

**The Highland Council
No.4 2025/2026**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 15 May 2025 at 9.35am.

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

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive - People
Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Joint Democratic Services Managers

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Ms H Crawford, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr D Gregg, Mr S Mackie and Mrs T Robertson.

2. Declarations of Interest / Transparency Statements Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt / Aithris Fhollaiseachd

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

Item 3 – Mr M Cameron and Mr A Christie

Item 4 – Mr M Cameron and Mr A Christie

3. Operational Delivery Plan 2024-2027 - Annual Report Plana Libhrigidh Obrachail 2024-2027 - Aithisg Bhliadhna

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

Mr M Cameron – as a close family member was a teacher at Charleston Academy

Mr A Christie – in his capacity as a Non-executive Director of NHS Highland

There had been circulated Report No. HC/11/25 by the Chief Executive. The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate gave a presentation on the Delivery Plan, which covered best value, governance and assurance, forecasted savings for the Plan and per portfolio, risks & mitigation, the need for financial stability, alignment of new savings proposals to the Delivery Plan, staff engagement and feedback, and the roadshow programme. A Members' workshop was scheduled for 23 May 2025.

The Council Leader summarised the portfolio of plans that had been agreed by the Council, and thanked Members for their involvement and robust scrutiny through the Strategic Committees, which had resulted in a comprehensive plan to facilitate community and financial stability. Governance and scrutiny of the plan would be through the portfolio boards, with a Performance and Risk Management System (PRMS) system providing real time progress updates. Reference was made to the need to support partners to deliver services, and to improve procurement and income generation.

The Leader of the Opposition focused on the key issues surrounding the provision of Adult Social Care (ASC) and supporting people to live the best lives possible. Challenges included the funding for ASC not keeping pace with demographic change, staffing shortages, including the reducing number of immigrant workers and inadequacies in the national care contract and its impact on care homes. The Leader of the Opposition called for more up to date financial monitoring, the importance of focusing on prevention, and the need to pay ASC workers a higher salary. He indicated his intention to move the following amendment:

'That the Joint Monitoring Committee be tasked to oversee the production of a report for presentation to Council on the 11 December 2025 (taking into account the Operational Delivery Plan) which details proposals for transforming the way Adult Social Care Services are delivered. Areas that the report should investigate should be framed against the values of dignity, respect, compassion, inclusion, care required and sustainability. To ensure adequate scrutiny and appropriate assurance can be taken when the report is presented back to Council in December 2025 Council requests that the process be conducted using a similar methodology to that as detailed in Section 6 of the report.'

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- given the significant financial pressures facing ASC, assurance was sought, and provided, that long-term modelling was being undertaken to assess the impact of the ageing population and the associated costs, to align with practices elsewhere in Scotland, and to reduce the ongoing reliance on reserves. The intended use, as well as the governance and scrutiny, of the additional £20m for ASC was summarised, as was the review of the model of integration that had just started, and the ongoing work with partners to deliver care services;
- the project name change from 'Home to Highland' to 'Home in Highland' was welcomed and reflected the aim to keep young people in their communities;
- the planned replacement of CareFirst, due to be completed in September 2025, was welcomed and would lead to efficiencies and improved communication between the Council and the NHS;
- services provided to unpaid carers, including day care, and respite, were preventative spend and should be expanded;
- the income generation projects detailed in section 9.7 of the report were welcomed and might require a specific skill set to those normally required by the Council. Community and Member buy-in for the projects was essential;
- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons several projects in the 'net zero, investment and innovation' workstream were ragged as amber, with some of these being issues outwith the control of the Council;
- with reference to the recently announced new government policy on immigration, it was acknowledged that it was too soon for the Council to have fully considered the implications, but it was queried what additional pressures this might create, especially for ASC;
- the pilot project looking at a future care model for the Lochaber area was welcomed, with the community keen to make innovative changes. Reference was made to a recent suggestion attributed to MP Angus MacDonald to consider a network of care facilities including staff accommodation;
- the format and presentation of the report was welcomed;
- ongoing engagement with the workforce on the Delivery Plan was urged, and a summary was provided of the staff engagement programme and the Investors in People award;
- with reference to the housing and rental crisis, it was queried what could be done to encourage housing developers to provide their affordable housing to the Council for rental;
- it was hoped the positive results from some of the income generation projects would be able to offset other areas with less positive outcomes;
- many of the decisions affecting staff recruitment and housing in the Highlands were the result of decisions made by the UK Government, with reference to the cost of food and energy;

- the care home delivery model for remote and rural areas required revision;
- it was important that if projects were cancelled or discontinued, adequate communication of this to staff and Members was undertaken;
- given the recruitment challenges in several areas, flexible contracts were urged;
- listening to communities was a vital part of engagement, as was the use of plain English in communications;
- urgent action was requested in relation to the threatened closure of the Sutherland and Dunbeath hubs, and their value to the community was highlighted;
- timescales were queried for the report to Members on the outcome of the Council's public consultation over the proposed Visitor Levy, which closed on 31 March 2025;
- given the small amount of projected income from the Highland Campervan and Motorhome Scheme, it was queried whether the scheme should be scrapped. A summary was provided of the low ongoing costs and the desire to raise funds to improve infrastructure for motor homes;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, for the reported savings on Food in Schools, with attention drawn to work undertaken on this through the Council's Redesign Board;
- further detail was sought, and provided, on reported saving on winter road gritting;
- it was suggested that further Members training on PRMS was required;
- clarity was sought on when the drawdown process would be formalised for the proposed £20m from Council funds, which would be available for drawdown by NHS Highland for ASC;
- information was sought, and provided, on advice and support available post-Brexit for EU nationals living in the UK; and
- given the proposed tightening of immigration regulations, the importance of upskilling the UK workforce was emphasised, as well as the need to provide a reasonable living wage.

In relation to the Leader of the Opposition's amendment, the Council Leader pointed out that it was not within the gift of the Council to oblige the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) to undertake a report, given that half of the membership was NHS Highland representatives. The Council Leader offered to raise the matter with the JMC and with Council Members of the JMC, as detailed below at vi. As a result, the Leader of the Opposition withdrew his amendment. The Council Leader also offered to meet with Councillors L Johnston and A MacLean to discuss issues they felt would benefit being passed to the NHS via the JMC, and he summarised discussions he had undertaken with NHS Highland officials with regard to the Sutherland and Dunbeath health and wellbeing hubs.

Decision

The Council:-

- APPROVED** the progress of the Operational Delivery Plan;
- APPROVED** the adjustments to portfolio construction within the plan which were provided at section 9 and Appendix 4 of the report;
- APPROVED** the reporting schedule for 2027/28 at Appendix 5 to the report;
- NOTED** that project reports would continue to be submitted to strategic committees for scrutiny;

- v. **AGREED** that further drawdown of £5.6m from Council earmarked reserves to support the NHS Highland Adult Social Care budget and address the forecast overspend position in 2024/25; and
- vi. **NOTED** the Council Leader had given a clear commitment to raise the points made by the Leader of the Opposition at the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) and to seek the JMC's agreement to request that officers produce a report outlining the activities that were underway jointly, and separately, to deliver Adult Social Care transformation, and to ensure the priorities set out in the Strategic plan were being delivered. The Council Leader would also seek the agreement from all Council representatives on the JMC to inform the JMC of the debate that had taken place at full Council, demonstrating Members' serious focus on ensuring change and transformation. The Council Leader would also ask the Council's Chief Executive to raise the same issues with the NHS Highland Chief Executive.

4. Highland Investment Plan Plana Tasgaidh na Gàidhealtachd

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

Mr M Cameron – as a close family member was a teacher at Charleston Academy

Mr A Christie – in his capacity as a Non-executive Director of NHS Highland

There had been circulated Joint Report No. HC/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place and Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

The Assistant Chief Executive – Place gave a presentation in amplification of the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) and the associated funding model had set about tackling challenging issues by ensuring a sustained, planned approach to investment in schools, Points of Delivery (PODs), roads, depots, other infrastructure and other projects that would otherwise not be delivered. The report represented the culmination of decisions made by the Council to invest significantly in areas where communities needed it most and build the foundations for a fairer, more resilient and more sustainable place to live. The consolidated HIP represented over £750m of investment over the next five years and would have a positive impact throughout Highland. The programme was part of a longer-term strategy for the HIP, with a potential £2.1bn of capital investment between now and 2045;
- investment in schools was fundamental to the Council's vision for the future, and the Phase 1 schools were just the start of the ambition. Enhancing opportunity and supporting children and young people to gain skills would help Highland thrive, not just in the near future but for decades to come;
- the HIP was the robust and sustainable basis of services at local PODs, making them more accessible and flexible to local needs. Retaining jobs and reversing depopulation was key, and the HIP would create opportunities to retain and train skilled people who would be able to live and work in communities throughout Highland. It would also connect people through

roads and transport, create power efficiencies through updated workplaces and technology, and generate income from innovative new ventures;

- it was intended to move an amendment reducing the investment in the School Estate Improvement Programme by £1m each year from 2025/26 to 2028/29 and creating a new line entitled “Provision of covered area to allow pupils a warm, dry and secure space to eat at lunch times commencing with Inverness Royal Academy and Culloden Academy”, thereby still investing in the school estate. In that regard, it was highlighted that there were three schools in the Inverness area - Millburn Academy, Inverness Royal Academy and Culloden Academy – where the school rolls had grown so much that there was insufficient space for children to eat under cover at lunchtime, and they were eating outside in all weather. In relation to Inverness Royal Academy in particular, children were eating in a wooded area near the school to avoid being attacked by seagulls. The proposed amendment sought to address the situation and support and benefit young people by allowing them to eat under cover in a warm, dry and secure space. It was added that the Council Leader had previously indicated that proposals would be brought forward to address the situation at Culloden Academy and Inverness Royal Academy but they had not been forthcoming;
- good progress had been made with some of the projects in the HIP, and this was welcomed. Particular reference was made to the flood mitigation works at Dingwall Business Park, and the partnership approach that had been taken to the project was commended;
- the importance of ongoing maintenance in respect of all projects was emphasised;
- in relation to St Clement’s School, parents felt they had been sidelined, and the importance of two-way communication was emphasised. If the Statutory Consultation on the relocation of St Clement’s School went ahead, and if the outcome of the consultation was that the school would be on the new Community POD site, it was queried where the project sat within the five-year programme. It was added that children from multiple Council Wards attended St Clement’s School and, when updates were available, it was not only Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Members who needed to be informed. The Chair of the Education Committee highlighted that a report regarding the statutory consultation on the relocation of St Clement’s School would be coming to the Education Committee on 4 June 2025, and the Assistant Chief Executive - People was due to meet with Local Members following today’s Full Council meeting. Senior officers had been meeting with parent representatives. However, timescales could not be conveyed to stakeholders until they had been agreed by the Education Committee;
- the pace of progress of the programme was key, and it was necessary to get ahead of inflation and ensure best value for every pound of taxpayers’ money;
- with reference to the recent Supreme Court ruling that in the Equality Act 2010 “sex” referred to biological sex, and the updated guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, information was sought on the estimated financial impact of bringing all Council facilities, particularly the school estate, into compliance with current legal obligations regarding the provision of single-sex spaces; how many buildings were affected by the change in legislation; and where, in the capital plan, was the cost to rectify the situation. In response, it was explained that the final guidance in that regard had not yet been issued and, when it had, the Council would bring forward proposals to ensure it complied with the legislation going forward;

- concern was expressed regarding whether there were sufficient human resources to implement the programme, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether there was an anticipated increase in staffing levels and whether there was a risk of programme delays due to recruitment challenges;
- in relation to communications, an assurance was sought that when issues arose, as they invariably did with multi-million-pound projects, Local Members, parents and other stakeholders would be notified at an early stage so people were not disappointed and trust was not lost;
- with reference to Appendix 1 of the report and the funding allocated to flood protection, information was sought, and provided, as to what areas the funding was for and whether any was set aside for Nairn, which had outstanding recommendations in relation to the Alton Burn, River Nairn, and coastal defences and erosion;
- in relation to Culloden Academy, the issues were wider than the lack of dining space referred to earlier. Children organised themselves in a certain way in schools, with different year groups occupying different spaces, and it was suggested it was necessary to look at the shared spaces outwith the classrooms to see whether the money in the budget for Culloden Academy could be used innovatively to create social areas, whether for eating, hanging out or quiet space, that gave young people the space they needed. Ward Members would be content to go with officers to look at what was currently being delivered and what was possible. It was added that the situation in respect of Inverness Royal Academy and Millburn Academy was different as they were relatively new builds: Culloden Academy was an old school, and was rundown and uninspiring;
- in response to questions, information was provided on the expenditure in 2024/25 in respect of the Beaulay Primary School project and Rose Street, Inverness Multistorey Car Park, and the Assistant Chief Executive – Place confirmed that a detailed breakdown of what had been charged against the Capital Programme for each project could be circulated to all Members;
- with reference to a report to the City of Inverness Area Committee regarding a potential heat network development in Inverness with a start date of 2027, for which there was no money in the budget, it was queried what opportunity there would be for Members to make revisions to the HIP over the years to come;
- it was important to remember that the HIP projects involved a great number of people, agencies and partnerships, and many of them were very dynamic. Officers had to manage a range of considerations including changes over time to legislation, governments and inflation;
- approximately £80m would be invested in road improvements over the next five years. These improvements would take time but a difference could already be seen, and Members acknowledged the work that had taken place;
- reference was made to specific projects including the Inshes roundabout, which demonstrated the need to work closely with partner agencies such as Transport Scotland; Naver Bridge, which would benefit local people and enhance the North Coast 500 route; Uig Ferry Terminal, which had been a risky project using new engineering under water and in winter, but had been delivered effectively; the Corran Ferry infrastructure, which was now moving forward as a result of the successful collaboration within the Council to agree the funding package; and Inverness Castle, which it was anticipated would open later this year and would be a boon not only for Inverness but for all of Highland;

- clarification having been sought regarding the figures in respect of roads in Appendix 1 of the report, and it having been questioned whether these sums of money were sufficient to improve the roads in Highland, it was explained that the combined total across Appendices 1 and 2 of the report gave a 5-year profile of roads capital investment. It was intended that the appendices would be combined for future reports;
- in relation to public conveniences, given the new toilet block in Wick cost approximately £400,000, £30,000 per annum would not go far and it was queried whether that figure was correct. In that regard, it was highlighted that public conveniences were listed in Appendix 3 of the report in the context of some of the emerging capital pressures, and officers were reflecting on the point raised;
- Members having questioned the sum allocated to war memorials, it was explained that maintenance of war memorials was typically revenue expenditure rather than capital;
- it was queried whether it was correct that there would be no more expenditure in respect of the Nature Restoration Fund in the future;
- the HIP would have a positive impact in terms of maximising the objectives of the Gaelic Language Plan. A number of schools that currently delivered Gaelic Medium Education would be in scope for future investment that would support their ability to expand Gaelic education across Highland. This would also open the door to engage with the Scottish Government to bid for future grant funding;
- the HIP would support significant economic growth and community benefits as well as additional local employment opportunities, particularly new graduate and apprenticeship posts;
- the HIP should be seen as the key driver in reversing the projected depopulation of Highland, making it a sustainable destination of choice;
- the Council now had the ability to fund and deliver new high-quality community facilities that would support and enable a place-based approach to integrated service delivery, along with Highland-based partners;
- thanks were expressed to all those involved in developing the HIP and making it a reality, and it was hoped Members could continue to agree on the significant benefits the consolidated HIP would deliver; and
- in relation to the amendment, whilst it was to be expected that the proposer would support schools in his area, every Member could come forward with an ask about a school in their area. The HIP had been agreed in March, and it was necessary to be careful not to derail what had been agreed and set an unrealistic precedent.

Following summing up, during which the Council Leader confirmed he would be happy to commit to a report to the Housing and Property Committee setting out how and when the issues raised in relation to the lack of dining space at Culloden Academy, Inverness Royal Academy and Millburn Academy could be addressed, Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** the recommendations in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A Baxter, moved that recommendation i. be amended as follows:-

Note and agree the update provided regarding the consolidated Highland Investment Plan and estimated £756m of net investment over the 5-year period and amend Appendix 1 as follows:

Capital Programme 2024/25 - 2028/29

	Total	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29
	Net	Net	Net	Net	Net	Net
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
SCHOOLS - ESTATE MANAGEMENT	25,740	4,658	5,155	5,136	5,264	5,527
School Estate Improvement Programme	25,125	4,547	4,774	5,013	5,264	5,527
School Residential Properties	615	111	381	123	-	-
	<u>25,740</u>	<u>4,658</u>	<u>5,155</u>	<u>5,136</u>	<u>5,264</u>	<u>5,527</u>
Amend To						
SCHOOLS - ESTATE MANAGEMENT	25,740	4,658	5,155	5,136	5,264	5,527
School Estate Improvement Programme	25,125	4,547	3,774	4,013	4,264	4,527
School Residential Properties	615	111	381	123	-	-
Provision of covered area to allow pupils a warm, dry and secure space to eat at lunch times commencing with Inverness Royal Academy and Culloden Academy			1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
	<u>25,740</u>	<u>4,658</u>	<u>5,155</u>	<u>5,136</u>	<u>5,264</u>	<u>5,527</u>

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 41 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 16 votes, with 2 abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Ms S Atkin, Mr A Baldrey, 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, Mr S Coghill, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, 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, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D McDonald, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmondson, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms J McEwan, Mr A Sinclair, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr M Reiss, Mrs L Saggars, Mr R Stewart.

Abstentions:

Mr C Ballance, Mr R MacKintosh.

Decision

The Council:-

- NOTED** the update provided regarding the consolidated Highland Investment Plan and estimated £756m of net investment over the 5-year period; and
- AGREED** that officers progress actions to ensure the programme was managed within the overall funding envelope, as described within Section 7 of the report.

It was further **AGREED** that a report be presented to the Housing and Property Committee setting out how and when the issues raised in relation to the lack of dining space at Culloden Academy, Inverness Royal Academy and Millburn Academy could be addressed.

5. Review of the Highland Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils 2024/25 – Phase 1 Feedback

Ath-sgrùdadh air Sgeama na Gàidhealtachd airson a Bhith a’

Stèidheachadh Chomhairlean Coimhearsnachd 2024/25 – Fios Air Ais Ìre 1

There had been circulated Report No. HC/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- all the participants in the first stage of this consultation process were thanked for their contributions. Community Councils undertook valuable work and were supported by the Council with their work and the report reflected this. In particular, thanks were extended to the Community Support and Ward Management team for their support to Community Councils;
- there had not been a Community Council operating in East Nairnshire for many years and this had in the past been a very effective Community Council. A proposal was put forward to the extend boundaries of both Auldearn and Cawdor and West Nairnshire Community Councils to allow the residents within East Nairnshire to have a Community Council in their area. It was suggested that the A939 road was used as the boundary between both Community Councils. Therefore, the following amendment was proposed – recommendation 2.1(ii) to add an additional bullet point:- “the proposals for East Nairnshire Community Council as set out in section 7.3 and Appendix 2 of the report, to proceed to phase 2 consultation.” The Council was supportive of this proposal;
- it was explained that when there were proposals for boundary changes for Community Council areas, the support of Community Councils involved would be sought;
- sometimes Community Councillors were vulnerable to the threat of litigation and it was queried if there was any work being undertaking to help and protect them;
- there was concern that during the election years, to change the six monthly election of Community Councils in abeyance to a yearly election, would effectively mean that every three years there would only be one opportunity to get Community Councils formed again;
- work was being undertaken to update population figures and this would be in place prior to the final Scheme being reported back to Council for consideration;
- Community Councils had many planning applications to respond to and training was very important for them to undertake this role;
- reference was made to the Code of Conduct for Community Councillors and it was queried how this was enforced. It was explained that there was a complaints process on the Council’s website and amongst other things, this could be in relation to complaints about conduct;
- the issue of the sustainability of Community Councils was raised, as they were volunteer led and had limitations on their finances.
- it was queried that when a Community Council went into abeyance, should there be interim election ballots for all the members and not just the members that had resigned. It was advised that this had been considered, but it would increase the number of interim elections significantly and therefore from a practical perspective was not appropriate;

- with interim elections being every six months, consideration be given to extending this time period so that elections did not consume too much officer time; and
- it was explained that co-opted members were only in place until the next interim election and then they would need to stand for any of the vacant positions.

Decision

The Council:-

- NOTED** the feedback received during the phase 1 consultation as part of the review of the Community Council Scheme; and
- AGREED** the following for proceeding to phase 2 consultation:-
 - revised phase 1 boundary proposals set out at 7.3 of the report;
 - new boundary proposals received as part of phase 1 at 7.4 of the report;
 - recommendations for amending the existing Scheme proposals set out at 8.3 of the report;
 - new proposals to amend the Scheme set out at 8.4 of the report and detailed at Appendix 2 to the report; and
 - **AGREED** recommendation 2.1 (ii) of the report be amended to add an additional bullet point as follows:- the proposals for East Nairnshire Community Council as set out in section 7.3 and Appendix 2 of the report.

6. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

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

7. North of Scotland Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Partnership Com-pàirteachas Bun-structar Teàirrdsidh Charbadan Dealain Ceann a Tuath na h-Alba

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. HC/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following discussion, Mr K Gowans, seconded by Mr M Green, **MOVED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mrs B Jarvie moved that this Council paused the proposed roll out, and instead called for an urgent and comprehensive review of health and safety, including fire safety, in all Council-operated car parks with electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure. This review should include an assessment of the Council's potential liability and the adequacy of current risk management practices.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 48 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 4 votes, with 7 abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Mr A Baxter, 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, Mr S Coghill, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Dr M Gregson, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Mr A Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr P Logue, Mr D Loudon, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mrs L Saggars, Mr R Stewart.

Abstentions:

Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gunn, Ms M MacCallum, Mr T MacLennan, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

8. Decisions of Standards Commission for Scotland – Hearings
Co-Cdhùnaidhean Coimisean Inbhean na h-Alba – Èisteachd

(a) Hearing – 26 March 2025

There had been circulated Report No. HC/15/25 by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance/Monitoring Officer.

The Council **NOTED** the decision of the Standards Commission of Scotland.

(b) Hearing – 15 April 2025

There had been circulated Report No. HC/16/25 by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance/Monitoring Officer.

The Council **NOTED** the decision of the Standards Commission of Scotland.

9. Appointment of Office Bearers
Cur an Dreuchd Luchd-oifis

Following the resignation of Mr Calum Munro as a member of the Highland Council, the Council was required to appoint a new Vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee and a new Chair of the Gaelic Committee.

The Council **AGREED** Mrs M Reid be appointed as Vice Chair of Corporate Resources and Mr D Millar be appointed Chair of Gaelic Committee.

10. Membership of the Council Ballrachd na Comhairle

The Council **NOTED** that Ms Maxine Smith had tendered her resignation as a Highland Council Member with effect from 30 April 2025 and a By-election for Ward 6 (Cromarty Firth) would be held on 19 June 2025.

The Convener, along with Members of the Council, paid warm tribute to Ms M Smith who had recently left the Council after many years of public service. Members referred to the different roles she had held and her achievements during her time with the Council. They expressed their appreciation for her dedication and support to the Council and her community. Members extended their best wishes to Ms Smith for the future.

11. Membership of Committees, etc Ballrachd air Comataidhean, msaa

The Council:-

- i. **AGREED** that Mr S Kennedy be appointed to the Pensions Board;
- ii. **AGREED** the appointments the following appointments to Committees -
 - Corporate Resources Committee – Mr L Fraser;
 - Economy and Infrastructure Committee – Mr A Sinclair;
 - Gaelic Committee – Mr W Mackay;
 - Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board – Mr J McGillivray;
 - Housing and Property Committee – Mrs M Ross; and
 - Redesign Board – Mr D McDonald
- iii. **AGREED** the appointment of Members to the Area Committees Review Working Group as tabled and **NOTED** that the membership of the Poverty and Equality Commission would be referred to the next meeting of the Council on 26 June 2025 for approval; and
- iv. **NOTED** that for:
 - a) Ward 6 (Cromarty Firth), Mr J Edmondson was the substantive member of the North Planning Applications Committee and Mr S Coghill was the substitute; and
 - b) Ward 21 (Fort William and Ardnamurchan), Mrs K Willis was the substantive member on the South Planning Applications Committee and Mr A Baxter was the substitute member.

12. Timetable of Meetings Clàr-ama Choinneamhan

The Council **AGREED** the calendar of meetings from 1 April to 30 June 2026 as circulated, subject to the May Council meeting being moved and avoiding Planning Application Committees and Planning Review Boards being held on consecutive days.

13. Deeds Executed Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

The Council **NOTED** the list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 27 March 2025.

14. Confirmation of Minutes**Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais**

There were submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 27 March 2025 (as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately).

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

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

Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee	28 April 2025
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh Committee	28 April 2025
Caithness Committee	28 April 2025

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

Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee: Starred Item: 4 Housing Performance Report as follows -

The Council **AGREED** to request that options for a local housing allocations policy be explored for Badenoch and Strathspey to ensure local housing need in the Area was being met.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- officers had worked with Members, partners and tenants to provide a clear and robust housing allocation policy;
- the Council had a duty to house homeless people in all areas;
- each Area Committee could make a request to have a local housing initiative for their area;
- the current housing allocations policy gave 20 points to people with a reason to reside in an area, which was thought to be higher than any other Council in Scotland;
- having one housing register for Highland meant that those wishing to be allocated a house only needed to fill out one application;
- the policy was last reviewed in 2023 so this was an opportunity to review the whole policy rather than focussing on one area;
- a change to the policy would have an impact on the other organisations involved so a decision should not be taken without consultation with partners;
- between 52% and 53% of homeless accommodation was for local people;
- the housing pressures in Highland were caused by a shortage of houses rather than by the Housing Allocations Policy;
- a review of how houses were allocated in the Badenoch and Strathspey Area had been requested because the figure for how many houses were allocated to homeless people was not available;
- under the current Housing Allocations Policy many young people who grew up in Badenoch and Strathspey would never be able to get a council house in the area;

- attention was drawn to the previous introduction of the Short Term Let Control Area which only applied to Badenoch and Strathspey;
- there were legal requirements involved in housing allocations, many of which were controlled by the Scottish Government;
- the housing pressures in the Badenoch and Strathspey area were recognised and the need for Local Members to bring this to the attention of the Council was understood;
- a full housing summit involving all Members was requested;
- concern was expressed over the effectiveness of the current housing allocations policy;
- while Badenoch and Strathspey might have benefited from a local housing allocations policy there were other areas that could have also benefited from local policies so an overall review to determine this was welcomed;
- the importance of local democracy was highlighted; and
- the impact of this review on the wider Highland area was not known.

Mr R Jones, seconded by Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** the starred item.

As and amendment Mrs A MacLean, seconded by Mr A Christie, moved an **AMENDMENT** that:-

Highland Council acknowledges the pressures in the Highland on Housing in all our areas. We recognise the robust Housing allocation policy we have in place. We request a review of the whole Housing Allocations Policy

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 25 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 32 votes, with 2 abstentions. The **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the motion:

Dr C Birt, Ms I Campbell, Ms M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr M Green, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Loudon, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Ms M Reid, Mr M Reiss, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

For the amendment:

Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Edmondson, Ms S Fanet, Mr K Gowans, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

Abstentions:

Mr M Cameron, Mr P Oldham.

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

- Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 20 November 2024 (approved by the Board on 18 February 2025) **NOTED**;
- Chief Officer Recruitment Panel held on 3 April 2025 **NOTED**; and
- Investment Sub Committee held on 7 May 2025 **APPROVED**.

16. Question Time

Àm Ceiste

There had been circulated Members Questions received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance as follows -

1. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

Please could the Leader detail the number, nature (e.g. bullying and harassment, relationship with managers or colleagues, unrealistic workloads, working conditions, disputes over pay, benefits or terms and conditions etc), categorisation by Department including the outcome and corrective actions taken for all Staff Grievances received in 2022/23, 2023,24 and 2024/25?

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked whether it was considered disrespectful to not have attempted to answer the original question fully, as a key part of it called for the nature of grievances to be analysed across particular headings.

In response, the Leader indicated he would review his answer.

2. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

Please could you detail the procedure and guidance (whether finalised or still in draft) that will be used as part of the Chief Executive performance appraisal process and how that may differ from the Assistant Chief Executives appraisal process?

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked who selected the Validated Self-Evaluation model for use in the performance appraisal process for the Chief Executive.

In response, the Leader would circulate a response to the Council.

3. Mr M Reiss

To the Leader of the Council

Is Highland Council achieving, in the current financial year, the “standstill figure” for roads maintenance works across the council area?

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if there was a better way of answering a question which was of public interest.

In response, the Leader reiterated that there was no standstill figure available, and given the millions of pounds that had been spent on roads recently, it was not intended to speculate what that figure might be.

4. Ms K Willis

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Last summer the bus service was reduced in Fort William, and the two new housing developments in Upper Achintore and on the Blar still do not have a bus service. Following the Council's recent acquisition of 64 buses, please can the Chair advise when buses will be made available to provide a bus service that meets the needs of residents in the Fort William area?

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if discussions around the car/minibus services incorporated input from local residents, and if that service might provide evening and early morning cover, to develop a fit for purpose timetabled service.

In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure would provide a response, upon clarification.

5. Mr A Baldrey

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

With the amendments proposed by the Council to Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) areas on Highland trunk roads expected to come into effect this summer, how many new parking enforcement officers does the Council plan to recruit across Highland?

There was no supplementary question.

6. Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Following the closure of the Highland Council's Visitor Levy Consultation, can the Chair confirm whether the council administration's official position remains in support of the introduction of a local tourist levy, as set out by the Leader of the Highland Council, Councillor Raymond Bremner, in the press release issued on 25th May 2023, in which he stated:

"The Highland Council has long supported the idea of a tourist levy to enable the local authority to invest in local infrastructure and is a commitment in our Council Programme. The introduction of the Bill is good news and means we can now plan for the introduction of this local levy following approval of the Bill by Parliament."

If there has been any change in the administration's position or its plans for the implementation of the levy following the consultation, can the Chair provide details of how the implementation plan has been revised, the reasons for any changes, and what consultation feedback informed these revisions?"

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked what response the Council had received to the Convener's letter to the Minister for Public Finance, noting considerable industry concerns about a Visitor Levy introduced on a percentage rate basis.

In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure stated the question should have been directed to the Convener.

7. Mrs I Mackenzie

To the Leader of the Council

Can the Council outline what specific actions are being taken to bring long-term empty homes back into use, and how these actions are being aligned with efforts to provide affordable housing specifically for key workers across both the public and private sectors in Highland, so we can help support recruitment, retention, and community sustainability?

In terms of a supplementary question, it was asked if the Council might look at increasing the capacity or resourcing of the Empty Homes Officer function, and whether any forthcoming Empty Homes Strategy would prioritise key workers' housing needs, particularly in areas experiencing acute recruitment and retention challenges.

