

The Highland Council
No. 3 2023/2024

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 11 May 2023 at 10.35 am.

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

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Interim Chief Executive
Interim Deputy Chief Executive
Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning
Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care
Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Gregg, Mrs B McAllister, Mr A Rhind, Mrs T Robertson and Ms M Smith.

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

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

Item 7 – Mr R MacKintosh
Item 10 – Mr R MacKintosh

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

Item 6 v – Mr C Munro
Item 7 – Mr A Christie
Item 10 – Mr A Christie

3. **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 9 March 2023 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately.

The Council **APPROVED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held 9 March 2023.

4. **Minutes of Meetings of Committees** **Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan Chomataidhean**

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

Easter Ross Area Committee (Special Meeting)	13 March 2023
Climate Change Committee	16 March 2023
Nairnshire Committee	21 March 2023
Audit and Scrutiny Committee	23 March 2023
City of Inverness and Area Committee (Special Meeting)	23 March 2023
Gaelic Committee	30 March 2023
Comataidh na Gaidhlig	30 Màrt 2023
Housing and Property Committee	27 April 2023
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	4 May 2023

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

Economy and Infrastructure Committee: 4 May 2023

Starred Item 18 iii – Appointment to the Board of Tornagrain Conservation Trust

AGREED to appoint Mrs M Reid to serve as a Director on the Board of the Tornagrain

Conservation Trust.

Notice of Amendment – Highly Protected Marine Areas Consultation Response
Brath Atharrachaidh – Freagairt Co-chomhairleachadh nan Sgìrean Mara Fìor
Ghlèidhte

With reference to the Minutes of the Meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee held on 4 May, the following Notice of Amendment had been received in accordance with Standing Order 13 –

“We, the undersigned, give this Notice of Amendment to rescind the decision of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee meeting on Thursday, 4 May 2023 to note the details of the HPMA’s and the proposals put forward by Scottish Government; agree to homologate the Council’s response to the consultation; and agree the next steps proposed for engaging with the process.

And instead move that the Council:

Note the details of the HPMA’s and the proposals put forward by Scottish Government; agree that the response reflects the view of a private political group within the Highland Council; and agree next steps proposed for engaging with this process.”

Signed: Mr R Stewart Mr P Logue Mrs H Crawford Mrs I MacKenzie Mrs L Siggers
Ms B Jarvie Mr J Bruce Mr S Mackie Mr A Sinclair

In this connection, there had been re-circulated Report No. ECI/25/2023 dated 5 April 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Speaking to the Amendment, Mr Stewart explained that the response had been formulated following consultation with only a few Elected Members, with no formal records made, and therefore he questioned its transparency and accountability. He argued therefore that this failed to reflect the diverse range of opinions and perspectives of the Council as a whole as well as communities. Only once since the May 2022 Council elections had a similar approach been adopted seeking homologation of a response but this had involved a much shorter timescale and yet there had still been an opportunity for all Members to express their views in advance. The HPMA consultation had opened on 12 December 2022 and closed on 17 April 2023 and it was argued therefore that there had been ample opportunity to include Member representation.

In response, the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee explained that the deadline for the consultation was the result of a debate scheduled at the Scottish Government on HPMA’s on 3 May 2023, the day before the Economy and Infrastructure Committee met. Therefore, the Council’s response reported to that Committee had been included as part of the debate. Another round of public consultation was to take place in 2025, open to anyone to participate.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- public accountability and transparency were important;
- HPMA’s were a substantive policy issue;
- the information received regarding the discussions which had taken place at the Senior Leadership Group had been reflected in the Notice of Amendment;
- in terms of the Scheme of Delegation, it was the responsibility of Strategic Committees to deal with responses to consultations from Scottish and Westminster Governments;
- it was questioned why 4 months had not been sufficient time to allow Members any opportunity to consider the matter. A meeting could easily have been called

expeditiously by using MS Teams to allow Members, especially those representing coastal communities, to participate;

- it was recognised that, in the past, there had been a need to respond to consultations expeditiously and this had been done by officers in consultation with relevant Members but, akin to workshops and seminars, it was contended sessions could be arranged to deal with matters such as this;
- due process had been followed and there would always be instances where decisions were needed as a matter of urgency. Nevertheless, there was acknowledgment that lessons would be taken to avoid a repeat where possible;
- many fishermen were opposed to HPMAs; and
- reductions in staff numbers had resulted in additional pressure on those remaining to respond to the various consultations and perhaps the time had now come to rely more on the expertise that existed across the Council Chamber.

Thereafter, Mr K Gowans, seconded by Mr M Green, **MOVED** the Minute of the Economy and Infrastructure as it stood in relation to its decision regarding the Council's response to the Highly Protected Marine Areas Consultation.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mr P Logue, moved the terms of the Notice of Amendment.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 49 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 13 votes, with 7 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr C Aitken, 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, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mr W MacKay, Mr S Mackie, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, 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 K Rosie.

For the Amendment:

Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Mr H Crawford, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mr M Reiss, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

Abstention:

Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr R Gale, Mr R Gunn, Mr J McGillivray, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K Willis.

Decision:

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the details of the HPMAs and the proposals put forward by Scottish Government;
- ii. **AGREED** to homologate the Council's response to the consultation; and
- iii. **AGREED** the next steps proposed for engaging with the process.

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

- i. **NOTED** Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 25 November 2022 and
- ii. **APPROVED** Redesign Board held on 30 March 2023.

