

Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Sandwick Road, Stornoway on **Tuesday, 10 June, 2025 at 12 noon.**

Present:

Representing The Highland Council:

Mr M Cameron (remote)
Mr L Fraser
Mr A Graham (remote)
Mrs M Paterson
Ms J McEwan
Ms T Collier (remote)
Mr J McGillivray (remote)

Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar:

Mr D Crichton

In attendance:

Mr F Finlayson, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Mr R Christie, Depute Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit (Remote)
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Clerk's office (remote)
Mrs K Arnott, Committee Officer, Clerk's office (remote)

Also in attendance:-

Ms E Scoburgh, Senior Audit Manager, Audit Scotland (remote)

Mr L Fraser in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd and Mr G Murray.

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

The Board **Noted** the following:-

Declaration of Interest - Item 6 – Mr L Fraser; Mr D Crichton.

3. Minutes of Meetings Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

There had been circulated, the Minute of Meeting of the Board held on the 18 February 2025, the terms of which were **Approved**.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes Gnothaichean Ag Èirigh on Gheàrr-chunntas

A progress report had been requested on the creation of the departmental logo. Members were advised that an update had been available in the departmental report.

5. Membership Ballrachd

The Board **Noted** that Mr J McGillivray, Highland Council had been appointed as a substantive member on the Board replacing Ms M Smith.

Interim Convener

The Board **Agreed** to appoint Mrs M Paterson as Interim Convener of the Board for item 6.

6. Convener and Depute Convener Remuneration Cur an Dreuchd Neach-gairm agus Iar Neach-gairm

Declarations of Interest: Mr L Fraser and Mr D Crichton made a declaration of interest on this item as they had a financial interest. In accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the Code of Conduct, they left the meeting for this item.

In terms of paragraph 2(2)(c) of the Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 (Remuneration) Amendment (Amendment) Regulations 2025, it was recommended that the remuneration for the posts of Convener and Vice Convener for 2025/26 be as follows:-

Convener	£28,207 (2024/25 rate £26,686) (5.7% increase)
Vice-Convener	£26,797 (2024/25 rate £25,352) (5.7% increase)

It having been clarified that the recommended remuneration comprised the basic salary for a Councillor (£25,982) and an enhancement to reflect the responsibilities of the Convener and Depute Convener posts, to make the overall total as detailed above, the Board **Agreed** the recommended remuneration amounts for the Convener and Vice-Convener.

7. Departmental Report Aithisg Roinneil

There had been circulated Report No VAL/8/25 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

Following a summary of the report by the Assessor and ERO, a discussion had taken place on the postal vote renewal system and how elderly people might have found this a complicated process. It was advised that it was cost-effective to renew postal voting applications online, but paper postal vote application forms were issued when requested, there were telephone helplines and the public could attend the department's local offices for assistance. This change in the process was as a result of a change in legislation and the department was happy to receive feedback on its administrative arrangements for postal vote applications.

It was highlighted that not everyone had received a postal vote renewal letter. Assurances had been given that the correspondence was being sent in batches, with a deadline of 31 January each year to complete the process.

In response to a query, the Board had now received an intimation of review date for its Records Management Plan from the Keeper of the Records of Scotland. Under the terms of the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 the Keeper had deemed that date to be 31 October 2025. This was an extensive piece of work which required completion within a relatively short timescale.

It was queried whether the postal vote form that had been distributed to the public had been for Westminster election postal votes or the Scottish election postal votes, and when postal votes were renewed what time period these would be valid for if the application was accepted. Clarification had been given that these would be valid for 3 years. There had been a divergence between Westminster and Scottish Elections and a Private Members Bill going through Parliament, aimed to get convergence on this, so postal vote renewal applications would cover both Westminster and the Scottish elections and would not have to be done separately, as this caused confusion.

In relation to the annual canvass of electors and the national and local data matching exercises, it was queried what sources were being used to match the electoral roll against. It had been highlighted that there had been different routes for sending out a canvass form, including information from the Department for Work and Pensions register and Council databases on vacant, empty properties and Council tax roll. Using information that was already there, would speed up the canvass process and was more cost effective.

Work on the creation of a departmental logo was continuing, and a revised draft logo would be sent to Members out with the meeting for their views. An update on vacancies within the department and plans to fill these was provided at the meeting.

The Board **NOTED** the recent activities of the department as set out in the report.

8. Equalities Report **Aithisg Cho-ionannachdan**

There had been circulated Report No. VAL/9/25 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

There was a requirement to renew the Equalities report every four years and this was the renewed report now being submitted to the Board. Every second year an update report would be submitted to the Board.

The Board **Approved** the contents of the report.