In response, the Leader referred to the discussion on the Housing Allocation Policy during Agenda Item 15, as it was relevant.

8. Mr R MacKintosh

To the Chair of Communities and Place

How much has the Highland Council managed to reduce its Glyphosate usage compared with last year?

In terms of a supplementary question, given the year-on-year reduction was expected to stabilise, and all feasible measures had been implemented to minimise the use of glyphosate, it was asked if that meant that the Council could not phase out glyphosate completely.

In response, the Chair of Communities and Place explained that the Council continued to make every effort to remove glyphosate from usage. However, weedkiller was needed and it was difficult to find a suitable and practical alternative.

9. Mr D Macpherson

To the Leader

The Highland Council declared a Housing Challenge in 2024 and held a Housing Summit, while other Scottish local authorities declared a Housing Emergency.

Creating adequate affordable housing for the population it serves, in our city and towns and also in our remote and rural communities is the key to addressing the depopulation of the Highlands and Islands that our region is currently experiencing.

How many second homes are there in the Highland Council area by Ward, and how much money is generated for the Council in second home Council Tax charges?

In terms of a supplementary question, the allocation of the £5.8m generated in Council Tax from second homes to this Council was sought, and it was asked if it was allocated to new house building and the purchase of additional houses for the Council to use on their housing lists.

In response, the Leader would provide a response to Members in as much detail as possible, although the information was not readily available.

17. Notices of Motion

Brathan Gluasaid

There had been circulated separately in Booklet A Notices of Motion received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance.

1. The Council notes that both UK and Scottish Governments have recently issued guidance on the use of mobile phones in schools, enabling increased monitoring and improved management. The Highland Council has a good record of supporting and encouraging good digital and online practice.

The excessive use of mobile phones is a significant issue, and some studies suggest it can have the characteristics of addiction. This is particularly significant for children and young people in an educational context. We have a responsibility to reduce distraction and the potential for bullying and invasion of privacy. We believe a strong Council policy can support schools in introducing and implementing appropriate measures.

This Council instructs schools to consult on how best to ensure pupils' use of phone screen time does not adversely affect their learning.

Chromebooks remove the need for phones as educational tools.

Consulting the whole school community – school managers, parents, teachers and pupils – will ensure the development of policy at local level, in order to agree what the appropriate use of mobile phones should be for their particular areas. The Council further commits to give fulsome support to schools seeking to implement a ban on pupil use of phones during the school day.

Signed:

Dr M Gregson

Mrs H Crawford

Decision

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

2. At the beginning of April, the Scottish Government introduced free ferry travel for young islanders under 22 living on Orkney, Shetland, and the Outer Hebrides. Free ferry travel will help offset some of the extra costs and higher bills that families and young people living on islands already experience and encourage young people to continue living in their island communities.

This Council agrees to write to the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Transport requesting that young people living on the Small Isles (Rum, Eigg, Muck and Canna) and Knoydart, which is only accessible by ferry, are also be able to access free ferry travel within their Local Authority.

Signed:

Ms K Willis

Mr A Baldrey

During discussion, support was expressed for the motion with Members highlighting the importance of free ferry travel for young islanders under the age of 22 which would give them the opportunity to travel freely for education, work and recreational purposes. A request was made for Raasay to be added to the Islands listed in the Motion. However, it was recommended that the Motion should be extended to encompass all ferries within the Highland Council region regardless of the ferry operator (i.e. Scottish Government, CalMac or Highland Council). Members indicated support for this approach.

Decision

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

The meeting concluded at 3.15pm.

**The Highland Council
No.5 2025/2026**

Minutes of Meeting of the Special Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 29 May 2025 at 2.00pm.

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

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr S Kennedy
Mr C Ballance (Remote)	Ms E Knox (Remote)
Dr C Birt (Remote)	Ms L Kraft
Mr B Boyd	Mr D Louden
Mr R Bremner	Ms M MacCallum
Mr I Brown	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr J Bruce (Remote)	Mr S Mackie
Mr M Cameron	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs I Campbell (Remote)	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Ms K MacLean
Mr A Christie	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr S Coghill (Remote)	Mr D Macpherson
Ms T Collier (Remote)	Mr D McDonald
Mrs H Crawford	Ms J McEwan
Ms L Dundas (Remote)	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Mr J Edmondson	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Ms S Fanet	Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Mr D Fraser	Mr P Oldham
Mr R Gale	Mrs M Paterson
Mr K Gowans	Mrs M Reid (Remote)
Mr A Graham (Remote)	Mrs T Robertson
Dr M Gregson	Mr K Rosie
Mrs J Hendry	Ms M Ross (Remote)
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)	Mrs L Saggars
Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)	Mr R Stewart (Item 4 only)
Ms L Johnston (Remote)	Ms K Willis
Mr R Jones	

In Attendance:

Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive – Place
Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Principal Solicitor (Planning)
Joint Democratic Services Manager

Mr K Gowans in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr M Baird, Mr A Baldrey, Mr A Baxter, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr J Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr J Grafton, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mr B Lobban, Mr P Logue, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms L Niven, Mr M Reiss and Mr A Sinclair.

2. Declarations of Interest / Transparency Statements Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt / Aithris Fhollaiseachd

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

Item 4 – Ms S Atkin, Mr J Edmondson

3. Notice of Amendment (Planning) – Planning Application (PLN/026/25) Brath Atharrachaidh (Dealbhadh) – Iarrta Dealbhaidh (PLN/026/25)

Applicant: Energiekontor UK Ltd. (24/02094/S36) (PLN/026/25)

Location: Land 1150M SW Of Tigh An Alt, Acheilidh, Rogart (Ward 04)

Nature of Development: Acheilidh Wind Farm - Erection and operation of a wind farm for a period of 35 years, comprising of 12 wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of between 200m and 230m, battery energy storage system (BESS), access tracks, borrow pits, substation, control building, and ancillary infrastructure.

Recommendation: Raise No Objection

The North Planning Applications Committee (NPAC) agreed to raise no objection for the above application at its meeting on 23 April 2025. The following Notice of Amendment was then received on 28 April 2025:

“We the undersigned, being Elected Members of the Highland Council, hereby declare our wish that the decision of the North Planning Applications Committee at its meeting on 23 April 2025 on the above applications (Agenda Item 5.2) be reviewed at the next scheduled meeting of the full Council.”

Signed:	Mr R Gale	Mr D Macpherson	Ms M Smith	Mr M Reiss
	Dr M Gregson	Mrs B Jarvie	Mr S Coghill	Mrs H Crawford
	Mrs T Robertson	Mr A Christie	Mrs J McEwan	Mr S Mackie
	Mr R Stewart	Mr A Graham	Mr J Grafton	Mr J McGillivray
	Mr J Edmondson	Mrs L Saggars	Mr A Jarvie	Mrs I MacKenzie
	Mrs M Paterson	Mrs L Dundas	Mr A Baxter	Miss M MacCallum
	Mr D McDonald			

In this context, there had been circulated Report No PLN/026/25, by the Area Planning Manager – North containing the case officer’s assessment of the planning application and a copy of the draft Minute from the meeting of the North Planning Applications Committee held on 23 April 2025.

During discussion, Members’ comments included the following:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the difference between Special Landscape Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, conditions relating to archaeology, how the decision on whether an application would have a significant effect on the landscape was reached, why the context images had not been provided in a 50mm focal length to mimic what would be seen by the naked eye, the Planning Permission in Principle Application for an associated Battery Energy Storage Scheme, aviation lighting and mitigation of the effects of access tracks and associated concrete on the environment;
- it was queried whether the Special Protection Area for Hen Harriers could be considered as part of the decision and, if not, why Member’s attention had been drawn to this. This was one of only four Special Protected Areas in Scotland for hen harriers;

- clarification was sought concerning the relevance of the decision on Garvary Windfarm and what would happen following the Council's decision on this application;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that a five-year implementation period would be recommended rather than the ten-year period requested by the applicant;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Transport Scotland would assess the impacts for transporting the turbines on trunk roads and the Council's Transport planning team would manage the impact on smaller roads. A Construction Traffic Management Plan would be put in place prior to the commencement of the development;
- it was queried whether there was a maximum acceptable cumulative number of wind turbines in an area;
- on the point being raised it was explained there were unlikely to be any residential properties close enough to be effected by noise from the windfarm. However, it was confirmed that noise levels would be effected by wind conditions and there would be a cumulative effect with surrounding windfarms;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that comments, caveats and conditions could be added to a decision not to raise an objection;
- the installation of 230m tall turbines would result in an unacceptable visual impact;
- local communities would not see any energy or economic benefit from the development;
- the granting of the application for Garvary windfarm added to the cumulative effect of windfarms in the area and could be seen as a reason to raise an objection to this application rather than as a reason to raise no objection;
- in response to the assertion that every application should be decided on its own merits, it was confirmed that the decision by Scottish Ministers to grant planning permission to Garvary Windfarm was a material consideration in this case;
- it was highlighted that the grounds given for raising an objection would be difficult to defend in a Public Inquiry;
- there would be a substantial impact to the view from many of the viewpoints shown along with disturbance to peat and agricultural land;
- attention was drawn to the fact that in previous applications turbines that could be seen against the skyline were often removed from the application;
- a large amount of street furniture would need to be removed in towns and villages to facilitate the transportation of the turbines to the development site;
- there would be consequential effects from this development such as the need to upgrade overhead power lines to deal with a higher volume of energy;
- it was emphasised that energy security was a priority and that there were no substantial planning reasons to raise an objection; and
- a Public Local Inquiry could have significant financial and reputational implications for the Council.

Mr R Gale, seconded by Ms H Crawford, **moved** that:-

This Council agrees to raise an objection to this application because it does not accord with the provisions of Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 by virtue of not demonstrating sufficient regard to the desirability of, and failing to reasonably mitigate effects detrimental to, conserving flora and physiographical features of special interest on the basis that the proposed development gives rise to unacceptable landscape and visual effects, including higher magnitude cumulative effects, within the south of the Strath Fleet LCA of LCT135 Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland, and on the Inhabited Surrounds Within a Wilder Backdrop

of Hills and Moors Special Quality (SLQ2) of the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area, in particular when experienced from the Struie Viewpoint (VP12) and for travellers along the B9176.

The proposed development, when combined with the effects of the consented Garvary wind farm and others in the area, would have significant adverse cumulative effects on SLQ2 of the Dornoch Firth NSA specifically the wild character to the backdrop of hills and moors when viewed from VP12 as the effects on the landscape would be intensified by this development at such a distinctive and high-quality scenic location. The large-scale vertical nature of the proposed turbines would be seen against the skyline above the horizontal nature of the landscape and would become prominent in northward looking views across the firth towards the distant mountains. With regard to the recent granting of the Garvary Windfarm while it is a material consideration it must be treated in context and the weight given to that consideration must be reflective of the additional cumulative effect of this development, which is unacceptable.

None of these concerns are outweighed by any possible economic benefits of this development or contribution it will make to the country's net zero targets. Therefore, this proposal is contrary to NPF4 Policies 4 (a) and (c)(ii), and 11 (b), (e) (ii). It is also contrary to Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HWLDP) Policy 28 (Sustainable Design) and Policy 67 (Renewable Energy Development).

As an **AMENDMENT** Mr D Millar, seconded by Ms A MacLean, moved that the Council uphold the decision of the North Planning Applications Committee and raised no objection to the application for the reasons and conditions set out in the report.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 18 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 24 votes, with no abstentions. The **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the motion:-

Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Ms H Crawford, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr S Kennedy, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr H Morrison, Mrs M Paterson, Ms T Robertson, Ms K Willis

For the Amendment:-

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Ms I Campbell, Ms T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr D Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr D Loudon, Ms A MacLean, Ms K Maclean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr P Oldham, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross

Decision

The Council **AGREED** to raise no objection to the application for the reasons and conditions laid out in the report.

**4. Digital Connectivity
Comas-ceangail Didseatach**

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

Ms S Atkin - as her partner had shares in a Broadband business
Mr J Edmondson – as a director of Ardross Online Community Interest Company

There had been circulated Joint Report No. HC/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place and Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, Members' comments included the following:-

- frustration was expressed that improvements to infrastructure and services in Highland often followed other areas and the rollout of the R100 initiative was cited as an example where South and Central Scotland were much further ahead;
- digital connectivity was important for businesses and the lack of connection in some parts of Highland placed them at a disadvantage;
- the most vulnerable in communities were often the elderly who were dependent on the need to be able to communicate. When debating changing the balance of care and keeping people safe, one of the tools was good reliable communications. Where there was no mobile signal or proper internet connection this had a disproportionately negative impact;
- the Convener and Leader had made representations at the recent Convention of the Highlands and Islands (CoHI), where the Depute First Minister and Government officials were present, highlighting the points which had been laid out in the report;
- the impact on vulnerable people and rural properties of the planned switch off of the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) in January 2027, without broadband access, was concerning. An interim measure was proposed by Openreach but that would last only until 2030;
- connectivity in some areas was virtually impossible;
- it was not only rural areas that encountered problems with broadband connections. Highland as a whole needed to be seen as a unique area with specific needs;
- there were also some areas in Highland which needed to rely on generators for electricity, thus impacting on connectivity. This too needed to be highlighted
- non-existent or poor connectivity had a detrimental impact on property prices;
- it was understood that there was cellular technology which allowed smart meters to work off broadband and, once broadband coverage was improved in Highland, this could be promoted to those households with poor mobile phone signals;
- the Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS) switch off was scheduled for 30 June 2025 but clarity was sought if it was to be phased out, otherwise this was a time of critical risk for households across Highland, There was also a shortage of meter engineers to deal with the scale of the task so a regional postponement of the RTS switch-off for the Highlands and Islands was sought, given known gaps in the Data Communications Company (DCC) network coverage in Highland. This meant that smart meters would not work in some households;
- mapping of DCC coverage was sought;
- there was concern at the reliability of some meters which might result in no heating or hot water or, alternatively, switching on when not needed. This could result in fuel poverty for some but also had implications for public health;
- a RTS taskforce had been established but was not operating effectively and Ofgem needed to be made aware of these concerns;

- Ofgem had made a commitment that no one would be financially worse off as a result of meter changes but it was unclear exactly what this meant. Furthermore, information was sought as to who would compensate anyone who was worse off and the claim process involved;
- the proposed officer task group was welcomed but, given the imminent switch-off date, it needed to be established expeditiously. It would also be useful if representatives from the business community were involved. In this regard, the taskforce needed to consider who the public should contact if they encountered problems after the RTS switch off;
- the proposed officer task group should also consider to what extent it could monitor at-risk households, coordinate contingency plans with housing, health and energy services, and report back on supplier failures and connectivity gaps to enable urgent escalation to Ofgem and UK Government;
- Council housing tenants were responsible for their own utilities;
- there were tariff discrepancies in Highland which needed to be addressed;
- the roll-out of RTS across the Council's housing estate in the 1980s had been seen as a good news story given the benefits to tenants. It was technology that had lasted well. In contrast, there were doubts about the reliability of the new technology proposed and, for the most vulnerable people, this could have serious consequences. 40,000 people in Highland could be impacted and it was the duty of Highland Council to do everything it could to address this;
- a united approach was sought with all Group Leaders signing a letter of representation to the UK and Scottish Governments stressing the importance of Highland maintaining RTS, analogue lines and 3G until the alternative was there for everyone in Highland;
- communication around the RTS switch off had been poor but if the Council took a more proactive approach, with photos of the types of meters which would be affected, it would raise greater awareness;
- the gigabit voucher scheme had been flawed and take-up slow as, once a provider came forth, no others providers were permitted; and
- an explanation was sought, and provided, as to what was meant by a 4G communication hub.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the current position with regard to digital activity across the Highland Area and **AGREED**:-

- i. Party Group Leaders write to both the UK and Scottish Governments to highlight:-
 - the very real concerns expressed through the Convention of the Highlands and Islands about the potential impacts on households in the Highlands;
 - frustration at the slow roll out of connectivity improvement initiatives, as compared with other parts of Scotland and calls upon the Governments to increase the speed of roll out of R100 in the Highlands as a matter of urgency;
 - a regional postponement of the Radio Teleswitch Service switch-off for the Highlands and Islands, given known gaps in the Data Communications Company network coverage and the high risk of residents being left without heating or hot water;
 - the need for clarification on who would compensate anyone who was worse off as a result of the meter change and the claim process;

- the possibility of cellular technology which allows smart meters to work off broadband, once broadband coverage was improved in Highland, to be promoted to those households with poor mobile phone signals; and
 - that some areas in Highland needed to rely on generators for electricity, thus impacting on rural connectivity.
- ii. Council approach Highlands and Islands Enterprise and seek their support for the establishment and management of a short life officer task group to manage and mitigate issues in the run up and following the Radio Teleswitch Service RTS switch off in June 2025.

The meeting ended at 6pm

**The Highland Council
No. 6 2025/2026**

Minutes of Meeting of the Special Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 12 June 2025 at 2.00pm.

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

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Head of Roads and Infrastructure
Joint Democratic Services Manager

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr M Baird, Mr J Bruce, Mr J Grafton, Mr D Gregg, Ms M MacCallum, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D McDonald, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs T Robertson and Mr A Sinclair.

2. **Declarations of Interest / Transparency Statements** **Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt / Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

Notice of Amendment – Corran Ferry – Foot Passenger Fare **Brath Atharrachaidh – Aiseag a’ Chorrain – Faradh Choisichean**

With reference to the Minutes of the Meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee held on 29 May 2025, the following Notice of Amendment had been received in accordance with Standing Order 13.2 –

“We the undersigned, give this Notice of Amendment to review the decision of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee at its meeting on 29 May 2025 at the next meeting of the full Council and agree not to introduce a foot passenger fare on the Corran Ferry”.

Signed:	Mr A Baxter	Mr A Christie	Ms K Willis	Mr R Stewart
	Mr P Logue	Dr M Gregson	Mr R Gale	Mr M Reiss
	Mrs A MacLean	Ms J McEwan	Mrs T Robertson	Mr D Macpherson
	Mr J Edmondson			

In this context, there had been circulated Report No. ECI/13/25, by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place and a copy of the draft Minute from the meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee held on 29 May 2025.

Mr Gowans **MOVED** the Minutes the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 29 May 2025 with the addition of Mr I Brown as being present at the meeting and except for Item 7 which was the subject of the Notice of Amendment.

In summarising his motion, Mr Gowans drew attention to the support and approximate £70m of funding that had been provided by the Council for the Corran Ferry vessel and infrastructure improvements, which included around £27m of Scottish Government funding that had initially been intended for projects in the Inverness area. A comprehensive report had been presented explaining the socio-economic benefits and risks associated with the proposal to charge £2 for foot passengers on the ferry. It was estimated that around 270k people used the ferry every year, many of whom were tourists. Anyone under the age of 23, over the age of 59, or registered as having a disability, was entitled to free passage on the ferry. The original amendment from Mr Baxter, considered at the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 29 May 2025, contained the phrase ‘at this time’ in relation to not implementing the foot passenger charge and, as this had been removed from the current amendment, Mr Gowans queried at what point Mr Baxter would consider implementing a foot passenger charge. He also drew attention to Mr Baxter’s proposal in February 2019 to introduce a £1 foot passenger fare. The 2024-25 Quarter 3 revenue monitoring report had shown a forecast £1.3m overspend on the Corran Ferry, which demonstrated that the ferry was already being heavily subsidised by other Council wards. While the Corran Ferry was a vital part of the Council’s integrated transport infrastructure, people did not expect to

use public transport free of charge, with various examples provided of other Highland ferries and their charges. In implementing a foot passenger fare, the key issues were ensuring fairness and equality, and generating much needed income to ensure sustainability of services.

Mr Baxter summarised his Amendment, citing the importance of the Corran Ferry, and highlighting the change from a £3 foot passenger fare proposal at the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 29 May 2025 to a £2 fare proposal, which it was estimated would generate an income of around £20k. He acknowledged his proposal in 2019 to introduce a £1 charge and explained that he had been told at the time that this would raise £200k in income. He referred to the recent article in the Lochaber News about the impact the proposed foot passenger fare would have on local residents and businesses, and he expressed concern that engagement on the latest fare proposal had not been undertaken with local Members, residents or businesses. He proposed that a review, with appropriate consultation, of the entire ferry fare structure and more clarity on passenger numbers was required, and he highlighted what the cost of the foot passenger fare would be for someone using the ferry to commute to work without a vehicle.

Ms Willis summarised her proposed addition to Mr Baxter's amendment, which was as follows: "Not to proceed with the introduction of a foot passenger fare on the Corran Ferry at this time. To pause and review with an investigation and review of the fare structure and ticketing system on the ferry, to be reported to Full Council in October."

Ms Willis emphasised the need for full consultation with all stakeholders, for more concrete information on passenger numbers, and the impact the introduction of a foot passenger fare would have on local businesses, and for a review of the ticketing system, which required modernisation. She expressed concern that the proposal had been presented to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee without consultation with local Members.

During discussion, some Members spoke in favour of introducing a foot passenger fare as follows:-

- all other Highland ferries charged for foot passengers and other methods of public transport were not free;
- while a bridge would be free, taking a bus across the bridge would not be free;
- a significant amount of funding, which could have been spent elsewhere in the Highlands (with some examples being provided), had been diverted to the Corran Ferry improvements, and income from the foot passenger fare would subsidise the expenditure on the ferry to an extent;
- the cost of holding a special Council meeting to review a democratic decision made at a strategic committee was highlighted;
- the actual number of foot passengers was unknown but once a fare had been introduced, this could be tracked and reported; and
- Members were reminded they represented the needs of the whole of the Highlands, not only those of their local wards.

Other Members spoke against the introduction of a foot passenger fare as follows:-

- key issues included the lack of concrete data on the number of foot passengers using the ferry and the impact the introduction of a fare might have on local businesses and residents, especially those using the ferry to commute to work from this remote and fragile community;
- 800 local residents had signed a petition against the introduction of a fare;
- the residents on the Ardnamurchan peninsula had suffered 145 days without a ferry service, which had cost them financially, and they should not be further penalised by increased fares;
- the 500-year history of the crossing at Corran was summarised, noting its long-term key role for the local economy;
- the lack of consultation with local people, businesses, local Members and the Corran Ferry Stakeholder's Group was concerning;
- the possible impact on depopulation if people felt they could not afford to live and work on the peninsula should be considered as a risk; and
- given the relatively low level of income that would be generated, it was not worth the damage that might be caused to the local economy and individuals without further engagement and investigation.

It was also suggested that only tourists and visitors, and not local residents, should be charged the foot passenger fare.

Following a summary of the motion and amendment, Mr Baxter accepted the addition of Ms Willis' proposal into his amendment.

Mr K Gowans, seconded by Mr M Green, **MOVED** the decision made by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 29 May 2025 to introduce a Corran Ferry Foot Passenger Fare.

Mr A Baxter, seconded by Ms K Willis, moved as an **AMENDMENT** the motion as detailed above, with the following addition: not to proceed with the introduction of a foot passenger fare on the Corran Ferry at this time. To pause and review with an investigation and review of the fare structure and ticketing system on the ferry, to be reported to Full Council in October.

Following a vote there were 34 votes for the motion and 27 for the amendment, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore carried, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the motion:

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, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr K Gowans, 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, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross.

For the amendment:

Mr A Baldrey, Mr C Ballance, Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mrs H Crawford, Mr J Edmondson, Ms S Fanet, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs L Saggars, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** to introduce a Corran Ferry Foot Passenger Fare and **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee held on 29 May 2025 subject to the inclusion of Mr I Brown in the attendance.

The meeting was concluded at 3.20pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday 12 May 2025, at 10.00 am.

Present:

Sarah Atkin
Sinclair Coghill
Tamala Collier
Laura Dundas

John Edmondson
Lyndsey Johnston
Morven-May MacCallum
Maureen Ross

Participating Officials:

Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Ms R Robertson, Bereavement Services Project Co-ordinator
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance
Mr A Byrne, Principal Housing Officer
Mr G Ralph, Housing Investment Officer
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in Attendance:

Mr David Cowie, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr Jamie Thrower, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Ms Kate Kenmure, NHS Highland

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

Ms L Johnston in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr D Loudon.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement.

Item 4: Mr J Edmondson

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Services Area Performance Report
Aithisg Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No BIER/11/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Mr D Cowie, recently appointed Station Commander in Invergordon, introduced a new style of performance report. An update was provided and it was said that the report was visually improved, easier to understand, and provided more information at a glance.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Chair expressed delight as the number of firefighters included 8 women;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the number of Home Fire Safety Visits;
- the recent wildfires were concerning, especially when the majority of wildfires had a human element;
- road signs indicating high fire risk had been considered. The matrix signs on the A9 near to both Tore and Kessock Bridge roundabouts had been used in the past, however, social media was currently the most cost-effective method. It was appreciated that social media posts would not be seen by everybody;
- it was disappointing that 'The Place' in Alness had been forced to close due to anti-social behaviour. Members were encouraged that a meeting had taken place to tackle the behaviour, and they looked forward to an update;
- most fires involving lithium batteries occurred in waste sites;
- it was asked if the Balintore Fire Station would be upgraded. It was confirmed that station areas were under constant review and operational intelligence visits would be carried out;
- in terms of battery storage, SFRS were consulted at every stage of the planning process;
- school visits continued but with busy curriculums, it was difficult to be fitted in; and
- recruitment was ongoing.

The Committee **NOTED** the attached Area Performance Report.

4. **Easter Ross Area Place Plan Plana Àite Sgìre Rois an Ear**

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

Mr J Edmondson – as a Director of Ardross Online, a community interest company that helped with the provision of broadband in the local area.

There was circulated Report No. BIER/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Easter Ross Area Based Plan could be used to create local area plans. Support offered to communities wishing to take their own plans forward was welcomed, but it was asked how much support could be provided in areas where there was only a small number of enthusiasts. Invergordon was given as an example;
- the plan highlighted a need for communities and employers to consider what their hopes and aspirations were for employment and training opportunities going forward. Although the Social Values Charter was not compulsory, it was felt beneficial for local businesses to sign up. Community Support Officers would work with local businesses and in the community;
- public engagement was difficult. It was thought that the survey responses received might not capture everyone's feelings. Progress was fed back to communities and an update would be provided to this Committee. It was suggested that local Members encouraged engagement;
- school based attainment was important if opportunities from the Freeport were to be realised;
- the above points raised would be considered by the Community Partnership Working Group for People, as well as data the working group had already gathered, which included the thoughts of children and young people;
- it was felt that mentioning specific locations for improvement in the Plan, such as the Tomich junction on the A9, might convey that other locations not mentioned were being ignored, which was not the case; and
- effective broadband was important and this should include homes in rural areas.

The Committee:

- AGREED to adopt** the Easter Ross Area Place Plan, using it as a tool to inform and support decision making about Easter Ross;
- AGREED to support and promote** the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other plans, strategies, development and funding opportunities across or impacting the Easter Ross area; and
- NOTED** the next steps for progressing the work set out in the plan.

5. Bereavement Services Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Sheirbheisean Caoidh

There was circulated Report No. BIER/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the consideration of green burials was important, in terms of climate change and net zero obligations;
- in response to a question regarding fallen headstones, Members were reminded that headstones were not owned by the Council and that the priority was safety within the grounds;
- repairs to steps at Rosskeen Cemetery would be considered;
- in response to a question regarding cemetery boundaries, and in terms of the Burial and Cremations Act 2016, there was no requirement to have an 8 foot high wall; and

- the purchase of additional burial space was ongoing and an update would be provided in due course.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in the Black Isle and Easter Ross area; and
- ii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development

**6. Housing Management Performance Report 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025
Aithisg Coileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2024 – 31 Màrt 2025**

There was circulated Report No. BIER/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, regarding assistance available to tenants with rent arrears;
- concerns were raised in terms of anti-social behaviour. Members were informed of weekly Safer Ross meetings with Police Scotland and Housing Associations, and were invited to pass any concerns to the Housing Service;
- it was asked if data was collected in terms of section 8.5 of the report, and a response was provided; and
- in terms of sections 8.4 and 8.7 of the report, it was asked if trend lines could be added to the graph. A response would be provided outside of the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

**7. Area Roads Capital Programme 2024/25 Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Calpa Rathaiden na Sgìre 2024/25**

There was circulated Report No. BIER/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Roads Operations Manager outlined the works completed in 2024/25.

Members found the report confusing and were concerned about the budget for 2025/26 works. Clarification was provided.

In terms of the breakdown of roads investment, Members were directed to Report HC/05/24, Place Based Approaches to Strategic Capital Planning and Asset Management, from the Meeting of the Highland Council on 14 March 2024.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the final budget allocation for Black Isle and Easter Ross area for 2024/25;
- ii. the works completed on the approved list to date; and
- iii. the additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year

8. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

There was circulated and **NOTED**, details of the Discretionary Budget applications that had been approved.

9. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** minutes of the meeting of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee held on 27 January 2025, which had been approved by the Council on 27 March 2025.

The meeting ended at 12.20pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, and remotely on **Monday, 12 May 2025 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Ms S Fanet
Mr T MacLennan

Ms L Saggars
Ms K Willis

Officials in Attendance:

Ms T Urry, Head of Roads & Infrastructure
Ms K MacLeod, Roads Operations Manager - Lochaber
Ms M Macdonald, Area Education and Learning Manager
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry
Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry)
Mr A Maciver, Principal Engineer
Ms E Wilkinson, Principal Housing Officer
Mr J Murray, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services

Also in attendance:-

Chief Inspector D Allan, Police Scotland (Item 3 only)

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

Ms K Willis in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Grafton and Mr A Baldrey.

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

Item 4 – Mr A Baxter (Transparency statement)

3. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/13/25 by the Area Commander, Police Scotland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised by Members and responded to by Chief Inspector Allan:

- the extent to which local communities could challenge people with open fires during a period when the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had issued an extreme hazard warning, and other anti-social behaviour such as littering, and at what point should the police be involved. Education of the public was

important, and the employment of seasonal rangers was highlighted. The matter would be taken on board by the Police and liaison undertaken with the SFRS;

- the process for taking anti-social and criminal behaviour to court was lengthy, and the reasons for this were summarised;
- concern was expressed at the handling of a recent incident of vandalism in the West End car park, which would be looked into; and
- concern was expressed at the occasional use of the emergency helicopter landing pad at Carr's Corner by members of the public and it was requested that this be investigated and appropriate mitigation undertaken, such as signage.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. **Kinlochleven High School Associated School Group Overview** **Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-Sgoil Cheann Loch Liobhann**

Transparency Statement - Mr A Baxter declared a transparency statement in relation to this item as he had children that attended Kinlochleven High School. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No. LA/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the results of the recent inspection of Kinlochleven High School were welcomed but it was disappointing the information had not been included in the overview report. It was requested that future inspection reports and progress with the action plans, be reported to the Committee. Education officials were thanked for meeting with the parent Council and local members after the release of the inspection report, and for their commitment to various improvement measures;
- Members voiced their support for the Head Teacher and other staff at Kinlochleven High School and welcomed work being undertaken to address long-standing issues;
- it was queried why some schools had waited a significant number of years for an inspection and it was clarified that the Scottish Government was taking steps to address this;
- information was sought and provided on the schedule for secondary schools to be informed of their probationer teacher allocation, and it was pointed out that delays held back schools from finalising their teaching staff recruitment requirements. It was requested that anomalies be investigated;
- acknowledging that it was challenging to report on some detailed attainment figures for small primary schools in order to protect individual pupil identity, it was requested that primary school attainment be reported for a cluster;
- information was sought and provided on strategies in place to support pupils with special needs and to stretch very able children; and
- the extent of the use of non-specialist teaching staff at Kinlochleven High School was queried.