**5. 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 list and give details of what he regards as the top five achievements of the Administration to date including the benefit to Highland residents (except for Opportunity Cromarty Firth)?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, the Leader was asked to update the Council on a few of the failures of the Administration, for example the failure to secure LEIP funding from the Scottish Government for much needed new schools including St Clement's.

In response, Members were advised that information was still awaited of the process of securing LEIP funding and as soon as LEIP funding information was forthcoming the Council would be able to move forward with its Capital Programme.

(2) Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

In the Budget the following two savings referred to Council officers working with the organisations to identify alternative sources of funding.

5.1 Review of the Early Years grants budget for non-statutory services with the view to full removal by the beginning of 2024/25. This is a legacy budget which does not provide funding equitably for all EY organisations across Highland and the organisations do not provide commissioned services provided through an SLA with the Council via this grant funding.

Organisations currently in receipt of grant funding from this budget are: SNAP £65k, Toybox Gairloch £10k, Pultneytown Peoples Project £25k, CSS £60k, Fas Mor £10k, Allsorts £10k.

To mitigate the financial impact of the removal of these grants, a 6 month notice period will be given from 01/04/23 – effectively providing a 50% reduction in year one. From the next financial year the full year saving total will be £0.180m.

Officers will work with the organisations involved to identify alternative sources of funding to offset the reduction in the Early Years budget. There are a range of Council funds that can be applied to - the most likely, but not only, source being the Council's Coastal Communities strategic fund, where Members will be able to consider and approve applications on a bid by bid basis.

5.2 Remove legacy funding provided to a number of arts, culture, sports, music and community organisations. Where Service Level Agreements are in place, notice per the

terms of those agreements will be given. From the next financial year the full year saving total will be £0.107m. The organisations and savings are as follows: Aros (skye) £7k, Highland Print Studio £7k, Lochaber Music School £9k, Village Hall grants scheme (£50k pan Highland) and Sports Council funding (£34k pan-Highland). The grant schemes for the final two funding streams have been under subscribed in recent years.

As with 5.1 above, to mitigate the financial impact of the removal of these grants, organisations will be supported by the Council to identify and apply for alternative funding options.

Please could the Leader of the Council detail for each organisation the engagement that has been carried out to date by Council officers together with the financial outcome resourced for each organisations for 2023/24 and 2024/25 including the budget area any funding has come from?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, the Leader was asked if it was fair to assume that, as his answer did not address the question relating to 2024/25 funding, at this point no money had been identified for any of the groups listed on the paper.

In response, it was clarified that at the Council's Budget meeting back at the beginning of March it had been indicated that the Administration would be putting a budget review in place and that budget review would also be looking proactively in terms of the following year's budget. So, in terms of 2024/25, nothing had been allocated for anything. This has yet to be discussed throughout this budget year.

(3) Mr M Reiss

To the Leader of the Council

Please could you explain, in reasonable detail, why the publication by Highland Council of the annual SRCMS results have been delayed by several months past the expected or customary date, despite having been received by the Council at approximately the expected time. (The previous two surveys were published by the Council in November and December of the two preceding years).

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

(4) Mr R Gale

To the Leader of the Council

Following on from the Motion that was agreed at the Full Council on the 8th of December can you provide details of what actions were taken by you to lobby the NHS and the Minister for Women's Health to ensure that the breast screening unit is available in villages and communities such as Helmsdale to ensure that every woman has access to this vital service.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was requested that, in the absence of a response from NHS Highland to his letter in January, if the Leader would write them to again to seek an actual response.

In response, it was confirmed that this would be done as soon as possible.

(5) Mrs H Crawford

To the Leader of the Council

In relation to the implementation of the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) in March 2024, to ask the Leader to please provide a comprehensive projected financial impact assessment of the DRS on Highland Council, including potential savings or net losses to Highland Council, the anticipated impact to sales revenue for glass, aluminium and plastic and the impact upon the current level of staffing for Highland Council's waste and recycling services.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, information was requested as to what income had been received by Highland Council from the sales of aluminium and glass, each year, for the past five years.

In response, it was agreed that this information would be provided.

(6) Ms K Willis

To the Chair of Education Committee

The Soil Association's Food For Life programme supports local authorities to serve healthier, sustainable, and locally sourced food for school meals that have a positive impact on health, the environment, and the local economy.

Please can the chair provide information on how many nurseries, primary schools, and secondary schools in Highland currently have bronze, silver and gold Food For Life awards for their school meals service?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, information was sought if the Highland Council was actively working with food for life to achieve Silver and Gold awards for its school meals.

In response, it was stated that this question should have been submitted to the Chair of the Housing and Property Committee, as this is within the remit of that Service, and that Chair would provide an answer to that question.

(7) Mr A Baldrey

To the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Bike Racks on Buses

In pursuit of net zero targets and to facilitate greater use of 'wheeling opportunities' it would be highly desirable to see bike racks placed on all buses.

As Highland Council now operates a number of buses, can action be taken to progress the installation of bike racks on its own bus fleet to act as a 'leading example' to other bus operators?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if investigations were being made into potential publicity and consultation to see how much demand there was for people to put their bikes on buses so that they could change from a car journey to work to a bus plus a bike journey to work.

In response, it was confirmed that as the Council moved forward it would need to look forward as to how it could add value to its Council bus services and bike racks and their appropriate deployment could, and should, be considered. In the first instance, officers would be asked to collate information on how this could be approached and how others do this so the Council would be better able to take advantage of any opportunities to enhance and expand the appeal of council bus service.