9. Service Plan **Plana Seirbheis**

There had been circulated Report No. VAL/10/25 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer which provided a new Service Plan for 2025 – 2028. It set out what the functions of the department were, key activities and outcomes. New sections had been included in relation to the self catering audit and the establishment of a new Board in 2027.

Members had welcomed the very thorough report, which had covered many issues, and had spoken of their delight in noting the contents within. It had been agreed that regular reviews of the service plan were merited, and it had been agreed to review this annually.

A comment was made that the Board did not have much discretion on what it did as all the tasks and duties of the Board were set out in legislation. An element of discretion was how these tasks were approached. The Board was a separate body to the two Constituent Authorities as electoral registration and the valuation roll had to be maintained independently of the billing authorities and the Returning Officer for Elections.

The Board **Noted** the contents of the report.

10. Report to the Scottish Government Aithisg do Riaghaltas na h-Alb

There had been circulated Report No. VAL/11/25 by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer.

Following a summary of the report by the Assessor and ERO, reference had been made to the lack of funds for training of staff, and this had been raised with the Scottish Assessor Association, highlighting the seriousness of recruitment challenges. Issues had been raised around the availability of Surveyors with non domestic rating experience which had been compounded with extra work arising from the Barclay Review. It had been highlighted that a solution to boost staff numbers had been required, with the understanding that bringing in a graduate Surveyor trainee might take 5–7 years before qualification. The importance of home-grown staff retention, with a career pathway was highlighted and a focused apprenticeship scheme was an option worth investigating.

The Board **Noted** the content of the report.

11. Unaudited Accounts 2024/25 Cunntasan Neo-sgrùdaichte 2024/25

Work around the unaudited accounts was still ongoing. These accounts were scheduled to be emailed to Members, for comment, prior to submission to Audit Scotland on 30 June 2025. The audited accounts would then be submitted to the Board meeting in October for approval.

The Board **Noted** that the Unaudited Statement of Accounts for the financial year 2024/25 were close to being finalised and would be e-mailed to Members' prior to them being submitted to the appointed auditor, Audit Scotland.

12. Internal Audit Reports Aithisgean In-sgrùdaidh

12a Internal Audit Report – Review of CiA Financials Aithisg In-sgrùdaidh – Ath-sgrùdadh Ionmhas CiA

There had been circulated Report No. VAL/12/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit), Highland Council.

The Board had discussed the level of assurance provided, questioning why only substantial assurance had been given rather than full assurance. A medium-priority recommendation had been raised regarding the financial monitoring process.

It had been noted that, based on the report, the Board had been left without a full picture of financial performance for the first six months of 2024/25. This had been due to delays in budget information being entered into the new CiA Financials system, which had made it difficult to accurately measure actual financial performance during that period. Members had expressed concern that, until the budget data had been properly recorded, the system could not reflect accurate financial information.

It had also been noted that the Board had invested significantly in the CiA Financial system, and Members had expected a full budgetary monitoring report to have been available in early 2025. It was queried if the CiA Financial system was now fully operational. It was advised that with the implementation of any new financial system there were often teething problems. Delays in inputting information into the system had been acknowledged. However, it was confirmed that the system now contained the necessary budgetary information, and staff had access to this and were able to utilise this going forward.

The Board **Noted** the Internal Audit findings and audit opinion provided.

12b Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/25
Aithisg Bhliadhnail In-sgrùdaidh 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No. VAL/13/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit), Highland Council, which included an assessment of the Board's framework of governance, risk management and control, and the associated opinion which provides information for the Board's Annual Governance Statement. It also set out work carried out on 2 audits during the year. A 3rd audit on maintenance of self catering units on the valuation roll was still ongoing and the outcome would be reported to the Board at the next meeting.

The Board **Noted** the content of the report and the audit opinion provided.

12c Internal Audit Annual Plan 2025/26
Plana In-sgrùdaidh 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. VAL/14/25 by the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit), Highland Council.

Two new audits were planned in the annual plan. Firstly, a review of Payroll would focus on processes for starters, changes/ amendments and leavers and establishment as well as monitoring of Payroll costs. Secondly, a review on Staff Development would focus on induction, mandatory training, employee training/ development, and succession planning. This was important due to the recruitment challenges as previously discussed by the Board. It was confirmed that there was a budget for training of staff.

The Board **Approved** the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan.

**13. Scheme of Delegation
Sgeama Tiomnaidh**

There had been circulated Report No. VAL/15/25 by the Clerk which outlined proposed amendments to the Scheme of Delegation. These amendments reflected changes in post titles in The Highland Council's senior management structure.

In discussion, the Board were content with the proposed changes and that it be delegated to the Clerk to the Board to make any future changes in post titles. It was queried what would happen should the Clerk not be available to attend meetings. Members were advised that the Clerk to the Board was the Chief Officer Legal and Corporate Governance, The Highland Council and a member of the Democratic Services team of either The Highland Council or Comhairle nan Eilean Siar would always be available to provide clerking support at Board meetings.

