

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Wednesday 13 August 2025** at **9.30am**.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr B Boyd (remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr R Bremner (remote)	Ms A MacLean
Mr I Brown	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr D McDonald
Mr L Fraser	Ms J McEwan (remote)
Mr R Gale ((substitute)	Ms L Niven (remote)
Dr M Gregson	Ms M Ross (remote)
Mr R Jones (remote)	Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Dr C Birt (Remote)	Mr G Mackenzie (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr D Fraser (Remote)	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)	Mrs T Robertson

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 B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing & Customer Services
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning & Estate Strategy
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead Finance (Place)
Ms H Cameron, Housing Development Manager
Ms S Stuart, Portfolio Manager
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates Management)
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mr E McIntosh, Community Support Officer
Ms C Fisher, Housing Policy Officer
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

There was an apology for absence from Mr A Graham.

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

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

**3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaìdh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 26 June 2025 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Housing and Property Committee.

**4. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

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

**5. Property & Facilities Management Services Revenue Budget: Final Outturn for 2024/25 and Monitoring Statement to 30 June 2025
Buidseat Teachd-a-steach Seirbheisean Seilbhe is Stiùireadh Ghoireasan: Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach airson 2024/25 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh gu 30 Ògmhios 2025**

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

During discussion, an explanation was sought and provided on the underspend on staff costs, mainly in the Catering Cleaning and Facilities Management (CCFM) Team, and related gradings. In this regard, concern was expressed at the impact of staff vacancies on the standard of cleanliness of buildings and additional pressure this may place on existing staff. A further point was raised as to whether there had been consultation with trade unions around staff welfare and to ensure terms and conditions were not effectively being changed as a result of staff vacancies.

An assurance was provided that the filling of vacancies was actively being pursued and there was ongoing engagement with trade unions. A range of actions were being taken and options considered to ensure a full range of services was covered by the CCFM Team and more detailed information on progress would be provided to the next Committee in this regard.

Thereafter, the following items were raised:-

- in response to a query, further clarity was provided on the health and safety measures that might be reprioritised or deferred as part of cost control measures;
- an update was sought and provided on progress with achieving asset management savings and income generation; area reviews were being undertaken as a priority and officers would be attending area business meetings to have discussions with local Members on this issue;
- concern as to how realistic the annual savings target for 2025/26 was given the shortfall detailed at Appendix 5 of the report;

- an explanation was sought and provided on the rationale for the savings listed as ‘savings from time to fill vacant posts’;
- concern as to whether the budget for revenue maintenance was realistic given rising costs. It was confirmed that information would be provided in the next report to the Committee on the work being carried out by the Service across the estate to provide a better overview of where the available budget was being invested;
- In response to a query, it was confirmed that details would be provided to Mr D MacPherson on the arrangements in place for Police Scotland’s occupancy of the Town House, Inverness;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Landbank Fund included monies generated by Council tax from second homes and was therefore contributing to house building across the Highlands; and
- an overview was sought and provided on the improvements delivered in the performance of biomass heating installations across the Council.

During further discussion, an assurance was provided that the Committee would continue to be updated on progress in relation to the Council’s estate being safe and operational and on the savings being achieved.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- APPROVED** the final budget position for the 2024/25 financial year;
- APPROVED** the budget position for the first quarter of the 2025/26 financial year, and the estimated year-end position; and
- NOTED** the update provided regarding budget savings delivery.

6. **Property Capital Monitoring Statement and Progress Update** **Aithris Sgrùdaidh Calpa Seilbhe agus Cunntas air Adhartas**

There had been circulated Report No HP/24/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an assurance was sought and provided that Members would be provided with further updates on the Highland Investment Plan projects going forward;
- it would be helpful for officers to meet with local Members for Ward 8: Dingwall and Seaforth, to discuss progress with the Highland Investment Plan locally and progress with a new St Clement’s School in Dingwall;
- it would be helpful for a briefing note to be circulated on the Gypsy Traveller Member briefing to be held on 14 August 2025; and
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that asbestos removal was being undertaken at the Council depot at Tulloch Street, Dingwall prior to demolition and clearing of the site.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- APPROVED** the final capital budget position for the 2024/25 financial year;
- APPROVED** the capital budget position, including project progress at the end of the first quarter of the 2025/26 financial year, the estimated year-end position and the main financial variances outlined in the report; and
- AGREED** that a briefing note be circulated to Members on the Gypsy Traveller Member Briefing being held on 14 August 2025.

7. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Non-HRA Budget: Final Outturn 2024/25 and Quarter 1 Reporting for 2025/26
Buidseat Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais is Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Neo-Thaigheadais: Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach 2024/25

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

During discussion, it was queried on what basis the recommendation was being made to transfer the year-end surplus of £0.395m to Housing Revenue Account reserves rather than this sum being allocated towards repairs and maintenance, improving Council estates, energy efficiency or upgrading and improving tenant properties. In response, Members were advised the recommendation was being made on the basis of the Council's Section 95 Officer's advice in relation to the importance of bolstering the reserves. Thereafter, further clarification was provided on the reasons for the underspend on the HRA revenue budget, this being due to lower loan charges, albeit they remained a long-term pressure, and higher than anticipated income as detailed in the report.

In response to a query, it was explained that work was underway to develop a financial strategy, including a long-term rent strategy, to ensure a sustainable approach to the HRA moving forwards. A workshop would be held for Members in early Autumn to support this work, along with engagement with the Tenant Forum and tenant representatives and a report brought to the Committee on 5 November 2025. A long-term rent strategy would provide tenants with more stability and certainty going forward.

Further items raised by Members included the following:-

- the process for setting up tenant groups in new Council build estates, the potential to be more proactive in this regard and for this to be an item for discussion at a future Tenant Forum;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that a list of all tenant groups in Highland and other forms of tenant engagement would be included in the update on tenant engagement to the next Committee in November 2025. Members input into tenant engagement was also welcomed;
- further clarification was sought and provided on the fact supervision and management costs were lower than budgeted as a result of reduced bad debt provision. It was confirmed the potential to separate bad debt provision from the supervision and management budget line would be considered for future Committee reports; and
- in response to a query, it was confirmed the impact of the increase in national insurance costs on the Housing Revenue Account had been factored into the budget for 2025/26.

Thereafter, the Tenant Representative advised that from a national perspective, tenants would appreciate being more involved at the rent setting point, rather than later in the consultation. She recognised tenant organisations could be off-putting for tenants and nationally it was considered that other options such as landlord recognised groups might encourage more groups to be formed, noting they had the same rights to be consulted.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the final outturn figures for the Housing Revenue Account and Non-Housing Revenue Account 2024/25;
- ii. **AGREED** the transfer of the year-end surplus of £0.395m to the Housing Revenue Account reserves;
- iii. **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2025/26 as set out in the report and appendices to the report; and
- iv. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed.

8. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring to 31 March 2025 and to 30 June 2025
Sgrùdadh Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais gu 31 Màrt 2025 agus gu 30 Ògmhios 2025

There had been circulated Report No HP/26/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- the houses delivered through the New Council House Build Programme was a good news story which was welcomed and the staff involved were thanked for their hard work in this regard;
- the additional external funding secured to improve the energy efficiency of Council properties was a good news story and staff be commended in this regard; the importance of these works in alleviating poverty was also highlighted;
- the potential for the underspend on the HRA Capital Programme to be invested in improving the standard of sheltered housing accommodation and in energy efficiency works to properties in rural areas;
- the need to consider the procurement model in terms of whether the Council built new or as an alternative purchased affordable housing from a private developer to ensure best value was being achieved; and
- the potential to consider as part of the budget setting process a significant uplift of Council tax for second homes to further support the Landbank Fund for new housing development.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the:-

- i. final outturn figures for the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2024/25; and
- ii. Quarter 1 figures and projected outturn for the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2025/25.

9. Highland Housing Register Allocations Monitoring Report 2024/25
Aithisg Riarachaidhean Bliadhnail Clàr Taigheadais na Gàidhealtachd 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No HP/27/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members were advised that the report highlighted the continued demand for social rented housing in Highland and the importance of continuing the efforts of the Highland Housing Challenge in building more houses where they were most needed across the area. It also reflected the importance of prioritising the allocation of houses to applicants most in housing need and that this might cover a number of different requirements depending on individual circumstances. Members were reminded that they were being asked to scrutinise performance against the current Allocations Policy agreed by the Committee in April 2023. In addition, and as agreed by the Council, a review of the Allocations Policy was to take place, the proposed scope of which was set out in the report.

