would be required;
- in relation to the Green Book Five Case Model outlined in the report, it was suggested that "The Community Case" be added to ensure community was embedded in the process from day one. The Interim Depute Chief Executive endorsed having a standalone section on community and undertook to ensure this was fed back to the consortium;
- the extension of the Freeport boundary to include Brora and Golspie was welcomed. However, it was important to look at Highland as a whole and use the opportunity to unlock the barriers that existed in terms of improving infrastructure to allow access to services and jobs;
- the Longman former landfill site, which was valuable commercial land owned by the Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF), was within the Freeport area and an assurance was sought that the interests of the ICGF would be safeguarded and benefits and opportunities maximised;
- it was important to ensure the wealth the Freeport would create remained in Highland;

- the report stated that all partners had committed to fair work and implementing the Living Wage, and it was queried whether the latter was the government-set National Living Wage or the Real Living Wage. The Interim Depute Chief Executive explained that it was the Scottish Government interpretation of the Living Wage and undertook to seek clarity in that regard;
- whilst communities in the Freeport area were excited about the project there was also trepidation, particularly about the impact of industrialisation on small villages;
- reference was made to the North Sea oil boom in the 1970s and the transformation yards such as Nigg, Kishorn and Ardersier had brought to the area, and the opportunity for a new generation to see such change was welcomed;
- green hydrogen could be produced in Highland at low cost and at scale, and it was hoped this would be high on the list of priorities;
- the approach being taken by the Scottish Government in terms of supporting high quality employment opportunities, the Living Wage, the requirement to contribute towards Scotland's climate ambitions, abiding by environmental regulations, and Trade Union recognition was welcomed. However, other Members drew attention to a report on Scotland's Freeports by UK in a Changing Europe which raised concerns that some of the things the Scottish Government wanted to guarantee were, in part, reserved to the UK Government, and clarification was sought, and provided, in that regard;
- there was a potential role for the Climate Change Committee in terms of considering how to mitigate the environmental impacts associated with the development of the Freeport. In addition, clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the governance of local environmental impacts;
- it would be helpful to receive regular updates and briefings as matters progressed;
- the proposed re-branding to include Inverness was welcomed. However, it was important to recognise the full extent of the Freeport area;
- information was sought, and provided, on the legal implications of the outer boundary;
- it would be beneficial to upgrade parts of the A9 north of Tain. In addition, it was suggested dualling the A9 between Inverness and Tain needed to be considered;
- Caithness had one of the highest rates of depopulation in the Council area and any benefits for the far north would be welcomed. Particular reference was made to institutions such as North Highland College, the Environmental Research Institute and schools;
- it was necessary to carry out a self-evaluation of the options and opportunities in the area and work with partner agencies to ensure housing, infrastructure, services and facilities were in place to meet the needs and expectations of those remaining in and moving to the area to work;
- whilst businesses welcomed the opportunities associated with the Freeport they were also wary of losing employees to new industry and it was necessary to plan for that eventuality and work with partner agencies, colleges and universities in terms of reskilling and training people. It was added that staff might also leave the Council and, given that recruitment challenges were already being experienced, it might be necessary to look at pay scales;
- many people with neurodiversity were engaged in engineering and project management, and a request was made that there be specific reference to neurodiversity to ensure employers made the necessary adjustments;
- further information was requested as to how the project would encompass the whole of Highland, particularly wards that were a considerable distance from the Freeport area such as Caol and Mallaig;

- all facility owners had committed to the Scottish Business Pledge, a key element of which was “Supporting your Community” which meant employing locally, using local supply chains and having local activities, all of which encouraged employees to stay;
- Opportunity Cromarty Firth would be a showcase for progressive forward-thinking businesses; and
- the importance of Kishorn Port to the west coast was emphasised.

The Council:-

- NOTED** the successful Green Freeport bid made by the Opportunity Cromarty Firth consortium and the environmental, social and economic benefits that were expected to be achieved;
- NOTED** the Council’s role and responsibilities, including as Accountable Body, as summarised in Section 6 of the report;
- AGREED** that the Interim Depute Chief Executive be the Council representative on the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Board; and
- NOTED** the next steps outlined in Section 7 of the report including the proposal to take a report to a future meeting of the Council prior to submission of the Outline Business Case to UK and Scottish Governments.

