

## **The Highland Council**

Minutes of the meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 20 August 2025 at 9.30am.

### **Present:**

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

### **Non-Members present:**

Dr M Gregson	Mr S Mackie
Mr J Finlayson	Mr J McGillivray
Ms M Hutchison	Mr P Oldham
Mr T MacLennan	Mrs T Robertson
Mr R MacKintosh	

### **NHS Highland representatives:**

Ms J Davies, Director of Public Health  
Ms L Bussell, Director of Nursing  
Mr S Steer, Director of Adult Social Care  
Ms A Johnstone, Interim Chief Officer

### **Third sector representatives in attendance:**

Dr G Rodger, Inspiring Young Voices

### **Also in attendance:**

Ms L McKittrick, Outgoing Youth Convener  
Ms L McBain, Incoming Youth Convener

### **Participating Officials:**

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People  
Ms F Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer, Health and Social Care  
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer, Integrated People Services  
Mr I Kyle, Lead Officer Strategy, Performance and Quality Assurance  
Ms J Park, Strategic Lead Child Health  
Mr J Libby, Transition Head of Children & Justice  
Ms V Gunn, Human Resources Business Partner  
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager  
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

**Mr D Fraser in the Chair**

## **Preliminaries**

The Chair introduced and welcomed the new Director of Public Health, Ms Jennifer Davies, to the meeting. She hoped in future to present the 2024 Director of Public Health report on Health Inequalities to the Committee, and explained that work had commenced on the 2025 report, which would build on the same themes.

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

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mrs K MacLean and Mrs M Paterson.

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

Declaration of Interest – Item 8, Mr A MacKintosh

Transparency Statement – Item 5, Mrs M Reid

### **3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

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 Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee.

### **4. Service Achievements Coileanaidhean Seirbheis**

Updates were provided, and had been circulated, on the following:

- June Voice in Action Award Winners - Scottish Highlands;
- The Highland Council Commendation to Dr. Tina Barrows on Doctoral Achievement;
- Care Experience and Corporate Parenting e-learning module;
- Vision 26;
- SQA exam results day for young people across Highland 2025;
- Joint Inspection of Adult Services in Highland: Integration and Outcomes – focus on people living with mental illness;
- Student Summer Placements (6th Year);
- Congratulations to our Graduating Trainee Social Workers; and
- Gordon Wyness was congratulated and thanked for 45 years' service as a Children's Hearings Volunteer Panel Member.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the Chair congratulated all those who had received a mention in the Service Achievements, and also thanked the many others who were doing excellent work for the Council, and for the NHS and third sector;
- Members highlighted the positive feedback received following the summer placements and it was hoped this would continue in future years; and

- a desire was voiced for Members to consider the Scottish Government's Population Health Framework, which would provide an opportunity to learn from the past and facilitate joint working with the NHS and third sector.

The Committee **NOTED** the updates and **AGREED** a Members' workshop on public health issues be arranged.

**5. Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 – Annual Report  
Achd Slàinte agus Cùraim (Luchd-obrach) (Alba) 2019 – Aithisg  
Bhliadhna**

**Transparency Statement - Mrs M Reid declared a connection to this item as a registered childminder but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that she had an interest to declare.**

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

Attention was drawn to a typo in section 6.1 of the report where reference to 1 April 2025 should read 1 April 2024.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- concern was expressed at the lengthy list of requirements for childminders and that this might put some people off becoming a childminder. While it was acknowledged as challenging, the benefits in terms of quality service provision were outlined; and
- information was sought on concerns that social work assistants could be asked to undertake work that they were not qualified or trained for, and assurance in relation to this would be provided as part of Item 6.

The Committee **NOTED** the annually mandated report by The Highland Council on the implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019.