The Committee **NOTED** the report and **AGREED**:

- i. that future inspection report information would be included in Education performance reports, and regular updates on Inspection report action plans be provided to the Committee;
- ii. that information on the use of non-specialist teachers at Kinlochleven High School, be provided to Members outwith the meeting; and
- iii. that consideration be given to the provision of attainment data for primary school clusters rather than individual schools.

**5. Area Roads Capital Programme 2024/25 Update
Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2024/25**

There was circulated Report No. LA/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the number of outstanding area roads projects not included in the capital programme was queried and, following a summary being provided, it was suggested that the total value of capital schemes that were not included in the programme was now around £6m in value, whereas in 2022 this figure had been around £4m. In response, a summary of the reasons for rising costs was provided, as was a recap of the Highland-wide position, the amount of funding required to maintain the roads in a steady state, and the current backlog in improvements;
- reference was made to the continued insufficiency of funding for roads, and improved ways of working and engagement with communities was welcomed. However, concern was expressed at the allocation process for area capital roads funding and as well as disappointment that Mr Ken Gowans, Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure, had not been able to attend the meeting as requested. Mr Baxter asked that Mr Gowans be invited to attend the August or November meetings, noting the political nature of the decisions that were required with regard to capital roads funding; and
- the improvements that were being made to the road to Kinlochhourn were welcomed, and the busyness of the car park at the end of the road was highlighted.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the final budget allocation for Lochaber area for 2024/25;
- ii. **NOTED** the works completed on the approved list to date;
- iii. **NOTED** the additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year; and
- iv. **AGREED** to invite Mr Ken Gowans, in his capacity as Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, to attend the August or November meeting of the Lochaber Committee to address concerns about the area roads capital programme allocation.

6. **Corran Ferry Update** **Cunntas air Aiseag a' Chorrain**

There was circulated Report No. LA/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- information was sought, and would be provided outwith the meeting, on the frequency and outcomes of requests to Transport Scotland to increase ring-fenced grant funding, community engagement with regard to proposed fare increases, and the estimated income from the proposed £3 walk-on fare;
- information was sought and provided on smart ticketing, for which there was no current funding although a new ticketing system was in place, the crew transfer boat project, which was designed but had no current funding, and the use of marshals at either side of the Corran Straits;
- assurance was sought on the likelihood of further slipway repairs being required but this was dependent on unknown factors such as severe weather and the ageing infrastructure; and
- assurance was sought on the completion dates for the infrastructure (summer 2027) and new vessel delivery (end of 2028), and that the vessel would be operational upon delivery.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update on Corran Ferry Operations; and
- ii. **NOTED** the update on the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme and New Electric Vessel which can be found below within Appendix 2; and
- iii. **AGREED** information on the following be provided to Members outwith the meeting:
 - a. the number of times in recent years the Council had requested that Transport Scotland increase the level of ringfenced grant funding for a project, and the number of times this had been agreed;
 - b. community and local Member engagement undertaken with regard to the proposed Corran Ferry fare increases, and to the proposed £3 walk-on fare, including the anticipated approximate income expected from this.

7. **Housing Management Performance Report** **Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais**

There was circulated Report No. LA/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- The engagement with communities and walkabouts being undertaken by Housing staff were appreciated;
- Information was sought and provided on how antisocial behaviour should be reported; and
- The issue of housing stock for homeless people was considered, noting the challenges around location.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

8. Environmental Health - Annual Report & Activity 2024/25

There was circulated Report No. LA/18/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Information was sought and provided on the process for abandoned cars, and the definition of an abandoned car. Similar information was sought for boats abandoned on the shore, and the process for that would be clarified outwith the meeting;
- Concern was expressed at debris building up in the water around the West End carpark, Fort William, and various measures were proposed including short term monitoring of littering, improved signage, and consideration to a clean-up operation with local volunteer divers; and
- An update was requested for ward 21 Members on noise monitoring at Achaphubuil sawmill.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the range and volume of work being undertaken locally by the environmental health team.
- ii. **NOTED** the Highland wide issues;
- iii. **NOTED** the report format and content; and
- iv. **AGREED**:
 - a. to provide further information to Members outwith the meeting on where responsibility for washed up marine debris, including abandoned boats on the shore, lay;
 - b. that the interim summary on noise monitoring activities at Achaphubuil sawmill be provided to Members; and
 - c. consideration be given, outwith the meeting, to the issue of waste in the loch near the West End car park in Fort William, including short term monitoring of unlawful waste disposal, the provision of appropriate signage, and the possible organisation of a clean-up using local diving club.

9. Ward Discretionary Fund Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund grant awards since the last Committee meeting:-

2024/25 budget

Ward 11

Caol Community Council - Caol Local Place Plan - £1500

South Knoydart Community Council - SKCC Local Place Plan - £1500

Lochaber Action on Disability - Volunteer Training - £980

Remembrance Day Costs - £283.05

Cycling Without Age Scotland - Cycling Without Age Scotland Fort William - £555.95

Loch Shiel Spring Festival - Loch Shiel Festival "The Big Music" - £900

Ward 21

Urram - Childcare Needs in West Highland Peninsulas - £2500

Remembrance Day Costs - £283.05

Voluntary Action Lochaber - Plantation Larder - £1938.58

Lochaber Environmental Group - Fort William Repair Café - £1500

Nether Lochaber Community Association - Extend & Enhance Floral Displays in Nether Lochaber - £900

2025/26 budget

Ward 11

Mallaig Community Hub & Shop - Toilet construction for community space - £1000

Arisaig & District Community Council – Laptop - £400

Kilmallie Community Fridge and Garden - £2000

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED**, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 27 January, 2025 which had been approved by the Council on 27 March, 2025.

The meeting ended at 12.45pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Monday 19 May 2025 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance	Mrs J Hendry (Remote)
Mr B Boyd	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr I Brown	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr M Cameron (Remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (Remote)(am only)	Ms K MacLean
Mr A Christie (am only)	Mr D Macpherson (Remote)(am only)
Mr D Fraser	Mr D McDonald
Mr K Gowans (Remote)	Mrs M Reid (Remote)
Mr A Graham	Mrs T Robertson
Dr M Gregson	

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager
 Ms D Sutton, Strategic Lead (Comm Ops and Logistics)
 Ms F Shearer, Area Education & Learning Manager
 Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Planning, Infrastructure & Economy
 Mr N Osborne, Climate Change Manager
 Ms R Burbaite, Project Manager
 Mr G Munro, Revenues Manager
 Mr R Bartlett, Principal Traffic Officer
 Ms J MacRae, Principal Housing Manager
 Mr G MacCormick, Senior Environmental Health Officer
 Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
 Ms R Robertson, Project Co-ordinator
 Ms S Lamb, Project Officer (Community Regeneration)
 Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
 Mrs K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr A McLean, Station Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue
 Mr K Dingwall, Watch Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue

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

Mr I Brown in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to commencement of formal business, Members paid tribute to former Inverness Provost and Councillor Mr William John “Bill” Smith, who had recently passed away. Councillor Mr A Graham spoke warmly of Mr Smith, both as a friend and colleague, highlighting his long-standing dedication to public service, his integrity and his deep commitment to the local community.

Originally from Lewis and later based in Inverness, Mr Smith served the public for over two decades across Inverness District Council, Highland Regional Council and Highland Council, including two terms as Provost. He was remembered for his thoughtful and independent approach, his support for small business and civic initiatives and his deep connection to Dalneigh and the wider Highland area. Beyond his political contributions, Mr Smith was also recognised for his active involvement in the Royal British Legion, the Rotary Club and his local church.

Members extended their thoughts and condolences to his family. His legacy of public service and community engagement was fondly acknowledged and deeply appreciated.

Business

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 H Crawford, Ms E Knox and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following the following Transparency Statements:-

Items 4, 7, 9, 11 and 16 – Mr A Christie

Items 14 – Mr M Cameron, Mr K Gowans and Mr D Macpherson

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – Area Performance Report Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba – Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No CIA/13/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Members expressed condolences following the recent loss of two firefighters in Oxfordshire, acknowledging the risks routinely faced by Fire and Rescue personnel and their vital role in protecting lives and property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members expressed appreciation for the continued dedication of the Service, including its rapid response to major incidents and proactive engagement with schools and communities to promote fire prevention. Thanks were extended to operational crews, with a request that this be formally passed on;
- the swift response to the recent major fire at Inverness Fairways Business Park fire was commended, with Members noting the proximity to other buildings and the potential escalation that was successfully prevented. The incident was also cited in support of previous decisions not to permit a battery storage facility nearby;
- the work of retained crews, particularly in rural areas such as Loch Ness, was commended where they regularly respond to road traffic collisions. Their significant contribution, and the support provided to them and their families, was acknowledged with gratitude;

- Members raised concerns about the stress placed on business keyholders responding to out-of-hours unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS), especially in mixed-use buildings with residential accommodation above. It was suggested that reassurance and practical training be offered to city centre businesses. It was also proposed that businesses might be willing to pay for unwanted call-outs to ensure prompt safety confirmation in high-risk or multi-occupancy premises;
- Members requested that consideration be given to improving support and communication from control centres during such incidents. Officers clarified that UFAS consultation had been ongoing for several years and that full mobilisation would still occur where indicators of fire, such as smoke or heat, were present;
- the recent response to the Tomnahurich Cemetery Hill fire was praised, and the success of the Service's charity car wash was noted as a reflection of strong community support; and
- a further concern was raised regarding antisocial behaviour and suspected fire-raising by young people in the cemetery area, linked to gates being left open overnight. Members queried the extent of engagement with local schools and youth settings. In this regard, it was confirmed that a thematic action plan was in place, including educational visits to primary and secondary schools and youth development projects addressing fire safety and antisocial behaviour.

Thereafter the Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report

4. **Inverness Common Good Fund: Discretionary Scheme for Winter Payments 2025/26**

Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis: Sgeama fo Ùghdarras airson Pàighidhean Geamhraidh 2025/26

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

The Committee was informed that no changes were proposed to the scheme's criteria, apart from the Chair's amendment to recommendation (ii), which extended the end date from 28 February to 31 March, consistent with previous extensions.

In addition, the Committee was provided with clarification that recommendation (iv) would apply the Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjustment, increasing the winter payment to £115 for eligible applicants.

The Committee thereafter:-

- AGREED** to provide an Inverness Winter Payments Discretionary Scheme for 2025/26 having regard to the financial support available from Social Security Scotland (SSS) and other sources as set out in sections 6 and 7 of the report;
- AGREED** to accept applications from 1 December 2025 to 31 March 2026 inclusive;

- iii. **AGREED** to provide a total budget of £0.237m inclusive for the 2025/26 Scheme noting that payments for Landward Areas would be sourced from available income within the Inverness Benevolent Funds first, with the ICGF being utilised for the Landward Areas, in the event that officers decided it financially prudent to do so;
- iv. **AGREED** to apply a Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase to the £111 award rate for 2024/25 in order to determine the 2025/26 single tier payment rate;
- v. **AGREED** agree to use the annual CPI of 3.4% (March 2025 rate), noting this would establish the 2025/26 award amount at £115 for eligible applicants;
- vi. **AGREED** that the criteria utilised for the 2024/25 scheme as set out in paragraphs 8.2 to 9.6 of the report would be used as the basis for the 2025/26 Scheme;
- vii. **AGREED** this discretionary scheme was to be made available to residents in the City of Inverness and the Landward areas of the seven City Wards; and
- viii. **NOTED** BACS payments were used for this discretionary scheme as this was the most secure method of payment for recipients of the payment and the Council alike.

5. Community Regeneration Fund – Approval of Process Maoin Ath-bheòthachadh Coimhearsnachd – Pròiseas Aontachaidh

There had been circulated Report No CIA/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to utilise the existing delegated powers granted to Inverness Common Good Fund Sub Committee (ICGFSC) to make recommendations to CIAC on final funding awards for the sifting of expressions of interest and assessment of applications; and
- ii. that the priority outcome for CRF funding in the City of Inverness and Area should be projects that met the outcome of reducing poverty and inequality.

6. Scottish Government Play Park Funding Maoineachadh Phàircean-cluiche Riaghaltas na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No CIA/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Appreciation was expressed for the work carried out by the team, with recognition that their continued efforts were making a meaningful and lasting impact at a local level.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. in Ward 12 £102,336 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at 6.5 of the report;
- ii. in Ward 13 £72,225 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at 6.6 of the report;
- iii. in Ward 14 £55,000 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlines at 6.7 of the report;

- iv. in Ward 15 £73,304 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at 6.8 of the report;
- v. in Ward 16 £56,000 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at 6.9 of the report;
- vi. in Ward 17 £93,187 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at 6.10 of the report;
- vii. in Ward 19 £60,000 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at 6.11 of the report; and
- viii. Ward 19 £60,000 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined at 6.11 of the report.

**7. Inverness Waiting and Loading Restrictions Consideration of Objections
Beachdachadh air Gearanan mu Bhacaidhean Feitheimh is Luchdachaidh
Inbhir Nis**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as Non-Executive Director on NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- permit parking should be extended to Ballifeary Lane residents given the overflow of vehicles from Ballifeary Road and these areas included in the same parking zone. It was confirmed that officers would progress this matter going forward;
- officers were thanked for resolving the issues in relation to Greig Street, Inverness;
- in response to a query, it was explained that businesses on Carsegate Road had been contacted and advised of the proposed loading changes. Officers had offered to meet with them but to date no response had been received;
- it was important to monitor parking and safety issues in central areas of Inverness on a continual basis given the condition of road surfaces in some areas and pressures created by visitor and events attractions and the re-opening of Inverness Castle;
- in terms of feedback received from disabled persons, the report recommended that the changes proposed for limited waiting disabled bays be removed from the Traffic Order to allow for further engagement activity;
- with regard to the objections received to Cullaird Road, a report would be presented to a future meeting that scoped the issues regarding parking outside schools in the City. The report should offer solutions to allow parents to drop off and collect children safely and should look at the situation in Lochardil as a priority first;
- support was expressed for the proposed restrictions on Cullaird Road on the basis it was not suitable as a school drop off zone taking account of the submissions of all parties and information provided in the report;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that officers, in conjunction with the Road Safety Team, would arrange a site visit with Members to consider safety issues at Inshes Primary School;

- concern was expressed about parking issues in a number of specific locations in Ward 17: Culloden and Ardersier, and it was confirmed arrangements would be made for a walkabout at these locations involving local Members and officers;
- in response to query, it was confirmed that Councillor Robertson would be provided with further clarity in relation to the issue of disabled parking permits and blue badges to persons/households;
- in relation to the further engagement activity in respect of Old Mill Road, it was important a full and public consultation with the community was carried out and a site visit held to allow residents to emphasise their safety concerns in this area; and
- it would be helpful for one large map to be provided, marked and numbered with the relevant information, to help Members navigate to specific areas.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the extents of the proposed Variation Eight;
- ii. the intention to remove the changes proposed for: Greig Street, Balnain Street from the Order;
- iii. the intention to remove the changes proposed for: Limited waiting disabled bays, Old Mill Road and Station Lane from the Order to be considered after further engagement activity;
- iv. the impact assessment in Appendix 1 of the report;
- v. the outstanding objections received to The Highland Council (Prohibition and Restriction of Waiting and Loading and Parking Places) (Decriminalised Parking Enforcement and Consolidation) Variation Eight Order 2024;

AGREED:-

- vi. that a report be presented to a future meeting that scopes the issues regarding parking outside schools in the City. The report should offer solutions to allow parents to drop off and collect children safely and should look at the situation in Lochardil as a priority first;

APPROVED:-

- vii. subject to i. to vi. above, the making of the Road Traffic Regulation Order.

8. **Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF)** **Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis**

a) **Grants Applications over £10,000** **Iarrtasan Tabhartais thar £10,000**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/18/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. A copy of supporting documentation had also been circulated as Booklet A.

The Committee **APPROVED** the following applications taking into account that a pro-rata reduction of 30% had been applied to the successful application in this category due to the limited budget available:-

- i. Highlands & Islands Blood Bikes (HAIBB) - £10,500
- ii. Crown Church, Inverness - refused a grant but would engage with applicant

- iii. Inverness Rowing Club - £7,000
- iv. Apex Scotland - £7,000
- v. Shopmobility Highland SCIO - £21,000
- vi. Calman Trust - £18,380

In relation to the application from Visit Inverness Loch Ness (VILN), the Committee **AGREED** to defer determination at this stage pending more detailed information on the proposed 'familiarisation trips' and how the requested funding would be spent along with the links to the VILN business plan with a Members private briefing to be provided by VILN detailing progress on the VILN Business Plan and how the application for funding supported this

9. **Potential Heat Network Development in Inverness** **Leasachadh Lìonra Teasa a dh'Fhaodadh a Bhith ann an Inbhir Nis**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as Non-Executive Director on NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/19/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- confirmation was sought, and provided, that the potential for households or businesses to have individual heat control on the network was being investigated, albeit the Council would have to retain an element of control in terms of pricing and usage;
- clarification was sought, and provided, that the intention was to bring forward a final business case model by the end of December 2025, progress being guided by the Scottish Heat Network;
- it was questioned whether the start date for projects would coincide with SSEN's recabling of the City. It was explained the Council was working with SSEN to try and align, this being dependent on the final business case model;
- in response to a query, further clarity was provided on the timescales for the recabling and ongoing discussions with SSEN on this issue;
- there was potential for households in poverty in the City Centre to benefit from a local heat network. It was explained a key priority with incoming investors was to understand how to tackle fuel poverty in each of the areas;
- in response to a query, it was noted that discussions in respect of a data centre on the River Ness were at an early stage;
- further clarity was sought, and provided, on how the Council would ensure key partners and large heat users were committed to the project in future, and the impact on local residents and future new housing development. It was reported the legislation was moving towards the public sector having to connect to local heat networks and the Scottish Government considered it a viable project;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, on the funding arrangements for the development, the Scottish Heat Network Fund being the main source of public funding to be supported by private investment, there having been significant commercial interest to date;

- the benefits that would be delivered were acknowledged, including to the Council, through a heat network on the west bank of the River Ness, and potential to incorporate Inverness Leisure, Botanic Gardens, Council Headquarters and Inverness Ice Centre;
- an assurance was sought, and provided, that there had been engagement with Inverness Ice Centre and a proposal to bring forward a joint project with Inverness Leisure was being considered as a priority;
- an update was sought, and provided, on progress being made with SSEN to resolve the issues with the electricity supply to the Victorian Market;
- concern was expressed that it was not possible to tap into the large amount of energy being generated in the Highlands, currently being transmitted outwith the area; and
- it would be helpful for Members to receive a briefing on the potential heat network development so that more detailed information could be provided.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress to date; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a Members' Briefing be held to provide more detailed information.

10. Housing Management Performance Report – 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025
Aithisg Coileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2024 gu 31 Màrt 2025

There had been circulated Report No CIA/20/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the report provided an overview of the good work being undertaken by the Service in challenging circumstances;
- the investment in emergency and non-emergency repairs showed a high level of commitment to ensuring the housing stock was maintained at its best possible level;
- the reduction in rent arrears was welcomed and it was hoped this trend would continue going forward and the information showing the value of current rent arrears by band for each ward was helpful as it gave a better perspective on the age of the debt;
- there was intensive work being undertaken with tenants who had higher end and thereby longer term rent arrears;
- the Council had agreed a budget allocation for poverty including additional staff resources to encourage the uptake of benefits and it was hoped this had been realised;
- information was sought as to how the Service addressed the high demand for one bedroom properties in relation to homeless cases and that this be considered in the mix of new house build developments. It was explained the Service considered those in temporary accommodation for lengthy period of time for two bedroom properties;
- the downward trend in homeless presentations was welcomed and a point as to whether this would sustained going forward;

- a report was sought to the Committee on the measures that could be taken to significantly reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation and to make Highland an exemplar across the UK;
- it would be helpful in future reports to have information on the number of lets to homeless applicants that did not have a local connection to the area;
- further clarity was provided on the assistance provided by the Council and partner organisations if evicted persons subsequently became homeless and the approach taken to overcrowding; and
- the Service was commended on organising the estate walkabouts involving Members which helped highlight specific issues in areas.

Thereafter, concern was expressed at the impact of anti-social behaviour on Council properties and the lives of neighbours, and the potential for the Committee to consider this issue in more detail. It was suggested that more extensive reporting and detail was required in relation to anti-social behaviour, further clarity being sought on the significant increase in the percentage of cases resolved and what this constituted.

Members were advised that consideration was being given to better ways of reporting anti-social behaviour in future reports and that significant improvements in performance on the number cases resolved had been achieved.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025; and
- AGREED**, following consideration by the Housing and Property Committee, a report be submitted to a future meeting detailing how the time spent in temporary accommodation could be reduced.

11. **Environmental Health - Annual Report & Activity 2024/25** **Slàinte Àrainneachdail – Aithisg Bhliadhnaidh & Gnìomhachd 2024/25**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as Non-Executive Director on NHS Highland and Non - Executive Director of Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- in response to a query, confirmation was provided that arrangements could be made for Ward briefings or Ward level reports to be produced containing more specific data such as complaint types, response times and enforcement outcomes;
- there was a need for a single point of contact for the public to report issues and it was explained work was ongoing to improve the online reporting system on the Council's website;

- it was questioned how the Council could raise awareness of the short term let licensing regime and the public encouraged to report a neighbour operating without a licence;
- there was concern regarding the cycle for renewal of short term let licences would commence later in the year and an update was provided on the resources and plans in place to address pressures on the Service;
- concern was also expressed that a main source of complaints continued to be in relation to dog control and littering;
- a proactive approach needed to be taken with developers when commencing work on site to identify colonies of rats and deal with them at source to avoid them being displaced into people's houses. It was noted the Council no longer provided a free pest control service, however officers would give advice and take enforcement action if there was an identifiable source;
- there was potential for the pilot scheme for abandoned vehicles being trialled in Easter Ross to be extended to the Inverness area;
- a more robust approach needed to be taken so that abandoned vehicles were uplifted, and any identifiable owner charged for the cost;
- a collaborative approach was needed with businesses and schools in respect of the disposal of waste at Steven's Brae and an update was provided on the work ongoing to find a solution to current issues around bin storage in this location. The newly appointed Education and Enforcement Officers as part of their remit would be undertaking work within schools;
- there was a plea for cross service working between Environmental Health and Amenities in relation to shredded cans and glass deposits left following grass cutting and strimming of public areas. It was confirmed this point would be fed back to the Amenities Team;
- it be emphasised to business not to overfill and secure their bins properly to prevent gull problems being exacerbated and to exercise their social responsibilities by clearing up litter dropped by customers;
- as a measure to support enforcement and compliance in the City Centre, the potential to introduce by laws to give powers to officers to ensure the best possible standards was highlighted; and
- there was concern at the condition of the domestic bins the Council provided for locals and tourists in the City Centre, and how rectifying this problem could be resourced. It was confirmed that officers would take this matter forward with the relevant teams.

Thereafter, it was suggested a culture change was required within the Council and a zero-tolerance approach taken to the issues around waste, littering and abandoned vehicles in the City Centre for the benefit of the public and as a tourist destination, recognising this would involve resource and cost. It was suggested the matter be considered in more detail in consultation with Inverness BID and a report brought forward on this issue.

During further debate, the City Manager gave a commitment to continue to work with Inverness BID and Environmental Health colleagues to address the issues raised by Members in discussion.

The Committee **NOTED:-**

- i. the variety and volume of work being undertaken locally by the environmental health team;

- ii. the Highland wide issues; and
- iii. the report format and content.

12. Environmental Health - Air Quality Report Slàinte Àrainneachdail - Càileachd an Adhair

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information on air quality was available on the Scottish Air Quality website;
- there had been an improvement in air quality within Inverness City Centre;
- a “clean air day” would take place on 19 June 2025 and aimed to raise awareness about air pollution;
- Council Services needed to work together to educate the public on road transport safety in relation to vehicle idling and traffic congestion around schools given the public concern about air quality. Residents in the locality of schools were also concerned about traffic congestion. It was explained that there was an anti vehicle idling campaign and the Scottish Government’s clean air day this year was mainly focused on anti vehicle idling. There were also a number of Council Services that had input into traffic congestion around schools. Education Services carried out a lot of work on this, such as safer routes to schools;
- air quality could be affected by a change in traffic around schools due to proposed large developments. If such developments proceeded, a before and after comparison of air quality should be undertaken;
- in relation to the A82 trunk road which went through Inverness, it was queried what air quality monitoring had been undertaken, particularly in light of 20 mph speed restrictions on part of the route meaning vehicles would be travelling at much slower speeds and a risk that emission levels might increase. It was explained that it was not the speed of traffic that would cause increased emissions but, if the volume of traffic was to increase, particularly HGV’s, this would have the biggest impact on emissions. Air quality monitoring was carried out on part of the A82 route through Inverness and this could be extended if necessary;
- the guidance from SEPA was that a local air quality strategy should continue to be developed. There were issues that the A82 route through Inverness could affect other parts of the City Centre; and
- the responses from Primary and Secondary schools about the effects of climate change and the importance of air quality was commended as was the work of Education Service and Highland One World Group and other associated organisations.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the acceptance by Scottish Government (SG) of the 2024 AQMA Action Plan;
- ii. the general improvement in air quality in the City Centre;
- iii. the Revocation of the Inverness City Centre Air Quality AQMA;
- iv. the project work carried out in Primary Schools to monitor air quality and raise awareness;

- v. the proposed delivery of a city centre anti-idling campaign on Clean Air Day 2025;
- vi. the continued provision of Local Site Operator (LSO) service to the UK Automatic Urban and Rural Network (AURN); and
- vii. the report format and content.

13. Bereavement Services – Project Updates **Cunntas às ùr mu sheirbheisean bàis**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/23/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- there had been significant improvement in reporting on bereavement services at Committees which was welcomed as burials and cremations were among the most sensitive services that the Council provided to the community;
- many of the shortages in burial ground capacity had now been addressed, particularly in the Inverness area. Kilvean cemetery had the potential to be extended for more burial capacity;
- it was queried if other sites in Inverness had been identified for future burial grounds. It was confirmed that areas of land for burial grounds were being investigated, including East Inverness;
- Tomnahurich cemetery was a beautiful cemetery with a lot of history behind it. However, occasionally there were concerns about its upkeep and the lodge at the entrance was also in need of maintenance. It was explained that resources were restricted but maintenance had been carried out on the paths at the cemetery. The lodge was in private ownership but contact had been made with the owner. Also, the gates had been closed at the Bruce Gardens entrance to this cemetery, as the cemetery had been used as a “rat run” by drivers. The gates were opened when there was a funeral taking place;
- an update was sought on the crematorium upgrade. It was advised that the programme of works was being finalised with the contractor, with works anticipated to commence in the Autumn. More detail would be provided to Members once the programme had been completed;
- it was good to hear that work was being undertaken on Kilmorack cemetery and it was queried if this would include problems with water and mud at the entrance. An undertaking was given to look at these issues;
- a request was made for a waste bin to be located outside the entrance to Fasnakyle cemetery;
- in relation to Kilmore cemetery there was a row of graves against the boundary wall preventing anyone from walking past them. The Local Member undertook to discuss this further with the Bereavement services team;
- it was queried how much of the budget was allocated for maintenance on historic cemeteries. An undertaking was given to look into this.
- an update was sought as to when the new Dores cemetery would be able to take funerals. It was advised that the work on the access road was due to commence in June and progress would be reported to the Local Member;
- there were a lot of headstones in burial grounds that were in a very poor state of repair. Members were informed that there was an ongoing programme for memorial safety, albeit headstones were owned by the families of the deceased. Headstones were inspected on a five year rolling programme and

temporary repairs could be carried out. Given the limited budget, a permanent solution to maintaining headstones in a poor state would need to be addressed; and

- the Burial Grounds Commutation Fund had around £1m invested in it for the benefit of added value works to cemeteries in the Inverness area. Ways to utilise this fund on burial grounds would continue to be progressed and an update would be provided to Members in due course.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in the Inverness area; and
- ii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development.

14. Associated School Group Attainment Overview Foir-shealladh air Buileachadh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

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 M Cameron - as a relative worked at Charleston Academy

Mr K Gowans – as an employee of UHI

Mr D Macpherson – as a relative was employed as a teacher

There had been circulated Report No CIA/25/25, No CIA/25/25, and No CIA/26/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- in relation to the Inverness Associated School Group, increasingly in the upper primary classes and throughout secondary schools, there were challenges evidenced by the statistical performance which highlighted the importance of adequate staffing support to support young people in their attainment and attendance at school. It was reassuring to know this was being addressed by the Education Service;
- Skills Development Scotland's annual participation measure had the potential to be a much more useful measurement of school leaver destinations and therefore the success or otherwise of education provision to young people. It was queried if this was something that could be taken forward or to encourage Skills Development Scotland to use this as their main measure on school leaver destinations. It was advised that a longer term measure of young people destinations was being discussed;
- in relation to positive leaver destinations, when young people left school and contact was lost with them, it was very difficult to track them;
- the attendance at Charleston Academy was below both the national and Highland average but it was reassuring that the Education Service was addressing this. The impact on young people not being in school for a long time could have long term effects. There was an ongoing project to improve attendance, particularly in secondary schools, and this was a high priority for the Service. There was a need to improve the culture and ethos amongst young people to want to go to school;

- in relation to Beauly Primary School, the results for year 2022/23 were very good. This was a great achievement particularly given the condition that teachers and young people had to work in at the school;
- Glenurquhart Primary School was commended on their work with the community in developing a polytunnel;
- attainment in schools was still below average, albeit there had been considerable improvement. However, statistical data could be skewed by a number of very small schools in the area. An undertaking was given to provide more information on this issue to Councillor A MacKintosh; and
- the issue of meaningful attendance was highlighted. Improving attendance was good, but actually encouraging young people to engage in education provision while at school could be challenging. In many cases non attendance at school was out with the control of the Education Service and it was queried if more could be done to work with the NHS, GPs and Social Work to improve attendance.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the reports related to Charleston Academy, Glen Urquhart High, Inverness High School.