(8) Mr C Ballance

To the Leader of the Council

Youth Highland

To ask the Leader if he would be prepared to meet with Youth Highland, its funders and other key stakeholders to review the approach that has been trialled by the Voluntary Youth Network and to consider how this work could help inform decisions around shaping and delivering services in the future?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

(9) Mr P Logue

To the Leader of the Council

To ask for an update on progress towards reinstating weekend opening hours at Ullapool and Gairloch recycling centres.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if the Leader agreed that making recycling facilities as easily accessible as possible was a vital part of fulfilling Highland Council's environmental responsibilities and that making weekend opening hours were a key component of that, ensuring that those with week day work, educational or caring responsibilities are not excluded.

In response, whilst this was agreeable, it had to be affordable and resources available to deliver it. At this point of time, the Council did not have the ability to do that. The Chair of Communities and Place would be able to give further information on that.

(10) Mr A Graham

To the Leader of the Council

With reference to the Council's response to the Scottish Government's consultation paper on "Highly Protected Marine Areas", which Elected Members were involved in or

consulted during the preparation of this submission?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, the Leader was asked to undertake to ensure that in future important consultations, such as this one, input was obtained from a much wider range of Council Members, including those outwith the Administration

In response, Councillor Graham was referred to the debate at the Economy and Infrastructure Committee and to the discussion earlier in the meeting. There was already a commitment, where possible, for the Administration to comply accordingly but there would be certain circumstances where this was not possible, as had happened in previous Administrations

(11) Mr A Jarvie

To the Chair of Corporate Resources Committee

Will the Highland Council be following the Scottish Government's Public Sector Pay Strategy?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if the Highland Council's exemption from the Scottish Government's policy of reducing Chief Executive salaries by £10,000 for new appointments is supported by the Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee.

In response, it was explained that this wasn't a matter that had come before the Corporate Resources Committee. It was something that had been discussed at the Full Council in December and, the approach the Council would take was to find the best Chief Executive possible. That was the approach the Council agreed to follow and, at that time, it was stated that a pay award was pending and that was now included in the advert. .

(12) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Chair of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee

With Mental Health services for young people within schools and the local NHS CAMHS can the Chair give an update with regards to any vacancies to any gaps to the services?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, confirmation was sought if there was an update that all monies allocated by Highland Council in respect of mental health in schools was being used for this purpose.

In response, it was agreed that the relevant information would be circulated in due course.

**6. Notices of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid**

Transparency Statement: Mr C Munro declared a connection to Motion (v) as a Church of Scotland elder but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

- (i) It is well known that voluntary, charitable and youth organisations are struggling with the reduction in funding that they are all experiencing, and this is made significantly more difficult with the level of letting fees for council premises that are being levied on such organisations.

Many of these organisations make a significant contribution to the mental welfare of our young people and this is particularly important in the wake of the Covid pandemic.

In addition, other such organisations provide vital childcare and after school clubs and activities for the children of working parents.

The level of letting fees is threatening the very existence of such organisations and if they have to close and withdraw their services the knock-on effect for children's mental health and the ability for working parents to continue to work is considerable, with the added impact on the local economies that will ensue.

That being the case this Council will review the letting charges for all such organisations and introduce a reduction in letting fees of 50% for all charitable and voluntary organisations.

By doing this we will ensure that the invaluable services that they provide across Highland will continue to the benefit of all communities.

Signed: Mr R Gale Mr J McGillivray Mr A Graham Ms J McEwan

Decision

The Council **AGREED**, in terms of Standing Order 12, that this motion be referred to the Corporate Resources Committee due to there being financial implications, and that it would be the first motion presented to Council in June 2023.

- (ii) Wave Trust

Highland Council supports the Wave Trust's 70/30 campaign to reduce child abuse, neglect and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by at least 70% by the year 2030. Council asks officers to bring a report to a future meeting of this Council on how the ambitions of this campaign can best be achieved in Highland.

Further Highland Council considers that;-

Increased awareness of the impact of ACEs is key to driving investment in initiatives that promote safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments which can have a positive impact on a broad range of challenges and on the development of skills that will help children and young people reach their full potential and it urges all concerned to use ACE awareness to have a positive impact on both individuals and society as a whole and it supports all teaching staff, pupils support assistants and early years practitioners to be encouraged to take up opportunities for continued professional learning sessions on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Signed: Mr A Baldrey Mr R MacKintosh

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- Councillor Reid referred to a free webinar on 3 June 2023 on national trauma training awareness, the details of which she offered to share with the Council after the meeting;
- the difficulties in accessing support and services in remote and rural areas was highlighted; and
- attention as drawn to the wide range of processes and policies the Council already had in place to reduce trauma and ACEs, with particular reference to the work of the Child Protection Committee in partnership with other groups, communities and schools. It was important that Members were made aware of previous decisions and ongoing work in this area as part of their training sessions.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the motion.

- (iii) The Council Agrees that the creation of Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) will have a devastating impact on our island and coastal communities, which rely heavily on fishing and other marine-related activities for their livelihoods. Notes its strong opposition to the creation of HPMAs and urges the Scottish Government not to impose them where it is against the stated will of these communities. Notes that Local engagement and collaboration should be the way forward to Enhance the management of marine areas calling on the wealth of valuable local knowledge and inherited expertise of island and coastal stakeholders. Therefore, this Council agrees that a letter is to be sent to the Scottish Government expressing our opposition to the introduction of this HPMAs scheme and urging them to work with our local communities to find alternative solutions that protect our marine environment without compromising the livelihood, language, and culture of our remote, rural, island, and coastal communities and avoid the depopulation of rural areas via job loss & irreversible damage to the local economy.

