

**The Highland Council  
Pensions Committee and Pension Board**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Pensions Committee and Pension Board** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Thursday 4 September 2025 at 10.30 am.**

**Present:**

**Pensions Committee**

Mr R Gale  
Mrs J Hendry  
Ms L Kraft  
Mr B Lobban  
Mr A MacKintosh  
Mr R MacKintosh  
Mr T MacLennan (remote)  
Mr P Oldham  
Mrs T Robertson

**Pension Board**

Mr S Kennedy, Highland Council  
Mr N MacDonald, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (remote)  
Mr R Fea, representative for the other Employers (remote)  
Mr W Munro, Unison  
Mr D MacDonald, Unison (Western Isles (Local Government) Branch) (remote)  
Ms E Johnston, GMB

**Non-Members in attendance:-**

Dr C Birt  
Mr P Logue  
Mr R Stewart  
Ms M Ross (remote)

**Officers in attendance:**

Mr B Porter, Chief Officer Corporate Finance, Corporate Service  
Mr J Gibson, Trade Unions' Joint Secretary  
Ms C Strachan, Pension Fund Manager, Corporate Service  
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager, Corporate Service  
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Corporate Service  
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

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

**Mr P Oldham in the Chair**

**Business**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Paterson of the Pensions Committee and Mr G MacKenzie of the Pension Board.

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

There were no declarations of interest/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 had not been exercised in respect of this Committee.

**4. Governance Policy 2025/26**  
**Aithris Poileasaidh Riaghlaidh 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No. PC/6/25 by the Chief Officer, Corporate Finance.

Following consideration, the Committee **APPROVED** the Highland Pension Fund Governance Policy.

**5. Training Policy and Training Plan 2025/26**  
**Poileasaidh Trèanaidh agus Plana Trèanaidh 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No. PC/7/25 by the Chief Officer, Corporate Finance.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- Pension Fund induction training had recently been provided to new Members on the Committee/Board and the presentation slides had been sent out to Members for reference purposes;
- it was highlighted that responses had been low to the CIPFA Code and Framework: Training Needs assessment questionnaire and there was need for improvement in replies from Members;
- a Pension Fund manual would be developed for Members which was welcomed;
- training would be provided on the triennial actuarial valuation process and if Members had any other training requirements they were asked to contact the Pension Fund Manager; and
- attendance of Members at training sessions was recorded in the Annual Accounts.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the LGPS Skills and Knowledge Statement (Appendix 2), which was adopted by the HPF in September 2022 in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice Knowledge and Skills (2021);
- ii. **NOTED** the HPF's approach to training (section 8) which incorporated the CIPFA Knowledge and Skills Framework core areas (Appendix 3) and the CIPFA self-assessment matrix (section 7 and Appendix 4);
- iii. **NOTED** the training resources provided by The Pensions Regulator (TPR) alongside the recommendation from the Scottish Public Pensions Agency (SPPA) that Board and Committee members should be required to complete TPR training as part of their induction (section 9);
- iv. **NOTED** the requirements of TPR General Code of Practice (GCoP) (section 10) and results from formal audit to assess skills/knowledge and experience against the Knowledge and Skills Framework and schedule appropriate training, in accordance with best practice (section 7);

- v. **NOTED** the training delivered to date on pension fund matters (section 11 and Appendix 5) and that details of attendance were included in the Annual report and accounts (section 13); and
- vi. **AGREED** the training policy and programme for 2025/26 set out within the report (section 12).

## **6. Pension Fund Administration Tabhartasan agus Rianachd Maoin Peinnsein**

There had been circulated Report No. PC/8/25 by the Chief Officer, Corporate Finance.

During discussion the following points were raised by Members and responded to:-

- it was welcomed that the Pensions team had been successful in recruiting additional staff given the challenges with workload;
- it was noted that the guidance on implementing the McCloud remedy for transfers was not received until towards the end of 2024 and during this period the processing of Pension administration cases had been put on hold until guidance on the remedy was received. It was queried how much an impact this delay had had on the overall timescale for processing cases. It was advised that now the guidance had been received, transfer of funds to other Pension Funds was being progressed. However, this was a long process given the current need to do manual calculations;
- in terms of outstanding cases, it was queried how long a case could be expected to be in the system before they were completed. It was advised that the focus was on getting pension benefits and death grants paid all within the pension scheme targets, which the team were working hard to achieve. A large number of outstanding cases were where scheme members had changed job role with their employer. There was a focus was on members over 55 years old, so pension benefits were accurate by the time they retired. All cases were different with some more complicated than others;
- in terms of performance, the Pension Board were keen to see a focus on ensuring that the first pension payment was made on time along with the lump sum pension payment and death grant issues resolved. There had been a significant change in pension processes and investment in additional staff and it would be helpful to see how this investment impacted on improved performance going forward;
- Pension fund administration performance was not where the Pension team would like it to be and the report highlighted what was being done to improve performance. This included additional management capacity and other additional staff in the team and significant improvements to pension systems. This would hopefully ensure that there would be improved pension administration performance going forward.

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

- i. update on the Member Self Service (Engage) and Altair Pensioner Payroll projects (section 6);
- ii. action being taken by officers to ensure HPF compliance with The Pension Regular (TPR) General Code of Practice and reporting in respect

- incorporating the McCloud remedy into Annual Benefits Statements (section 7);
- iii. current HPF administration performance and action being taken to improve performance, with regular updates to be provided to Pensions Committee on an ongoing basis (section 8);
  - iv. update on the Pensions Bill 2024/25 (England and Wales) (section 9) and that the Pensions Bill did not apply to Scotland and this update was provided for information only;
  - v. update on HPF Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 and progress of the external audit being undertaken by Audit Scotland (section 12); and
  - vi. update on progress on implementing and testing connection to the Pension Dashboard (section 16).

## **7. Internal Audit Reports In-Sgrùdadh**

### **7.a Pension Fund Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/25 Aithisg Bhliadhnail In-Sgrùdaidh Maoin Peinnsein Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No. PC/9/25 by the Strategic Lead, Corporate Audit.

In discussion, it was noted that the tender process for the appointment of an Investment Advisor to the Pension Fund was to be completed by 1 October 2025. In response to a query as to why it had taken so long to renew this contract, it was explained that Officers had been working with the Fund's Investment Advisor in the implementation of a transition plan in order to achieve the revised strategic asset allocation included in the Statement of Investment Principles. It was important that this work be concluded prior to a new contract for Investment Advisor going out to tender.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and the audit opinion provided.

### **7.b Pension Fund Governance Arrangements Ullachaidhean Riaghlachas Maoin Peinnsein**

There had been circulated Report No. PC/10/25 by the Strategic Lead, Corporate Audit.

It was highlighted that an audit opinion of substantial assurance was very positive and staff were congratulated for this.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and the audit opinion provided.

## **8. Risk Management Update 2025/26 Fios às Ùr mu Rianachd Chunnairt 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No. PC/11/25 by the Chief Officer, Corporate Finance.

The Pensions team were congratulated for all their work and the Committee **NOTED** the updated risk register extract.

The meeting ended at 11.04 a.m.