15. Ward Discretionary Budget Applications Iarrtasan Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** that the following City of Inverness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 3 February 2025:-

Ward 12

- | | |
|---|--------|
| - Balnain Primary School Parent Council: Playground Update | £750 |
| - Beauly Gala: Gala Weekend | £990 |
| - Beauly Community Council: Maple Vale Beauly Playpark Planting | £1,628 |
| - Glen Urquhart Childcare Centre: ELC Room Provisions Upgrade | £703 |

Ward 13

- N/A

Ward 14

- | | |
|--|---------|
| - Crown Connects SCIO: Hill District Place Plan | £461.04 |
| - Partnership for Wellbeing: Friendship Bus / Club Expansion | £1,200 |
| - Inverness Foodstuff: Public Diner Feasibility | £1,000 |

Ward 15

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| - Westwing + Core (Inverness Royal Academy ASN Support Bases):
Annual Outdoor Education Trip | £1,000 |
| - Inverness Royal Academy: Bothy Nature Base | £2,000 |
| - Partnership for Wellbeing: Friendship Bus / Club Expansion | £1,200 |
| - Ness Castle Primary School Parent Council: Health & Happy-Ness | £6,840.50 |

Ward 16

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| - Hilton Primary Parents & Friends: P7 School Trip | £5,115.93 |
| - Partnerships for Wellbeing: Friendship Bus / Club Expansion | £1,200 |

Ward 17

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| - HLH Culloden Active Schools: Culloden ASG School Football Groups | £2,592.94 |
| - Culloden Community Council: New Benches & Bench Replacement | £4,500 |

- Cameron Drive Play Park £2,968.06

Ward 19

- Partnership for Wellbeing: Friendship Bus / Club Expansion £1,200
- Inshes Library: Fèis a' Bhaile & Inshes Library Community Piano Project £1,428
- Play Parks £4,553

**16. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as Non - Executive Director of Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

The following Minutes had been circulated for noting or approval as appropriate:-

- i. City of Inverness Area Committee held on 3 February 2025 - **NOTED**;
- ii. Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 20 February and 19 March 2025 - **APPROVED**; and
- iii. Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 6 May 2025 - **APPROVED**.

The meeting concluded at 2.45 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Wednesday 21 May 2025** at 9.30am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin
Mr B Boyd
Mr I Brown
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair
Mr L Fraser
Mr A Graham
Dr M Gregson
Mr R Jones
Mrs I MacKenzie

Mr R MacKintosh
Ms A MacLean
Mr D Macpherson (Remote)
Mr D McDonald
Ms J McEwan (Remote)
Mr P Oldham (substitute) (Remote)
Ms M Ross (Remote)
Mr R Stewart (Remote)

Non-Members also present:

Mrs M Cockburn
Mr S Coghill (Remote)
Ms S Fanet
Mr D Fraser (Remote)
Mr R Gale (Remote)
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)

Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)
Ms K Maclean (Remote)
Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Mrs M Paterson (Remote)

Tenant Representatives in Attendance:

Ms L Richardson, Tenant Representative
Mr A Dick, Tenant Representative

Officials in Attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr F MacDonald, Chief Officer – Property and Assets
Mr A Maguire, Head of Development & Regeneration
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing & Building Maintenance
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning & Estate Strategy
Ms D Delonnette, Service Lead - Housing and Homelessness
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates Management)
Ms H Jones, HR Business Partner
Ms H Chisholm, Housing Policy Officer – Resettlement Team
Ms T Taylor, Project Manager – Placement Programme Home to Highland
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair 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 R Bremner and Ms L Niven.

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

The Committee **NOTED** that there were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

4. **Housing Performance Report 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025** **Aithisg Coileanadh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2024 gu 31Màrt 2025**

There had been circulated Report No HP/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members commended officers on the level performance achieved as set out in the report and raised the following main points:-

- the reduction in rent arrears was encouraging and an explanation was provided on the main reasons for the decrease, credit being due to tenants, officers and focus on early intervention in conjunction with other agencies;
- clarification was sought and provided that the Council's performance on rent arrears and repairs compared well to other local authorities with similar geographical challenges;
- in response to a query, it was explained that £3.1m of rent arrears was in the context of £68m of revenue generated from rental income over the year. In addition, a proportion of those arrears would be due to tenants waiting for benefits to be paid, however it was not possible to quantify this;
- the improvement in performance on emergency and non-emergency repairs was welcomed and an explanation was provided on the contributory factors;
- how performance on emergency and non-emergency repairs would be sustained going forward and the balance to be achieved within the available budget between performance on repairs and average re-let times;
- it would be helpful for local Members to be informed when average re-let times were exceeded for properties within their wards;
- the potential for additional monies to be invested in low priority repairs;
- some of the factors impacting on average re-let times were outwith the Council's control including delays with utility companies;
- an update was provided on the lobbying being undertaken by the Council at a national level on the above issue and ongoing discussions with utility companies on improving performance;
- concern at the impact of the Radio Teleswitch Service switch off, was noted and it was confirmed that this was the responsibility of the utility companies. It was recognised the Council had a potential duty of care for vulnerable households and advice had been issued to tenants and energy advice agencies to raise awareness and encourage them to engage with

utility companies. Further promotion would be required and Members should continue to highlight the issue to constituents;

- it was suggested there was a need to reinforce the demand for more affordable one-bedroom properties in Highland and for other partners and sectors to be involved to increase supply. It was explained that a new housing need and demand assessment would help inform the next Strategic Housing Investment Programme to be presented to the Committee on 5 November 2025;
- the action being progressed by the Council to meet its obligations under the Scottish Social Housing Charter in relation to tenant participation. This included an ongoing focus on promoting tenant participation, involving more younger people, and tenant and Member involvement in estate walkabouts. The annual tenant participation report would be presented to the Committee on 5 November 2025;
- clarification was sought and provided that additional Council tax income from second homes was allocated to the Landbank Fund for developmental work to support the new build programme; and
- whether the Service was considering the purchase of a four-bedroom house in Daviot that had been empty for a considerable period of time. It was confirmed officers would report back to Mr D Macpherson on this matter.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

5. Homelessness Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Chion Dachaigh

There had been circulated Report No HP/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the lifelong impact of homelessness on children and their development and an assurance was provided that performance on the average time spent in temporary accommodation by households with children continued to improve and the importance of resolving cases involving children as quickly as possible was recognised;
- confirmation was sought and provided that if households with children wished to remain in their temporary accommodation, it was possible to convert to a secure tenancy and in practice this happened regularly;
- in terms of the number of people receiving housing support, it was explained the figures involved varying levels of support and represented a small percentage of the overall number of tenants;
- how a balance was achieved between housing local people and those with employment in the area compared to those who by choice wished to move to Highland from other areas. It was noted the number of cases with no local connection as defined in the Code of Guidance for Homelessness was relatively low and the majority related to Inverness;
- the potential to increase the 'need to reside' points for local people and those with employment in the area and noting this would form part of the wider Highland Housing Register (HHR) Allocation Policy review;

- it would be helpful to have a breakdown on the location, types and sizes of properties required in terms of homelessness and it was confirmed officers would respond directly to Mrs I Mackenzie on this matter;
- the potential to repurpose more empty houses in localities in Highland and noting a report on the ongoing work in this sector would be submitted to the Committee in August 2025;
- further clarity was sought on reference in the HHR Allocation Policy to unsatisfactory housing conditions and unmet housing need. It was confirmed officers would respond directly to Dr M Gregson on this matter;
- an assurance was sought and provided that the Council worked with partner agencies when appropriate to provide support to the homeless or those threatened with homelessness;
- in response to a query, it was explained no timescales had been set in relation to the Scottish Housing (Scotland) Bill and final details on the new level of prevention duties had not been received;
- it was important to note that under the Scheme of Delegation, the HHR Allocation Policy was clearly the responsibility of the Housing and Property Committee; and
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that the timescales for the HHR Allocations Policy review had not yet been set, timescale to be set, its scope having to take account of any legislative changes that came forward.

In conclusion of the item, it was stated that a main issue for the Council was that it did not have enough houses to meet demand and this was being raised at the highest level with the UK and Scottish Governments. A follow up Housing Summit was to be held on 6 June 2025 and officers had been working with the Scottish National Investment Bank and other providers to secure additional investment in housing. Other local authorities in Scotland had similar problems, however it was exacerbated in Highland due to its geography.

The Committee **AGREED** the progress in mitigating homelessness and delivering secure housing outcomes in Highland.

6. Council of Sanctuary Comhairle Comaraich

There had been circulated Report No HP/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- all those involved in supporting refugees arriving in the Highlands were congratulated on their efforts;
- this was an excellent report that set out all the resettlement programmes the Council had been involved in, funded by and in line with the UK and Scottish Governments humanitarian schemes;
- the dedication and drive to support and welcome refugee families to the Highlands was recognised. However, given this excellent work was already being carried out, it was queried whether anything would change by the Council joining the City of Sanctuary;

- it was queried whether it would have a positive reaction as it did not appear so on social media. However, it was highlighted that social media did not reflect the views of everyone and a decision should not be made based on this;
- specific concerns were expressed in relation to veterans and other citizens who were experiencing hardship and required support and who might perceive they were less of a priority at a time when there was already a lack of housing to accommodate demand;
- the challenges around the availability of housing were recognised, however the report was about the Council's responsibilities in terms of supporting and protecting people from other countries who were fleeing from violence and war;
- the proposal to apply for a City of Sanctuary Award was a public recognition of all those involved in working in refugee programmes and for the excellent work undertaken of which the Council, partners, third sector and communities in Highland should be proud of;
- the people involved in the schemes had made a positive contribution to their communities and to the Highlands and it was important to recognise that while by choice they would prefer to live in their home countries, through the work of officers and partner agencies they felt at home in Highland;
- although it was called City of Sanctuary Award, confirmation was provided that it was for the work of the whole of the Highlands;
- Highland hospitality was globally renowned and the Council could continue to be a welcoming local authority without the need for accreditation. Therefore, the Council should continue to support refugees in the manner it had been for many years;
- a number of questions were raised and responded to including the longer term post programme support measures that had been put in place and measures to monitor these; how the Council ensured there was sustained engagement and integration of those that did not qualify for the resettlement schemes; and ensuring that services were not working in silos;
- it was important not to set one group of the population against another, with both veterans and refugees requiring support;
- refugees did not wish to be singled out for preferential treatment, actual or perceived. The Highlands was renowned for welcoming and being respectful of people from all countries, however it was not necessary as a symbolic gesture to sign up to the scheme for this to be the case; and
- the cost of gaining a City of Sanctuary Award was only £2,100 over three years, however, concern was expressed at the timing of signing up to the scheme. It was felt that it would be prudent to pause signing up to this scheme to enable further review to understand how it would work with local communities with the full details being reported to a future meeting. This would not diminish or change the sterling work being undertaken from carrying on.

Thereafter, Mrs G Cambell-Sinclair, seconded by Ms S Atkin, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr D McDonald, seconded by Mrs I Mackenzie, moved as an **AMENDMENT** to delete recommendation ii. in the report.

On a vote being taken there were 7 votes for the motion, 9 votes for the amendment and 2 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Mrs S Atkin, Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mrs Campbell-Sinclair, Mr R Mackintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr P Oldham.

For the Amendment:

Mr L Fraser, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Jones, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr D Macpherson, Ms M Ross, Mr R Stewart.

Decision

The Committee **NOTED** the efforts made by Highland and partner agencies in supporting resettlement and humanitarian programmes to date.

**7. Service Workforce Plan Annual Progress Report
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Adhartais Plana Feachd-obrach Seirbheis**

There had been circulated Report No HP/18/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- concern at the increase in staff turnover rates, and noting the key reasons given in exit interviews related to salary levels compared to the private sector and career development and an update was provided on the work being progressed in those areas;
- concern at the challenges associated with the age profile of staff, reference being made to the succession planning tool designed to identify areas that required focus as a priority, this being an issue across the Council;
- an assurance was sought and provided that the skills of long serving staff due to retire would not be lost, reference being made to the importance of mentoring and sharing knowledge with other staff;
- highlighting positive and negative feedback received from tenants on interactions with the Service's maintenance officers and the importance of customer service skills training, quality interactions and supportive engagement with all tenants;
- clarification was sought and provided that the Housing and Building Maintenance Service was considered to be in a better place compared to the previous year due to the progress made and creative approach taken to filling vacancies more quickly and increased level of staff training;
- the officer time required in respect of the Investors in People accreditation and associated cost to the Council. It was confirmed this information would be provided directly to Ms J McEwan;
- concern at the level of agency staff costs, and an assurance this remained low compared to the rest of the organisation;
- skills shortages was a national issue and the importance of the Council growing its own younger workforce with a commitment that they stayed with the Council for a certain period of time. It was highlighted that the Service was taking the lead in terms of apprenticeships and traineeships;

- staff absence continued to be a work in progress and the Service's flexible approach to working arrangements for staff recuperating from illness be commended;
- concern staff absences may be exacerbated by the wider picture and specifically the burden being placed on the Service due to the pressures and poor standard of accommodation in some areas of the private rented sector;
- an update was sought and provided on the action being taken by the Service to offer recruitment incentives and packages and benchmarking undertaken with the private sector. The Highland Investment Plan would also act as an incentive for professional staff to work with the Council, help reverse the drift to the private sector and provide more opportunities to grow and mentor younger people;
- representations be made to COSLA with a view to getting a remote and rural area allowance to assist with the recruitment and retention of staff. It was explained the Council currently had a relocation scheme to assist with costs;
- whether the vacancies in the Service advertised in a recent radio campaign were based in Inverness. It was confirmed that specific details of locations would be provided directly to Mr R Jones; and
- the scope to have relief contracts for seasonal staff that rolled over from year to year to speed up the process. It was explained this issue would form part of the ongoing Amenities review to be shared with Members in due course.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. Housing and Property workforce planning progress report and updated action plan; and
- ii. positive outcomes from the report, including:
 - a. creative recruitment techniques reduced the overall number of vacancies within the service;
 - b. the Housing and Building Maintenance workforce planning pilot exercise involved enhanced HR support and resources over a 12-month period which enabled the managers to work together to identify and resolve challenges while developing their own managerial skills;
 - c. the Housing Team was approved as a partner with the Chartered Institute of Housing's Professionalism Commitment;
 - d. specific specialist training commitments were given to areas such as fire and asbestos safety and how to deal with traumatic events and vulnerable customers; and
 - e. team restructures improved efficiency, service delivery and supported staff development opportunities within the service.

8. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update Sgrùdadh Buidseit agus Cunntas Adhartais a' Phlana Libhrigidh

There had been circulated Report No HP/19/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on the Void Plus Policy being piloted in Caithness;

- an update was sought and provided on the progress being made in relation to the migration of property assets and property resources project;
- in response to a query, further details were provided on the network of community facilities savings to be delivered and how this related to the Community Points of Delivery Project in the Highland Investment Plan;
- concern the above approach may leave some properties in town centres and villages empty and derelict;
- further clarity was sought provided on the request that Devolved School Management (DSM) repair budgets be increased, noting this budget would be revisited next year. The potential to transfer this budget to the Service was also being considered to ensure it was spent in key areas;
- it would be helpful for a Members briefing to be arranged on the Single Property Service;
- the contingency planning in place in response to challenges with contractor capacity to mitigate against delays on projects. It was explained that innovative ways of overcoming the challenges were being considered and Members would be provided with an update on the new trades framework once finalised;
- the need to provide more accommodation for key workers and the potential to include the social care sector staff to help with recruitment and retention of staff. It was confirmed the broader definition of key workers agreed by the Committee as part of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan would be circulated to Members for their information;
- noting that, as agreed by the Council, an approach was to be developed in relation to mid-market housing and key worker housing across Highland and progress would be reported back to the Committee; and
- further clarity was sought and provided on the challenges around the use of compulsory purchase orders in relation to vacant land and buildings and the significant funding challenges for the Council following purchase due to extremely high development costs.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the progress of the Delivery Plan Programmes and Projects as per the updates provided in the report; and
- AGREED** that a Members briefing be arranged on the Single Property Service.

9. Service Performance Monitoring Report – Q4 2024-25 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais – R4 2024-25

There had been circulated Report No HP/20/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

10. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should 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.

11. Housing Development Initiatives
Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

12. Property Transactions Monitoring
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting was closed at 12.45pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 21 May 2025 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Ms S Atkin (remote)
Mr S Coghill (remote)
Ms S Fanet (Chair)
Mr A Graham
Dr M Gregson

Mr P Logue
Mr D Loudon
Mrs M Ross (remote)
Ms K Willis (Vice Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Ms Marianne Hutchison (remote)
Ms K MacLean (remote)

Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Mr R Stewart (remote)

In attendance:

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Project Manager
Mr S Miller, Project Manager – Innovation Funding and Bid Writing
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead - Transport and Logistics
Mr A Morgan, Climate Change Coordinator (Data)
Ms C Weaver, Climate Change Coordinator (Adaptation)
Ms R Burbaite, Project Manager
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing and Customer Services
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms H Loonsk, Climate Resilience Manager, Highland Adapts

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

Ms S Fanet in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mrs I Campbell, Mr J Grafton and Ms L Niven.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

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

The Chair informed the Committee of the following items of good news:-

- the inspection programme for all existing Solar PV systems had been successfully completed on time and on budget. This set the foundation for ensuring all systems were compliant and back to generating renewable energy;
- on 15 May, the Council had agreed to proceed with the North of Scotland EV Infrastructure contract, in partnership with Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray. Contract award was expected by the end of May, with the transition of existing infrastructure and rollout of new charge points taking place through the rest of the year;
- a public consultation had launched on 20 May 2025 on the proposed lease of Inverness Common Good land at the Longman site for Storegga's green hydrogen project. The consultation would close in mid-July, with the outcome due to be reported to the Committee in November. The project could cut emissions by up to 45,000 tonnes of CO₂e a year and generate income for the Common Good Fund; and
- the Council had been nominated for *Landlord of the Year* and *Local Authority of the Year* in recognition of its work to tackle fuel poverty. This had been thanks to the energy efficiency programme led by Isla MacMillan, Project Manager, Climate Change and Energy Team, delivered through the Energy Efficient Homes Workstream of the Delivery Plan.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. **Net Zero Programme** **Prògram Neoni Luim**

i. **Net Zero Programme Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mun Phrògram Neoni Luim**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was good to see new projects coming forward, particularly in relation to reducing food waste;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the provision of mandatory climate training for the Council's Risk and Resilience Group;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the work taking place to develop Net Zero Design Standards would not impact on the progress of the Highland Investment Plan;
- it having been queried whether Members would see the results of the waste audit at Kingussie High School, it was confirmed that it was intended to provide an update from the Waste Thematic Group at the August meeting of the Committee;
- in response to questions regarding Solar PV, it was explained that the cost of remedial works to bring systems back into operation would be funded from the financial benefit of the electricity generated. Expansion of Solar PV would be

partially funded through external grants, if available, but the primary funding route would be the Salix Fund. The number of sites online prior to 1 April 2019 was difficult to determine. However, the Energy Manager undertook to see what information was available; and

- reference having been made to the request, at the January meeting, for an update on the Food in Schools project, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager confirmed that discussions had taken place but unfortunately an update had not been available in time for today's meeting. He undertook to ensure an update would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** progress to date as outlined in the report and Appendix 1 of the report; and
- * ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval of the project brief templates in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

ii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Capital Programme and Net Zero Funding Strategy
Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Prògram Calpa agus Ro-innleachd Maoineachaidh Neoni Luim

There had been circulated Report No CCC/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and the good work taking place;
- information was sought, and provided, on the Verified Carbon Credits – Retrofit Credits Model and the associated process overview, including whether the acquiring of credits would enable further retrofitting to be carried out; whether any other local authorities in Scotland were using Local Climate Bonds; what the proposed pilot of Lifecycle Carbon Assessments within the Capital Programme decision-making process would consist of; what weighting would be given to carbon analysis, as opposed to other aspects such as build quality and cost, when assessing capital projects; and the steps being taken to source external funding streams.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress being made to identify alternative Net Zero funding options, including the potential use of Climate Bonds and Carbon Credits;
- ii. **NOTED** the launch of a pilot programme testing the Capital Sustainability Assurance Protocol as a decision-making tool within the Capital Programme; and
- iii. **AGREED** to support the principle of embedding lifecycle carbon analysis into the Council's Capital Gateway processes to enable data-led, sustainable investment decisions.

**iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Sustainable Business Travel
Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Siubhal
Gnothachais Seasmhach**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the estimated emissions in respect of Elected Member travel were based on average assumptions in terms of car and fuel type;
- reference was made to the very low percentages in terms of car sharing, active travel and Car Club use by Elected Members, and it was suggested that in the Inverness area, where a number of Members lived locally, the active travel percentage could be increased. It was queried how Members would be involved, going forward, in trying to change travel behaviour, and it was suggested that consideration be given to a workshop and nominating champions from within each political group. The Service Lead – Transport and Logistics confirmed that a Members' workshop looking at the different forms of travel and the availability of the Car Club could be brought forward;
- surprise was expressed at the high level of grey fleet use by both staff and Elected Members, and it was suggested lessons could be learned from organisations such as NatureScot which had a travel hierarchy and online booking system for vehicles. In addition, information was sought, and provided, as to whether there was a scheme to incentivise the use of low emission vehicles, and whether there was scope within the expenses claim system to capture vehicle registrations and thereby identify the type of vehicle and the emissions produced. In responding to the points raised, it was confirmed that the Council had a travel hierarchy that would be reviewed. With regard to expenses claims, any change to the process and the information captured would require approval. The Service Lead – Transport and Logistics confirmed that officers could liaise with Enterprise, who provided the Car Club, with a view to promoting lower emission vehicles first;
- Members and senior officers needed to lead the way in terms of behaviour change;
- there was a broader discussion to be had about the way the Council operated its meetings. There were some meetings that lent themselves to attendees being there in person but there were others that could, it was suggested, be wholly online. It was also necessary to consider the start and finish time of meetings to facilitate the use of public transport by attendees;
- in relation to staff travel, progress had been made in that the use of petrol vehicles had decreased and the use of hybrid vehicles had increased;
- Appendix 2 of the report indicated that 8% of light fleet vehicles had annual mileage of 2000 miles a year or less, and it was questioned whether those vehicles were needed. However, it was recognised this figure probably included vehicles such as school minibuses and snow ploughs that were not in use year round;
- it was emphasised that active travel and public transport were not always viable options for those living in some of the more remote and rural areas of Highland;
- Appendix 2 of the report, which set out car travel by account, indicated that the Car Club, hire cars and fleet cars were all more expensive than paying the

standard mileage rate of 45p per mile for grey fleet usage. It was questioned whether promoting the Car Club, for example, represented best value, which the Council had a duty to provide, when paying all the car travel mileage at the rate of 45p per mile would have saved approximately £0.75m. Particular reference was made to the cost of £1.20 per mile for a fleet car, and it was queried why the cost was so high and what type of vehicle that rate was being paid for. Attention was also drawn to the estimated 18,459 “days lost” travelling based on an average speed of 35mph. Based on an average speed of 20mph the number would be significantly higher, and the loss of productivity to the Council and the associated cost to the Highland taxpayer were emphasised. The Chair suggested that Councillor R Stewart liaise with the Service Lead – Transport and Logistics outwith the meeting regarding the questions raised.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED**:-

- i. the high-level data relating to Elected Member Travel as outlined in the report and presented in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. the high-level data relating to Staff Business Travel as outlined in the report and presented in Appendix 2 of the report.

5. Highlands Adapts Update and Funding
Cunntas às Ùr agus Iartras Maoineachaidh dhan Ghàidhealtachd a’ Freagarrachadh

There had been circulated Report No CCC/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- a first draft of the Adaptation Strategy would be brought to the Climate Change Committee in August. Highland Adapts would support the Council in the production of the strategy and action plan, ensuring it was robust and comprehensive, reflected local risks, and aligned with national best practice;
- Members reiterated the significant cost of not adapting to climate change, referencing examples in section 6.1 of the report, including reductions in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), impacts on local industries such as salmon and whisky production, and flooding damage;
- Members expressed strong support for the Highland Adapts partnership, highlighting its long-term value;
- reference was made to the River Ness Flood Prevention Scheme webpage, which featured an outdated image of Prince Andrew. Members requested that the visual materials be reviewed and updated, and the Climate Change Coordinator (Adaptation) confirmed this would be undertaken. In addition, concern was raised regarding flood risk at the River Ness, and it was suggested that local risk management data be re-examined in light of observable seasonal changes in river levels. It was recognised that the partnership had a broad remit and this was just one risk, but it was an area where it was necessary to work proactively in advance of issues;
- questions were raised regarding the current membership of the Highland Adapts partnership. It was commented that farming representatives were not part of the governing group, and their inclusion was considered vital, particularly in relation to flooding and land management. In response, it was confirmed that Highland

Adapts was reviewing its governance structure, and that broader stakeholder engagement, including with the agricultural sector, would be considered as part of that process. It was further clarified that the governing partners represented only one part of the wider partnership network and, while the National Farmers Union was not a core partner, engagement with the organisation took place through other channels;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the first Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment, due to be completed by December 2025, would be made available to Members, who would also be given the opportunity to contribute to the Council's own corporate Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment; and
- support was expressed for the funding request, with particular praise for the research being conducted on the circular economy. It was highlighted that the research concentrated on the food and drink sector, which would include farmers.

Before moving on to the next item, the Chair highlighted that May was Lyme Disease Awareness Month and spoke to the link between diseases and climate change, as outlined in the report. It was observed that rising temperatures could increase the prevalence of tick-borne illnesses, particularly in areas such as the Highlands. Personal experience was shared regarding the long-term effects of Lyme disease, including fatigue and reduced productivity, with reference made to the potential economic impact. An estimate from the Netherlands' National Institute for Public Health in 2017 had placed the annual cost of Lyme disease at €20m, with the current figure likely to be higher. Appreciation was expressed for the efforts of Councillor MacCallum in raising awareness locally.

Members endorsed the comments and shared further reflections, including reference to a recent presentation at the Housing and Property Committee by a tenant representative who had been disabled as a result of Lyme disease. The importance of public awareness and taking personal precautions during the spring and summer months was emphasised.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress to date, the current and planned activities, and the partnership's role in supporting the Highland Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy;
- ii. **NOTED** the national recognition of Highland Adapts' approach as a model for regional adaptation partnership; and
- * iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval of £15,000 of funding to support the Highland Adapts partnership during financial year 2025/26.

6. **Climate Change Duties Reporting Consultation** **Co-chomhairleachadh mu Aithris Dhleastanasan Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In introducing the report, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager apologised for the reference in section 1.2 of the report to a Members' Workshop, which had been cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances after the paper had

been produced. Thanks were expressed to Members for their feedback following circulation of the draft response, and it was confirmed that the points raised were being incorporated into the final submission.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the significant work undertaken in compiling the response, with particular reference to the inclusion of climate justice and the challenges in terms of identifying groups most impacted by climate change;
- in response to a query regarding governance and cross-service alignment, it was explained that, following approval of the Council's Delivery Plan, six new Portfolio Boards had been established including the Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio Board, which had oversight of the projects within that portfolio. There was also a Net Zero Strategy Group made up of senior members of staff from across the organisation. Furthermore, as the development of the Council's Adaptation Strategy, for example, progressed, consideration would be given to which additional members of staff needed to be involved in specific workstreams; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the final consultation response was due for submission by close of business on Friday 23 May 2025, and that any further contributions would need to be received by the end of the day.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the statutory requirement for all public bodies to report annually under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Council's response to the draft statutory guidance consultation (attached as Appendix 1 of the report).

7. **Heat Network Feasibility Report** **Aithisg Sho-dhèantachd an Lìonra Theasa**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report, which set out the possibility of excellent carbon reductions as well as cost reductions, and Members commended officers for having pursued the initiative in a positive and professional way. The potential was highlighted for the Council and NHS Highland to see their heating bills come down, and families and businesses would also benefit from action being taken based on the report; and
- Members looked forward to the opportunity to attend more detailed briefings on individual projects; and
- information was sought, and provided, on whether there were opportunities for heat networks where there was existing heat available from industry. In that regard, reference was made to the distillery in Invergordon having excess heat which it would be willing to share.

The Committee **NOTED** progress to date.

8. Solar PV Non-Domestic Estate Update
Cunntas às Ùr mun Oighreachd Fotobholtaig Grèine Neo-dhachaigheil

There had been circulated Report No CCC/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the way in which they had responded to the challenge in terms of Solar PV, and for identifying firms to undertake the necessary work, the completion of which would lead to benefits in terms of carbon reduction, lower energy costs and income generation;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including the proposed programme of maintenance to ensure availability of infrastructure was maintained; why there was such a large variation between secondary schools; whether there was scope to install solar panels on PFI (Private Finance Initiative) and PPP (Public-Private Partnership) schools; the position in respect of the sites where the operational status was “Isolated” as opposed to “Live”; the plans for the systems that had been removed; whether the latest technology was being utilised in terms of gathering generation capacity; and whether consideration was being given to innovative installations such as in car parks.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the current status of Solar PV generation assets on the Council’s non-domestic estate; and
- ii. the proposed development of new and proposed installations.

9. Performance Monitoring Report – Q4 2024-25
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh – R4 2024–25

There had been circulated Report No CCC/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an update on progress was requested in respect of the action to incorporate Just Transition principles into strategic planning and the Net Zero Strategy; and
- an update was sought, and provided, on progress with the delivery of Carbon Literacy Training, which was ragged Red and had been raised at previous meetings.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service’s performance information.

10. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update Q4 2024-25
Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas Adhartais a’ Phlana Lìbhrigidh R4 2024–25

There had been circulated Report No CCC/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on what the issues were and how work was progressing in terms of embedding Net Zero in the Capital Programme and across all Council services; and
- with reference to the key risks set out in section 5.4 of the report, information was sought, and provided, as to how confident officers were that the revised end dates in respect of carbon budgeting and integrating Net Zero into financial decision-making frameworks would be met. In addition, it was commented that the restructuring of the Council would help foster cultural change and transformation.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** progress to date as outlined in this report.