During discussion, it was proposed that the feasibility of introducing time-limited Local Lettings Plans be examined for areas with the highest percentage of lets to homeless households, as identified in the annual Allocations Monitoring report — currently Inverness, Mid Ross, Nairn, and Skye/Lochalsh & Wester Ross. These Local Lettings Plans would be modelled with a capped priority for verified key workers in essential services — such as health, education, care, and emergency response. Statutory reasonable-preference requirements would be fully met in each area. The modelling and integrated impact assessment would consider the effects on both statutory priority groups and the long-term viability and sustainability of the affected communities.

In response, an assurance was provided that the opportunity for local lettings initiatives would be considered as part of the Allocations Policy review. The work being undertaken as part of the Highland Housing Challenge and Allocations Policy review was multi-faceted and all-encompassing and would comprehensively consider all aspects of the challenges in each of the local areas in Highland. Members would have a full opportunity to debate and discuss ideas and proposals on how to improve the Policy, including addressing the challenges in attracting and housing key workers and others to local areas to help sustain communities.

Further comments from Members included:-

- an assurance was sought and provided that a broad definition of key workers had been agreed as part of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan and this would be re-circulated to Members. Key workers were also being considered as part of the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment;
- confirmation that as part of the Allocations Policy and Armed Forces Covenant, need to reside points were applied to armed forces veterans across Highland;
- the challenges faced by tenants who wished to downsize and families being able to relocate in their local area under the current Policy and the need to factor in the need for age friendly and intergenerational communities in new build developments;
- it was important also to recognise those who had lived in their communities for many years with no prospect of being allocated a house due to the current points system which was based on prioritising those in greatest housing need;
- the need for local Member engagement at the earliest opportunity so there was a full understanding of the expectations and limitations of the Allocations Policy and the elements governed by national legislation;

- in addition to the above, it was important there was community engagement in relation to the review;
- the need to remove some of the bureaucracy from the current system so that new house building could be expedited more quickly;
- the need to follow up more proactively on tenancy agreements given the number of properties that were left badly damaged resulting in high repair and void costs;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that following Members approval of the scope of the Allocations Policy review, consideration would be given to setting timescales and milestones for the review;
- the challenges in achieving fairness through the Allocations Policy and reference to the extremely difficult decisions officers and Council partners had to make in allocating properties; and
- the potential for the method of mutual exchange to be better promoted and to make tenants aware of the process.

Thereafter, the Tenant Representative advised that Members' core obligation as duty bearers was to the most vulnerable in communities and that should be borne in mind in reviewing the Policy. This included elderly and disabled tenants in properties which were not accessible, victims of domestic abuse and the homeless all of which were a priority and who should not be held accountable for the lack of social housing and creativity in the use of the existing stock. As an example, the potential to house key workers in under occupied homes be considered, noting this type of co-housing was being taken forward elsewhere.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the information contained in the Annual Monitoring Report on housing allocations which demonstrated that the policy was achieving its objectives and that the Highland Housing Register Partnership continued to provide affordable and secure social housing in Highland Communities; and
- APPROVED** the scope of the review of the Allocations Policy, as agreed at Council on 15 May 2025.

10. Annual Assurance Statement Aithris Barantais Bhliadhnail

There had been circulated Report No HP/28/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- an assurance was sought and provided that a commitment had been given to the Scottish Housing Regulator and Health and Safety Executive that there would be annual inspections of the flatted blocks with presumed or suspected asbestos, and that no works had been required to be carried out to these blocks;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the challenges with compliance with the updated legislation around electrical inspections due to tenant non-access, discussions held with the Regulator and Tenant Forum on this issue and the action being taken to encourage access; and

- the potential for the tenant access for the above to be included in secure tenancy agreements for their own safety. It was explained that while the Council could legally gain access to properties, the preference was to work with tenants on this issue.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the Annual Assurance Statement for 2025 detailed in Appendix 1 of the report which would be subsequently submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