The Board **Agreed**:-

- i the proposed changes to the Scheme of Delegation as detailed in the Appendix to the report; and
- ii that it be delegated to the Clerk to make future changes in post titles to the Scheme of Delegation.

**14. Corporate Governance – Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings
Riaghlachas Corporra – Gnàth-riaghailtean a' Buntainn ri Giùlan Choinneamhan**

There had been circulated Report No. VAL/16/25 by the Clerk which advised on proposed amendments to the Board's Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings.

Members reflected on the changes to Standing Orders. It had been queried why meetings had moved from Fridays to Tuesdays, and the Clerk advised that meetings were arranged on days to secure the best availability for all Members. Members also requested that paragraph 8 (Places of Meetings) should include Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Headquarters, as a meeting venue.

The Board **Agreed** the proposed changes to the Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings as tracked in Appendix 1 to the report, with the addition that paragraph 8 (Places of Meetings) should include Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Headquarters, as a meeting venue.

The meeting concluded at 1:10pm.



Highland
Community
Planning
Partnership

Com-pàirteachas
Dealbhadh
Coimhearsnachd
na Gàidhealtachd

Minutes of Meeting of the Community Planning Partnership Board held in Committee Rooms 1 and 2, Highland Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 6 June 2025 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

The Highland Council:

Councillor Hugh Morrison, Vice Chair of Communities and Place Committee (substitute) (remote)

Kate Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People (substitute)

Highlands and Islands Enterprise:

Eann Sinclair, Area Manager – Caithness and Sutherland (also representing Caithness Community Partnership) (remote)

NHS Highland:

Sarah Compton-Bishop, Chair, NHS Highland Board

Tim Allison, Director of Public Health

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service:

Paul Freeman, Station Commander (substitute) (remote)

Community Partnership representative:

Eann Sinclair, Chair of Caithness Community Partnership (also representing HIE) (remote)

High Life Highland:

Steve Walsh, Chief Executive

Highland Third Sector Interface:

Cath Wright, Chair of HTSI Board (remote)

Mhairi Wylie, Chief Officer (remote)

NatureScot:

Graham Neville, Head of Operations - North

Skills Development Scotland:

Roddy Bailey, Area Manager (remote)

University of the Highlands and Islands:

Chris O'Neil, Principal and Chief Executive, Inverness College UHI (remote)

In attendance:

Fiona Duncan, Chief Officer - Health and Social Care, The Highland Council (remote)

Fiona Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services, The Highland Council (remote)

Ian Kyle, Chair, Community Learning, Development and Engagement Strategic Group

James Maybee, Chair, Community Justice Partnership (remote)

Carron McDiarmid, Chair, Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (HADP) (remote)

Gail Prince, Partnership Development Manager

Melanie Murray, Principal Committee Officer, The Highland Council

Also in attendance:

Hayley Brown, Senior Manager Early Years, The Highland Council

Jaci Douglas, Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance

Liz Humphreys, Non-Executive Director, NHS Highland (remote)

Frances Matthewson, Research and Intelligence Specialist, Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (remote)

Ms Sarah Compton-Bishop in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair highlighted that Tim Allison, Director of Public Health, was retiring and today was his final meeting as a member of the CPP Board. Jennifer Davies would be his successor.

It was also highlighted that Michael Humphreys, former Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) had moved on to a new role within the SFRS. His successor was Lynne Gow.

Thanks were expressed to Tim and Michael for their contribution during their time on the Board.

In addition, the Chair welcomed Liz Humphreys, Non-Executive Director, Public Health Scotland and Scottish Ambulance Service, who was shadowing her as part of the Aspiring Chairs Programme, to the meeting.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillor Raymond Bremner, Councillor Graham MacKenzie, Derek Brown, Stuart Black, Fiona Davies, Ch Supt Rob Shepherd, Lynne Gow, and Vicki Nairn.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

For transparency, the Chair of the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership declared a connection to items 5, 11 and 13 as a Non-Executive Director of Public Health Scotland. However, there was no conflict of interest.

The Board **NOTED** the position.

3. Minutes of Meetings

The Board:

- i. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Community Planning Partnership Board – 21 February 2025;
- ii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Community Justice Partnership – 12 December 2024; and
- iii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Strategy Group – 11 February 2025.

4. Action Tracker

The Board was asked to review progress of its agreed actions as set out in the Action Tracker which had been circulated.

The Board **NOTED** the Action Tracker and **AGREED** that the remaining actions be closed.

5. Health Inequalities

The Chair of the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership declared a connection to this item as a Non-Executive Director of Public Health Scotland. However, there was no conflict of interest.