The meeting concluded at 4.10 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 22 May 2025 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin (substitute) (remote)
Mr C Ballance
Mr S Coghill (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)
Mr L Fraser
Mr A Graham
Mr R Gunn
Mrs J Hendry (remote)

Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Ms M MacCallum
Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Ms K MacLean
Mr D Millar
Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr M Reiss

Non-Members also present:

Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mr R MacKintosh
Mr T MacLennan (remote)

Mr D McDonald
Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mrs M Ross (remote)

In attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations
Ms D Sutton, Strategic Lead – Community Operations and Logistics
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead – Finance (remote)
Ms E Barrie, Head of HR
Ms H Ross, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms H Jones, HR Business Partner
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead – Transport and Logistics
Ms C Butler, Equalities and Inequalities Officer
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr M Humphreys, Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr B Barnwell, International Commando Heritage Trust
Mr P Wilson, International Commando Heritage Trust
Mr D Burnett, International Commando Heritage Trust
Mr A Sykes, International Commando Heritage Trust

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr M Green and Mr S Mackie.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

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

The Chair informed the Committee of the following items of good news:-

- Whin Park in Inverness had successfully reopened following a £500k refurbishment, completed on time and within budget. The park had been very popular since reopening, and the official opening ceremony was scheduled for Friday, 30th May;
- ILM Highland, in partnership with Highland Council, had launched a new monthly Household Electrical Recycling Collection Service for rural communities. Covering areas with limited access to recycling centres, the service helped residents recycle unwanted electrical items. Funded through the Scottish Government's Recycling Improvement Fund, the initiative included a new van operated by ILM Highland to support increased reuse and recycling;
- congratulations were extended to Juliana Teixeira and Prameela Middleton from the Environmental Health team, who had passed their exams in March to become fully qualified Food Safety Officers, and to Claire Lyall and Carol Littlewood on passing their registration exams in March. Following completion of an intensive study programme they had become fully qualified Registrars;
- extensions to Croy and Duror Cemeteries had been completed, providing 92 and 140 new lairs respectively, adding over 30 years of capacity. Bereavement Services had also enhanced memorial options at Inverness Crematorium, with the Book of Remembrance becoming available online from May 2025 to improve accessibility for families and the public;
- congratulations were extended to Annemarie MacAlpine, Operations Manager for the Customer and Registration Service, who had been appointed President of the Association of Registrars of Scotland for a two-year term. The Association represented Registration staff across Scotland and worked with National Records of Scotland and the Scottish Government; and
- the Amenities team had been shortlisted for a Silver APSE Award in the *Striving for Excellence* category, recognising their work in establishing the in-house play team. Since its formation, the team had partnered with over 50 community groups, refurbished 27 play areas, and developed the Play Park Strategy and action plan. They had been interviewed for the Gold Award and the winner would be announced at the annual dinner.

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News.

4. **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Highland Performance Report** **Aithisg Choileanaidh Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson** **na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report for Quarters 3 and 4 2024/25.

In introducing the report, the Local Senior Officer explained that this would be his last meeting of the Communities and Place Committee as he was transferring to a new national role. The new Local Senior Officer for Highland would be Lynne Gow.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the work done to control the fire in Culbin Forest near Nairn, and it was clarified that the cause of the fire could not be commented on as an investigation was ongoing;
- home fire safety visits and visits to tenant groups were welcomed;
- the success of fire skills days for young people was commended, and it was suggested these could encourage more young people to join the SFRS;
- the success of sharing crews between stations in Skye was highlighted, and an update was sought, and provided, on the progress of a new Portree Fire Station;
- concerns were raised that the SFRS was not a statutory consultee on planning applications for Battery Energy Storage Systems, that the figures given for the amount of water needed to suppress fires at such facilities may not be accurate for those in remote areas; and that local fire crews would be unable to deal with a fire at a large facility;
- thanks were extended for the work done to deal with a bad moorland fire near Thurso;
- information was sought, and provided, on the area covered by Inverness Fire Station and how it interfaced with retained stations;
- it was suggested that the core strategic priority in Highland should be availability in remote and rural areas, and information was sought, and provided, on what could be done to increase availability in remote areas such as Bettyhill, Tongue, Lochinver, Scourie, Bonar Bridge and Cannich;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that a breakdown of road traffic accidents by road would be addressed at Area Committees;
- the increase in pay and introduction of more flexible hours for retained firefighters was welcomed; and
- the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, extended best wishes to the Local Senior Officer for Highland in his new role. Appreciation was expressed for the partnership approach that had been taken during his time in post, and for the regular Members' briefings. Members looked forward to meeting his successor.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report.

5. **Equalities Mainstreaming and Outcomes Report 2025** **Aithisg Bhuilean Co-ionannachd agus Àbhaisteachaidh**

There had been circulated Report No CP/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the importance of the report was emphasised, and it was suggested that, in future, it should be taken to the Full Council. The Chief Officer - Housing and Communities undertook to raise this at the next review of the Scheme of Delegation;
- it was highlighted that the new prison in Inverness did not have any facilities for women, and it was queried whether it was possible to embed Equalities Impact Assessments into the planning applications process at an early stage. The Chief Officer - Housing and Communities undertook to discuss the matter with planning officers;
- while flexible and hybrid working was helping women to work around their caring responsibilities, it was suggested this could hinder women from achieving more senior positions, and it was questioned whether the Council was thinking radically enough in terms of potential solutions;
- information was sought, and provided, on the child friendly complaints process, and the Senior Community Development Manager undertook to share the detail with Councillor S Atkin;
- the neurodiversity outcome was welcomed, and attention was drawn to the neurodiversity awareness training received by Housing staff;
- a Members' briefing was requested on the steps being taken to improve living standards for the Gypsy Traveller community. The Chair confirmed this would be arranged;
- it was highlighted that only 15% of staff had responded to the staff survey, and information was sought, and provided, on how to improve engagement;
- the reduction in the gender pay gap was welcomed, although it was unacceptable that it still existed, and it was suggested it needed to be made a priority;
- in response to questions, the Senior Community Development Manager undertook to provide Councillor M MacCallum with further information on the inclusion of verbal violence in the Equally Safe at Work pilot, whether sexism was included in equality and diversity training and the school bullying survey, and the timeframe for collecting data on maternity and pregnancy; and
- the Chair and Committee Members extended their thanks and congratulations to Senior Community Development Manager, Helen Ross, on her retirement. Helen had worked for Highland Council since 1998, in a number of roles in both Housing and Ward Management, and would be greatly missed by colleagues and Members.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Outcome and Mainstreaming Progress Report for the Highland Council covering the period 2023 – 2025 (and incorporating the Education Authority and Licensing Board) as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- AGREED** a revised set of Equality Outcomes for the Council for the period 2025 – 2029 as detailed in section 8 of the report; and
- AGREED** that a Members' briefing be organised on improving living standards for Gypsy Travellers.

6. Environmental Health Performance 24/25 and Operational Plan 25/26 Cunntas às Ùr mu Ghnìomhan Slàinte Àrainneachdail

There had been circulated Report No CP/7/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- appreciation was expressed for the range and volume of services carried out by the Environmental Health team;
- concern was expressed regarding the increase in dog attacks across Scotland and information was sought, and provided, concerning engagement with the Scottish Government on dog control and whether the current legislation was considered to be sufficiently clear and robust;
- the problem of abandoned vehicles was highlighted, with particular reference to abandoned boats, caravans and trailers. It was confirmed that guidance would be produced on dealing with abandoned boats and the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to keep Members updated on progress;
- concern was expressed about infestations of rats in residential buildings and, on the point being raised, the Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to clarify with housing colleagues where the responsibility for pest control lay in relation to Council houses;
- information was sought, and provided, on shellfish monitoring and problems caused by seagulls;
- work with schools on air quality was welcomed and it was hoped this would continue;
- the focus on food safety and private water supplies was welcomed; and
- it was welcomed that grass cutting would be carried out around housing estates as this would help to reduce the tick population.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Environmental Health performance in 24/25 to date including delivering statutory duties to over 6000 properties on private water supplies, over 5000 food businesses, and receiving over 13,500 service requests on a wide range of public health, nuisance, licensing, safety, dog control, animal health and incivility issues; and
- APPROVED** the Environmental Health Operational Plan to 31 March 2026 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

7. Fleet Traffic Commissioner Response Freagairt Coimiseanair Trafaig a' Chabhlaich

There had been circulated Report No CP/8/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Thanks having been extended to staff for their hard work in preventing a possible public inquiry, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- the action plan as supplied to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland; and
- the progress to date on implementing the action plan.

8. Service Workforce Plan Annual Progress Report Aithisg Dealbhadh Feachd-obrach

There had been circulated Report No CP/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the steps being taken to attract more young people to work for the Council, managing an aging workforce, and what could be done to take care of employees' physical health in order to reduce staff absences; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Play team had increased from three to six members of staff. Progress on some playpark improvements had been delayed due to the availability of equipment from suppliers, and the Strategic Lead - Community Operations and Logistics undertook to liaise with suppliers in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Communities and Place workforce planning progress report and updated action plan; and
- ii. the positive outcomes from the report, including:-
 - a. team redesigns and restructures had improved efficiency, service delivery and supported staff development opportunities within the service; and
 - b. specific training commitments had been given to areas such as Environmental Health and Fleet.

9. Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) - Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlana Leasachadh Bhuilean na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the HOIP Delivery Plan and Performance Framework which could be found at Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
- ii. the progress update against the HOIP Delivery Plan; and
- iii. that the annual progress update on the HOIP would be considered at the Council meeting in October.

10. Service Performance Reporting for Q4 January 2025 to March 2025
Aithisg Coileanadh Seirbheis R4 Faoilleach – Màrt 2025

There had been circulated Report No CP/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

11. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update Q4 2024/25 - Person Centred Solutions Portfolio – Capacity Building – Community Led Service Delivery
Cunntas às Ùr mun Phlana Lìbhrigidh

There had been circulated Report No CP/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the work of the employability team was commended, and it was queried what role Local Members could play in terms of referring young people. The Chief Officer – Housing and Communities undertook to raise this with the employability team and update Members;
- reference was made to volunteer fatigue, and it was questioned how more people could be encouraged to volunteer. In response to a request, the Chief Officer – Housing and Communities confirmed that an update on community volunteering in Skye could be provided at a Ward Business Meeting; and
- further information was requested on community-led service delivery, how it would work in specific areas, such as the west of Inverness, and what the project costs of £1.2m would cover. A request having been made for a Members' briefing, it was confirmed this could be provided either to all Members or at a local level.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report, including progress to date and next steps.

12. Minutes of Waste Strategy Working Group **Geàrr-chunntas de Bhuidheann-obrach na Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

There had been circulated, and were **APPROVED**, the Minutes of the meeting of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 28 April 2025.

13. Membership of Waste Strategy Working Group **Ballrachd de Bhuidheann-obrach na Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

The Committee **AGREED** the following changes to the membership of the Waste Strategy Working Group:-

- Mr S Coghill to replace Ms M Smith
- Mr C Ballance to replace Mr A Baldrey

14. Presentation: International Commando Heritage Trust **Taisbeanadh: Urras Dualchais nan Comandothan Eadar-nàiseanta**

Mr B Barnwell and Mr P Wilson of the International Commando Heritage Trust gave a presentation providing an overview of the Trust's mission and aspirations ahead of the charity's formal launch at Achnacarry, Spean Bridge, in June 2025.

During discussion, thanks were expressed for the presentation, and support was expressed for the project. The importance of preserving and educating people about local history was emphasised, and it was suggested that the details of the project be shared with the Town Twinning Association. It was also requested that the Trust's Mission Statement be circulated to all Members.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

The meeting concluded at 12.45 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held Remotely on 26 May 2025 at 10am.

Present:

Mr M Green
Ms B Jarvie
Mr L Fraser
Mr P Oldham

In Attendance:

Mr M Greig, Community Development Manager
Mr J Henderson, Housing Manager
Ms C MacKenzie, Housing Options Officer, (South)
Ms F Shearer, Area Education and Learning Manager
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Mr E McIntosh – Community Support Officer
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

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

Mr M Green in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 5.b – Mr L Fraser

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the following Good News:-

- congratulations and credit was extended to Nairn Golf Club for hosting the globally prestigious Women's Amateur Championship on the 9 – 14 June 2025 and reference was made to the economic benefits this would bring to Nairn;
- congratulations were extended to Nairn St Ninian Football Club in reaching the final of the Domino Regional Cup which would be held on 31 May 2025 at Forest Park, Burghead against Culter;

- the Nairn Service Point would be extending their opening hours with effect from 2 June 2025. The new hours would be 9.30am to 12.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and 1.30pm – 4.30pm on Tuesday and Thursday. Full details of the new opening hours would be published on the Council's website and the signage at the Service Point would be updated;
- the Nairn and Nairnshire Community Partnership had received funding for a further two years and this was welcomed. Reference was made to the improved governance arrangements and the positive engagement being achieved. In addition, grants of up to £10,000 were available through the Highland Community Led Local Development Fund. It was highlighted that this funding had been underclaimed in Nairn and a plea was made for applications to be submitted prior to the closing date of 30 May 2025;
- there were three members of staff based at the Court House in Nairn that could provide advice to people dealing with arrears and help with income maximisation. Reference was also made to the Council increasing the welfare advice staffing levels to help alleviate poverty;
- gratitude was extended to Ros Philip, District Manager at Nairn Community Hospital, who had recently retired and had been replaced by Kara McNaught;
- donations were sought for the forthcoming picnic event at the Riverside Park being held in June 2025;
- the new roundabout on the A96 at Upper Delnies had been open since 23 May 2025. Accordingly, the Welcome to Nairn signs had been relocated and the new speed limits had been implemented which had been welcomed by communities on the west side of Nairn. In addition, work continued with the aim of having the 30mph speed limit reduced to 20mph on the A96 at the east entrance to Nairn; and
- paths at Kingsteps Quarry were being improved, which was appreciated by residents. This had not been funded from the Community Regeneration Fund, with funding having been secured from another source.

4. Highland Charities Trust - Allocation of Funds **Urras Charthannasan na Gàidhealtachd – Riarachadh Mhaoinean**

There had been circulated Report No NC/07/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- thanks was extended to the team at the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) for administering disbursements of the hardship funds. It was recognised that £2,000 was not a lot of money but further work would be undertaken to look at the feasibility of allocating a larger sum in the future along with modified procedures; and
- in response to a question, it was clarified that work had not yet been undertaken in regard to how the capital funding (approximately 50% of both the Nairn Poor Fund and Children's Fund) would be utilised. There would be further discussion with Members on this. It was recognised that these sums were relatively small and the funds could be transferred to the CAB at the appropriate time.

Thereafter the Committee **AGREED**:

- i. to allocate funds from the Nairn and Auldearn Poor Fund to be used as a form of Hardship Fund to serve the people of Nairn and Nairnshire; and

- ii. that the Nairn Citizens Advice Bureau administer the funds as part of the 'Peoples Pot' currently administered by CAB.

5. Nairn Common Good Fund (NCGF)

(a) Nairn Common Good Fund – Annual Review Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann

There had been circulated Report No NC/08/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- Members thanked the team for their efforts. The NCGF was now being operated in a more transparent and professional manner which was welcomed. The assets were being utilised for a wide range of activities which were generating income and would increase funds;
- it was suggested that a power point should be installed at the Team Hamish seating area but concern was expressed that in doing so this area might be used as a performance space and planning permission had not been granted for this type of activity. It was indicated that an appropriate public entertainment licence would be required for events/performances to be held in this area. It was stressed that the space had been designed, and permission granted, on the basis of this being an area for contemplation and assurance had been provided to local residents that it would be used in this manner. It was suggested that appropriate signage should be erected to inform the public on the use of this area;
- Members commended the work of the Common Good Development Officer with reference made to the improved management of the NCGF and the strong focus on improving the wellbeing of the community which was praised;
- clarity was sought on progress with the next stage of the Riverside Development Plan during which it was confirmed that this would encompass the whole Riverside area;
- the consultation had been worthwhile and the Engagement Group had a valuable role in ascertaining community feedback. The support for the Nairn Community Arts Centre and the establishment of the Hardship fund was welcomed. It was felt the Engagement Group should continue as it was a valuable forum providing the opportunity to be a helpful sounding board and had generated a number of new ideas;
- clarity was sought in respect of option 2, during which it was explained that it was intended to change the Terms of Reference of the Engagement Group to progress partnership working in terms of Common Good projects/initiatives, keep the business focussed and avoid duplication by directing business to existing community groups;
- concern was expressed that views were being sought on Nairn issues from the Community Planning Partnership the membership of which was from across Highland and did not involve people from Nairn. However, assurance was provided that invites to the Nairn and Nairnshire Community Partnership meetings were directed to local people in Nairn. It was reported that the meetings had been very productive with positive progress being made via Action Plans. However, it was felt that various groups/organisations attended

Community Planning Partnership meetings to have their plans confirmed and it was suggested that it might be more appropriate for these to be presented to local Area Committees;

- it was queried whether there should be two representatives from each Community Council on the Engagement Group and whether the survey had been issued to the substitute representatives. However, it was felt that one representative from each community council was the fairest approach noting that this did not need to be a designated person, i.e. community councils could rotate/select their representative to attend on a meeting by meeting basis; and
- it was felt that the Engagement Group meetings had become more positive as they progressed and they had been well attended.

Thereafter the Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the progress over the last 12 months in relation to the Nairn Common Good Fund within section 5 of the report;
- ii. the progress made by the Nairn Common Good Officer and **AGREED** an extension to the current post for a further 2-year period as outlined in section 6 of the report; and
- iii. the review of the Nairn Common Good Engagement Group and its findings and **AGREED** option 2 as set out in section 7.5 of the report.

**(b) Common Good Fund Allocations – Over £10,000
Riarachaidhean Maoin Maith Choitchinn – Thar £10,000**

Declarations of Interest: Mr L Fraser made a Declaration of Interest as a committee member of the Nairn Highland Games and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for the determination of this item.

There had been circulated Report No NC/09/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- Members commended the amount of work that had been undertaken and expressed their appreciation to all those involved;
- the Nairn Highland Games was the mainstay of the community and more committee members would be helpful; and
- the NCGF was the main sponsor of the Nairn Highland Games and this needed to be promoted.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** £12,000 be allocated from the Nairn Common Good Fund to support the Nairn Highland Games as per the application in Appendix 1 of the report.

**6. Housing Performance Report 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025
Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2024 - 31 Màrt 2025**

There is circulated Report No NC/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- clarification was sought and provided on Table 5 - Antisocial behaviour cases – at para 7.3 of the report during which it was explained that these were cumulative numbers. The Committee was also advised that this would be clearer in future reports as the format of this table would be changed to the same style used for arrears along with information on the action that had been taken;
- although the current day economic difficulties were acknowledged, a desire was expressed for the rent arrears to be reduced. It was highlighted that most cases had less than £500 of arrears and it was confirmed that in some instances this would be due to a timing issue;
- appreciation was expressed for the hard work of the staff who often had to deal with very difficult situations;
- concern was expressed at the length of time spent in temporary accommodation and it was queried whether this cost more than being in a fixed tenancy property; and
- the quick turnaround of void properties was commended. Figures were requested on the number of properties in Nairn that were paying 50% Council tax due to the house being under repair. Further information would be sought on this and reported back to Mrs B Jarvie.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

7. Nairn Academy Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Acadamaidh Inbhir Narann

There had been circulated Report No NC/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- concern was expressed at the performance of attainment at Millbank Primary School as set out in the table at para 9.1 of the report. Assurance was provided that the position was improving due to the measures that had been put in place by the Collaborative Lead Officer;
- national and local benchmarking across Highland indicated that Nairn was performing well, particularly in respect of Pupil Destinations. However, disappointment was expressed that the most recent data in the table was in respect of 2022/23 and it would be helpful if more up to date data could be released faster;
- it was queried if there was further information available on whether pupils were going onto further education/online courses to re-sit exams that they did not achieve at school;
- it was important that pupils left school with as much potential as possible and the destinations information needed to be more detailed in order to break down barriers and reduce depopulation;
- it was imperative that all school leavers were able to read and write and concern was expressed regarding these figures. It was queried what support was being provided to children to ensure these basic skills were being achieved before they left school to ensure they would be able to progress in employment. It was also highlighted that these figures should indicate a breakdown of school leavers by year group;

- Cawdor Primary School was performing very well and it was queried whether their good practices would be replicated across other schools;
- further information had been sought on whether Rosebank Primary School was including parents in the learning process and whether the maintenance issues had been addressed;
- confirmation was provided that the future school roll forecast had made provision for the new housing at Delnies;
- further information was sought and provided on the formula for Additional Support Learning allocations; and
- further information was sought and provided on the definition of the gradings used in the Standards and Quality reports.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

8. Bereavement Services – Project Updates Cunntas às ùr mu sheirbheisean bàis

There had been circulated Report No NC/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- the pre-purchase of lairs was welcomed and there was a need to promote public awareness of this;
- responding to concerns raised regarding capacity at Nairn Cemetery and the new cemetery at Granny Barbour Road, it was explained that Members had previously been advised that Nairn Cemetery had only five years of capacity remaining. However, new areas had since been identified for use following the removal of tress in Nairn Cemetery enabling capacity to be increased to over 10 years; and
- requests were made for general repairs at Nairn Cemetery and assurance was provided that these works would be undertaken.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Nairnshire area; and
- ii. challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development.

9. Place Planning Update: Our Nairnshire – Local Place Plan (LPP) Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlanadh Àite: Ar Siorrachd Inbhir Narann – Plana Àite Ionadail

There had been circulated Report No NC/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- appreciation was expressed to officers for bringing the Plan to fruition;
- although there were several good points within the Plan, disappointment was expressed that some Member responses to the statutory consultation had not been included and consequently Kingsteps Quarry had not been included in the Plan. In response to a question, it was clarified that any

amendments to the Local Place Plan would be at the discretion of the community trust that had led the preparation of the document;

- it was hoped that the local groups would use the Plan as evidence for development proposals to be brought forward for Nairnshire in the future;
- disappointment was expressed at the high cost to prepare the Plan;
- concern was raised that the Plan would be regarded as a statutory document, which it was not (outside of its role as a potential material consideration in the Planning system), and it was therefore felt that it should only be noted by the Committee;
- the Plan should be adopted as one source of evidence and it was therefore proposed that recommendation iii should be amended to read as follows – ***agree to adopt the plan as one source of evidence of community aspiration, to inform wider decision making about spatial planning, service delivery, options for asset management, development and investment towards the continuous improvement and wellbeing of the Nairn and Cawdor Ward. We look forward to any community groups, either currently or newly formed, to take forward any projects for the enhancement of the ward*** – and this was supported by Members; and
- this was Nairn's Plan and ownership of the document should come from the community. Anyone could take any part of the Plan forward and should be encouraged and supported to do so.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** Our Nairnshire is both a Local Place Plan under national planning legislation and an Area Place Plan, in line with Highland's Place Based Framework for Planning and Investment in Communities (HC/34/21);
- ii. **NOTED** that when validated and registered as a Local Place Plan by Highland Council's Development Plans Team, the Plan would be taken into account as a source of evidence, alongside other sources of evidence, in preparation of the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) - required by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019; and
- iii. **AGREED** to adopt the plan as one source of evidence of community aspiration, to inform wider decision making about spatial planning, service delivery, options for asset management, development and investment towards the continuous improvement and wellbeing of the Nairn and Cawdor Ward. We look forward to any community groups, either currently or newly formed, to take forward any projects for the enhancement of the ward.

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of the Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 10 February 2025 which were approved by the Council on 27 March 2025.

The meeting was concluded at 12.00pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on Monday, 26 May 2025 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr S Kennedy
Mrs G MacKenzie
Mrs A MacLean

In attendance:

Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Ms F Shand, Principal Housing Officer - Mid Ross
Ms C Murray, Project Officer, Community Regeneration
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr P Young, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Paterson.

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

There were no Declarations of Interests/Transparency Statements.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn

There had been circulated Report No DSA/9/25 together with the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. This was a new style of report, which was said to provide a more in depth analysis.

The Fire Service continued to work with local agencies, both to carry out Home Fire Safety Visits in households deemed most at risk of fire, and in terms of road safety.

The Dingwall Station refurbishment was now complete and had recently been officially opened, an event which Members attended.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- delight was expressed at the completed refurbishment;
- information was sought, and provided, in terms of premises considered high risk of fire, and how a referral of concern could be made to SFRS;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding deliberate fires. A Fire Skills course would be held in Dingwall Fire Station for children and young people in education in the third week of June. The course had already been successful in other areas of Highland and Members looked forward to an update at a later Committee;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding weather related incidents and wild fires. Many crews in the local area had been upskilled to assist with wild fires, which were generally difficult to deal with. Spreading the message was vital and SFRS continued to engage with local camping sites and tourists; and
- information was sought, and provided, in terms of an incident that occurred near Dingwall High Street.

The Committee **NOTED** the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report.

4. Area Roads Capital Programme 2024/25 Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Calpa Rathaiden na Sgìre 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No DSA/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Prior to discussion, Members were informed of changes to the report. In terms of section 6.7 of the report, the local area allocation amounted to £105,205, and in terms of section 6.8, the capital budget had been increased to £1,454,205.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, in terms of the works on Newton Road;
- improvements to the road network had made a difference to communities and it was asked if there would be an opportunity to provide more dropped kerbs on footways this year. A response was provided;
- it was asked how much of the work had been put out to contract;
- there was concern that the allocation of funding by way of road length was not the fairest way. This would be discussed at a future Ward Business Meeting; and
- there was a need for major road works in the Ward of Dingwall and Seaforth.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the final budget allocation for Dingwall and Seaforth area for 2024/25;
- ii. the works completed on the approved list to date; and
- iii. the additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year.

5. Comparison of Recent Capital Programmes and Required Works
Coimeas eadar Prògraman Calpa agus Obraichean Riatanach o Chionn Ghoirid

There had been circulated Report No DSA/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members were concerned about the deterioration of the road network. As a central ward, there was high road usage, and it was asked what the worst roads were and how they would be prioritised. A response was provided;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that the deferred works from last year would be funded from this year's budget, as the original funds were redirected to resurfacing. However, there was concern for this year's funding;
- information was sought, and provided, in terms of the GPS tracker detection system and the calculation of insurance claims;
- information was sought regarding revenue works and it was said that the repairing of potholes, along with weeding and verge works would make a big difference to the road network; and
- Members were eager for Dingwall and Seaforth to benefit from the use of the thermal heat machines as soon as possible.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

6. Housing Management Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No DSA/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, in terms of the reasons for technical rent arrears;
- information was sought, and provided, in terms of anti-social behaviour and it was confirmed that the Safer Ross meetings allowed the Police, Fire Service and Council Services to work together; and
- in response to a question regarding homeless allocations, it was confirmed that the Council worked from the same allocation list as local Housing Associations.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

7. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No DSA/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members were delighted with the support from Fèis Rois in leading the delivery of the Dingwall 800 celebrations. Along with the Community Council and Dingwall Community Development Trust, Members were keen to move this project forward as soon as possible.

The Event Producer had been appointed and was due to start in July 2025.

Clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the budget allocations.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the application form and summary RAG assessment carried out by the CRF team; and
- ii. **AGREED** to homologate the Council committing £51,000 for project CRF4004: Feis Rois – Dingwall 800 Event Producer.

8. **Approval of New Street Names, Conon Bridge** **Aonta airson Ainmean Sràide Ùra, Drochaid Sguideil**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to homologate the approval of one street name for a new development in Conon Bridge as Riverside Place; and
- ii. four further street names as: Holly Drive; Larch Drive; Harvest Way; and Scots Pine Road.

9. **Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary budget applications approved since last meeting** **Iartasan buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàrd Inbhir Pheofharain agus Shìophort air an aontachadh bho choinneamh mu dheireadh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved between 10 February and 31 March 2025.

- i. The Neil Gunn Trust – Writing Competition: £630
- ii. Muir of Ord Golf Club – Hickory Club Event: £300
- iii. Dingwall Academy – The Coffee and Truck Garden: £950
- iv. Conon/Maryburgh Outdoor Bowling Club – Bowls Scotland Finals: £1,800
- v. Muir of Ord Golf Club – 150 Year Anniversary: £1,500
- vi. Dingwall Fire Brigade – Senior Citizens Party: £500
- vii. Dingwall Community Council – Dingwall in Bloom: £1799.80

10. **Minutes** **Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 10 February 2025 which were approved by the Council on 27 March 2025.

The meeting ended at 12.05pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in **The Glass House Room, Kingussie Courthouse, Kingussie/Remotely** on 27 May 2025 at 9.00 am

Present:

Mr J Bruce
Ms M Cockburn

Mr R Jones
Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Ms P Betts, Common Good Funds Officer
Ms T Batchelor, Solicitor
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

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

Mr R Jones in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

3. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee resolved that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting for following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 12 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

4. Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund Update

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

The meeting concluded at 9.10am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of the meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 28 May 2025 at 9.30am.

Present:

Dr C Birt	Ms E Knox
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms L Kraft
Mr S Coghill	Mrs I Mackenzie
Mr D Fraser	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr R Gale	Mrs A MacLean
Mr R Gunn	Mrs K MacLean
Mrs B Jarvie	Mrs M Reid
Ms L Johnston	Ms M Ross

Non-Members present:

Mr A Christie	Ms J McEwan
Mr J Finlayson	Mr P Oldham
Ms M Hutchison	Mrs T Robertson

NHS Highland representatives:

Dr T Allison, Director of Public Health
Ms L Bussell, Director of Nursing
Ms R MacDonald, Depute Director of Adult Social Care

Third sector representatives in attendance:

Dr G Rodger, Inspiring Young Voices

Participating Officials:

Ms F Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer, Health and Social Care
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer, Integrated People Services
Mr I Kyle, Lead Officer Strategy, Performance and Quality Assurance
Ms J Park, Strategic Lead Child Health
Mr J Libby, Transition Head of Children & Justice
Ms J Jennifer Baughan, Programme Manager, Whole Family Wellbeing
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mr D Fraser in the Chair

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

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr J Grafton and Mrs M Paterson.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 6 – Ms L Johnston

3. Service Achievements
Coileanaidhean Seirbheis

The Committee **NOTED** updates on the following:-

- North Partnership NQSW Conference
- Brighter Beginnings – Inverness Family Centre
- Service Achievements – Child Protection Committee
- Bairns Hoose
- Safe & Together model
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner (England & Wales) Report: "Victims in their own right; babies, children and young people's experience of domestic abuse"
- The Care Inspectorate video working in partnership with Social Workers

4. Performance Monitoring Report
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh

There had been circulated Report No HCW/07/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was queried whether the relatively low number of applicants to become foster carers was partly the result of kinship carers being able to receive payment, and the complexities of the situation, including the perceived intrusiveness of the foster care recruitment process, were summarised, as well as measures being undertaken to address the situation;
- information was sought and provided on the relatively high rates of sickness absence in the Health and Social Care Service, and the training provided to managers to tackle this;
- attention was drawn to the 15% staff survey return rate and whether this suggested staff were not adequately engaged;
- possible links between people waiting for care at home and the increased use of Self Directed Support (SDS) were queried;
- in relation to Adult Social Care (ASC) in the community, an example was provided of the useful intervention of the Council's welfare team in resolving an issue, for which the staff were thanked;
- the significant challenges facing ASC, with particular reference to delayed discharges from hospital, and the use of SDS, were summarised, and it was suggested that more detailed information on this would be useful. The Chief Officer, Integrated People Services, explained that a report on SDS was being considered by the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) and that an update to this committee might be beneficial in future;

- also in relation to delayed discharges from hospital, information was sought on whether waits for occupational therapy, the need for home adaptations, lack of power of attorney, or delays in the SDS application process were exacerbating the problem, and whether there was a shortage of frontline staff to deal with these issues. The list of codes for delayed discharges would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting; and
- an explanation was sought and provided of the scoring system for the Council's risk register, which factored in the severity of the risk, and the likelihood of the risk coming to fruition.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Service's performance and risk information.