Signed: Mr R Stewart Mrs B Jarvie

Decision

The Council **AGREED**, in terms of Standing Order 34, that this motion could not be discussed as it had already been considered in the preceding six months.

- (iv) The positive impact of the NC500 around the Highlands has been manyfold, however, with the positive impact on the economy of the Highlands comes the negative impact on services and amenities across the area.

Last year the Council waste collection services innovatively introduced a flexible and additional bin collection scheme which made a significant difference to the levels of waste that was abandoned in some of the most scenic parts of the Highlands.

Local communities have commented on what a positive difference this initiative made around the NC500 route.

That being the case this Council will put a similar project in place for the coming season to ensure that we make the NC500 route memorable for all the right reasons for the traveling visitors. In addition, this will also be welcomed by the local communities along the route who do not want to be faced with uncontrolled waste abandoned indiscriminately by the roadside.

Signed: Mr R Gale Mr M Baird Mrs McEwan Mrs A MacLean

During discussion, it was queried, and explained, why motions deemed incompetent for immediate discussion were not eliminated from inclusion on the agenda.

Decision

The Council **AGREED**, in terms of Standing Order 12, that this motion be referred to the Corporate Resources Committee due to there being financial implications, and that it would be the second motion presented to Council in June 2023.

(v) Voting rights of religious representatives on the Education Committee

New research shows a sharp decline in religious identity. Around 1 million less Scots now identify with Christian groups compared to 2011, when 53% of Scots identified with a Christian religion. That figure has now dropped to 33%.

Given these findings it seems bewildering that we allow unelected religious representatives the ability to vote on the education committee. Fundamentally no one who is unaccountable to the electorate should be able to vote on public policy and it's clear that decisions relating to education should be done on a democratic basis by people who are held to account by the electorate. Faith groups who wish to participate in discussions relating to local education may still do so in the same manner as any other interested local community group.

Currently the Council is required under the terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to have three religious representatives on any committee established by the Council to discharge their responsibilities as an education authority.

There is no legal requirement however for these representatives to have a vote. The Scottish Government has clarified that "voting rights on committees are a matter for each authority."

In line with the above clarification statement by the Scottish Government, Highland Council agrees that only elected members of the Council with a mandate from the electorate should have a vote on the Education Committee.

Signed: Mr R MacKintosh Ms K Willis

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- legal advice was sought, and the Clerk clarified that while legislation required religious representation on the Education Committee, the decision on the voting rights of those representatives was a matter for individual Local Authorities;
- it was pointed out that if only elected Members were to be given voting rights on the Education Committee, then other non-elected representatives, such as the Youth Convenor, would also lose their right to vote. It was clarified that non-elected representatives on the Committee would still be permitted to participate in discussion, even if not able to vote. The accountability that accompanied the democratic election process was cited a key reason why non-elected representatives should not be permitted to vote. A review of the position of non-elected representatives was suggested, noting that parents and teachers were not represented on the Education Committee;

- reference was made to the importance of separating church from state, with reference to practice in France, and to the detrimental impact some religious views could have of the mental wellbeing of children in relation to LGBTQ acceptance and women's rights;
- some Members spoke of the valuable contribution made by religious representatives over the years to the Education Committee, while others pointed out that some religious views could be hurtful;
- the statistic quoted in the motion referred to religious practice Scotland-wide, and it was suggested that areas of the Highlands remained more religious than the national picture;
- it was clarified that Members from wards for which no election had been required had the same status as Members who had been through the ballot process; and
- it was pointed out that the Church of Scotland had provided free education in the Highlands two centuries before it had been provided by the state, and church schools often provided a better standard of education than non-church schools. Reference was made to the valuable role of clerics in the House of Lords, and the wider contribution of religion to society.

Ms M Nolan proposed as an amendment to the motion, to delete the words from 'New research shows' to 'to vote on the education committee'. Mr MacKintosh accepted this amendment to his motion.

Mr R MacKintosh, seconded by Ms K Willis, **MOVED** the motion, as amended by Ms Nolan.

Mr L Fraser, seconded by Mr R Stewart, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, to reject the motion.

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

For the Motion:

Mr C Aitkin, Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Fraser, Mr R Gunn, Mr R Gale, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr P Logue, Mr D Louden, Ms M MacCallum, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mrs K MacLean, Ms J McEwan, Mr C Munro, Mrs P Munro, Ms L Niven, Ms M Nolan, Mr P Oldham, Mrs S Rawlings, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mr A Sinclair, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mr J Bruce, Mrs I Campbell, Mr J Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr A MacDonald, Mr W MacKay, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Macpherson, Mr J McGillivray, Mr H Morrison, Mr S Mackie, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Reiss, Mrs L Saggars, Mr R Stewart.

Abstention:

Mrs H Crawford

Decision

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

Fundamentally no one who is unaccountable to the electorate should be able to vote on public policy and it's clear that decisions relating to education should be done on a democratic basis by people who are held to account by the electorate. Faith groups who wish to participate in discussions relating to local education may still do so in the same manner as any other interested local community group.

Currently the Council is required under the terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to have three religious representatives on any committee established by the Council to discharge their responsibilities as an education authority.

There is no legal requirement however for these representatives to have a vote. The Scottish Government has clarified that "voting rights on committees are a matter for each authority."

In line with the above clarification statement by the Scottish Government, Highland Council agrees that only elected members of the Council with a mandate from the electorate should have a vote on the Education Committee.