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/6/25 by the Director of Public Health, NHS Highland, who gave a presentation in amplification of the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- the useful and interesting report and the proposed indicators were welcomed;
- in relation to the indicator in respect of alcohol-related deaths or admissions, it was explained that the HADP had been tracking alcohol-specific rather than alcohol-related deaths. The Chair of the HADP undertook to look at including alcohol-related deaths. However, it was understood there was an issue around time lags in the data. The Director of Public Health suggested it was necessary to look at both alcohol-related and alcohol-specific deaths, explaining that alcohol-related deaths demonstrated the contribution of alcohol to a number of different diseases – for example, a proportion of strokes were as a result of alcohol;
- it was queried whether it might be helpful to include not only the gap in life expectancy but the gap in healthy life expectancy, which was also a good marker for inequality and gave a sense of the burden of disease and the type of care people might need. The Director of Public Health confirmed this could be looked at, explaining that the gap in healthy life expectancy was important but data in that regard could be harder to get, and it was necessary to balance the utility of the indicators with the ease of obtaining the data;
- with reference to the recommendation in the Director of Public Health's Annual Report that the CPP learn from models such as Collaboration for Health Equity in Scotland (CHES), it was explained that Public Health Scotland had developed CHES with partners and although there were pilot areas in Scotland (Aberdeen City, North Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire) there was scope to be part of the learning network. The Chair of the HADP undertook to provide a link to sign up to the learning network for distribution to partners;
- information was sought, and provided, as to why the percentage of exclusively breastfed babies in Caithness was less than half that in Wester Ross, and the Director of Public Health undertook to look further at the underlying reasons;
- it was suggested the proposed indicator in respect of the S4 tariff score should take account of all school leavers rather than focussing solely on S4. The Council's Assistant Chief Executive – People confirmed data was readily available for all school leavers;
- with reference to the indicator in respect of access to open space, it was suggested more could be done around access to nature, which linked to the work of the Green Health Partnership and the Natural Capital tool at item 7 on the agenda. There was inequality around access to high nature space rather than just open space, and engaging with nature led to positive mental and physical health outcomes;

- the impact sport, physical activity and culture could have in terms of addressing inequality was emphasised, and it was suggested it should be given greater prominence. There was a lot of data available on what High Life Highland was doing in partnership with **sportscotland** and the Council in terms of the Highland Investment Plan, which would see a significant amount of investment to address inequality across the region. It was added that the Scottish Human Rights Commission's report at item 9 on the agenda talked about some areas of Highland being a "cultural graveyard" and it was necessary to take that on board;
- UHI was in the process of developing a Drug and Alcohol Misuse Policy specifically for students and it would be helpful, at a later stage, to bring the draft policy to the Board for feedback. Drugs such as Ecstasy were available for as little as £1, and misuse of drugs and alcohol amongst the student body was linked to gender-based violence, safeguarding, health and safety, and negative impacts on mental health. There was work to be done, collectively, to ensure Highland did not become as impacted as other parts of Scotland. The Chair of the HADP confirmed she was happy to connect with the Principal and Chief Executive, Inverness College UHI, regarding support for students. It was added that the Council's Lifestyle Survey of school pupils included questions on alcohol and drugs, and might provide some useful data;
- in relation to the proposed indicator regarding active travel to school, it was suggested this would be extremely difficult to measure. Many learners got a bus or taxi to school due to the geography in Highland, and the ability to use active travel was also weather-dependent;
- given the indicators were still under development, and the points raised during discussion, the Chair suggested that partners take them away and review them in terms of how they aligned with work already taking place, and feed back to the Director of Public Health accordingly; and
- the Director of Public Health thanked Board Members and attendees for their constructive comments and welcomed further feedback in the future. It was added that health inequalities linked to many other items on the agenda, and the indicators would provide a way of sense-checking where the CPP was across a range of different areas.

The Board:

- NOTED** the Report of the Director of Public Health and its recommendations;
- NOTED** the work on health inequalities and **APPROVED** the indicators as a basis for future reporting to the Board, subject to the points raised during discussion; and
- AGREED** that partners review the indicators and feed back to the Director of Public Health in terms of how they aligned with work already taking place.

6. Childcare Innovations

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/7/25 by the Jaci Douglas, Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance; Hayley Brown, Senior Manager Early Years, The Highland Council; and Jacqueline McGuigan, Senior Development Manager, HIE.

The appendix to the report was **confidential** and had been circulated separately.

