

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 14 August 2025 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance	Ms M MacCallum (remote)
Mr S Coghill (remote)	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr R Cross (substitute)	Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr L Fraser	Mr S Mackie (remote)
Mr R Gale (substitute)	Ms K MacLean
Mr R Gunn	Mr D Millar (remote)
Mrs J Hendry	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)	

Non-Members also present:

Dr C Birt (remote)	Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mr J Finlayson (remote)	Ms J McEwan (remote)
Ms C Gillies (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Dr M Gregson (remote)	Ms M Ross (remote)

In attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive – Place
Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management (remote)
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer – Operations and Maintenance
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead - Finance
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing and Customer Services
Mr P Tomalin, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Ms J Ross, Customer Service Delivery Manager
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Superintendent R Shepherd, Divisional Commander, Police Scotland

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, Ms T Collier, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green and Mr M Reiss.

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 5: Mr D Millar

Item 6: Mr D Millar

Item 7: Mr D Millar

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaìdh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 26 June 2025 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Communities and Place Committee.

4. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

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

5. Police Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Poileis

Transparency Statement: Mr D Millar declared a connection to this item on the basis that a close family member was a serving Police Officer outwith Highland but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CP/13/25 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

The Divisional Commander highlighted several key areas of the report including the rollout of body worn video in Highland; the two large exercises undertaken with partners on counter terrorism and disaster recovery; the nomination of eight police officers from Highland for the Chief Constable's Excellence Award; the decrease in violent offences, missing people and shop-lifting; and the continued activity around County Lines and drug-related crimes.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a request, the Divisional Commander undertook to liaise with Roads Policing to see if it was possible to obtain figures on the number of road traffic accidents involving cyclists or pedestrians;
- information was sought, and provided, on the use of body worn video footage in court; whether the redeployment of a large number of Police Officers during the visits of the American President and Vice President had resulted in any increase in crime or reduction of service; the robust approach being taken to the enforcement of shoplifting offences; and what was being done to address the increase in sexual crimes and build confidence in victims to report such crimes;

- a number of complaints had been received about young people using off-road bikes in areas where they were disturbing members of the public, and it was queried how a solution could be found to this problem;
- the presentation on County Lines given to the Association of Caithness Community Councils was commended; and
- on the point being raised, it was clarified that, due to the significant number of Community Councils in Highland, officers would no longer be routinely attending Community Council meetings. However, they would attend if there was a specific policing issue to be discussed. Attention was drawn to the new strategy of providing area-wide reports to Community Councils, and the Black Isle-wide Community Council report was commended.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

6. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the period Q4 2024/25 and Q1 2025/26 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach airson R4 2024/25

Transparency Statement: Mr D Millar declared a connection to this item on the basis that a close family member worked for the Communities and Place Service but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

The Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management provided a brief overview of the measures being taken to mitigate the overspend on fleet, including a holistic fleet review; a cessation of fleet procurement; cross-department working to reduce the mileage of light fleet; the recruitment of six agency mechanics; the further utilisation of the Car Club; and opportunities for outsourcing workshop space to key stakeholders.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the use of grey fleet appeared to be the default option for many members of staff and was causing a significant cost to the council. This behaviour could be difficult to change, and it was suggested that Council leadership needed to lead the way by being seen to use pool vehicles for the majority of journeys; and
- having spare vehicles, such as bin lorries, could be beneficial as it could prevent disruption to services in the case of vehicles breaking down. However, it was explained that, given the financial challenges, best use of resources was essential, and it was not always possible to do this.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the final budget position for 2024/25 as set out in the report and Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
- ii. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendices 3 and 4 of the report;
- iii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and

iv. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery.

**7. Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the periods Q4 2024/25 and Q1 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Calpa airson R4 2024/25 agus R1 2025/26**

Transparency Statement: Mr D Millar declared a connection to this item on the basis that a close family member worked for the Communities and Place Service but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the outturn for the year 2024/25 as set out in the report and Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for the year 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendix 2 of the report; and
- iii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed.

**8. Highland Local Child Poverty Action Report – 2024/25
Aithisg Gnìomh Bochdainn Chloinne Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd – 2024/25**

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the reduction in childcare options, particularly after-school and school holiday childcare, was a significant issue in areas such as Sutherland, and information was sought, and provided, on what was being done to improve childcare provision in rural areas; and
- the majority of children involved in Children's Hearings came from deprived backgrounds and many of them were on the autistic spectrum. The importance of early diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was highlighted, and it was queried what could be done to support parents of children with ASD or other additional needs. The Chair clarified that this issue would be more appropriately discussed at the Education Committee, and it was confirmed that the Chair of the Education Committee would be made aware of the points raised.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the actions carried out in 2024/25 as set out in Section 2 of Highland's Child Poverty Action Report in Appendix 2 of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** the actions for delivery in 2025/26 as set out in Section 3 of the Action Report in Appendix 2 of the report; and
- iii. **NOTED** the activity to be undertaken during 2025/26 to review the priorities in line with the refresh of the Integrated Children's Services Plan.