5. **Delivery Plan Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mun Phlana Lìbhrigidh**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/08/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the timetable for the review of technology-enabled care was queried and a brief summary of progress provided, with business cases being worked on, and more detail to be provided in due course. Assurance was sought that provision of telecare would not be affected by the analogue switch-off, with concern expressed in particular for those who were receiving telecare outwith the NHS. Attention was drawn to the item on the agenda for the special full Council meeting on 29 May 2025, Digital Connectivity;
- information was sought and provided on the pilot care project in Lochaber, for which a report would be presented in due course;
- the process for carers to receive funding from the whole family wellbeing team was queried and explained; and
- it was requested that, in future, specific examples of how the delivery plan had helped to improve outcomes, especially in remote and rural areas, and to work towards sustained service improvement, would be useful.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the updates provided for the Projects/Programmes in the report.

6. **Adult Social Care Assurance and Strategic Update** **Barantas agus Cunntas Ro-innleachdail mu Chùram Sòisealta Inbheach**

Transparency Statement: Ms L Johnston declared a connection to this item as an employee of Connecting Carers but, having applied the objective test, did not feel that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No HCW/09/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought and provided on progress with plans to return some vaccination programmes to GP practices. Historical anomalies in record-keeping for vaccinations were queried and efforts to tackle this summarised, Information was also sought and provided on how vaccinations would be delivered in remote and rural areas, noting that the detail remained under discussion. Concerns about the effectiveness of the vaccination booking system were highlighted;
- an update was sought and provided on progress to keep Strathburn House care home open, and attention was drawn to many wider challenges in the locality, including childcare, housing and education provision;
- assurance was sought and provided that local Members would be kept updated on progress with a new care facility planned in Sutherland, and a brief summary of progress to date was provided;
- the acknowledgment in the report of the work of unpaid carers was welcomed, and attention was drawn to the importance of providing respite and support for unpaid carers, with the suggestion that breaks should be built into care packages. The Council's support of staff who were carers was welcomed and information would be provided outwith the meeting on efforts undertaken to publicise this;
- the Chair thanked staff, third sector partners, and unpaid carers for their work, with particular reference to the challenges in remote and rural areas;
- attention was drawn to the forthcoming changes in the model of integration between the Council and NHS Highland, and the various threads that connected both organisations and the third sector in delivering services in the face of significant challenges, including pressure in ASC and delayed discharges from hospitals. The extent of future-proofing, and plans for collaboration, were queried;
- noting that it had been agreed that the codes for delayed discharges would be circulated after the meeting, information on the percentage of hospital beds being used by people delayed in hospital was sought and provided;
- specific examples of the uses of the Carers Wellbeing Fund were sought and provided, these being primarily for short breaks;
- it was suggested that people with experience of unpaid or kinship caring might be interested in paid employment in the care sector;
- it was queried whether records were kept of the numbers of people who were given places in care homes due to the lack of availability of care at home; and
- the value of the wellbeing hubs was highlighted, and a summary was provided of efforts being undertaken to support them, and the delivery of the Strategic Plan, with more information available outwith the meeting from the Chief Officer, Integrated People Services.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

7. **Integrated Children's Services Annual Report** **Aithisg Bhliadhnail Seirbheisean Chloinne Amalaichte**

There had been circulated Report No HCW/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Vision 26 event, which would take place at Eden Court on 11 August 2025, was welcomed;
- assurance was sought that the GIRFEC refresh would include similar multi-agency training as its original launch;
- the increase in the 6-8 week breastfeeding target achievement was welcomed, as was the reducing number of children in temporary accommodation;
- concern was expressed at the numbers of young people not attending school, and information was sought of what was being done to assist this group, from an educational and mental health perspective. A summary was provided on the workstream being developed in this regard, and reference was also made to home-schooled children, while acknowledging that this area was covered by the Education service;
- it was queried what support was offered to cared for young people when they went on to higher education. The ongoing monitoring of this cohort was highlighted;
- it was queried whether the increase in looked after children could be a positive situation as a result of the successful Home in Highland project. Noting also that referrals to the Children's Reporter had reduced, it was queried whether both of these sets of figures represented an overall positive situation, and the complexities of the reasons behind the changing figures was summarised. A summary of the implication of a child being on the child protection register was sought and provided;
- increased engagement with local Members on the proposed new children's home in Thurso was requested and would be undertaken as long as doing so did not compromise the need for confidentiality etc;
- the format of the report was welcomed;
- assurance was sought on the work being undertaken by the youth work team, since returning to the control of the Council, with particular reference to their work to support young people in communities;
- it was noted that some targets were not being met within timescale in relation to staff sickness;
- with regard to rights and participation, attention was drawn to the work undertaken by Inspiring Young Voices to help implement the People's Participation Strategy, with particular reference to engaging with young children and those with learning support needs. Funding challenges were summarised;
- the benefits of a parental employability pilot in Wick was referenced and it was suggested that a pilot scheme teaching 'from scratch' cookery skills, to save money and increase nutrition, was suggested, with possible input from third sector organisations; and
- the Chair thanked officers and third sector partners for their work.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the ICSB annual report which shared the work undertaken by the children's services planning partnership 2024/25 in delivering the Highland Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023/2026; and
- ii. the work of the delivery groups.

8. Whole Family Wellbeing Programme Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Sunnd Teaghlaich air Fad

There had been circulated Report No HCW/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the value of working in close partnership with third sector organisations was highlighted, with particular reference to their local expertise;
- it was requested that the outcomes of the funded projects detailed in the report be reported to the Committee once they had been completed, noting in particular the importance of tracking the outcomes of funded third sector projects to try to protect their funding. It was concerning that there were some excellent funded projects taking place in localities, but local Members had not been informed of them. Attention was drawn to the use of data analysts to assess the impact of projects, and to the role of the joint strategic needs assessment to help measure impacts;
- a request was made for more information on various issues including the contextual safeguarding project, and the children and young people companions, and this would be provided to outwith the meeting;
- information was sought and provided on the commissioning and governance processes, and the role of the locality co-ordinators with regard to communication with communities and local Members;
- the need for legacy planning for projects was highlighted;
- advice for the families of children with less severe autism or other neurodiversity issues would be useful;
- Mrs B Jarvie queried whether funding for projects in the Nairn area had been ringfenced and this would be discussed further outwith the meeting to clarify which funds were being queried;
- the importance of the availability of venues for many of the projects was highlighted; and
- clarification was sought that the funding was available for individual families but that they could not apply for it directly.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the update with reference to the Scottish Governments Route-map and National Principles of Holistic Whole Family Support.

9. Models of Integration Review Ath-sgrùdadh air Modailean Amalachais

There was circulated Report No HCW/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED** the update provided in the report.

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes were circulated and **NOTED**:-

- i. Highland Council / NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee held on 13 December 2024;
- ii. Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group held on 30 October 2024; and
- iii. Child Protection Committee held on 7 November 2024.

Closing remarks

The Chair thanked Dr T Allison, outgoing Director of Public Health, for his work, and wished him well for the future.

The meeting ended at 12.25pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 28 May 2025 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr C Ballance	Ms J McEwan
Mr B Boyd	Mr P Oldham
Mr R Jones (Remote)	Mrs T Robertson
Mr G MacKenzie	Ms M Ross
Mr D McDonald	Mr R Stewart (Remote)

Non-Members also present:

Ms L Johnston
Mrs A MacLean

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Miss D Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit)
Ms S Armstrong, Chief Officer – Revenues & Commercialisation
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Ms E Barrie, Head of People
Mrs A MacPherson, Strategic Lead (Resources)
Mr T Murdison, Service Lead (Corporate Property)
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager
Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Internal Audit
Mrs A MacKenzie, Pay & HR Transaction Manager
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change Manager
Mr M Watters, Corporate Performance and Information Governance Manager
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms E Scoburgh, Audit Scotland

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

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr M Baird, Mr L Fraser, Mr A Jarvie and Mr A Sinclair.

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

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

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

There had been circulated Report No. AC/7/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

Prior to discussion, Members' attention was drawn to a report by the Accounts Commission, namely the 2023/24 Audit of Aberdeen City Council, where it was stated that an employee had embezzled over £1.1m over a 17 year period.

The Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit) shared that in light of the Accounts Commission report, the Revenues Team had temporarily suspended their own Council Tax refunds to check for any weaknesses within their own processes, to ensure this would not happen in Highland.

The update included copies of the following final reports issued:-

- a) People – Review of Financial Arrangements in Primary Schools (Reasonable Assurance)

During discussion, Members enquired as to the training available to new and acting head teachers. It was confirmed that induction training was provided for acting and new head teachers, in addition to mandatory financial training on Traineasy. A new structure was to be put in place to provide more support, but there was an expectation of head teachers, as the budget holder, to familiarise themselves with the financial software and associated training.

It was asked how, and if, the Education Service monitored the completion of training. As line managers were provided this information directly, the Strategic Lead (Resources) would review this and provide a response outside of the meeting.

Assurance was sought, and provided, regarding the removal of School Fund cheque signatories who were no longer employed by the Council.

- b) Corporate – Council Tax Refunds (Full Assurance)

Members were pleased to see Full Assurance had been given to the Council Tax Refunds Internal Audit Report and the Revenues Team was commended.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the final reports referred to in section 5.1 of the report; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at sections 6 and 7, and the status of work in progress detailed at Appendix 1.

**4. Internal Audit Action Tracking
Tracadh Ghnìomhan In-sgrùdaidh**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/8/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

During discussion, Members emphasised the importance of responsible officers setting, and adhering to, realistic initial target dates.

In terms of the Corporate Landlord Model and Community Asset Transfers, it was asked if the Council would consider the use of buildings otherwise sitting empty by third sector groups. In response, it was said that this was being looked at by the Strategic Asset Management Board.

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

5. Payroll Overpayments Update
Cunntas às Ur mu Phàighidhean Anabarrach Rola-pàighidh

There had been circulated Report No. AC/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

Since the November 2024 Audit Committee, various steps had been taken to reduce salary overpayments, including a monthly staff newsletter to remind staff to check their pay and managers to keep Payroll updated. In addition to the statistics provided in the report, Members were informed that the overpayments for April and May 2025 were under £40,000, delivering payment accuracy of 99.95%.

While some Members were concerned that the amount of overpayment was £10,000 more in 2024/25 than the previous year, officers viewed the situation as improved as recommendations agreed at the June 2024 Audit Committee had been actioned. Measures to mitigate salary overpayments were effective and progress would continue to be monitored.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress in relation to the Audit Recommendations agreed at June 2024 Audit Committee including all actions are now completed; and
- ii. that a further report be brought to the November 2025 Audit Committee.

6. Review of Corporate Risks
Ath-Sgrùdadh air Cunnartan Corporra

There had been circulated Report No. AC/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- information was sought as to how risk ratings, in terms of likelihood versus impact, were calculated. In response, it was explained this would be addressed at the training session arranged after the conclusion of the Committee meeting; and

- concern remained about the Council having a sustainable and adaptive workforce.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Corporate Risk Register provided at Appendix 1; and
- NOTED** the risk profile at Appendix 2.

7. **Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/25** **Aithisg Bhliadhnail In-Sgrùdaidh 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/11/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- the low number of Committee Members responding to the internal audit feedback survey;
- information was sought as to when the in-house bus operation report would be considered by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- confirmation was sought, and provided by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate in the earlier Payroll Overpayments Update report, that the actions from the review of the Payroll Control Environment had been completed; and
- in terms of the review of the Health and Safety arrangements, due to be completed by 27 June 2025, the question was asked if the Council had enough Responsible Premises Officers to cover all its buildings. In response, it was confirmed that this was a matter reviewed regularly by Senior Management as the future operating model evolved.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report, the audit opinion provided and to raise any relevant points with the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

8. **Fraud and Whistleblowing Annual Report 2024/25** **Cunntas Bliadhnail Foille agus Innsireachd 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/12/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

The Committee:-

- NOTED** details of the fraud investigations and activities undertaken as detailed in section 5.1 of the report;
- NOTED** the information at section 5.2 of the report including the low number of whistleblowing concerns requiring investigation; and
- NOTED** that where a fraud or whistleblowing investigation identifies any control weakness, fraudulent activity or areas for improvement, this will be addressed through an Internal Audit report which will be provided to Committee for scrutiny purposes.

9. **National Fraud Initiative (NFI) 2024/25 Exercise** **Eacarsaich Iomairt Foill Nàiseanta 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/13/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit).

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the work in progress to support the NFI 2024/25 exercise;
- ii. **AGREED** the NFI in Scotland Self-appraisal checklist at Appendix 1 of the report for those charged with governance (N.B. the Audit Committee); and
- iii. **NOTED** the NFI in Scotland Self-appraisal checklist at Appendix 2 of the report provided by the Key Contact.

10. **Audit Committee Annual Report 2024/25** **Aithisg Bhliadhnail Comataidh an Sgrùdaidh 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/14/25 by the Audit Committee Chair.

Speaking to the Report, the Chair expressed disappointment at the low number of Audit Committee Members who had completed the self-assessment of good practice survey. This was a responsibility of being a Member of the Audit Committee and it was hoped there would be greater participation in next year's survey. In addition, the lack of participation online was highlighted as well as Members who didn't submit apologies in advance of Committee meetings. There had been a variety of scrutiny undertaken during 2024/25 and this would continue next year and Members were encouraged to continue with this function, an important role for them. Turning to deadline dates for completion of actions arising from Audits, and referring to earlier discussion at the meeting, realistic target dates needed to be set so responsible officers worked towards addressing issues within the timescale agreed.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Audit Committee Chair's annual report including the identified areas for improvement. The report was provided at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** that this report should be recommended to Council to acknowledge that the necessary assurances had been provided by the Audit Committee to demonstrate that it had fulfilled its purpose and can demonstrate its impact for 2024/25.

11. **Draft 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement** **Dreachd Aithris Riaghlachais Bhliadhnail 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/15/25 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- confirmation was sought that the strategy (business and financial) for the in-house bus service would be brought to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- confirmation was also sought that the reporting of void properties would be brought to the Housing and Property Committee;

- it was confirmed that the Cessation of Utility Supplies related to all corporate properties; and
- re-structuring of the approach to the management and control of road maintenance was to be rolled out to teams and a request was made that this would also include all Members.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the draft 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement provided at Appendix 1; and
- ii. **AGREED** the re-structured approach to the management and control of road maintenance be rolled out to all Members.

12. Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act Achd Riaghladh Chumhachdan Sgrùdaidh (Alba)

The Council had made 4 applications for authorisation in terms of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 between 15 September 2024 and 31 March 2025. The applications involved 3 applications for directed surveillance and 1 for a covert human intelligence source (CHIS).

The Committee **NOTED** the number of applications and that the Council continued to be a modest user of the powers. A report would be forthcoming to the November meeting.

The meeting ended at 3.05 pm.

1969

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drumbuie, Golspie on Monday 2 June 2025 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Gale
Ms M Hutchison

Mr J McGillivray
Mr H Morrison

In attendance:

Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager
Ms R Robertson, Bereavement Services Project Coordinator
Ms M Grant, Principal Housing Officer
Mr P Waite, Outdoor Access Manager
Mr M Dent, Access Officer
Mr D Hopwood, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager

Also in attendance:

Station Commander Mr D Bell, Scottish Fire and Rescue

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

Mr R Gale in the Chair

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were apologies for absence from Mr M Baird and Ms L Niven.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

Members were advised that Brora Primary School had received an excellent report following an inspection by HMIE and staff and pupils were congratulated on this achievement. Melvich Community Care Unit (Care Home) had also received an excellent report following an inspection by the Care Inspectorate and the staff were congratulated in this regard.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

At this point, concern was expressed that Edderton Primary School was likely to be mothballed for the next academic session and that this reflected issues of depopulation across Sutherland. It was suggested the Scottish Government's Addressing Depopulation Action Plan was having a lack of impact in the area.

Thereafter, the Chair of the Education Committee and Assistant Chief Executive – People were thanked for their assurances that Edderton Primary School would be

maintained in a proper condition to allow it to re-open immediately the school roll increased and that the School would be strongly marketed and promoted for enrolment of new pupils.

Following further discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to write to the Deputy First Minister of Scotland expressing its deep concern at the ongoing level of depopulation in Sutherland and the impact it was having on schools in the area.

Following on from the above, it was suggested there was a need to be mindful of the decision to close Durness Primary Nursery for one year, resulting in the loss of staff. The premises were in a position to re-open for the next academic year if staff could be recruited. There were similar issues with care home staffing on the North Coast, and highlighting the need for housing to accommodate the staff required for the new care home development in that area.

In regard to the above, it was suggested the Council had to be more forward thinking and consider ways around these issues. It was reiterated that jobs and housing were key to addressing depopulation in the area. There was also a need for additional investment in new housing development in rural areas, specific reference being made to a funding issue with a new build development in Edderton.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No SCC/12/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the need for the Council to learn lessons from the high numbers and lack of spacing between campervans parking in its invitation to pay car parks in the area;
- whether the Council had submitted any site fire safety risk assessments for its car parks. It was confirmed the matter would be followed up with the Service's fire safety enforcement team and a response provided;
- the potential for the recruitment process for retained firefighters to be expedited more quickly to retain the interest of new recruits and help ensure they completed the process. It was confirmed this point would be fed back to the Service's recruitment team;
- concern at the high number of vacancies across stations in Sutherland and that this reflected the lack of young people in rural communities;
- it would be helpful if information on the new contracts for retained staff could be shared with communities as the new flexibility around availability may generate more interest from potential recruits. It was confirmed the opportunity to share this information on social media would be considered;
- further clarity was sought and provided on the causes of deliberate fires in relation to grasslands;
- confirmation was sought and provided that all the unwanted fire alarm signals at the significant risk premises detailed in the report had been attended by the Service. The Service's fire safety enforcement team also engaged with premises to educate and provide guidance;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the changes to the referral process for home fire safety visits;

- in relation to the Wildfire Strategy, it was explained that Dornoch Fire Station had been designated as a Tier 2 station and would be provided with specialist equipment and support vans; additional staff training was also currently ongoing; and
- the Service be thanked for their excellent response to recent serious fires in Sutherland.

The Committee **NOTED** the Sutherland Performance Report.

**5. Dornoch Common Good Fund – Grant Application Dornoch Firth Independent Lifeboat (East Sutherland Rescue Association)
Maoin Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich – Iarrtas Tabhartais Bàta-teasairginn Neo-eisimeileach Caolas Dhòrnaich (Comann Teasairginn Chataibh an Ear)**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the Association was commended on the significant amount of funds it had raised towards the overall cost of the project and further clarity was provided on the firefighting element of the project as a condition of planning consent.

The Committee **APPROVED**:

- i. the revised budget for Dornoch Common Good Fund; and
- ii. the grant of £25,000 from Dornoch Common Good Fund to Dornoch Firth Independent Lifeboat (East Sutherland Rescue Association).

**6. Sutherland Area Place Plan
Plana Àite Sgìre Chataibh**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members welcomed the Plan and commended the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust on the work undertaken to review the priorities for Sutherland. The fact that priorities included employment and housing was also welcomed and it was hoped the Plan would take priority over the current planning system in addressing depopulation in the area.

Further comments included that the Plan highlighted areas for improvement and continuing action and Members looked forward to receiving the bespoke action plan that would set out the route for the delivery of the priorities. A further point was raised as to the importance of communities being heard in relation to renewables and the impact they had on their areas.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** to adopt the Sutherland Area Place Plan, using it as a tool to inform and support decision making about Sutherland;
- ii. **AGREED** to support and promote the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other plans, strategies, development and funding opportunities across or impacting the Sutherland area; and
- iii. **NOTED** the next steps for progressing the work set out in the plan.

7. Bereavement Services - Project Updates
Cunntas às ùr mu sheirbheisean bàis

There had been circulated Report No SCC/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were conveyed for the works carried out in respect of the Proncynain Burial Ground extension;
- confirmation was sought and provided that no new lairs were being sold in Melness Burial Ground to preserve as many as possible for time of need and until such time as an extension could be provided;
- in relation to the remaining capacity in Golspie Burial Ground, it was confirmed that all options were being explored and any suggestions from Members, the community council and others would be welcomed and added to the list of investigations; and
- the progress being made to repair a wall at Clynekirkton Burial Ground, Brora and confirmation a response would be provided directly to the Chair on this issue.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Sutherland area; and
- ii. the challenges identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development.

8. Housing Repairs Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No SCC/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, the Service was commended on performance on rent arrears in Sutherland, gross rent arrears as a percentage of annual rent due being well below the Highland average. In addition, Members thanked the Housing Team in Sutherland for their hard work in supporting tenants in the area.

Thereafter, it was queried as to the proportion of rent arrears of £500 or less that were due to benefits being paid in arrears as this may skew the figures and cause undue stress for tenants. It was confirmed a response would be provided directly to the Chair on this issue.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

9. Sutherland Access Rangers CRF Funding 2024/25 Progress Report
Aithisg Adhartais Maoineachadh Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd Maoir-dùthcha Chataibh 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No SCC/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that Members would be provided with a contact list for the Access Rangers in post in each area;
- the potential for Access Rangers to attend a community council chairs meeting to establish a first point of contact with them and the Police, given the importance of appropriate liaison and a coordinated approach. It was confirmed this matter would be taken forward;
- the need for discussions involving all relevant parties to be held at the earliest opportunity on resolving the issues at the Wailing Widow Falls;
- the range of work undertaken by the Access Rangers was greatly valued and appreciated and thanks be conveyed to all staff;
- the fact the Council had agreed to fund the Service was welcomed and it was hoped this would continue into the future;
- confirmation was sought and provided that it was hoped to retain a number of staff on a part-time basis over the winter months; and
- the need for the extension of the tourist season to be taken into account in terms of providing a full Ranger service next year.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided by the report and within Appendix 1 as the final claim to the Community Regeneration Fund for this project.

10. Environmental Health - Annual Report and Activity 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No SCC/18/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- highlighting the broad range and volume of work being undertaken by the Environmental Health Team;
- an update was sought and provided on the staff resources available to deal with the high volume of service requests the Team received, including short term let licensing consultations;
- confirmation was sought and provided that no fixed penalty notices for dog fouling had been issued in the previous financial year. There was an increased focus within the Team on education, staffing remits and refreshing processes and procedures with a view to securing more fixed penalties in future; and
- the appointment of a new dog warden in the area was welcomed and emphasising the importance of both education and enforcement in relation to dog fouling.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the range and volume of work being undertaken locally by the Environmental Health team;
- ii. the Highland wide issues; and
- iii. the report format and content.

11. Ward Discretionary Awards **Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget applications **approved 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025**

NOTED the following Ward Discretionary Fund payment that have been approved since the previous meeting of the Committee

Assynt Dev. Trust – Menopause Chats	£1,425.00
Community Food Initiatives North East – FareShare in Highland	£5,050.00
Bradbury Centre – Medical Bath Replacement	£500.00
North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust – First Aid Training	£500.00
Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust – Kyle Feeds	£500.00
Lairg & District Community Initiatives – Lairg War Memorial Upkeep	£377.92
North West Training Centre – Learning programme 24-25	£500.00
Lairg & District Community Initiatives – Lairg Lunch Club	£840.00
Lairg in Bloom – Village Floral Planting	£2,000.00
Bonar Bridge Football Club – Playing Field Dugouts on Wheels	£2,707.08
Poppy Wreaths	£92.38

East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications **approved 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025**

NOTED the following Ward Discretionary Fund payment that have been approved since the previous meeting of the Committee

Community Food Initiatives North East – FareShare in Highland	£2,179.00
Embo Trust – Old School Transition – Final Step	£780.00
The Dornoch Area CIC – Dornoch Transport Project	£999.00
Bradbury Centre – Medical bath Replacement	£1,500.00
Dornoch Cricket Club – Practice Nets Extension	£500.00
Dornoch Youth Service Summer Programme	£1,000.00
Embo Football Club – Essential Works to Changing Rooms	£900.00
Engaging with Activity CIC – Hub Outings	£1,000.00
Timespan – Gutting Girls	£1,000.00
Rogart Community Council – Rogart Hub	£1,866.00
TimeSpan Title Check	£191.67
Brora Development Trust – Christmas Outing for Youth Room	£1,202.00
Helmsdale Primary School Parent Council – A9 Crossing Hut	£238.00
Brora Development Trust – Food Provision for Youth Room	£96.00
Poppy Wreaths	£92.37

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 17 February 2025, which were approved by the Council on 27 March 2025.

The meeting concluded at 12 noon.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 4 June 2025 at 9.35 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin
Mrs I Campbell (remote)
Mr A Christie
Mrs M Cockburn
Ms H Crawford (remote)
Ms S Fanet (remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)
Mr R Gale
Mr J Grafton

Ms M Hutchison
Ms L Johnston (remote)
Ms K MacLean (substitute)
Mr D Macpherson
Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mrs M Ross (substitute)
Mr R Stewart (remote)

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Rev C Caley
Ms S Lamont

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms L McKittrick (remote)

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr R Bremner (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)
Mr K Gowans
Dr M Gregson
Mr R Jones (remote)

Ms E Knox (remote)
Mr B Lobban (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)
Mrs A MacLean (remote)
Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Mrs T Robertson (remote)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education
Ms B Scott, Chief Officer – Early Years and Primary Education (remote)
Ms A Jansson, Interim Chief Officer – Early Years and Primary Education
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead – Resources
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead - Capital Planning and Estate Strategy
Mr D Martin, Principal Education Officer
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer
Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist
Mr I Kyle, Head of Performance and Improvement
Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years
Ms M Garson, Senior Lead, Employability and Skills 3-18
Mrs F Shearer, Area Education and Learning Manager (South)
Ms F Dalgetty, Chief Executive, Fèis Rois (Third Sector)
Ms G Rodger, Chief Officer, Inspiring Young Voices (Third Sector)
Ms M Chemonges, Highland Parent Council Partnership
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland

Mr N Bolton, Head of Music Development, High Life Highland

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

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms L Dundas, Ms L Kraft and Ms M MacCallum.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 11: Mr K Gowans

Item 12: Mr A Christie

Item 13: Mrs M Ross

The following Members made general Transparency Statements but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr J McGillivray, on the basis that he was still registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, and as a retired member and former Highland District Secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association.

Mr R Stewart, on the basis that a close family member was employed by the Highland Council.

Mr D Macpherson, on the basis that a close family member was a Primary School Teacher.

**3. Good News/Outstanding Achievements
Naidheachdan Matha/Coileanaidhean Air Leth**

A presentation on outstanding achievements by pupils and schools had been circulated.

Having congratulated all schools included in the presentation for the wide variety of achievements, the Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

4. **Statutory Consultation: Relocation of St Clement's School** **Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Ath-shuidheachadh Sgoil Naoimh Cliamhainn**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, it was confirmed that the date of the public meeting, which it was indicated in the report would be finalised following engagement with St Clement's Parent Council, would be Wednesday 2 July 2025.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including how the estimated cost of £50m at section 3.1 of the report had been arrived at and whether it was considered to be a realistic figure; how many other agencies would be working within the community POD (Point of Delivery); what security arrangements would be put in place, particularly at St Clement's School given it was a Special School; and which Special Schools St Clement's would be benchmarked against;
- given the broad catchment area of St Clement's School, it was welcomed that consultation with Elected Members would be wider than just the Dingwall and Seaforth Ward. It was also welcomed that the consultation would be made available to parents of pre-school pupils;
- it was good to see progress being made with regard to St Clement's School. However, the need for pace was emphasised given increasing construction costs;
- it was important to listen to the views of the community, and to get the new St Clement's School right;
- an assurance was sought, and provided, that all members of Council staff who would be working within the POD would have the appropriate PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) or disclosure checks;
- St Clement's School community had experienced many false dawns in the past, and the statutory consultation needed to be handled with care as some parents felt marginalised and that their views were not always taken into account. Concern was expressed regarding meetings taking place during the school holidays, and the need to ensure people were not excluded simply because they were taking a much-needed break was emphasised. It was important to reflect, at every stage of the consultation, on whether everyone was being given the opportunity to engage and whether things were moving in a positive direction. In responding to the points raised, the Assistant Chief Executive recognised the importance of all stakeholders having the opportunity to engage in a way that was appropriate for them and their needs, and she summarised the process that would be followed. In particular, it was explained that the public meeting was taking place on 2 July as that was when parents had indicated would work best for them, and it would be a hybrid meeting. There would be no in-person engagement over the school holidays as it was recognised that that was a difficult time for people, and Members were asked to contact officers if anyone felt they were being marginalised at any time so they could be drawn into the process;
- tribute was paid to the parents who had campaigned, over a number of years, for a new St Clement's School
- the facilities at the new St Duthus Special School in Tain, which was nearing completion, were commended, and should give confidence to Members regarding the new St Clement's School; and

- thanks were expressed to all involved for the work that had been done with regard to St Clement's School.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation, based on the proposal attached to the report at Appendix 1.