13. Corporate Plan Plana Corporra

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr A Christie - as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland
Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland

There had been circulated Report No. HC/6/23 dated 25 February 2023 by the Interim Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Leader thanked Members for their participation in the Corporate Plan Workshop that had taken place in February 2023. As explained in the report, proposed new priorities or actions that were not in the Council Programme could not be included in the Corporate Plan but could come forward again when the Programme was reviewed later in the year. Financial challenges and the cost of living crisis were having a significant impact on the Council’s resources and ability to operate but it was important to remain focussed and ambitious. However, it was also necessary to be realistic and plan over the whole life of the Programme. The Corporate Plan would provide Members with appropriate levels of assurance and the opportunity to scrutinise delivery against targets, and he thanked all officers involved for the work that had gone into developing it;
- concern was expressed regarding the lack of reference to and progress in respect of the climate emergency. Reference was made to a baseline study carried out in 2020 and it was queried why this was not being used to identify targets. Reference was also made to the repurposing of funds set aside for climate action and it was hoped that, when the budget was next reviewed, another £2m would be set aside as it was needed. In relation to Net Zero targets, it was necessary to be ambitious and aim higher than the 2045 Scottish Government deadline as any slippage would put the Council in legal jeopardy. The Interim Chief Executive undertook to review the 2020 baseline report to establish whether there was any data that could be used and built

upon. However, it was understood there were some gaps in terms of key industry emitters;

- the third sector had a crucial role in respect of a number of targets yet there was no reference to it in the Corporate Plan;
- disappointment was expressed regarding the lack of Active Travel routes, specifically the omission of key routes such as Beauly to Inverness, Inverness to Lochend and Munloch to Avoch. Local Members added that the Munloch to Avoch route could not be progressed until such time as all landowners along the route agreed, and they were doing all they could to expedite matters. In relation to Beauly to Inverness and Inverness to Lochend, funding had been applied for through Sustrans and, if successful, it was expected that the routes would be delivered in the future;
- in relation to the percentage of Council dwellings that were energy efficient, information was sought, and provided, on how efficiency was defined, why there was no target for improvement when Highland was below the Scottish average, and why a target had been set that had already been made in 2021/22;
- the importance to communities of reliable bus services was emphasised, and an aspiration was expressed for the Council to have a fleet of low carbon buses. It was welcomed that increasing the number of low carbon buses was a priority in the Programme. However, the target of one by March 2024 was disappointing;
- in relation to developing Area Place Plans, there was no mention of 20-minute communities despite being a Council policy and planning consideration;
- there was a disconnect between the Council Programme, the Corporate Plan and Service Plans that needed to be addressed;
- the need for robust scrutiny was emphasised and, on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Service Plans would be presented to Strategic Committees on a quarterly basis. In addition, it was suggested that each Strategic Committee should have a workplan so Members knew what items were coming up at future meetings, and the Interim Chief Executive undertook to look into that;
- there was a need for rapid training on the Performance and Risk Management System to enable Members to interrogate and drill down into the performance measures. The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that training would be provided and guidance made available on the Members' intranet;
- the clear and readable layout of the Plan was commended. However, it was questioned whether there were too many measures;
- given that targets were still to be determined for a number of measures, it was queried whether an updated version of the Plan would be presented when targets had been set;
- it was surprising, given that the population of Highland was approximately 235,000, that there were only 85 Council-owned Electric Vehicle Charger Sites and it was necessary to be more ambitious in that regard;
- in addition to the points raised regarding active travel and 20-minute neighbourhoods, far more emphasis was needed on developing the circular economy if the Council was to have any hope of meeting its Net Zero targets;
- the urgency of the Corran Ferry replacement project was emphasised and its inclusion in the Corporate Plan was welcomed. Several Members spoke at length on matters including the age of the current vessels, the busyness of the route, the impact of the cost of constant repairs on the Council's already stretched finances, the vital nature of the ferry to local communities and businesses, and the carbon emissions from the current diesel vessels which were equivalent to the rest of the Council's fleet combined. Concern was expressed regarding the economic repercussions of the recent decision to impose a 3.5 tonne weight limit and calls were made for this to be revisited as a matter of urgency. Replacing the existing vessels with low carbon electric vessels would show that the Council was committed to meeting Net Zero targets for transport emissions, and it was essential that a bid for two electric ferries and the associated shoreside infrastructure was developed for the