9. Customer Services Update

Cunntas às Ùr mu Sheirbheisean Luchd-cleachdaidh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- on the point being raised, the Customer Service Delivery Manager undertook to look at better ways of advertising Thurso Service Point opening hours for those who did not have access to the internet. In addition, it was confirmed that, although there was continuous review of services, there were no current plans to change the opening hours or location of the Service Point;
- the reduction in calls answering times was welcomed, and it was queried how many calls were abandoned daily. The Customer Service Delivery Manager undertook to provide Mr R Gale with information on the number of abandoned calls. However, it was clarified that the way figures on such calls were reported had changed significantly due to the new system of adding informative recorded messages to particular phone lines, leading to a level of informed abandonment;
- customer service was hugely important to the reputation of the Council, with Service Points being particularly important to vulnerable residents. The closure of Invergordon Service Point had had a negative impact, causing customers to have to get a bus to Alness to access the services they needed, and a plea was made to retain the remaining Service Points;
- the improvement over time of the customer experience and the ambition to improve further were commended, and it was suggested that the exercise that had been undertaken in respect of the Housing repairs process be applied to all services as it continued to take members of the public a long time to access some services;
- profound dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the closure of Dornoch Service Point, which it was suggested was at odds with the Council's localism agenda and stated priorities of People, Place and Prosperity. The Customer Service Delivery Manager explained that, whilst service delivery had changed in Dornoch, the Service Point had not closed. Services could still be accessed by a dedicated freephone facility within the Service Point building, or face-to-face by appointment. In response to a follow-up question, it was confirmed that one call had been made from the freephone line since its implementation, and it had been answered within 20 seconds. Monitoring would continue, and statistics on call answering times would form part of the review of the service delivery model; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the opening hours of Nairn Service Point.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the work and performance of the customer service network; and
- ii. the improvement work completed and planned.

10. Waste Management Update

Cunntas às Ùr mu Stiùireadh Sgudail

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Waste Management team was commended for its success in rationalising the waste management process;
- there would be far greater buy-in to the recycling process if people understood what happened to the recyclate following collection, and Members reiterated previous requests for information/education in that regard. The Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations confirmed that, following implementation of the service changes, the Waste Management Team would focus on enhanced waste awareness in conjunction with key contractor partners. The Chair suggested that, at an appropriate time, a briefing paper on what happened to recyclate and food waste following collection be provided to all Members;
- on the point being raised, if it was confirmed that the re-routing of refuse collections in Inverness would be an opportunity to provide households with updated or reminder information on how to use their recycling bins;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the Repair the Highlands Fund; and
- to reduce instances of fly-tipping, more education was needed on the appropriate disposal of garden waste and large items such as domestic appliances.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the national work being undertaken to introduce a new Household Recycling Code of Practice;
- ii. **NOTED** updated information on the introduction of Waste Service change in Lochaber, including collection route optimisation;
- iii. **NOTED** the progress being made on the new Waste Transfer Station infrastructure in Portree and Fort William;
- iv. **NOTED** the position on the introduction of Industrial Waste Shredders; and
- v. **AGREED** that a briefing paper on what happened to recyclate and food waste following collection be provided to all Members.

11. Bereavement Services Update

Cunntas às Ùr mu Sheirbheisean Caoidh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the large number of headstones which had been cordoned off in Thurso cemetery; responsibility for repairing older headstones where it was difficult to find family members; the costs of the Inverness Crematorium refurbishment and why the budget continued into 2028/29; and the required maintenance works at Clynekirkton burial ground;
- the work on the cemetery extension in Portree was commended, and thanks were expressed to officers for their swift response to concerns regarding campervans parking in the new car park. In addition, an update was requested on any snagging works, and it was queried when the new lairs would be available for purchase;

- in response to a request, the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to provide an update at a Ward Business Meeting on the burial grounds at Broadford, Strath, Dunvegan and Skeabost;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that people were advised to consider taking out insurance when they purchased headstones, and while the Council did not currently provide insurance this was something that could be explored; and
- it was queried whether the operational date for Dores Cemetery could be brought forward given the reasons for the delay had now been addressed.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress of current projects in the burial ground extension programme;
- ii. the progress of the current memorial safety programme; and
- iii. the progress of the Inverness Crematorium refurbishment project.

12. Service Performance Reporting for Q1 April 2025 to June 2025 Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson R1 Giblean 2025 gu Ògmhios 2025

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

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

The meeting concluded at 11.20 am.