11. Community Asset Transfer Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd

a. Annual Community Asset Transfer Report 2024/25 Aithisg Bhliadhnail Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No HP/29/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- concern at the length of time it was taking to legally complete some community asset transfers and the potential for the Council to set a priority timescale for these transfers. It was explained there was a range of factors that might cause delays with the community asset transfer process, details of which were provided;
- confirmation the Terra Tracker project had been hugely beneficial in helping to identify Council assets at an early stage and in supporting community groups with aspirations to develop projects;
- in response to a query, further clarity was provided that economic burdens placed on some community asset transfers would apply if a community group transferred an asset out of community use; Members were urged to bring any specific concerns on this issue to officers;
- confirmation that officers would arrange to meet with Mrs M Ross to discuss a specific community asset transfer within her Ward; and
- in view of the discussion, it would be helpful for a Members briefing on community asset transfers to be arranged.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the annual report on Community Asset Transfer, as detailed in the report and at Appendix 1 of the report, for submission to the Scottish Government; and
- ii. that a Members briefing on Community Asset Transfers be arranged.

b. Community Asset Transfer Request – Former Roy Bridge Primary School Iarrtas Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd – seann Bhun-Sgoil Dhrochaid Ruaidh

There had been circulated Report No HP/30/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following items were raised:-

- whether it would be prudent for the Council to use mothballed or closed school sites for its own developments using a similar model. It was confirmed the Council's Housing Development Team was consulted in regard to any potential community transfers at the outset to establish if there were opportunities for development on a site;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the rationale and assessment process around the recommendation to agree the discount on the market value of the property requested by the applicants; and
- this was an excellent project and should be supported on the basis outlined in the report.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** to the sale of the land and property comprising the former Roy Bridge Primary School to the Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation for £100,000 (with vacant possession) or £75,000 (with sitting tenant) based upon the terms of transfer as set out in section 6 of the report.

12. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025 Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2025 gu 30 Ògmhios 2025

There had been circulated Report No HP/31/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, it was highlighted that rent arrears for Quarter 1 had decreased to a 3-year low and that this was an impressive effort. The decrease had been achieved without recourse to evictions due to rent arrears. Members commended the staff involved on this achievement and for their early intervention work with tenants. Members also thanked the majority of tenants in Highland for continuing to manage their rent accounts and recognising the importance of rental income in delivering services to their homes.

In response to a query, reference was made to the challenges in quantifying the current level of rent arrears due to late payment of benefits. In addition, confirmation was sought and provided that the format of reporting on total rent arrears would be reviewed to consider how more perspective and context in terms of the figures presented could be provided.

Thereafter, it was highlighted that while homeless demand remained high in Highland, there had been another decrease in the number of households in temporary accommodation. This reflected the work of the Council and its partner agencies in delivering services to households experiencing homelessness and as they continued to prioritise moving families into permanent accommodation as quickly as possible.

Further items raised by Members included:-

- in response to a query, it was explained there was a range of factors why landlords may be leaving the private rented sector, including the opportunity to convert their property into a short term let;

- the opportunity for the Council to improve engagement with private landlords, and consider any support that could be provided and for Members to make representations to ensure the legislation was fit for purpose;
- performance in respect of the average time to complete emergency and non-emergency repairs was excellent and Service teams be commended on this achievement;
- confirmation was sought and provided that a list of what was classed as emergency and high priority repairs would be circulated to Members;
- an update was sought and provided on the action being taken to address ongoing issues with contractor capacity and shortage of skills and trades to conduct work for the Council and its partners; and
- the opportunity to promote and encourage contractors onto the Council's trades framework and in response an update was provided on the work being undertaken as part of the renewal of the Inner Moray Firth trades framework to make it more attractive to contractors whilst maintaining high standards of work.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on Housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025.

13. Delivery Plan and Performance Monitoring Update Quarter 1 2025/26 Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlana Lìbhrigidh agus Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Cairteil 1 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No HP/32/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. Service's performance information; and
- ii. progress of the Delivery Plan Programmes and Projects as per the updates provided in the report.

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 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

15. Housing Development Initiatives Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/33/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

16. Property Transactions Monitoring

Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/34/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, it was confirmed that officers would investigate and report back on a specific issue raised in respect of a Council owned car park in Inverness.

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

The meeting was closed at 1.10pm.