5. **Statutory Consultation: Closure of Badcaul Primary School – Final Report** **Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Dùnadh Bun-Sgoil a' Bhad Chall – Aithisg Dheireannach**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an issue that had caused consternation at the public meeting and subsequently was the proposal to transfer the catchment to Ullapool Primary School, which was 31 miles from Badcaul. There was another school, Bualnaluib Primary School, 13 miles away which it was suggested would provide a more attractive proposition to families that might move to the area, and it was queried whether it was possible for the catchment area to be looked at again, if required. In response, it was explained that the parents who had moved their children in January 2022 had chosen Ullapool Primary School rather than Bualnaluib. It was confirmed it could be possible to change the catchment, however, a full statutory consultation would be required. It was added that Bualnaluib Primary School was part of the Gairloch Associated School Group so any change to the catchment would also require changes to Gairloch High School and Ullapool High School catchment areas;
- there were positive developments to look forward to in the Badcaul community and, while the recommendation was for the school to close, it was not impossible that there would be a school there in the future. It was necessary to think much more creatively, as was already happening with Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision;
- continued mothballing would mean the school building would remain closed and unused, potentially for years, which created uncertainties and did not galvanise community spirit. It was suggested there was potential for the community to lease the building and bring it back to life, which would create a sense of hope and positivity;
- in relation to the Integrated Impact Assessment, the conclusion that there was no impact on children and young people was questioned, and it was suggested there was a significant impact on the young people who had to make a 60-mile round trip to Ullapool. In response, it was explained that Badcaul Primary School had been mothballed since January 2022. Closing the school would do no more than formalise the current situation on the ground so, in that sense, there was no impact on local children;
- children from Badcaul attending school in Ullapool would be bound by school transport and would be unable to take part in after-school activities without private transport, and it was queried whether transport provision could be looked at with a view to allowing the children to participate in activities and feel more socially included in Ullapool. The Chair confirmed such discussions could take place if required, citing examples in Skye whereby school transport left later on certain days of the week to facilitate young people taking part in extra-curricular activities;

- it was queried what the minimum number of pupils would be for opening a new school to be viable if the community had a resurgence in the future. In that regard, the Chair confirmed that officers had looked at school roll projections and would look at them again should there be an influx of young people in the area;
- sympathy was expressed for the plight of the Badcaul community, four schools having closed in Sutherland over the last eight years. Edderton Primary School now faced the prospect of mothballing, and it was commented that depopulation was no longer confined to rural areas in the north and west but was having an impact close to the Inner Moray Firth. Thanks were expressed to the Chair and the Assistant Chief Executive – People for their assurances that Edderton Primary School premises would be maintained in a fit and proper state, ready to re-open when the school roll increased, and that the school would be actively promoted for enrolment in the spring of 2026 for academic session 2026/27;
- schools were the heart of a community, not just a place for education but a crucial part of the social and economic fabric, particularly in rural communities where they were a hub for local activities. Closing Badcaul Primary School would be to remove one of the few remaining community assets and would reduce the attractiveness of the community to families looking to move to the area. In that regard, reference was made to the closure of Kentallen School in the 1960s whereby families with young children had largely stopped settling in that area. In recent years remote working had increased the appeal of living in rural areas, and it was important not to discourage families from moving into a community;
- closing schools went directly against the Council's aim of addressing rural depopulation;
- keeping schools open was essential for sustaining multi-generational communities, and Education Scotland had recognised the value of small school settings;
- it was not considered that closing the school would generate significant financial savings. In response, it was explained that the proposal had not been advanced on the basis of financial savings but on the viability of the school;
- if the school closed and the local population increased in the future, the Council would have to provide a new school or increase transport subsidies, and it was suggested that the recommendation was short-sighted with potential long-term consequences;
- closing the school would lead to housing developments struggling to attract young families, and children having longer daily commutes, and it was suggested that the Council should instead work with residents and explore suitable alternatives until it could perhaps reopen;
- small schools provided high-quality personalised learning, which was important for attainment;
- transporting children to Ullapool by bus did not align with the Council's environmental goals as it led to more emissions and did not promote active travel. It also meant that children were away from home for longer than they needed to be;
- it was important to make a decision based on the facts in the report in terms of the very low number of school and pre-school children in the Badcaul community;
- it was queried whether it was the case that the status of mothballed schools was reviewed annually;
- it was commented that two children from Badcaul attended Ullapool Primary School at present. However, they were there by parental choice;
- thanks were expressed to officers for the time taken to clarify points and provide additional information to Members; and

- whilst the reasoning behind the recommendation in the report was understood, it was intended to move an amendment seeking to allow time for current developments to progress, and for all those involved to work together to build community resilience, capacity and agency. When families were looking to relocate, access to primary education and childcare were often a first consideration. Currently there were no early years children in the Badcaul Primary School catchment area but, looking ahead, the pre-school children of today would require ELC in a year or two and primary education a couple of years later. It was hoped that community-led action would change the current outlook. Currently, children were required to travel for over an hour, depending on the conditions. The first part of the journey was on a challenging road, and particularly difficult in wintry conditions. Children as young as four years old would have to travel unaccompanied and change buses in a siding on the way. It was questioned how many Members would be happy for their very young children to undertake such a journey, setting off at 7.40 am and not returning until 4.30 pm. Developments in the area were being progressed by SSEN and Wester Ross Fisheries whose letter of support stated that “recruitment is challenging in the Highlands due to the relocation of individuals and families to larger cities. In order to ensure we have a viable workforce in a remote location, Badcaul Primary School is vital in providing the community foundation that families look for when relocating”. Communities Housing Trust had carried out a housing needs survey in October 2022 and had conducted a community engagement event to explore suitable sites for an affordable housing development. They had narrowed the options down to a site opposite the school. Communities Housing Trust had stated that “the provision of education and housing in fragile rural areas have both been identified as key elements in the 2024 Scottish Government paper on population decline. Communities Housing Trust would support delaying a decision to close Badcaul Primary School whilst other opportunities, including affordable housing, are allowed to develop.” Closure of the school would have long-term implications for Badcaul and Wester Ross, and it was believed the decision had Highland-wide implications. If the Council was serious about supporting fragile communities towards regeneration and sustainability, it was necessary to create opportunities and plan for repopulation. An extended period of mothballing would give time for change and positive impacts of developments to address the overarching threat of depopulation.

Thereafter, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr D Millar, **MOVED** the recommendations in the report, namely, that the Committee agree to recommend that the Highland Council discontinue education at Badcaul Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Ullapool Primary School.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Ms M Hutchison, seconded by Mr R Gale, moved that the Committee recommend a further period of mothballing for Badcaul Primary School. Since the report was published the outlook has changed.

- Most importantly, there is a small group of pre-school children in the area who will soon be entitled to statutory ELC.
- The construction of a major fish farm facility is well underway at Badcaul and should be operational this year, offering new employment opportunities.
- A community housing project is ongoing.
- Local estates, the Community Council and the local development trust have voiced their opposition to closure of the school.

Another period of mothballing would allow all stakeholders to work alongside the community, help it to thrive and support the Council's commitment to address depopulation.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 8 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 9 votes, with no abstentions. The **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Ms S Atkin, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr J Finlayson, Ms L Johnston, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Millar, Mrs M Ross.

For the Amendment:

Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Ms S Fanet, Mr R Gale, Ms M Hutchison, Mr J Grafton, Mr D Macpherson, Mr J McGillivray, Mr R Stewart.

Decision

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council a further period of mothballing for Badcaul Primary School. Since the report was published the outlook has changed.

- Most importantly, there is a small group of pre-school children in the area who will soon be entitled to statutory ELC.
- The construction of a major fish farm facility is well underway at Badcaul and should be operational this year, offering new employment opportunities.
- A community housing project is ongoing.
- Local estates, the Community Council and the local development trust have voiced their opposition to closure of the school.

Another period of mothballing would allow all stakeholders to work alongside the community, help it to thrive and support the Council's commitment to address depopulation.

6. Statutory Consultation: Merger of School Nurseries at Caol Primary School and St Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, to create a new pre-school provision serving both schools

Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Cur còmhla Sgoiltean-àraich aig Bun-Sgoil a' Chaoil agus Bun-Sgoil Chaitligeach Cholm Cille, gus solar ùr ro-sgoile a chruthachadh a bhios a' frithealadh an dà sgoil

There had been circulated Report No EDU/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the school nurseries at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School be merged to create a new pre-school provision serving both schools.

**7. Statutory Consultation: Closure of Kinlochewe Primary School – Final Report
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Dùnadh Bun-Sgoil Cheann Loch Iù – Aithisg
Dheireannach**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Highland Council discontinue education at Kinlochewe Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Gairloch Primary School.

**8. Statutory Consultation: Creation of Gaelic Medium Catchment Areas for
Craighill Primary School and Tain Royal Academy
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Cruthachadh Sgìrean-sgoile Foghlaim tron
Ghàidhlig airson Bun-Sgoil Chnoc na Creige agus Acadamaidh Rìoghail Bhaile
Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the creation of Gaelic Medium catchment areas in line with the proposal set out at paragraph 1.2 above, namely, overlaying the current English Medium catchments of all primary schools within the Associated School Groups of Tain Royal Academy, Invergordon Academy, Dornoch Academy and Golspie High School.

**9. Service Performance Reporting for Quarter 4 2024/25
Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson Ràith 4 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- with reference to section 8.3 of the report, it having been queried why two ends of the educational spectrum had been included in the same intensive programme, it was confirmed that there were two distinct projects sitting within the workstream;
- information was sought, and provided, on what was being done to encourage more staff to undertake GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) training;
- in relation to the table on page 333 of the papers, several indicators referred to an annual update in February, and it would be useful, in future reports, to indicate which year the annual update covered; and
- with reference to the indicators relating to Complementary Tariff Scores, it was queried whether the figures represented the number of pupils involved. The Chief Officer – Secondary Education undertook to revert to Mr A Christie in that regard.

The Committee scrutinised and **APPROVED**:-

- i. the Service's performance and risk information;
- ii. the update on the Workforce for the Future Portfolio at section 9; and
- iii. the actions taken following an internal audit of financial procedures in schools at section 10 of the report.

10. Improving Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Action Plan – Update Plana-gnìomha airson Dàimhean agus Modh-giùlain a Leasachadh ann an Sgoiltean – Cunntas às Ùr

There had been circulated Report No EDU/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report was a follow-up to the recent Members' workshop, and he thanked those Members who had attended the workshop and provided helpful and insightful feedback. The report provided information on both the national work taking place and what was happening in Highland.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was recognised that keeping staff safe and managing children was often a fine balancing act within the school setting, and how quickly children who did not have good emotional intelligence could misinterpret cues. Information was sought, and provided, on how the actions being taken contributed to keeping staff members safe from physical violence at work, and whether interventions included restraint, whether figures were available in that regard and whether parents were informed;
- the recent Members' workshop had provided valuable insight and background to the statistics on behaviour in schools;
- it appeared that a small number of pupils were causing the majority of the issues, and it was questioned whether these pupils were suitable for the mainstream school environment;
- anecdotally, Members had heard that schools were a violent unsafe place for learners, and a request was made for more reporting on violence by pupils towards other pupils. In addition, reference was made to a survey by the Teachers' Union, NASUWT, that had identified issues in terms of violence and the use of vapes, alcohol, energy drinks and illegal drugs in schools, and it was necessary to take a holistic view of the issues to understand how best to tackle them. Other Members disputed the comment that schools were violent and unsafe, stating it was scaremongering and misrepresented children in Highland. 613 pupils out of approximately 31,000, less than 2%, had been involved in pupil-staff incidents in the last school session. 85% of incidents involved children with ASN, and 28% of incidents were in P1. Schools in Highland were amongst the safest in the country if not the UK and, as evidenced by the Lifestyle Survey, children felt safe in schools. It was necessary to get matters into perspective and accept that all staff involved were doing a good job in trying to address some of the challenges children faced, which had been heightened since Covid;
- information was sought, and provided, on what support was put in place for teachers in terms of how to handle situations whereby they were verbally or physically attacked, and what support was provided for children in the playground to ensure it was a safe environment for them to play in;
- it was welcomed that a survey of school staff had been carried out, and the finding that staff felt time and sufficient staffing levels could have a considerable effect on their ability to manage classes and meet pupils' needs was consistent with reports from constituents that staff, including support staff, were insufficient in number and did not have time to deal with their caseload;
- given 85% of incidents involved children with Additional Support Needs (ASN), it was questioned whether enough was being done to integrate children with ASN

into the mainstream school system, and it was suggested it might be necessary to look again at the approach being taken;

- in terms of emotional dysregulation, it was highlighted that autistic people processed emotionally so it was not necessarily dysregulation in some cases;
- offers to train could give the impression that teachers were responsible, and it was important children understood they were responsible for their behaviour;
- the statement in the report that it was unlikely that one approach would address all issues was welcomed. It was important to accept that some approaches, including restorative practice, might sometimes not work. In that regard, reference was made to advice provided by NASUWT which stated that “a range of approaches and consequences are required given that restorative approaches to poor behaviour do not work for all pupils and cannot be the only tool available to schools when responding to incidents of abuse or violence”, and it was hoped this would be taken on board;
- it was welcomed that references had been provided at the end of the report, and it was suggested that more reports should include information on sources;
- the importance of taking a whole family approach was emphasised;
- it was questioned whether teachers dealing with challenging incidents always had time to report them, and information was sought, and provided, on how robust the reporting process was considered to be, and whether there was any indication from Head Teachers as to how many unreported incidents there might be due to pressure of work;
- it was necessary to engage with parents, carers and the wider school community to understand the social, economic and emotional factors that might be impacting on children’s behaviour;
- with reference to long waiting lists for child psychologist appointments, it was queried whether additional support could be put in place prior to formal diagnosis of specific conditions such as Autism or Dyslexia which were often evident to teaching staff;
- the importance of early intervention and parental responsibility was emphasised;
- reference was made to instances of teachers feeling pressure to not exclude a child from school when they felt it was the solution, and to teachers being absent from work due to stress related to the behaviour of particular children, and it was questioned what could be done to make things better for children, families and teaching staff;
- restorative practice was reputed to be a “soft option” but it was quite difficult for children to face up to the consequences of their actions and, done properly, restorative practice could be transformative;
- with reference to section 7.1 of the report, the percentage of Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) that responded to the survey of school staff was quite low, and the importance of the voice of PSAs was emphasised as they dealt with many challenging incidents;
- whilst sanctions and punishments were not generally considered to be helpful in supporting distressed children, boundaries and consequences, and a sense of fairness, were important;
- with reference to section 7.9 of the report, the way someone spoke, not only to a child but to anyone, mattered, and there should be a whole school approach in that regard;
- it was hoped that data would determine where resources were targeted;

- as indicated in section 7.11 of the report, hunger had a huge impact on how children behaved, and something as simple as extending morning break by five minutes to allow children to eat could be transformative;
- the Chief Executive, Fèis Rois, suggested there was an opportunity to have a discussion around collaboration between the Council and third sector partners, adding that children and young people often had trusted relationships with youth workers outwith school, for example, through arts and sports clubs. From a Fèis Rois perspective, it was striking that 85% of incidents involved children with ASN. There were numerous academic papers on the impact of music, particularly singing and group singing, in supporting children with language development, speech, language communication and emotional regulation, and it was suggested there could be opportunities to pilot initiatives such as having a musician in residence in early years settings and P1. It was highlighted that Fèis Rois had recently held a whole day of training with a clinical psychiatrist from NHS Highland for musicians working in schools because they had reported seeing behaviour in primary schools that they had not seen pre-pandemic. In addition, £165,000 of funding had been secured to work with nine primary schools in the Highlands and 19 class teachers over the next two years on a project specifically looking at using music as a way of improving health and wellbeing outcomes for primary school children; and
- disappointment was expressed that the Committee's religious representatives had not been made aware of the Members' workshop, and it was requested they be notified of future workshops relating to education. The Chair apologised for the oversight, and confirmed the presentation from the workshop could be circulated and the Principal Educational Psychologist would be happy to have a discussion with the religious representatives.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the work ongoing nationally in supporting better relationships and behaviour in schools;
- NOTED** the evidence base that supported the approach taken in Highland to address relational issues in our schools; and
- AGREED** the actions being taken in Highland to ensure our practice is in line with national recommendations.

11. Education Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Fhoghlam

Transparency Statement: Mr K Gowans declared a connection to this item as an employee of UHI but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report looked at the positive progress that had been made in improving positive destinations, the planned next steps in the development of the refreshed Raising Attainment Strategy, and the ongoing progress with the restructure of the Education and Learning Service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- parents and carers were becoming increasingly concerned that the current system by which funding for ASN provision was allocated, which was based on indicators of poverty, was causing frontline support to be withdrawn from some of the pupils who needed it most as, whilst living in poverty might have a detrimental impact on attainment, it did not have a causal link to diagnosable ASN. Parents had asked how this could be acceptable and why there had not been any consultation with the pupils, parents and carers, and it was emphasised that the provision of support should be based on need;
- the words of a pupil who was concerned about the withdrawal of their one-to-one support having been shared with the Committee, it was confirmed that the allocation of ASN resource within schools was the responsibility of Head Teachers. It was further clarified that one-to-one support was not always the best option for a young person as it could create dependency rather than encouraging independence and building confidence. Other Members suggested that one-to-one support should be withdrawn gradually in order for young people to build confidence;
- the importance of adequate ASN provision to the success of the Raising Attainment Strategy was emphasised;
- it was highlighted that positive post-school destinations could include personal development or volunteering opportunities which were not sustainable positive destinations, and that some employment destinations were not necessarily positive as demonstrated by the fact that the minimum wage for a 16-year-old was only £7.55 an hour. It was suggested that a survey be carried out to ask young people if they believed they had a positive destination six months after leaving school. In response, it was confirmed this would require working with Skills Development Scotland who currently tracked young people for six months after leaving school;
- it was queried what the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) could do to address the fact that Highland had the lowest percentage, compared to other Scottish local authorities, of school leavers continuing to further or higher education. It was suggested that a joint report or presentation with UHI be taken to a future meeting of the Committee, and the Chair confirmed this would be discussed with UHI;
- attention was drawn to the difference between achieving what was considered to be a positive destination and a young person reaching their full potential, and it was highlighted that many neurodivergent people felt that they had been unable to reach their full potential;
- it was good to see young people who had failed to achieve positive destinations being recognised and prioritised;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that the My Future My Success service was not being suspended but was changing to focus on earlier intervention as this would lead to participants achieving higher levels of success;
- it was important to keep young people in school as long as possible to build up their resilience, skills and experience, leading to the choices they made after school being more sustainable. Increasing the variety of courses and qualifications available in schools would help with this;
- work was valuable in increasing confidence and self-esteem, and the importance of establishing a strong work ethic as soon as possible after leaving education was highlighted;
- further or higher education might not be the best destination for all pupils as some young people would prefer to start earning money directly after leaving school;
- with employment opportunities coming to the Highlands through developments such as those at Kishorn, Dounreay, Vulcan and the Green Freeport, it was

important to focus on helping young people to develop the skills they would need to take advantage of these opportunities;

- the importance of widening the school curriculum and working with partners to prepare young people for a variety of different work opportunities was emphasised;
- it having been queried whether the allocation of ASN provision would be moving to a needs-based approach, it was confirmed that the current ASN staffing standard would be due for review in 2026;
- it was highlighted that the lower number of young people continuing to further or higher education was due to a larger number of young people going into work after leaving school, and that there were a variety of reasons why they would choose to do so;
- there was a close relationship between UHI and secondary schools, especially concerning pupils with ASN to ensure they were well supported in their transition from school to further or higher education; and
- it was emphasised that many young people could find positive destinations and fulfilling careers within the retail sector, and Members should be supporting the retail sector in Highland.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the content of the report and the positive progress made in improving positive destinations for all;
- NOTED** the planned next steps on the development of the refreshed Raising Attainment Strategy;
- NOTED** the ongoing progress with the restructure of the Education and Learning Service; and
- AGREED** that discussions take place with UHI regarding the possibility of a joint report or presentation to a future meeting of the Committee on what could be done to increase the number of school leavers in Highland entering into further or higher education.

12. Integrated Children's Services Board Annual Report Aithisg Bhliadhnail Bòrd nan Seirbheisean Cloinne Amalaichte

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, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, the Chair commended the format, commenting that it was both easy to read and provided much valuable information.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members looked forward to the Vision 26 event in August, and welcomed the Integrated Children's Services Board Annual Report being brought to the Education Committee, in addition to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee, as many of the beneficial outcomes stated in the report would help put young people in the best position to make the most of their education;

- information was sought, and provided, on how care-leavers, who did not have parental financial support, would be supported;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the progress of Young Carers Statements, and it was confirmed that a further update would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee; and
- in response to a question regarding Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Strategy projects, it was confirmed that key performance indicators formed part of the commissioning arrangements and officers would be in a position to report on the outcomes of the projects.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Integrated Children's Services Board Annual Report which shared the work undertaken by the children's services planning partnership 2024/25 in delivering the Highland Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023/2026;
- ii. the work of the delivery groups; and
- iii. the work of the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme.

13. High Life Highland Progress Report Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd

Transparency Statement: Mrs M Ross declared a connection to this item as a close family member worked for High Life Highland as a music teacher but, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/18/25 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

The Chair welcomed Steve Walsh, Chief Executive, and Norman Bolton, Head of Music Development, High Life Highland, to the meeting, and thanked the fantastic young musicians who had played prior to the commencement of the Committee and had clearly demonstrated the great work taking place within the Music Tuition service. It was a very busy period for High Life Highland, particularly with the Inverness Castle Experience and Levelling Up projects in the Northern Meeting Park and Bught Park coming into operation imminently. However, it was important the Chief Executive got out and about across the region, and it had been great to welcome him, the Council's Chief Executive and the CEO of **sportscotland** to Skye recently. The Chair then handed over to the Chief Executive, High Life Highland, to introduce the report, followed by a short video celebrating the Music Tuition service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- surprise was expressed that there were no Gaelic implications listed in the report as music was an important route into Gaelic for many people;
- the emphasis on learning to play music together and the range of music styles offered were commended;
- information was sought, and provided, on which areas did not have music tuition available and what was being done to remedy this;
- the success of the Mod Academy and the benefits of group singing for young people were highlighted, and it was queried what was being done to provide group singing lessons;

- the financial recovery of High Life Highland following the Covid pandemic was welcomed;
- the impact of playing music on young people's confidence, mental health and character development was highlighted;
- it was pleasing to see the continued development and success of the music tuition service given the risk to the continuation of the service prior to the establishment of High Life Highland;
- congratulations were extended to the City of Inverness Youth Pipe Band who would be representing Highland in Spain, and the Skye and Lochalsh Youth Band who would be travelling to Portugal;
- it was requested that a similar report or presentation on High Life Highland be taken to a meeting of the Full Council so all Members could see the good work taking place, particularly in respect of music tuition;
- congratulations were extended to Orla MacIver on becoming the first young person to achieve a platinum hoodie for 1000 hours of volunteering. She was a great example of the value of volunteering to young people;
- in response to questions, it was confirmed that the percentage of budget High Life Highland memberships was proportionate to the number of people receiving benefits in Highland, and that there were no plans to re-open the outdoor pool at Inverness leisure at present;
- the Leisure Link scheme was commended;
- High Life Highland was one of the Council's most important partners, and the figures showing its reach and increased activity across a range of services indicated that the partnership was growing in strength; and
- Members praised the Chief Executive and his team for the work done by High Life Highland across all its service areas. Particular reference was made to the new Inverness Castle Experience, the opening of which was greatly anticipated.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period to 31 March 2025, including HLH's contributions to the implementation of the Highland Council Corporate Plan in Appendix A of the report;
- ii. the general updates provided in Appendix B of the report; and
- iii. the information on the music tuition service in Appendix C of the report.

14. Minutes of Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee **Geàrr-chunntas Fo-Chomataidh Maoin Urras an Fhoghlaim**

There had been circulated, and were **NOTED**, draft Minutes of the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee on 17 March 2025.

The Chair highlighted that Educational Trust Funding was supporting music tuition across the authority area, including the Youth Pipe Bands who were going abroad in the summer.

Finally, he expressed thanks to the Youth Convener, Lauren McKittrick, for all the work she had done to support the youth voice across the Highlands over the past year, and wished her well for whatever she decided to do in the future.

The meeting concluded at 1.05 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 4 June 2025 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr R Bremner (Remote)
Mr I Brown
Mrs I Campbell (Remote)
Mr S Coghill (Remote)
Ms S Fanet (Remote)
Mr J Grafton

Dr M Gregson
Mr P Logue
Mr W Mackay (Remote)
Mr D Millar
Mrs M Paterson (Remote)

Non-Member also present:

Mr A Graham
Mr D Macpherson

In attendance:

Mr D Brown, Chief Executive
Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Ms B Scott, Chief Officer – Early Years and Primary Education
Ms A Jansson, Interim Chief Officer – Early Years and Primary Education
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager
Ms M A MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer
Ms E Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer
Mr R MacKay, Development Officer, Education and Learning
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr D Ansdell, Head of Gaelic and Scots for The Scottish Government
Mr J Graham, Chief Executive Officer of An Comunn Gàidhealach
Miss J Macrae, Principal Teacher, and pupils from Muirtown Primary School

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

Mr D Millar in the Chair

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr A MacKintosh.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Items 4 and 7 – Dr M Gregson

3. Good News

The Committee were provided with a short video highlighting various developments and initiatives as well as items of good news.

In addition, Mr Derek Brown, Chief Executive of Highland Council spoke about the recent Gaelic Conference held in Inverness where the focus was very much on developing the Gaelic economy. He had addressed the conference, in Gaelic, emphasising the importance of partnership working and linking closely with Gaelic Medium Education.

In discussion, the wide range of opportunities shown in the video to speak Gaelic was welcomed as was the showcasing of what was happening throughout Highland. The Gaelic Team were commended for their hard work in this regard. The Chief Executive too was congratulated for actively learning Gaelic and this was something to be proud of.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as presented.

4. Scottish Languages Bill – Areas of Linguistic Significance

Transparency Statement: Dr M Gregson made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as he was a member of Cultarlann Inbhir Nis. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. G/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People, and Mr Douglas Ansdell, Head of Gaelic and Scots Unit for The Scottish Government provided an update on the Scottish Languages Bill.

The Scottish Languages Bill was at an important stage, with the final concluding debate taking place on 17 June 2025. Amendments to the Bill were due on 9 and 10 June and Mr Ansdell highlighted those expected. Once the Bill was passed, the Gaelic and Scots Unit would work with Highland's Gaelic Team and others, to shape the guidance that would be prepared for Areas of Linguistic Significance.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members commended Mr Ansdell for his efforts in promoting the Gaelic Language within the Scottish Government, and it was said that the Highland Gaelic Team were committed and dedicated to do the same;
- information was sought, and provided, in terms of determining what qualified an Area of Linguistic Significance;
- clarification was sought, and provided, in terms of the language standards and it was confirmed that guidance was issued by Bòrd na Gàidhlig;
- information was sought in terms of the financial memorandum, further if the Amendments would be reflected;
- in terms of funding, it was the Scottish Government's intention to have an additional fund to support Areas of Linguistic Significance, however, this was not likely to happen in this financial year;
- the final list of Amendments was expected to be published on the Parliamentary website by 10 June;

- in response to a question, it was highlighted how areas with a lower percentage of people with Gaelic skills might still be considered as an Area of Linguistic Significance;
- it was queried if Gaelic provision in childcare might be a weak link. In response, the Gaelic Team had been looking at age related statistics to discover what intervention might be needed.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** continued preparatory work to ensure Highland Council was able to respond to the new duties and opportunities presented by the Scottish Languages Bill.

5. Gaelic Conference

There had been circulated Report No. G/7/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The aim of the Gaelic Economic Conference was to highlight the cultural and economic value of the language across Highland. The event was attended by over one hundred delegates from a wide range of sectors. The Depute First Minister had recorded a message, a copy of which would be circulated to Members, in which she emphasised her support for Gaelic in the economy, particularly in rural areas. The conference showed that Gaelic was an economic asset and emphasised the importance of youth engagement and community development as part of that.

Delegate feedback would be analysed and this would feed into the proposed future next steps.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- it was important to recognise and promote the work Highland Council did, in respect of the Gaelic Language, and how this fitted in with the rest of the Gaelic world. This Conference had provided an opportunity to do that;
- the attendance of Councillors at the Conference was welcomed;
- it was important to build on the outcomes of the Conference and any other opportunities which might arise. It was suggested a timeline be prepared with this in mind;
- the post-Conference analysis would be reported to the next Gaelic Committee and would give an indication if further Conferences were possible;
- Gaelic was now hugely important not only in schools but out in the community and the workplace; and
- speaking through Gaelic was a real strength of the event.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the key messages from the conference; and
- iii. **AGREED** next steps in section 9 of the report.

6. Gaelic Education

There had been circulated Report No. G/8/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People and there was a presentation by Muirtown Primary School.

The Head Teacher and pupils informed the Committee how Gaelic played a big part in their school. Gaelic was now prominent in every day life in Highland with it being used on street signs, place names and in the media. Being able to speak Gaelic would therefore open up lots of opportunities for them in the future but meantime they were happy to share Gaelic across the school community. Learning Gaelic had been fun and they made particular reference to Seachdain Na Gaidhlig (World Gaelic Week) where they were the only non-Gaelic Medium School to be filmed for online assemblies. Joy Dunlop, one of Seachdain Na Gaidhlig's organisers, had visited the school and the pupils had taken the opportunity to present Gaelic weather forecasts to her.

The Teacher and pupils were congratulated for their excellent presentation. The Council Leader too had visited Muirtown Primary with Joy Dunlop and the standard of videos, weather presentations and concerts had been outstanding. The young people involved were true ambassadors for Gaelic learning. This highlighted why Highland Council was the leading authority for Gaelic Education in Scotland and the success of the 1+2 Language Initiative.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the leadership shown at the Muirtown to grow interest and involvement in Gaelic across the school;
- ii. **NOTED** and welcomed the progress towards the GLP target for Gaelic education in L2 and L3 in Highland in paragraph 6.2 of the report
- iii. **NOTED** the strategic professional learning opportunities for teachers in Gaelic education; and
- iv. **AGREED** the next steps for Gaelic Education.

7. GLP Progress (PRMS)

Transparency Statement: Dr M Gregson made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as he was a member of Cultarlann Inbhir Nis. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. G/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Officers were thanked for the positive paper which highlighted the high level of delivery and the low level of slippage. The Gaelic language was now seen in a more positive light. There was a huge opportunity in Highland, with cruise liners, especially in the port of Invergordon, where there was an interest in Gaelic and Highland culture. This could not only generate profit for businesses but drive about an interest in learning Gaelic in those areas.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

8. Mod Lochaber (ACG)

There had been circulated Report No. G/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Mr James Graham, Chief Executive Officer of An Comunn Gàidhealach gave an update on the preparatory work taking place in advance of the Lochaber Royal National Mòd. All the main stakeholders were working in tandem. Regular meetings were held to make sure all the strategic issues, such as infrastructure, were in place and appreciation was expressed to Council Officers, from various Services, for their assistance. Entries for the Mod had just closed and he was pleased to report that numbers had increased since the previous Mod in Oban. Business engagement sessions had been held in association with Lochaber Chamber of Commerce and this had been hugely beneficial. Overall, it was hoped to deliver a gold standard event.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- the increase in numbers was welcomed and an indication was sought as to the demographics of this. An analysis had still to be carried out but initial indications were that the increase was from junior levels and schools who had benefitted from the Mod Academy;
- Mods usually attracted competitors from the local area;
- information was sought as to how younger competitors could be encouraged to continue competing in Mods and then enter adult competitions. Discussions were taking place with Education Scotland to stress the significant role Mods, both local and national, had in enriching young people in Education and a formal request had been made that it be formally included in the curriculum as an integral component;
- it was queried if work was taking place to target particular areas of opportunity in Highland, similar to the Mod Academy initiative. This would take the form of a Gaelic National Youth Choir which would dovetail with Mods and junior choirs;
- there was a growing network of twenty local Mods with a further two hopefully being added next year. An Comunn Gàidhealach was able to offer practical and modest grant support;
- Lochaber was looking forward to the Mod which it was hoped would be accessible to all. The Mod would not only be about music but about the other opportunities it brought; and
- it was understood that Mr Graham was to leave An Comunn Gàidhealach and was joining Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Committee wished him well for the future.

The Committee **NOTED** the actions to date regarding the management and organisation of the Lochaber Royal National Mòd 10 - 18 October 2025.

9. Na Trads – Economic Impact Assessment

There had been circulated Report No. G/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Members voiced their support for the Na Trads. It was an example of excellent partnership working, across various organisations, showcasing Highland generated and nurtured talent. It profiled the Gaelic language, arts and culture and enabled Highland to make a comparison with other areas. It also provided an opportunity for a wide range of groups to be nominated and recognised for the work they were doing

1996

in Highland communities and schools. It was important Highland continued to work collaboratively with Na Trads going forward.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** and recognised how Na Trads fostered strengthened partnerships with stakeholders to amplify Gaelic and cultural benefits, sustainability and creative industries.

The meeting ended at 4.05pm.