During discussion, the need for change was recognised, support was expressed for the proposals, and it was commented that Highland had a track record of being a testbed for innovative solutions. Whilst there were still legislative and regulatory barriers to be overcome, progress appeared to be being made and information was sought, and provided, on the discussions that had taken place in that regard, and the current position. The Ministers responsible for both adult care and childcare had indicated their support for the concept, as had CoHI (Convention of the Highlands and Islands). The Council's Assistant

Chief Executive – People explained that the Permanent Secretary, Joe Griffin, had also been receptive to the proposals at a recent meeting, and it was intended to share the Childcare Innovations report with him.

With reference to item 9 on the agenda, it was highlighted that the Scottish Government's response to the Scottish Human Rights Commission's (SHRC) report explicitly mentioned novel approaches to childcare, and it was suggested there was an opportunity for the CPP to respond to the SHRC's report in a similar way to the Scottish Government but expanding on what novel approaches potentially looked like and emphasising the third sector's contribution to the collaborative approach being taken.

It was also highlighted that the Just Transition Commission, which reported directly to the Scottish Government, had visited north Highland recently, and childcare innovations had formed part of the discussions. The Commission was scheduled to return with its final report in the next few weeks, which would be another opportunity to raise the matter.

The Board **AGREED** to:

- i. recognise and endorse the multi-agency cross sector place based and person centred innovative approach;
- ii. endorse the Single Care Model proposal and pilot;
- iii. help identify any funding streams that could support development on the ground; and
- iv. provide advice, guidance and support to the project.

7. Integrating NatureScot's Landscape-Scale Natural Capital Tool into the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/8/25 by Graham Neville, Head of Operations – North, NatureScot.

In response to questions regarding the proposed short-life working group, it was explained that partner representatives had yet to be identified, and that one of the tasks of the group would be to select pilot area(s) to test the Natural Capital Tool. It was suggested that core partners, as set out in the draft Terms of Reference, consider who would be best placed to sit on the group and notify the Head of Operations – North, NatureScot, accordingly by the end of July.

The Board:

- i. **NOTED** progress to establish the agreed Short-Life Working Group;
- ii. **NOTED** the draft Terms of Reference for the Short-Life Working Group which would be refined in the first group meeting; and
- iii. **AGREED** that core partners, as set out in the draft Terms of Reference, notify the Head of Operations – North, NatureScot, by 31 July 2025, of their nominated representatives to sit on the Short-Life Working Group.

8. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015: Update and Findings Report

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/9/25 by CPP Senior Officers and the Partnership Development Manager.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- there was an element of frustration amongst the third sector that the review of the Community Empowerment Act did not fully reflect the relatively consistent feelings, not only within Highland but across Scotland, regarding third sector participation. Feedback was it was felt there were still issues in terms of power imbalances and tokenism within community planning structures. In addition, the throughline from participation to design to delivery to impact was not necessarily visible to the third sector;
- a CPP Annual Report would provide an opportunity for the Board to reflect on what had been done and would help in terms of communication. It would also provide an opportunity for learning and continuous improvement. In that regard it was highlighted that, as indicated in the Partnership Development Team Quarterly Update at item 14 on the agenda, an Annual Report would be produced for submission to the September Board;
- the Partnership Development Manager spoke to her involvement in groups such as the Scottish Community Planning Network, which had given Highland a voice nationally. The Update and Findings Report had been discussed at a recent meeting, and she undertook to keep the Board updated on future developments;
- it was suggested there was an opportunity to do some more engagement work with the third sector, and that it would be advantageous for that to be carried out by the Partnership Development team rather than HTSI;
- it was necessary to compare the assessment of Community Planning in the Update and Findings Report with the CPP's own self-assessment work and the work that had been done with the Improvement Service; and
- reference was made to a previous workshop with third sector representatives, and it was suggested it would be helpful for the associated feedback report to be circulated to Board Members.

The Board:

- NOTED** the report and the Scottish Government commitments, with particular reference to the Assessment of Community Planning section on pages 24 through 31; and
- AGREED** that the third sector feedback report referred to by the Chief Officer, HTSI, during discussion be circulated to partners for information.

9. **Scottish Human Rights Commission: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Highlands and Islands**

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/10/25 by the Partnership Development Manager.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- it was helpful to look at the findings of the Scottish Human Rights Commission's (SHRC) report through the lens of the CPP, and thanks were expressed for the summary report;
- it would have been helpful for the Board to have the opportunity to analyse how individual partner organisations were responding to the SHRC's report;
- whilst the limitations of the SHRC's methodology were recognised, the report represented lived experience across the region and it was considered there would be value in providing a CPP response outlining the positive work currently taking place in relation to the issues identified. The Chair added that such a response would need to be informed by partners, and she suggested that a draft be prepared and circulated for input;
- with reference to the locations visited during the SHRC's research, Badenoch and Strathspey was represented by Skye and Lochaber, and it was suggested it be fed back

that a portion of the Highland demographic, with its own challenges and issues, had been missed out. In that regard, the cadence of the Commission's visits was queried, and it was suggested that enquiries be made as to the next steps;

- there had been no systematic engagement by the SHRC with service providers to understand broader context, opportunities and constraints in terms of service delivery, which was a missed opportunity; and
- the summary report was a start in terms of laying the SHRC's report over the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan and identifying where work was already taking place as well as where there might be gaps in CPP activity.