next round of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF). However, other Members commented that the estimated cost of two electric ferries and the associated infrastructure was approximately £70m which appeared to be unaffordable to the Council, was beyond the scope of the LUF and had been met with incredulity in the local press and on social media. In addition, the delivery time was three to four years and there was doubt as to whether the batteries would last a full day. It appeared likely that local communities favoured fixed link, which was viable but would take several years to work up. A proposed solution was to use the drawings from the existing MV Corran to commission and build a diesel replica at an estimated cost of £15m and give the commissioned organisation 18 months to deliver it. In addition, it was suggested that the Council should announce a survey of the populations of Morvern, Ardnamurchan and Nether Lochaber as to whether or not they were in favour of fixed link and, crucially, an announcement should also be made that the Council would work with Transport Scotland as a matter of urgency on exploring the fixed link. SNP Group Members were also urged, through the Leader, to lobby the Scottish Government for funding. The Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee welcomed the contributions by Local Members and confirmed he was happy to meet with Mr A MacDonald and other Ward Members and officers to explore further the proposal to commission a diesel replica. The decision to impose a 3.5 tonne weight limit had been taken by the Lochaber Emergency Liaison Group without consultation with Members and he had asked for an urgent review of the matter with a view to revoking it. However, it was important that all safety considerations were fully taken into account. Finally, on the point being raised, the Interim Chief Executive confirmed that a dedicated project manager had been appointed;

- many of the measures appeared to be retrospective, and continuous improvement required continuous measurement as part of officers' daily routine;
- attention having been drawn to the population trends and projections set out in the Plan, it was commented that Highland was becoming a two-tier authority and it was necessary to include something much more explicit as to what the Council was going to do to try to halt depopulation in areas such as Easter Ross, Caithness and Sutherland;
- the focus on suicide reduction, the Solihull approach to mental health and wellbeing, and non-fatal overdose reduction strategies was welcomed;
- in relation to attainment by children from deprived backgrounds, it was necessary to aim higher than maintaining the Council's current ranking;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the target in respect of the average number of days to complete medical adaptation applications. In addition, it would help NHS Highland to have a further target relating to medical adaptations for people who could not be discharged from health facilities until the adaptations were made, and the Interim Chief Executive confirmed she was happy to look into that;
- in relation to Accessible and Sustainable Highland Homes, it was necessary to look at age-friendly communities where people of all ages and abilities were able to live healthy active lives;
- the Corporate Plan was commended as a vision for the future; and
- NHS Highland had an aspiration to keep people at home for as long as possible, and the Council had the ability to attract and recruit more carers.

Thereafter, the Council:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Corporate Plan for 2022-27;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Corporate Plan would be the subject of an Annual Performance Report in September each year, with the first report due in September 2023; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the Plan was normally reviewed following the Annual Performance Report to Council with any changes submitted to Council for approval. The first such review would be undertaken in Autumn 2023.

14. Annual Report – Statutory Performance Indicators, Benchmarking and Best Value 2021/22
Aithisg Bhliadhnaidh – Taisbeanairean Coileanaidh Reachdail, Tomhas-mheasaidh agus an Luach an Fheàrr 2021/22

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr A Christie - as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland

Mr K Gowans - as a close family member was an employee of High Life Highland

Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland

Mrs J Hendry - as a close family member was an employee of High Life Highland

There is circulated Report No. HC/7/23 by the Interim Chief Executive.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- there was potential for the report to be brought to Council earlier in the year so that the data was more up to date. There was also an issue with academic years feeding into financial years that resulted in older results for Education;
- the range of positive statutory performance indicators (SPIs) were highlighted and, in particular, the reduction in the average number of 'Looked After Children accommodated by the Council outwith Highland';
- the improvements made in literacy and numeracy attainment since the period covered by the report had been highlighted to the Education Committee. The report should be considered in the context of this and other improvements being delivered in Highland and officers be commended in this regard;
- further clarity was required in relation to the Council's ranking under 'Tackling Climate Change - CO₂ emissions area wide per capita';
- scrutiny of performance was undertaken on a regular basis at Strategic Committee level and Members were encouraged to attend these meetings and raise any concerns;
- the potential for reports to Strategic Committees to include a section on the performance indicators being covered in the report to provide for more scrutiny was suggested. It was explained the intention was to provide more clarity within the Service Plans brought to each Strategic Committee on the measures that were SPIs, local government benchmarking indicators and Corporate Plan indicators to improve Member oversight;
- the inclusion of numbers rather than percentages on which to base performance would provide more context for Members in the assessment of performance, specific reference being made to a number of young persons and children's indicators. It was explained that the Council had no leeway in terms of how national benchmark information was counted;
- it was suggested there was a gap in the benchmark information for performance on the care being provided to children with special and additional special needs;
- it was hoped there could be early improvement against the target for the average time between 'Child's Plan meeting decision to receipt of Child's adoption Permanence report' and that this indicator be reported to the relevant Committee as soon as possible; and
- there was a need to review and set a higher target for the proportion of properties receiving superfast broadband.