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Geàrr-chunntas coinneamh **Comataidh na Gàidhlig** a chumadh ann an Seòmar na Comhairle, Prìomh Oifis na Comhairle, Rathad Ghlinn Urchadain, Inbhir Nis, air Diciadain, 4 Ògmhios 2025 aig 2f.

An làthair:

Mgr R Bremner (air astar)

Mgr I MacIlleDhuinn

A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul (air astar)

Mgr S Coghill (air astar)

A' Bh-uas S Fanet

Mgr I Grafton

Dr M Gregson

Mgr P Logue

Mgr U MacAoidh (air astar)

Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir

A' Bh-uas M NicPheadrais (air astar)

Neo-Bhuill an làthair:

Mgr A Greumach

Mgr D Mac a' Phearsain

A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr D MacIlleDhuinn, Àrd-Oifigear

A' Bh-uas C Lackie, Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine

A' Bh-uas B Scott, Àrd-Oifigear – Foghlam Thràth-bhliadhnaichean is Bun-sgoile

A' Bh-uas A Jansson, Àrd-Oifigear Eadar-amail – Foghlam Thràth-bhliadhnaichean is Bun-sgoile

A' Bh-uas L Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig

A' Bh-uas M A NicLeòid Mitchell, Oifigear Leasachaidh na Gàidhlig

A' Bh-uas E Rodgers, Oifigear Poileasaidh Gàidhlig

Mgr R MacAoidh, Oifigear Leasachaidh, Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh

A' Bh-uas S NicIllinnein, Manaidsear Cho-Sheirbheisean Deamocratach

A' Bh-uas G Nic a' Phearsain, Oifigear Comataidh

Cuideachd a' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr D Ansdell, Ceannard Gàidhlig agus Albais airson Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Mgr S Greumach, Àrd-Oifigear a' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich

A' Bh-uas J NicRath, Prìomh Thidsear, agus sgoilearan bho Bhun-Sgoil Bhaile an Fhraoich

Tha rionnag air iomall na duilleige a' comharrachadh moladh a thèid chun na Comhairle. Tha co-dhùnaidhean gun chomharra fo ùghdarras na Comataidh.

Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir anns a' Chathair

Gnothach

1. Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Thugadh leisgeul seachad às leth Mhgr A Mhic an Tòisich.

2. Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan Aithris Fhollaiseachd a leanas:-

Nithean 4 agus 7 – An Dr M Gregson

3. Naidheachdan Matha

Chaidh bhidio goirid a shealltainn dhan Chomataidh, le cunntas air grunn leasachaidhean is iomairtean a bharrachd air naidheachdan matha.

Cuideachd, bhruidhinn Mgr Derek MacIlleDhuinn, Àrd-Oifigear Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd, mun Cho-labhairt Ghàidhlig a chaidh a chumail o chionn ghoirid ann an Inbhir Nis agus far an robh fòcas air a bhith a' leasachadh eaconamaidh na Gàidhlig. Bha e air òraid a thoirt seachad aig a' Cho-labhairt, anns a' Ghàidhlig, a' beachdachadh air cho cudromach 's a bha obrachadh com-pàirteach agus a bhith a' ceangal gu dlùth ri Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig.

San deasbaireachd, chaidh fàilte a chur air an raon chothroman gus a' Ghàidhlig a bhruidhinn a bha air an sealltainn sa bhidio a bharrachd air a bhith a' toirt am follais na bha a' tachairt air feadh na Gàidhealtachd. Chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air Sgioba na Gàidhlig airson an cuid obrach chruaidh a thaobh seo. Chaidh meal a naidheachd a chur cuideachd air an Àrd-Oifigear airson a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig agus b' e adhbhar moit a bha seo.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dha na naidheachdan matha a chaidh a thaisbeanadh.

4. Bile nan Cànanan Albannach – Sgìrean Cànan Sònraichte

Aithris Fhollaiseachd: dh'fhoillsich an Dr M Gregson Aithris Fhollaiseachd a thaobh an nì seo, seach gun robh e na bhall de Chultarlann Inbhir Nis. Ach, às dèidh dha an deuchainn a chur an gnìomh, cho-dhùin e nach robh com-pàirt aige ri fhoillseachadh.

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/6/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine, agus thug Mgr Dùghlas Ansdell, Ceannard Aonad na Gàidhlig agus na h-Albais airson Riaghaltas na h-Alba, seachad cunntas às ùr mu Bhile nan Cànanan Albannach.

Bha Bile nan Cànanan Albannach aig ìre chudromach, agus dheigheadh an deasbad deireannach a chumail air 17 Ògmhios 2025. Bha dùil ri atharrachaidhean a thaobh a' Bhile air 9 agus 10 Ògmhios agus dh'innis Mgr Ansdell mun fheadhainn ris an robh dùil. Aon uair is gun robh am Bile air aontachadh, bhiodh Aonad na Gàidhlig agus na h-Albais ag obair còmhla ri Sgioba Gàidhlig Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus feadhainn eile, airson cumadh a thoirt air an stiùireadh a dheigheadh ullachadh airson nan Sgìrean Cànan Sònraichte.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:-

- rinn buill moladh air Mgr Ansdell airson a chuid oidhirpean ann a bhith a' brosnachadh na Gàidhlig taobh a-staigh Riaghaltas na h-Alba, agus chaidh a ràdh gun robh Sgioba Gàidhlig Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd dealasach agus diorrasach an aon rud a dhèanamh;
- chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh agus fhaotainn, a thaobh a bhith a' dearbhadh dè bha a' cunntadh mar Sgìre Cànain Sònraichte;
- chaidh soilleireachadh a shireadh agus fhaotainn, a thaobh nan inbhean cànain agus chaidh a dhearbhadh gun robh Bòrd na Gàidhlig air stiùireadh a thoirt seachad;
- chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh a thaobh a' mheòrachain ionmhasail agus nan Atharrachaidhean;
- a thaobh maoineachadh, bha Riaghaltas na h-Alba an dùil gum biodh maoin a bharrachd ann airson taic a chur ri Sgìrean Cànain Sònraichte, ach cha robh dùil gun tachradh seo sa bhliadhna ionmhasail seo;
- bhathar an dùil gun deigheadh liosta deireannach nan Atharrachaidhean fhoillseachadh air làrach-lìn na Pàrlamaid ro 10 Ògmhios;
- mar fhreagairt do cheist, chaidh innse gum faodadh sgìrean le ceudad nas lugha de dhaoine le sgìlean Gàidhlig a bhith fhathast air am meas mar Sgìre Cànain Sònraichte; agus
- chaidh ceist a thogail a thaobh co-dhiù a bha laigse ann an solar Gàidhlig ann an cùram-chloinne. Mar fhreagairt, bha Sgioba na Gàidhlig air a bhith a' coimhead air staitistearachd a' buntainn ri aois airson fios fhaighinn air dè a dh'fheumadh a bhith air a dhèanamh.

Às dèidh sin:-

- THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg; agus
- DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gun deigheadh leantainn air adhart le obair-deasachaidh airson dèanamh cinnteach gun urrainn do Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd freagradh ris na dleastanasan is na cothroman ùra a tha an lùib Bile nan Cànanan Albannach.

5. Co-labhairt Ghàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/7/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

B' e amas na Co-labhairt Gàidhlig aire a thogail mu luach cultarach is eaconamach a' chàin air feadh na Gàidhealtachd. Bha còrr is ceud riochdaire bho raon farsaing roinnean an làthair aig an tachartas. Bha an Leas-Phrìomh Mhinistear air teachdaireachd a chlàradh, agus dheigheadh lethbhreac a chur gu Bhuill. An seo, bha i air a taic a chur an cèill airson na Gàidhlig san eaconamaidh, gu h-àraid ann an sgìrean dùthchail. Sheall a' cho-labhairt gur e so-mhaoin eaconamach a bha sa

Ghàidhlig agus cho cudromach 's a bha com-pàirteachas òigridh agus leasachadh coimhearsnachd mar phàirt dhen a sin.

Dheigheadh mion-sgrùdadh a dhèanamh air fios air ais bho riochdairean agus bhiodh seo air a thoirt an lùib nan ath cheumannan a bhathar a' moladh.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:-

- bha e cudromach aithne is brosnachadh a thoirt dhan obair a bha Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd a' dèanamh a thaobh na Gàidhlig, agus mar a bha seo a' co-thaobhadh ri saoghal na Gàidhlig. Bha a' Cho-labhairt seo air cothrom a thoirt seachad sin a dhèanamh;
- chaidh fàilte a chur air làthaireachd nan Comhairlichean aig a' Cho-labhairt;
- bha e cudromach togail air toraidhean na Co-labhairt agus air cothroman sam bith eile a dh'fhaodadh tighinn am bàrr. Chaidh moladh gun deigheadh loidhne-time ullachadh a thaobh seo;
- dheigheadh cunntas dhen mhion-sgrùdadh a dheigheadh a dhèanamh às dèidh an tachartais a thoirt chun na h-ath choinneimh de Chomataidh na Gàidhlig agus bheireadh seo beachd seachad air co-dhiù a bhiodh e comasach co-labhairtean eile a dhèanamh;
- bha a' Ghàidhlig fìor chudromach a-nis, chan ann a-mhàin ann an sgoiltean, ach a-muigh sa choimhearsnachd agus san àite-obrach; agus
- b' e neart dha-rìribh a bh' ann gun robhar a' bruidhinn sa Ghàidhlig aig a' Cho-labhairt.

Às dèidh sin:-

- THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg;
- THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na prìomh theachdaireachdan bhon cho-labhairt; agus
- DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh aonta a thoirt do na h-ath cheumannan ann an earrainn 9.

6. Foghlam Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/8/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine, agus bha taisbeanadh ann bho Bhun-Sgoil Bhaile an Fhraoich.

Dh'inns an Ceannard agus na sgoilearan dhan Chomataidh mar a bha pàirt mhòr aig a' Ghàidhlig san sgoil aca. Bha a' Ghàidhlig a-nis follaiseach ann am beatha làitheil sa Ghàidhealtachd agus bha i air a cleachdadh air soidhnichean sràide, ainmean-àite agus sna meadhanan. Bhiodh comas labhairt sa Ghàidhlig mar sin a' fosgladh mòran chothroman dhaibh san àm ri teachd ach aig an àm seo bha iad toilichte a' Ghàidhlig a cho-roinn thar coimhearsnachd na sgoile. Bha spòrs air a bhith an lùib a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig agus thug iad iomradh sònraichte air Seachdain na Gàidhlig far an robh iad air am filmeadh airson co-chruinneachaidhean air-loidhne – agus b' iad an aon sgoil nach robh an lùib Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig. Bha Joy Dunlop,

aon de stiùirichean Seachdain na Gàidhlig, air tadhal air an sgoil agus bha sgoilearan air cothrom a ghabhail tuairmsean sìde a thaisbeanadh dhi.

Chaidh meal an naidheachd a chur air a' Cheannard agus air na sgoilearan airson taisbeanadh sàr-mhath a thoirt seachad. Bha Ceannard na Comhairle cuideachd air tadhal air Bun-Sgoil Bhaile an Fhraoich còmhla ri Joy Dunlop agus bha inbhe nam bhidiothan, nan tuairmsean sìde agus nan consairtean air a bhith sònraichte. Bha an òigridh a bha na lùib nam fìor thosgairan airson a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig. Bha seo a' toirt am follais carson a bha Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd air thoiseach am measg ùghdarrasan ionadail a thaobh Foghlam Gàidhlig ann an Alba agus soirbheachas Iomairt Cànan 1+2.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan cheannardas a chaidh a shealltainn aig Bun-Sgoil Bhaile an Fhraoich gus ùidh is com-pàirt anns a' Ghàidhlig fhàs thar na sgoile;
- ii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** agus chuir a' Chomataidh fàilte air an adhartas gu ruige targaid a' Phlana Ghàidhlig airson foghlam Gàidhlig ann an C2 agus C3 anns a' Ghàidhealtachd ann am paragraf 6.2 dhen aithisg;
- iii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na cothroman airson ionnsachadh proifeiseanta ro-innleachdail do thidsearan ann am foghlam Gàidhlig; agus
- iv. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh na h-ath cheumannan airson foghlam Gàidhlig.

7. Adhartas PnG (PRMS)

Aithris Fhollaiseachd: dh'fhoillsich an Dr M Gregson Aithris Fhollaiseachd a thaobh an nì seo, seach gun robh e na bhall de Chultarlann Inbhir Nis. Ach, às dèidh dha an deuchainn a chur an gnìomh, cho-dhùin e nach robh com-pàirt aige ri fhoillseachadh.

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/9/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Chaidh taing a thoirt do dh'oifigearan airson deagh phàipear a bha a' sealltainn gun robh libhrigeadh aig ìre àrd agus sleamhnachadh aig ìre ìosal. Bhathar a-nis a' faicinn na Gàidhlig san fharsaingeachd ann an solas nas fheàrr. Bha cothrom air leth sa Ghàidhealtachd, gu h-àraid ri linn longan cuairtean-mara ann am port Inbhir Ghòrdain, a thaobh ùidh ann an Gàidhlig agus cultar na Gàidhealtachd. Chan e a-mhàin gum faodadh seo prothaid a chruthachadh do ghnòthachasan ach dh'fhaodadh e cuideachd ùidh a thogail ann a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig sna sgìrean seo.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg.

8. Mòd Loch Abar (ACG)

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/10/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Thug Mgr Seumas Greumach, Àrd-Oifigear a' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich, seachad cunntas mun obair ullachaidh a bhathar a' dèanamh air thoiseach air a' Mhòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail ann an Loch Abar. Bha an luchd-ùidhe uile ag obair ann an co-

bhann ri chèile. Bhathar a' cumail choinneamhan gu cunbhalach airson dèanamh cinnteach gun robh na prìomh nithean, a leithid bun-structar, air dòigh agus chaidh taing a nochdadh do dh'oifigearan na Comhairle, bho ghrunn sheirbheisean, airson an cuideachadh. Bha inntrigidhean airson a' Mhòid dìreach air dùnadh agus bha e toilichte aithris gun robh àireamhan air meudachadh bhon Mhòd mu dheireadh anns an Òban. Bhathar air seiseanan com-pàirteachadh gnothachais a chumail ann an co-bhann le Seòmar Malairt Loch Abar agus bha seo air a bhith buannachdail dha-rìribh. Uile gu lèir, bhathar an dòchas gun deigheadh sàr thachartas a libhrigeadh.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingeann a leanas a thogail:-

- chaidh fàilte a chur air an àrdachadh ann an àireamhan agus chaidh beachd iarraidh mu dheamografachd seo. Bha mion-sgrùdadh fhathast ri dhèanamh, ach bha coltas ann aig an ìre thràth seo gun robh am meudachadh ri linn ìrean òigridh agus sgoiltean a bha air buannachd fhaighinn à Acadamaidh a' Mhòid;
- bha Mòdan mar bu trice a' tarraing luchd-farpais bhon sgìre ionadail;
- chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh mu na dòighean sam faodadh farpaisich òga a bhith air am brosnachadh gus leantainn air adhart a' farpais ann am Mòdan agus an uair sin cur a-steach airson farpaisean nan inbheach. Bhathar a' cumail chòmhraidhean le Foghlam Alba airson cur an cèill cho fìor chudromach 's a bha Mòdan, an dà chuid ionadail agus nàiseanta, gus beairteas a thoirt do dhaoine òga ann am foghlam agus bhathar air iarrtas foirmeil a dhèanamh gun deigheadh seo a thoirt a-steach gu foirmeil dhan churraicealam mar cho-phàirt bhunaiteach;
- chaidh faighneachd an robh obair a' dol air adhart gus cuimseachadh air sgìrean sònraichte far am faodadh cothrom a bhith sa Ghàidhealtachd, coltach ri iomairt Acadamaidh a' Mhòid. Dh'fhaodadh seo a bhith ann an riochd Còisir Òigridh Nàiseanta Gàidhlig a bhiodh a' fighe a-steach le Mòdan agus còisirean òigridh;
- bha lìonra de fhichead Mòd ionadail ann bha seo a' sìor fhàs, le dòchas gum biodh a dhà eile ann an-ath-bhliadhna. B' urrainn dhan Chomunn Ghàidhealach taic phractaigeach agus beagan taic tabhartais a thoirt seachad;
- bha Loch Abar a' coimhead air adhart ris a' Mhòd agus bhathar an dòchas gum biodh seo ruigsinneachd dhan a h-uile duine. Cha b' ann a-mhàin mu cheòl a bhiodh am Mòd ach mu na cothroman eile a bha na lùib; agus
- bhathar a' tuigsinn gum biodh Mgr Greumach a' fàgail a' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich agus a' dol gu Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus bha a' Chomataidh a' guidhe gach soirbheachas dha san àm ri teachd.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na gnìomhan gu ruige seo a thaobh stiùireadh is eagrachadh Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail Loch Abar a thèid a chumail eadar 10–18 Dàmhair 2025.

9. Na Trads – Measadh Buaidh Eaconamaich

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/11/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Chuir Buill an cèill an taic do Na Trads. Bha iad nan eisimpleir de shàr obrachadh com-pàirteach, thar grunn bhuidhnean, a' taisbeanadh tàlant a chaidh àrach sa Ghàidhealtachd. Bha iad a' toirt am follais cànan, ealain is cultar na Gàidhlig agus a' toirt cothrom dhan Ghàidhealtachd coimeas a dhèanamh le sgìrean eile. Bha iad

cuideachd a' toirt cothrom do raon farsaing bhuidhnean a bhith air an ainmeachadh is air an aithneachadh airson an cuid obrach ann an coimhearsnachd agus sgoiltean na Gàidhealtachd. Bha e cudromach gun leanadh Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd air adhart ag obair ann an co-bhann leis Na Trads a' dol air adhart.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg; agus
- ii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** gu bheil Na Trads air com-pàirteachasan làidir a thogail le luchd-ùidhe gus buannachdan a bhrosnachadh dhan Ghàidhlig, do chultar, do sheasmhachd, agus do na gnìomhachasan cruthachail.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 4.05f.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday 5 June 2025 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr D Louden
Mr R Bremner	Mr G Mackenzie
Mr J Bruce	Mr S Mackie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr P Oldham
Mr A Christie	Ms M Reid
Mr L Fraser	Mr M Reiss
Mr K Gowans	Mrs M Ross (sub for Mr B Lobban)
Mr A Jarvie	Mr R Stewart
Mr S Kennedy	

Non-Members also present:

Mr J Finlayson	Ms K MacLean
Mr R Gale	Mr T MacLennan
Mr R Jones	Mr D Macpherson

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Mrs S Armstrong, Chief Officer - Revenues and Commercialisation
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer - Corporate Finance
Mr J Shepherd, Chief Officer - Business Solutions
Ms E Barrie, Head of People
Mr D MacKenzie, Trading Standards Manager
Mr C Donaldson, Principal Project Manager
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mr D Louden 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 M Baird and Mr B Lobban

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

There were no Declarations of Interest and the Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Items 4 and 5: Mr A Christie and Mr R Stewart
Items 7, 9 and 13: Mr A Christie
Item 11.b: Mr S Kennedy
Items 10, 12: Mr R Stewart

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the following good news stories and issued raised as follows:

- **Mental Health & Wellbeing Helpline Recognition**
It was confirmed the Employee Assistance Programme was available to Members as well as staff.
- **Business Solutions Restructure**
- **Investors in People**
This was welcomed and assurance sought and provided that this would be rolled out across the Council through 2026.

4. People Strategy Ro-innleachd Dhaoine

Transparency Statements: The following Members declared a connection to this item but, having applied the objective test, and reviewed their position, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:

- **Mr A Christie as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland**
- **Mr R Stewart as a close family member was employed by the Council**

There had been circulated Report No RES/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- given the importance of redeployment as a means of retaining staff and avoiding redundancies, it was suggested redeployment should be incorporated into the strategy more explicitly;
- the improved communication with staff by senior management was welcomed;
- the positive impact on the gender pay gap was praised;
- the importance of embedding trauma informed practice across all services was emphasised;
- the award of the Armed Forces Covenant Gold level in 2021 and aim to seek revalidation towards the end of 2026 was welcomed; and
- the importance of training of Members as well as staff was highlighted.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the work which was being undertaken;
- ii. **AGREED** the revised People Strategy as contained in Appendix 1 to the report; and
- iii. **NOTED** the activity achievements of the People Strategy as contained in Appendix 2 to the report.

5. **Flexible Working Policy**
Poileasaidh Obrach Shùbailte

Transparency Statements: The following Members declared a connection to this item but, having applied the objective test, and reviewed their position, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:

- **Mr A Christie as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland**
- **Mr R Stewart as a close family member was employed by the Council**

There had been circulated Report No RES/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- while welcoming the policy, concern was expressed that home / hybrid working had become the default position and doubts were expressed as to the productivity levels and governance. It could be detrimental to forging productive working relationships and could cause staff to feel isolated. Assurance was provided that homeworking would only be considered where managers thought it appropriate, and not as a default position;
- concern was also expressed at the prospect of staff, especially senior staff, working outwith the Highland Council area, or even abroad and, in response, it was emphasised that overseas working would only be by exception and on a temporary basis, for example to care for an unwell relative, and that there were no permanent overseas working contracts in place. The reputational risk of employing staff who worked abroad was highlighted;
- the importance of providing employment within the Highland Council area, and especially outwith Inverness, was emphasised;
- the legal obligation on the Council to consider flexible working where possible was highlighted, as was the Council's aim to ensure jobs remained based within Highland wherever possible;
- assurance was provided that no member of staff would be obliged to work from home, that the policy was being introduced to ensure consistency and fairness, that it would be subject to ongoing review, and that it did not apply to all staff as many Council jobs did not facilitate home working;
- concern was expressed that the impact assessment was not sufficiently thorough and should be reviewed when the matter was next reconsidered;
- further information was sought and provided on the type of contracts which involved annualised hours (mostly school-based staff who did not work during school holidays);
- assurance was sought and provided that major incident preparation took home and hybrid working into consideration; and
- a summary was provided on the benefits of hybrid working.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Flexible Workforce Arrangements Policy;
- ii. **NOTED** the Hybrid-Mobile Working Guidance and Flexible Working Guidance; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the policy would be subject to ongoing review and an annual update to full Council, which would include the staff survey outcomes as part of the Investor's In People process.

6. Corporate Debt Management Policy
Poileasaidh Stiùiridh Fhiachan Corporra

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to Item 6 as General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice, however having applied the objective test, and reviewed his position in relation to the item, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members thanked the Debt Recovery team for their work;
- clarification was sought and provided that the performance of the payment phone lines was monitored and reviewed;
- a summary was sought and provided of the various digital payment methods accepted, and the need to ensure as many methods as possible were accepted, while acknowledging that the cost of processing payments also had to be taken into consideration. Work was ongoing to enable frontline staff to process payments without having to refer customers to a specialised payment processing team; and
- staff were thanked for dealing with customers facing debt in a compassionate manner, and attention was drawn to the importance of early intervention. It was queried what methods could be used to measure the effectiveness of debt collection policies, and these included monitoring the percentage of debt write-offs and the age of debt.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the Council's Corporate Debt Management Policy.

7. Trading Standards Performance 2024/25 and Operational Plan 2025/26
Coileanadh Inbhean Malairt 2024/25 agus Plana Obrachaidh 2025/26

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to Item 7 as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland and as General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau, however having applied the objective test, and reviewed his position in relation to the item, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the work of the Trading Standards team, its scope and its value to the Council and Highland communities, was commended;
- information was sought and provided on work being undertaken locally, and with neighbouring local authorities, to tackle the proliferation of companies in the domestic energy markets who were targeting householders, often elderly people, with the offer of bogus government grants etc;

- Members were urged to share intelligence with the Trading Standards team of any scams or other unlawful behaviour they became aware of;
- it was clarified that the new Regulatory Services modern apprenticeship was being delivered through Edinburgh and South Ayrshire College;
- concern was expressed about children buying vapes in bulk from the internet and using a proxy to purchase vapes from shops for them. The value of intelligence and test purchasing to tackle this and other similar violations, was emphasised, as was the role of the NHS in trying to prevent children using vapes;
- preventative work for many of the issues dealt with by Trading Standards was praised;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the definition of unfair commercial practices;
- with regard to the increasing levels of doorstep crime, the usefulness of cold calling prevention zones was highlighted and some of the issues around their set-up and monitoring were considered and would be discussed further with Mr A Christie outwith the meeting; and
- further information was requested on what people should be alert to with regard to the purchase of second-hand electric vehicles. This information would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the performance of the Trading Standards team during the year 2024/25 as laid out in its Annual Report;
- ii. **AGREED** the Trading Standards Operational Plan for 2025/26; and
- iii. **NOTED** the steps being taken to modernise performance measurement in relation to Trading Standards.

8. Treasury Management – Summary of Transactions Rianachd Ionmhais - Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean

There had been circulated Report No RES/14/25 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

During discussion, an explanation was sought and provided for the policy around repaying the loans outlined in paragraphs 6.4 and 6.5 of the report.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management - Summary of Transactions report for the period 1 January 2025 to 31 March 2025.

9. Corporate Services – Performance Monitoring Q4 2024/25 Seirbheisean Corporra – Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R4 2024/25

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to Item 9 as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland, a Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID Ltd, and as General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau, however having applied the objective test, and reviewed his position in relation to the item, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- noting the increasing number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests being received, various suggestions were made including charging for or refusing unreasonable FOIs, and publishing all received FOIs with their responses on the Council's website, to reduce the likelihood of requests for the same or similar information. It was requested that this be further investigated with the relevant officers outwith the meeting and reported back within six months;
- information was sought and provided on the target and maximum response rates for dealing with queries from Members, and consideration was given to the use of the FOI process by Members to obtain information from the Council. The Assistant Chief Executive (ACE) (Corporate) urged Members to contact the relevant ACE if they had requested information that had not been forthcoming; and
- with reference to the recent high profile cyber-attacks on some large organisations, it was explained in relation to concern about only 90% of active staff devices being up to date with security updates, this was partly due to devices held by people on annual leave or sick leave meaning that devices were not connected to receive the updates, or due to staggered issuing of security updates. The patching status of devices was a point in time and would not check the status of devices that had not been connected for a while. Members suggested that efforts to increase the 90% figure would be prudent, and urged that the automatic updating of computers be scheduled outwith working hours.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the performance and risk information for the Corporate Cluster and **AGREED** to return to the Committee within six months with a plan on how all FOIs could be published on the website and to update the publication scheme with links to the relevant statutory information.

10. Corporate Systems Update – Finance, HR/Payroll and Pensions Programme

Cunntas air Siostaman Corporra – Ionmhas, Goireasan Daonna/Rola-pàighidh agus Prògram Pheinnseanan

Transparency Statement: Mr R Stewart declared a connection to this item as a close family member was employed by the Council but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the Finance system and Pensions projects were welcomed as worthwhile and a good news item, and those involved in the delivery of these projects were thanked;
- it was good to see the projects being delivered at considerable pace and progress to closure;
- it was suggested that when preparing for the budget this year that some information was not able to be reported at the level of granularity required to answer Member questions. It was hoped these pieces of information would become easier to access from new system to help drive efficiencies and achieve best value; and

- the Human Resources & Payroll project was welcomed and it was hoped that having a new and more robust system would contribute towards eliminating issues such as overpayments and deliver best value.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. updates regarding the Finance, Pensions and HR/Payroll Programme; and
- ii. updates regarding the HR and Payroll, including the commencement of the HR Data and Process Enablement Project.

11. Delivery Plan - Income Generation and Corporate Solutions Portfolios Update

Plana Lìbhrigidh – Cunntas air Togail Teachd-a-steach agus Cùraman-roinne Freagairtean Corporra

a. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update – Corporate Solutions Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas air Adhartas a’ Phlana Lìbhrigidh – Freagairtean Corporra

There had been circulated Report No RES/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress on the projects covered in the report.

b. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update – Income Generation Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas air Adhartas a’ Phlana Lìbhrigidh – Togail Teachd-a-steach

Transparency Statement: Mr S Kennedy declared a connection to this item as an owner of an empty second home but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/18/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- some Members felt the campervan and motorhome income generation scheme was not delivering as intended and should be discontinued, citing reputational risk to the Council. Others felt that as the investment in the scheme had been made and ongoing costs were low, there was merit in continuing with it, as had been agreed by full Council at the budget meeting, and noting that the decision made by the Council could not be revisited for six months without suspending standing orders. Seasonal rangers had been employed which should help to promote the scheme. The use of the Council’s website to purchase tickets was explained, and it was highlighted that knowledge that the scheme was voluntary was being shared among potential users;
- as an alternative to the campervan and motor home scheme, it was suggested that the Council should provide sites for such vehicles on Council-owned land adjacent to main roads. The Chair advised that any known locations for this should be provided to relevant officers;

- clarification was sought and provided that while the listed site for waste disposal in Lochaber had not been the preferred choice of local Members, investigation into the alternatives suggested had been undertaken. Officers would update local Members before proceeding; and
- assurances were sought and provided that, as the proposed site for possible income generation at Duncansby Head bordered common grazings land, engagement had been undertaken with the Common Grazings Committee.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the progress of each of the Income Generation projects.

12. Corporate Cluster Workforce Action Plan Update **Cunntas air Plana-gnìomha Feachd-obrach Buidheann Chorporra**

Transparency Statement: Mr R Stewart declared a connection to this item as a close family member was employed by the Council but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/19/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the SWOT analysis was welcomed, although it was suggested the analysis detailed in the appendices could have been undertaken in more depth, and the decision-making process shared with Members. The 'threats' section seemed thin and did not include reputational risk. A holistic approach was urged.

The Committee **NOTED** the Corporate Cluster workforce planning report and updated action plan.

13. Minutes of Meetings **Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan**

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to Item 13 as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland, however having applied the objective test, and reviewed his position in relation to the item, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

The following Minutes of Meetings were:

- i. **APPROVED** - Central Safety Committee held on 17 March 2025;
- ii. **NOTED** – Employment Release Sub-Committee held on 3 April 2025; and
- iii. **APPROVED** - Staff Partnership Forum held on 7 May 2025.

14. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 12, 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

15. Non Domestic Rates Appeals Committee
Comataidh Ath-thagraidhean nan Reataichean Neo-dhachaigheil

There had been circulated Report No RES/20/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

The Committee **AGREED**:

- i. the recommendations as set out in the report;
- ii. that the standalone non-domestic rates appeal committee panel comprise of the following Members:
 - a. Ms Morven Reid (Chair)
 - b. Mrs Campbell-Sinclair
 - c. Mr L Fraser
 - d. Mr K Gowans
 - e. Mr S Mackie; and
- iii. that Mr K Gowans replace Mr G Mackenzie on the Non-Domestic Rates Appeals Committee.

16. Debt Management Report
Stiùireadh Fhiachan

There had been circulated to Members only Report No RES/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report and **NOTED** that the response to the query raised by Mr A Jarvie would be circulated to the Committee.

The meeting closed at 12.35pm.