

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 Bhliadhnail

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 Beauly 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 Glusaid

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 full 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.