(vi) Disposable Vapes

Around 1.3million disposable vapes are thrown away in the UK each week, representing around 10 tonnes of lithium, the valuable resource crucial for electric car batteries, creating a new litter hazard across our streets and countryside, and contributing to extra plastic and toxic chemical pollution in land and sea. The Fire Brigade suggests that disposable vape batteries could have been responsible for the fire at the recycling depot in Aberdeenshire recently, and they have also been implicated in fires in bin lorries. E-cigarette use among teenagers doubled last year, creating a whole new generation of young people hooked on nicotine, with no societal benefit.

Highland Council therefore agrees to support the campaign by the Marine Conservation Society, Ash Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful to ban the manufacture and sale of disposable vapes in Scotland, and asks the Leader to join with other Councils in Scotland in writing to the First Minister welcoming the review into disposable vapes and to note Highland Council's support for a ban.

Signed: Mr C Ballance Mr A Baldrey Mr C Birt Mr A MacDonald Ms L Johnston

During discussion, Members referred to the useful role of vapes in assisting people to stop smoking cigarettes but expressed concern at the number of young people using them, to the detriment of their health, and the way they appeared to be marketed to appeal to younger people. It was proposed and accepted that the wording of the motion be strengthened with an additional sentence, as detailed below.

Decision

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

Disposable Vapes

Around 1.3million disposable vapes are thrown away in the UK each week, representing around 10 tonnes of lithium, the valuable resource crucial for electric car batteries, creating a new litter hazard across our streets and countryside, and contributing to extra

plastic and toxic chemical pollution in land and sea. The Fire Brigade suggests that disposable vape batteries could have been responsible for the fire at the recycling depot in Aberdeenshire recently, and they have also been implicated in fires in bin lorries. E-cigarette use among teenagers doubled last year, creating a whole new generation of young people hooked on nicotine, with no societal benefit.

Highland Council therefore agrees to support the campaign by the Marine Conservation Society, Ash Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful to ban the manufacture and sale of disposable vapes in Scotland, and asks the Leader to join with other Councils in Scotland in writing to the First Minister welcoming the review into disposable vapes and to note Highland Council's support for a ban.

Acknowledging the rapid increase in the popularity of disposable vapes, The Highland Council reiterates the importance of strong enforcement in preventing the sale of restricted products to underage people.

7. Carer Positive Policy Poileasaidh Cùramaiche Dheimhinnich

Declaration of Interest: Mr R MacKintosh declared an interest in this as an employee for Highland Home Carers, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for this item.

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/11/23 dated 27 April 2023 by the Interim Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members thanked the officers for their hard work in developing the policy and raised the following issues:-

- this was a proactive policy that would deliver positive change for all Council's staff including teachers;
- the trade unions were supportive of the policy and the post implementation policy review;
- the importance of the policy was recognised given that many staff with caring responsibilities had to take annual leave, sick leave, reduce their hours or give up work which impacted on family finances particularly in the current cost of living crisis;
- it was crucial the policy review was undertaken in consultation with the relevant stakeholders and trade union colleagues so it was co-designed with those most affected;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that information on any financial implications of implementing the policy would be brought to Members going forward;
- the policy would help with the current challenges around the recruitment and retention of staff;
- it was suggested recommendation iii. in the report be amended to read that the policy and guidance would be reviewed in approximately 6 months by the HR Sub Group, and a report brought back to the Corporate Resources Committee for consideration.
- issues for the review of the policy included whether the period of paid carers leave should be increased, couples who were both employees being allowed to apply individually for carers leave and the potential for employee carers and Members with an expertise to be involved in the review;

- consideration should also be given to the policy being extended to include those carers who lived separately from their dependents;
- It would be useful to establish the age and gender of those employees who were carers;
- there was a need to consider how to promote the policy to those employees who might not consider themselves as having caring responsibilities and to raise awareness of the financial support that might be available;
- wording in the policy needed to be considered in relation to circumstances where leave might be refused or postponed to make it less subjective;
- the importance of the Council being flexible and understanding in the definition of a carer was emphasised and that it considered all options to allow the carer to remain in employment; and
- an assurance was sought that the issues raised by Members would be taken into consideration in the review of the policy, noting this would be an ongoing process.

Decision

The Council:-

- APPROVED** the introduction of a Carer Positive policy;
- APPROVED** the introduction of up to 5 days paid carers' leave per year: and
- AGREED** the policy and guidance would be reviewed in approximately 6 months by the HR Sub Group, and a report brought back to the Corporate Resources Committee for consideration.

8. Member Survey Results and Learning and Development Programme Toraidhean Suirbhídh nam Ball agus Prògram Ionnsachaidh is Leasachaidh

There had been circulated Report No. HC/12/23 dated 27 April 2023 by the Interim Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members thanked the Interim Chief Executive, Business Manager and team for their hard work in relation to the Members' survey and raised the following issues:-

- to enable an effective Programme, as much data as possible needed to be gathered from the survey. However, only 27 responses were received out of 74 Members, a response rate of 36%;
- it was recognised that, whilst some Members were experienced, all Members could learn and improve in their role. This would be to the benefit of Members and constituents;
- it was suggested that, once the Member Working Group was formed, the survey be re-sent, to enable the Programme to benefit from as much rich data as possible and to assist officers;
- there was concern that individual Members could be identified from the publishing of the equalities section of the survey and an assurance was sought, and provided, that this would be kept in mind going forward;
- the time involved and salary paid to Members prevented many working young persons from becoming councillors;
- the challenges Members faced in terms of competing priorities in being able to attend the training sessions was highlighted, highlighting the fact online training was useful; and
- it was suggested the Members' survey be shortened on the basis this was likely to achieve a higher completion rate with questions being more focused on the key information that was required.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **NOTED** the findings of the Members' Survey;

and **AGREED**:-

- ii. to establish a short life Members' Working Group to scope future requirements, with a view to bringing forward a Members' Learning and Development programme for Council approval in June 2023;
- iii. to implement a range of evaluation metrics to assess the effectiveness of learning outcomes; and
- iv. to re-establish the Governance Review Steering Group with refreshed membership, to take forward a review of governance arrangements, supported by the ECO for Performance and Governance.