Thereafter, and in summary, Members were advised that an extensive review of all indicators and targets was to be undertaken. Consideration was also being given to whether it was necessary to report on all of the data in March each year. The ambition going forward was to produce information up to the end of March with a report being brought to Council in June of the same year.

Thereafter, the Council **NOTED** the:

- i. performance of the Council's SPIs for 2021/22 outlined in Appendices 1 – 3 of this report;
- ii. Audit Direction on public performance reporting and the Council's approach to compliance in Appendix 4 of the report;
- iii. Best Value Qualitative Report summarised in Appendix 5 of the report. Full details would be published separately on the Council's website; and
- iv. External Audit opinion on the Council's delivery of Best Value in relation to the Council's Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) and associated BVAR Improvement Plan as outlined at section 6 of the report.

15. Treasury Management Strategy Statement Aithris Ro-innleachd Rianachd Ionmhais

There had been circulated Report No. HC/8/23 by the Interim Head of Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- further clarity was sought on the reason there was no climate change/carbon clever implications detailed in the report. It was explained the Strategy was about the treasury activity that underpinned the Council's capital investment and not the consequences of projects within the Capital Programme;
- an assurance was sought, and provided, that given the current fluctuations in the markets, the Council's Treasury Team had the flexibility and adaptability when borrowing to take advantage of any temporary drop in interest rates and that this approach was underpinned by the Strategy; and
- there was an opportunity to secure a better rate of return for the Pension Fund from its bond portfolio and investments. It was explained this was a discrete issue from the Strategy Statement, the Pension Fund being a separate entity with oversight by the Pension Board/Committee.

Thereafter, the Council **APPROVED** the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Investment Strategy for 2023/24 and the Prudential Indicators as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

16. Scheme of Delegation Sgeama Tiomnaidh

There had been circulated Report No. HC/9/23 dated 27 February 2023 by the Interim Chief Executive.

The Council **AGREED** the changes to the Scheme of Delegation as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

**17. Timetable of Meetings
Clàr-ama Choinneamhan**

The Council **AGREED** the following changes to the dates of meetings in the current year:-

- Special Easter Ross Area Committee – 13 March 2023;
- Nairnshire Committee – 21 March 2023;
- Joint Planning Applications Committee – 22 March 2023 and 3 May 2023 (if necessary);
- Special City of Inverness Area Committee – 23 March 2023; and
- Special Highland Council on 24 April 2023 or 15 May 2023 subject to receipt of the LEIP information from the Scottish Government.

and **NOTED**:

- the proposal to revise the dates of the City of Inverness Area Committee had been withdrawn and the dates for the remainder of the year would be as scheduled on the timetable; and
- following the approval of the Convener due to urgent business, the Special meetings of:-
 - Badenoch and Strathspey Committee held on 13 February 2023; and
 - Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee held on 27 February 2023.

**18. Deeds Executed
Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 8 December 2022.

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

The Council **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**20. Independent Care Home Provision – Risk and Sustainability Update
Solar Dhachaghean-Cùraim Neo-eisimeileach – Cunntas às Ùr mu Chunnart is Sheasmhachd**

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Louden declared an interest in this as a family member had been a resident of a care home mentioned in the report and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for this item.

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

**Mr A Christie - as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland
Mr D Gregg - as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/10/23 dated 25 February 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

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

Additional Urgent Item

At this point in the meeting, and in line with Standing Order 8, it was advised that the Convener had agreed that the following should be considered as an urgent item of business on the grounds that the organisation required confirmation by 31 March 2023 that the break clause would not be in the lease or their external funding would not be secured:-

21. Community Asset Transfer Glusad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd

Transparency Statement: Mrs M Reid made Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Committee member of Inverness Caledonian Thistle Ladies Football Academy. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/11/23 dated 6 March 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

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

The meeting was concluded at 5.52pm.