**6. Annual Workforce Plan  
Plana Bliadhna Luchd-obrach**

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in relation to social work assistants, as raised at Item 5, assurance was provided that they would not be expected to undertake work for which they were not qualified or trained. The post might incentivise some to train as social workers and it was hoped that permanent contracts would soon be offered for these posts, noting that short term contracts made recruitment and retention more challenging. Assurance was provided that this would be considered in due course;
- social work succession planning and career progression, for those that wanted it, was vital and aimed to make social work a more popular career choice. In this regard, more work with schools would be helpful;

- the 'grow our own' talent approach was welcomed, the use of bank staff to improve flexibility was explained, and the importance of reaching potential care sector workforce early, through school and college engagement, was emphasised;
- although still high, the reduction in the vacancy rate was welcomed, and the benefits of having a spread of age groups was pointed out;
- in relation to the higher rate of sickness absence, it was hoped that health related training was being delivered regularly, including, for example, on infection prevention and control. Attention was drawn to the priority access to some vaccines provided to key staff;
- the need for affordable housing provision for key workers, especially in rural areas, was emphasised, and this was being tackled through the portfolio boards;
- it was hoped staff were offered flexibility in later years to reduce their hours and / or responsibilities, which might aid retention. Information from exit interviews would be helpful to understand why they were leaving, for example lifestyle choice or the pressure of work. It was also pointed out that not all staff wished to climb the career ladder, and they should be appreciated in the same way;
- it was welcomed that staff were being given time to complete training during working hours;
- it was hoped the Investors In People ambition would be beneficial and worth the expenditure; and
- the development of apprenticeships was welcomed.

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

- i. Health and Social Care workforce planning progress report and updated action plan;
- ii. positive outcomes from the report, including:
  - a. continued success of trainee programmes for Social Workers (both undergraduate and postgraduate), Health Visitors, and School Nurses, supporting workforce development and succession planning;
  - b. the turnover rate of staff had reduced from 14.7% in 2023 to 10.5% in 2024;
  - c. in mitigation of the high level of social work vacancies and subsequent risk, the role of Social Work Assistants (HC8) had been successfully introduced to alleviate some of the delivery pressures from Social Workers (currently on a fixed term basis). This alternative method of service delivery reduced the number of qualified Social Workers required whilst allowing the service time to evaluate the effectiveness of this role;
  - d. the implementation of the Person-Centred Solutions portfolio; and
- iii. continuing risk highlighted in this report and reflected in the Corporate Risk Register. This related to the high vacancy rate that continued with Children's Services and the impact this was having on service delivery and the wellbeing of the workforce.

## 7. **Care Reform Bill** **Bile Ath-leasachaidh a' Chùrainm**

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the legislation to strengthen support for unpaid carers was welcomed, and the impact of long term caring on the carer's health was highlighted. It was vital they were supported to take appropriate breaks. Attention was drawn to the number of people providing unpaid care, estimated at approximately 17% of the Scottish population, and the financial value of the care they provided. Suggestions were made on the ways this legislation could improve lives, which included supporting the third sector's community-based work, and providing carers with respite, funded through Self Directed Support (SDS) if possible;
- the unique needs of the Highlands and Islands should be taken into consideration and implementation of national policies, and it was queried what influence the Council could have in this;
- support was voiced for the future implementation of Anne's Law, which was planned legislation aimed at strengthening the rights of care home residents to see and spend time with their loved ones, even during infectious disease outbreaks;
- care for the carer should be front and centre of the implementation of new legislation; and
- the questions and issues raised would be useful during further discussions at COSLA in relation to this legislation.

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

- i. passing of the Care Reform (Scotland) Bill by Scottish Parliament; and
- ii. opportunities and challenges as currently set out in the report.

## **8. Registered Services Annual Report Aithisg Bhliadhnail Sheirbheisean Clàraichte**

**Declaration of Interest – Mr A MacKintosh declared an interest as a close relative was a member of staff at the Orchard, and he left the chamber for this item.**

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair thanked everyone involved in foster and kinship caring for their valuable services;
- the low intake of new foster carers was concerning, and attention was drawn to possible flaws in the marketing strategy, with specific reference to internet search results for fostering in the Highlands. It was queried what could be done to improve foster carer recruitment and it was explained that local publicity and recruitment, using lived testimony, tended to be the most effective. Clarification was provided that foster carer recruitment was proving a challenge internationally;