9. **Corran Ferry and Levelling Up Fund Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Aiseag a' Chorrain is mun Mhaoin Àrd-ireachaidh**

There had been circulated Joint Report No. HC/13/23 dated 26 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive and Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

The Interim Depute Chief Executive provided commentary on key points in the report during which he referred to the very difficult position with the Corran Ferry operations with both ferries currently being under repair. Every effort was being made to ensure repairs were carried out as quickly as possible. The Interim Depute Chief Executive would be visiting the boat yard the following week to see how the repairs were progressing. There had been extensive work by officers to mitigate the loss of the Corran Ferry service including community liaison as set out in the report. The loss of ferry service had highlighted the problems with old ferries and the need to address this, both in the short term with replacement ferries and long term the aspiration of a fixed link. An update on the proposed replacement vessels and shoreside infrastructure for the Corran Ferry service and an update on the Levelling Up Fund applications was provided. The Council's agreement was sought to submit a Levelling Up Fund (LUF) application for the replacement ferry service as a resolution to the challenges posed at Corran Narrows.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- the recent challenges the Council faced but, moreover, the community had faced due to the unreliability of the Corran Ferry service was recognised. Over a protracted period, officers and elected Members had met with a huge range of stakeholders and partners and members of the public. These conversations with such a diverse range of interests, some social, some technical, some financial and some governmental, had provided an extensive body of information that had enabled the Council to consider every solution and variation thereof;
- a considerable amount of professional expertise had gone into the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) proposal and thanks were extended to staff and also the many professionals from external sources who provided specialist knowledge that had informed the recommendations in the report;
- the Council had already spent £1.6m on an outline business case to support an option to improve the shore side infrastructure and provide 2 electrically powered vessels;
- the report was seeking Members' approval to begin the process to replace aged vessels and re-establish the reliable transport link that the communities on the both sides of the Loch Linnhe relied on;
- the breakdown and delay to repairs for both ferries had highlighted the increasing

fragility of the service and the urgent need to replace the old and the very old ferries. Because of the challenging conditions at the Corran narrows and because they were quarterdeck ferries it was not possible to replace them temporarily or permanently from vessels already operating in Scotland;

- the Corran narrows was the busiest ferry route in Scotland. The Outline Business Case had taken several years and significant Highland Council funds to develop and, with the help of CMAL and inclusion in the small ferry replacement programme, the ferry design was nearing completion. All that was missing was the funding. That was why the Council had to develop an application for the next round of the LUF for the Corran ferry. Because of the funding cap of £50m, the LUF bid would be for the shoreside infrastructure and one ferry. This had resulted in a rumour circulating locally in Lochaber that the Council would now only be progressing the project with one ferry. This was not the case. Therefore, clarity was urgently needed to avoid further confusion. It was requested that it be communicated as soon as possible to the communities affected that there has been no change to the Outline Business Case, that the ultimate ambition was to procure two new ferries, and that other funding opportunities would have to be sourced for the second ferry. An undertaking was given by the Interim Depute Chief Executive to do this;
- the catastrophic failure of the ferry service at Corran was having a significant impact on residents and business in the area. Not only was it making it very difficult for daily travel for those living and working in the area, but visitor numbers have dropped significantly with many people cancelling their holidays to the area. Businesses were reporting very significant loss of income and questioning how much longer they could survive with these losses. Until there were new ferries operating at the narrows, it was highly likely that service failure would become an increasingly frequent problem. Members were urged to support the Corran Ferry as the next LUF bid;
- reference was made to the desire for a Stromeferry bypass and the considerable effort that had gone into this over an extensive period of time. An option had been chosen but some 10 years later the community were still waiting for the funding to build the bypass route;
- a ferry service was not the only viable solution and the LUF bid should not preclude the option of a fixed link over the Corran Narrows. Therefore, an amendment was proposed that a future report be brought to Council providing further details of the prospectus for LUF Round 3 for the options of 1.) a fixed link Corran narrows crossing, and 2.) a Corran ferry replacement option, with an appraisal of the other constituency bids for agreement;
- a marine mortgage to pay for vessels had previously been suggested in a canvass of residents in the area with a small charge of users of the vessels to pay for the mortgage. This idea had not been taken forward. There were other funding opportunities to finance new vessels which could be explored;
- in relation to the fixed link option a study by HITRANS estimated that this could cost in the region of £150m to £200m. These figures were being checked to ensure they were up to date. Delivering such a significant capital project would take a very long time, even if funding was available and at present it was not. Therefore a short term solution was required;
- the difference in cost between the design and delivery of a hybrid ferry compared to an electric ferry was not significant and opportunities would be taken to generate electricity locally. Electric ferries would be a significant step forward in meeting the Council's net zero targets;
- in terms of practical financial relief to businesses in the area who were detrimentally financially affected by the loss of ferry service, it was understood that there was no compensation available and the focus had to be on finding a sustainable solution for crossing the Corran narrows;
- the lack of spend on infrastructure in the Highlands was highlighted, such as improving the A9;
- the additional costs associated with the loss of the ferry service would need to come

- from Council reserves if the Service budget was overspent;
- there were a number of issues, other than financial, to be resolved before a fixed link over the Corran narrows could be achieved such as there was a fault line on the Great Glen and cruise ships went through the narrows. A fixed link should be an iconic structure that would bring people to the area; and.
- when the ferry service recommenced, it was suggested that some help be provided to the community such as free use of the ferries for a short period and a webcam to let people know how busy it was. It was advised that the provision of a webcam was being looked at and would be progressed as soon as possible.