The Board:

- i. **NOTED** the summary report;
- ii. **NOTED** the Scottish Human Rights Commission's 2024 report on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Highlands and Islands found at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a CPP response to the Scottish Human Rights Commission's report be drafted, taking into account the points raised during discussion, and circulated to partners for input.

10. Integrated Children's Services Annual Report

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/11/25 by the Chair of the Integrated Children's Services Planning Board.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- Board Members commended the significant amount of work that had gone into the Annual Report, and the way it was presented;
- it was welcomed that Indicators 15 and 18, which related to alcohol and drug use, were moving in the right direction. It was added that the five secondary schools involved in the Planet Youth initiative would have more up-to-date and in-depth data in that regard. There were now eight secondary schools keen to be involved in Planet Youth, and the possibility of funding that through the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership would be investigated; and
- it was queried whether it would be worthwhile including questions regarding vaping use and exposure to gambling harms in the Lifestyle Survey. In relation to gambling in particular, concern was expressed regarding how companies were targeting young children, whether through gaming or advertising at sports events. The Chair of the Integrated Children's Services Planning Board explained that the importance of the Substance Awareness Toolkit, which had been enhanced to include vaping, had been discussed at a recent development day for the next Integrated Children's Services Plan, and the Toolkit would continue to be promoted throughout the life of the next Plan. The Partnership Development Manager referred to gambling awareness work being undertaken by Citizens Advice Bureaux, and undertook to forward information in that regard to the Chair of the Integrated Children's Services Planning Board.

The Board:

- i. **APPROVED** the Integrated Children's Services Planning Board Annual Report which shared the work undertaken by the children's services planning partnership 2024/25 in delivering the Highland Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023/2026; and
- ii. **NOTED** the work of the delivery groups.

11. Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (HADP) Annual Reporting Survey 2024/25

The Chair of the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership declared a connection to this item as a Non-Executive Director of Public Health Scotland. However, there was no conflict of interest.

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/12/25 by the HADP Coordinator.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- it having been queried how information on outcomes was reported to the Scottish Government, it was explained that most government scrutiny currently related to achievement of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards and the number of confirmed deaths from alcohol and drug use. However, there was a recognition that more needed to be done to achieve the national mission around those areas and, as a result, a National Delivery Support Group had been established. The Group's first engagement session with Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships was scheduled to take place the following week, and it was anticipated it would seek to have more outcome reporting put in place. The Chair added that it would be helpful for the Board to be kept informed as matters progressed;
- it was welcomed that the HADP had the opportunity to benchmark through national reporting;
- it was difficult to identify good measures for substance use, and an example was provided in that regard; and
- it was necessary to focus more on outcomes and to recognise the importance of the range of other activities which contributed to a reduction in harms from substance use. It was also important to understand service users' experience of the services they received.

The Board scrutinised and **AGREED** the HADP Annual Reporting Survey submission for 2024/25.

12. HOIP Core Priority Update: Community Wealth Building – Highland Social Value Charter

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/13/25 by Alan Webster, Economy and Regeneration Manager, The Highland Council.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- it having been queried what channels existed for the CPP or individual organisations to feed back to the Scottish Government regarding industry engagement with the Social Value Charter and the need for mandatory community benefit, it was suggested this could be done via the Scottish Government Place Director. It was added that there had been detailed engagement with the Scottish Government at both official and ministerial level but, to date, Ministers had not been minded to make community benefit mandatory;
- it was important not to disincentivise investment in the area if there were other benefits to be gained from that investment, and the fact that developers did not have to meet all nine points in the Charter to sign up was key. Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN), for example, would not be contributing to the strategic fund but would be investing significantly in housing. SSEN signing up to the Charter was a great endorsement and, it was hoped, would encourage smaller companies to do the same;
- it was emphasised that the strategic fund was in addition to local community benefit;

- it having been queried whether community benefit could potentially be made a material planning consideration, it was explained it was important there was absolute separation between the Social Value Charter and the planning process to prevent undue influence and ensure planning decisions were based on factors such as the development's impact on the local natural environment; and
- it was highlighted that representations regarding the Social Value Charter and community benefit had been made in the CPP's response to the consultation on Community Benefits from Net Zero Energy Developments and the Community Wealth Building Bill call for views.