- it was highlighted that a Care Inspectorate headline grade of ‘adequate’ could be demoralising for a care provider when the grade did not reflect the overall quality of care being provided but was impacted by the inability to recruit adequate foster carers. In the examples provided at section 6.5 of the report many of the personal care issues were graded good or very good. Engagement with the Care Inspectorate on this was proposed, and thanks were extended to all staff and care experienced young people who had contributed to the inspection;
- the shifting language of care to minimise causing trauma to people who wished to read their case files was welcomed, and a summary was provided of the provision of staff to accompany and explain case files if required;
- as corporate parents to Looked After Children, information was sought on the timelines for the repairs required to the Orchard Care Home, as highlighted by the Care Inspectorate and, while this was not yet known, a summary of engagement that had been undertaken on the issues was provided;
- in response to a query about the achievement of the recommendations in the Care Inspectorate report, attention was drawn to the improvement plan and its timeframes;
- information was sought and provided on processes for transition from children’s to adult services, and clarity was provided on the audits that had been undertaken in the areas of transitions and continuing care, with reports on this by the Council and by NHS Highland to inform the processes going forward; and
- the Chair urged anyone interested in becoming a foster parent to come forward.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the contents of the report;
- NOTED** improvements across services, including those areas where improvement needs to accelerate to enable sustained progress across all areas of service delivery; and
- AGREED** an annual Registered Services report comes back to Committee covering future inspections outcomes.

**9. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2025/26 and Final Out-turn 2024/25**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach Ràith 1 2025/26 agus Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach 2024/25**

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- an explanation was sought and provided for the unallocated savings in the family team, detailed at section 7.3 in the report, along with how this was being addressed across the budgets, in tandem with the action plan for the delivery of savings in children’s services;
- in response to a query about the three year delivery plan for savings in children’s services, it was intended the action plan would be shared at the

next meeting of the Committee, and a brief summary of what might be included was provided;

- information was sought and provided on reported overspends in relation to Self Directed Support, and some of the challenges that had been experienced around payment cards, which were being resolved;
- confirmation was sought and provided that staff vacancies were not being used as a planned savings measure but had previously balanced the budget where there had been overspends;
- in response to queries about delivery plan requirements and the challenges around meeting savings targets for Home in Highland, and Looked After Children, attention was drawn to the information available to Members on the PRMS system, help with which could be provided on request, and to the challenges around managing the costs of some of the children who were being cared for out of authority, which could be further explained outwith the meeting;
- the position in relation to the Adult Social Care budget and partnership working with NHS Highland on this was queried and it was noted that this could have an impact on the Council budget; and
- queries relating to the underspend in criminal justice were explained, and further clarification could be obtained out with the meeting from Strategic Lead for Child Health.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the 2024/2025 final end of year out-turn (Appendix 1 & 1a);
- ii. **AGREED** the forecast financial position for 2025/2026 as set out in the report and appendices (Appendix 2, 2a & 3);
- iii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for material variances and actions taken and proposed; and
- iv. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery (Appendix 4).

#### **10. Delivery Plan and Performance Report – Q1 2025/2026 Plana Lìbhrigidh agus Aithisg Choileanaidh – R1 2025/2026**

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought on whether the intended increase in hybrid working had been achieved, noting that hybrid might improve recruitment and retention. Further information could be provided outwith the meeting, although it was explained that due to the nature of many care sector jobs, hybrid often meant working between an office and the community, rather than from home;
- concerns were raised in relation to the situation with Moss Park Care Home in Fort William and what the future for care in Lochaber might involve. This was under consideration, with community engagement taking place; and
- noting that adult social care complaints were generally passed to NHS Highland to deal with, it was queried whether the Council also monitored performance in this area. The Chief Officer, Integrated People Services, would look into this and inform Members outwith the meeting.

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

- i. Service's performance and risk information; and
- ii. Delivery Plan progress information.

## **11. Minutes**

### **Geàrr-chunntas**

The had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group held on 6 February and 20 May 2025.

The meeting ended at 11.50am.