Thereafter, Mr K Gowans, seconded by Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, **MOVED** the recommendations in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mr P Logue, Moved that Members i) Note the current position in respect of the Corran Ferry service; ii) Note progress on delivering the Corran Ferry replacement project; iii) Note the outcome of Levelling Up Fund submissions for 2022; iv) Agree that a future report is brought to Council providing further details of the prospectus for Levelling Up Fund Round 3 for the options of 1.) a fixed link Corran narrows crossing, and 2.) a Corran ferry replacement option, with an appraisal of the other constituency bids for agreement.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 58 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 10 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Mr C Aitken, Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, 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 R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Ms M MacCallum, Mr A MacDonald, Mr J McGillivray, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R 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, Mr K Rosie, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mr J Bruce, Mr H Crawford, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mrs L Sagers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

Decision

The Council:-

- NOTED** the current position in respect of the Corran Ferry service;
- NOTED** progress on delivering the Corran Ferry replacement project;
- NOTED** the outcome of Levelling Up Fund submissions for 2022;
- AGREED** that the Corran Ferry replacement forms the basis of a submission to the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund for 2023; and
- AGREED** that a future report was brought to Council providing further details of the prospectus for Levelling Up Fund Round 3, with an appraisal of the other constituency bids for agreement.

**10. Highland Health & Social Care Partnership: Strategic Plan
Com-pàirteachas Slàinte is Cùraim Shòisealta na Gàidhealtachd: Plana Ro-innleachdail**

Declaration of Interest: Mr R MacKintosh declared an interest in this as an employee for Highland Home Carers, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for this item.

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/14/23 dated 25 April 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care. The report provided an update to Council on the latest draft of the Strategic Plan for delivery of integrated health and adult social care services. The report provided a draft version (Appendix 1) of the Strategic Plan for 2023 – 2026 for Members to provide comment on prior to the issue of the final draft plan by the Joint Monitoring Committee for formal consultation with the public.

Following commentary on the report by the Head of Integration Adult Social Care comments raised by Members during discussion included:-

- the officers and various stakeholders involved in developing the strategic plan 2023 to 2026 for adult social care services were thanked for all their work. It set out a vision on how to improve the health and wellbeing of adults over the next 3 years. It set out the need for reform and key principles to adopt. The consultation undertaken to date and the public consultation to take place would help inform how the delivery of the service was transformed. There would be more detailed locality planning once the strategic plan was in place. It was fully recognised that one size did not fit all and as far as possible the aim was to enable people to live at home independently. Work to improve health inequalities would continue alongside communities and partners and the strategic plan was an important step to enable this. The scale of the financial and staffing challenges highlighted the need for change and the closure of care homes was given as an example of this;
- the plan would enable residents to lead the best lives that they could. It was a good plan but there were gaps in it such as the section on 'making it happen'. This section had too many ideas, too much information and was not felt to be set out in a coherent order. An undertaking was given that this would be reviewed. Also, the plan was for 2023 to 2026 but perhaps it should be 2024 to 2027 as the strategic plan was nothing without the operational plans and given the time to develop these operational plans. Also, the performance reporting could be enhanced by setting timelines and tracking progress;
- for the plan to succeed, it was dependant on a number of other actions and ways of measuring and monitoring the plan were not clearly defined;
- there was a lack of co-production with communities in the plan and transformation in service provision would need support from communities and the way to do this was by co-production;
- the adult care crises had been looming for many years and this plan should have been considered before now. There were many suggestions in the plan that set out how care could be delivered to those that required it, and a focus on health, wellbeing and independence was welcomed;
- in terms of innovations and support options available to deliver services this would vary across areas and there would be a need to liaise with communities as to what they could offer;
- although there was a lack of workforce in the care sector, one had to appreciate the skills and knowledge of care workers which was a highly skilled and often undervalued job. The strategic plan must include the use of technology such as telecare solutions;
- locality planning was ongoing such as on the Isle of Skye and the Sir Lewis Ritchie report on primary care out of hours services which had social care elements to it;