The Board:

- NOTED** updates on progress against the Highland Social Value Charter;
- NOTED** the draft Partnership Agreement template detailed in Appendix 1 of the report which, once finalised, would be trialled over the next 6 months;
- NOTED** that the Council would continue making representations to both the Scottish and UK Governments on the need for mandatory community benefit;
- NOTED** that the Chair of the Highland Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee had written formally to Scottish Renewables seeking their immediate engagement with the Highland Social Value Charter; and
- AGREED** that the CPP's views in terms of engagement with the Social Value Charter and the need for mandatory community benefit be fed back to the Scottish Government by the Scottish Government Place Director.

13. Active Highland Strategy

The Chair of the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership declared a connection to this item as a Non-Executive Director of Public Health Scotland. However, there was no conflict of interest.

Following endorsement by the CPP Board, at its meeting on 4 December 2024, of the proposed set of priority actions to deliver on the agreed outcomes for the refreshed Active Highland Strategy, the final Strategy document and associated Action Plan had been circulated for information on behalf of the Active Highland Partnership Group (AHPG).

The Active Highland Partnership Group was now looking to develop awareness and support building work to strengthen the foundations for implementation. Discussions around that were in progress, including developing a programme of dissemination and calls to action across the region, supported by the Active Highland Partnership members and their teams.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- the Active Highland Partnership Group (the group) needed to deliberate on how partners were going to deliver against the Strategy, and ensure there was a plan in place that underpinned it. It was understood the group had struggled to bring in partners at the right level to support the Strategy, and it was suggested it would be helpful to review the Terms of Reference and bring a report to the next meeting of the Board with a view to reinvigorating the group. The Chief Executive, High Life Highland, undertook to liaise with the Head of Health Improvement, NHS Highland, in that regard;
- from a Council perspective, the Assistant Chief Executive – People gave a commitment to ensure the right people were involved in the group to make sure the Action Plan was deliverable and sufficiently ambitious. In particular, it was suggested more could be done, strategically, in terms of education; and

- the importance of play in terms of attainment and healthy outcomes for children was emphasised, and it was welcomed that play was threaded throughout the Strategy;

The Board:

- NOTED** the Active Highland Strategy 2025; and
- AGREED** that a report be brought to the next meeting of the Board, based on the points raised during discussion regarding the need for partner commitment to support the delivery of the Strategy, and a review of the Terms of Reference of the Active Highland Partnership Group.

14. Partnership Development Team Quarterly Update

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/14/25 by the Partnership Development Manager and CPP Senior Officers.

The Chair commended the Partnership Development Manager and her team for the significant amount of work taking place, as reflected in the report. Particular reference was made to the success of the recent Highland CPP Conference. In addition, it was helpful for the Board to see the next steps set out in the report.

The Board **NOTED**:

- the quarterly report; and
- the updated Year 2 Milestones at Appendix 1 of the report.

15. Strategic Risk Register Review

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/15/25 by CPP Senior Officers.

In response to a question, it was explained that local Community Partnerships did not currently have Risk Registers. However, it was intended that the new Strategic Risk Register could be a template that could be used at all levels of the CPP going forward.

In relation to the proposed Strategic Risk Register Sub-Group, it was suggested that CPP Senior Officers identify suitable partner representatives with experience of Risk Registers to sit on the group. Liz Humphreys, Non-Executive Director, NHS Highland, offered her assistance to the group, explaining that she had an interest in risk and chaired Public Health Scotland's Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

The Board:

- NOTED** progress on the Strategic Risk Register review;
- AGREED** to establish a Strategic Risk Register Sub-Group of the Board;
- AGREED** that CPP Senior Officers identify suitable partner representatives with experience of Risk Registers to sit on the Strategic Risk Register Sub-Group.

16. Highland Community Planning Partnership Terms of Reference Review

There had been circulated Report No CPPB/16/25 by CPP Senior Officers and the Partnership Development Manager.

The Chair highlighted that one of the changes in the revised Terms of Reference was the inclusion of the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) in the CPP Board

membership. In addition to the changes summarised in the report, she proposed that a Vice Chair of the CPP Board be appointed and that, to form a succession pipeline, it should be the succeeding Chair, currently Ch Supt Rob Shepherd, Police Scotland.

The Board **AGREED** the revised Highland Community Planning Partnership Terms of Reference as at April 2025, subject to an addition regarding the appointment of a Vice Chair of the Board, to be the succeeding Chair.