- staffing was key to providing services in social care and the challenges in recruitment were well known and innovative solutions to this would hopefully address this;
- the section on delivery plans should be enhanced with defining community in this context, such as who does this actually mean and who will we be working with and how will they be contacted. Defining these points will help deliver services more quickly once the plan was approved;
- a Care Inspectorate Scotland report highlighted the challenges facing private sector care homes many of which were unprofitable and did not have the money for upgrades to meet required standards. There was a particular problem for care homes in rural areas that tended to be smaller and were failing to make their homes financially viable. It was advised that for existing care homes, they were not required to meet new standards and this only applied to new care home registrations;
- the Council and NHS Highland working together could do more to improve the health of people in Highland such as trying to improve the diet of the Highland population. It was advised that the NHS worked with High Life Highland to keep people active and contributed to the prevention agenda;
- it would be better if there was a diverse range of providers of care homes and the plan would look to involve communities and families in the provision of social care;
- as part of the consultation on the plan there would be an equality impact assessment;
- engagement with communities and stakeholders on the plan would happen once a final draft of the plan was approved by the Joint Monitoring Committee;
- more central government support for help with tackling drug and alcohol abuse was needed;
- mental health issues had become more apparent since the Covid pandemic, particularly in remote areas, and services to support people were required. Mental health should be more articulated in the plan;
- Raigmore Hospital was an ageing hospital that provided services to all the Highland area and thought was required on how to meet the growing demand for facilities at this hospital. It was advised that Raigmore's primary role was to deliver acute services and was not therefore part of the plan;
- age friendly communities should be looked at for the Highlands as promoted by the World Health Organisation;
- Support for GPs in the plan and locality plans was welcomed as was the Council continuing to request additional funding for adult social care services;
- there should be a commitment to addressing how the plan would be delivered;
- housing would be key in enabling people to live and be supported locally as part of an age friendly community. The Housing & Property Committee had just agreed a housing plan with input from the NHS;
- locality social care hubs were envisaged for Caithness and Lochaber and were part of integrated working;
- extra money was to be provided for the hospital at home project to enable people to continue to live in their own homes;
- there would be demographical information appended to the plan and specific information relating to Nairn would be provided for Councillor B Jarvie; and
- reporting on health matters at Area Committees was being considered.

Decision

The Council **NOTED**:-

- i. the work undertaken by the Strategic Planning Group in producing a draft of the Strategic Plan 2023–2026; and
- ii. comments by Members on the proposed draft of the Plan would be considered by

the Strategic Planning Group prior to sign off by the Joint Monitoring Committee of a final consultation draft.

11. **Update on Outline Business Case for Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Dreachd Chùis-gnothachais airson Saor-phort Uaine Inbhir Nis agus Chaolas Chromba**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/15/23 dated 25 April 2023 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- assurance was provided that officers had spent a lot of time and hard work moving the project forward behind the scenes and it was anticipated that the Outline Business Case would be available shortly. In this regard a target date was requested for the Outline Business Case;
- a focus on housing and other local amenities should be maintained throughout the project, and include the community in the process;
- it was queried how much the project would cost the Council, and could it be assumed that current Council costs would be covered from the £1 million Outline Business Case fund. In addition, it was queried if the Council would ensure that funding for housing and other amenities would be met from the £25 million seed funding money;
- in response to a query how Members would be selected for the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) Members Monitoring Group, it was clarified that the Monitoring Group would be politically balanced;
- thanks were expressed to the officers and the team for their hard work on the project;
- regarding the terms of reference for the Members Monitoring Group it was requested to expand it so that the group reported directly to Council any concerns or breaches in conditions of the investment;
- it was queried what the work specifically entailed in relation to paragraph 4.12 Land within the Green Freeport tax site in Council Ownership, of the report;
- Members were pleased to acknowledge that the Council were working closely with other local authorities who had successfully been awarded similar status to cut down on duplication of working methods and to streamline the process;
- appreciation was expressed to see markers of regeneration and strengthening of communities across the region within the report; and
- it was confirmed that an updated report would be presented to Members at the next meeting in June 2023.

Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the Council's role and responsibilities in the preparing the Outline Business Case, including as Accountable Body, as summarised in Section 4 of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** to the proposals set out in relation to governance and particularly the establishment and Terms of Reference for the Member's Monitoring Group as set out in section 5.3 of the report;
- iii. **NOTED** the intention to report the Outline Business Case to a future Council meeting prior to submission to UK and Scottish Governments; and
- iv. **AGREED** to add an additional Term of Reference for the Member's Monitoring Group that the group report directly to Council any concerns or breaches in conditions of the investment.

12. **Public Sector Reform**

Ath-leasachadh Roinn Poblach

There had been circulated Report No. HC/16/23 dated 24 April 2023 by the Interim Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- support was expressed for the matter being progressed through the Redesign Board, and it was necessary to consider, as soon as possible, how to engage with the review and what the Council wanted to be devolved from central government – e.g. more powers over revenue setting. The Chair of the Redesign Board suggested that a Redesign Board workshop would provide a way forward;
- it was necessary to clearly articulate the Council's priorities and it was suggested that consideration be given to a further report to the Full Council in June setting out the types of things the Council would wish to prioritise for the benefit of Highland;
- representations had been made at CoSLA as to the need for governments to think differently in terms of how Highland and Island authorities operated and the responsibilities they had to diverse communities; and
- in relation to the Council's submission at Appendix 1 of the report, clarification was sought, and provided, as to what was meant by greater flexibility over teacher numbers.

Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the update;
- ii. **AGREED** to homologate the Council's submission to the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee's enquiry into Public Sector Reform; and
- iii. **AGREED** that work be progressed through the Redesign Board.

13. Clerk to the Highland Licensing Board Clèireach do Bhòrd Cheadachd na Gàidhealtachd

The Council **APPROVED** the appointment of Mr Iain Meredith as Clerk to the Licensing Board on a temporary basis until Ms Claire MacArthur returns from maternity leave.

14. Timetable of Meetings Clàr-ama Choinneamhan

The Council **AGREED** the following changes to the current timetable:

Easter Ross Area Committee – from 15 May to 22 May 2023.

15. Deeds Executed Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

There had been circulated a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 9 March 2023 which were **NOTED**.

The meeting ended at 5.15 pm.