17. Date of Next Meeting

The Board **NOTED** that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Friday 19 September 2025 at 10.00 am.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting of the **Investment Sub Committee** held in Council
Headquarters, Inverness/Remotely on Friday, 26 September, 2025 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:

Mr R Gale (remote)
Mr R MacKintosh

Mr P Oldham
Mrs T Robertson

Non Members in attendance:-

Mr L Fraser
Mrs J Hendry (remote)
Mr S Kennedy, Pension Board Observer
(remote)

Officials in attendance:-

Mr B Porter, Chief Officer Corporate Finance
Ms C Stachan, Pensions Manager, Corporate
Ms L Harrison, Pensions Accountant, Corporate
Mr M Gamble, Payroll Officer (Pensions)
Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager, Communities and Place
(remote)
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate

Also in attendance :-

Mr K Ettles, AON, Investment Principal and Actuary (items 1 to 9b only)
Mr B Peterkin, Dodge & Cox (item 5 only) (remote)
Mr M Ivory, Mr P Bottomley, Adam & Company (item 7 only)

Mr P Oldham in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Lobban, Ms E Johnston and Mrs M Paterson.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated and **Noted** minutes of meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 7 May 2025, which were approved at the Highland Council meeting on 15 May 2025.

4. Exclusion of the Public

The Sub-Committee **Resolved** that, under section 50(A) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 6 of Part 1 of schedule 7A of the Act.

5. Presentation: Dodge & Cox

There was circulated to Members only Report No. INV/5/25 which provided Members with possible questions for the Manager and further information regarding the performance of the Manager.

The Fund's Investment Advisor gave a short introduction about Dodge & Cox who were a value equity manager who invested in companies that they viewed as being undervalued and typically invested in banking, insurance, utilities and engineering sectors. There were a long established value manager with an experienced team.

Thereafter, Bart Peterkin from Dodge & Cox was welcomed to the meeting and gave an overview of the key characteristics of the organisation, details of the investment team, the manager's equity investment philosophy and approach to investing in value stocks, how they built portfolios, current portfolio holdings and performance results.

During discussion clarification was sought and provided on several issues including how the managers investment philosophy had evolved over the years; what risks and opportunities might artificial intelligence create for the portfolio; the investment approach to investing in companies in Japan and China; the effect of US Government policies, such as tariffs on the investment portfolio and the net fund flows in and out of the investment strategy over the last 12-18 months.

Thereafter, the Sub-Committee thanked Mr Peterkin, Dodge & Cox for his attendance and **NOTED** the presentation and discussion.

6. Inverness Common Good and Associated Funds Investment Report

There was circulated to Members only Report No. INV/6/25 by the Investment Advisor, which set out Common Good and Associated Funds investment performance for the quarter ended 30 June 2025.

The Investment Advisor provided commentary on the report. In particular, there had been a strong recovery in equity markets over the quarter, Bond returns were strong and there was a continued recovery in UK Property. Over the quarter all funds had positive returns, with the overall asset value of funds increasing. However, longer term performance was significantly below benchmark.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the report.

7. Presentation: Adam & Company

There was circulated to Members only Report No. INV/7/25 which provided Members with possible questions for the Manager.

Mark Ivory and Peter Bottomley from Adam & Company were welcomed to the meeting and gave a presentation on the performance of the portfolio and how this compared with benchmarks and peer groups. Information was also provided on Adam & Company current views on the economic and market outlook.

During discussion clarification was sought and provided on the portfolio's underperformance against benchmark. It was acknowledged that the last 5 years had been a difficult period for the managers investment style. Their returns against benchmark had been affected by a concentration of high returns internationally in the technology sector, which the managers had less exposure too. The managers expected to see better returns going forward and they explained their approach to achieving this.

The Sub-Committee thanked the representatives from Adam & Company for their attendance and they left the meeting.

At this point, the meeting was adjourned for a comfort break and the meeting resumed at 12.10p.m.

Following the presentation from Adam & Co, the Sub Committee discussed the presentation further and **AGREED** that given performance, a formal market review of the managers portfolio be undertaken, with options for the portfolio being reported back to the Sub Committee for consideration.

With the consent of the meeting the following item was taken after item 6 on the agenda.

8. Equity Portfolio Review

There was circulated to Members only Report No. INV/8/25 by the Chief Officer, Corporate Finance which provided information on the equity portfolio review and recommendations on changes to the equity portfolio.

Commentary on the report was provided by the Pensions Manager and Investment Advisor. They highlighted the reasons for changes to the equity portfolio which were to manage risk and increase the diversification of manager and investment approach. Members were asked to consider the report and the professional advice from the Fund's Investment Advisor.

There was discussion on the reasons for the changes to the portfolio with the Investment Advisor providing further clarification on this and that the changes, if approved, would take place over a phased period of time which would require a further report to the Sub Committee on the implementation of the changes.

Thereafter, the Sub Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed changes to the Equity Portfolio as detailed in the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** that a report would be submitted to a future meeting on implementation of the Equity Portfolio changes.

9. Investment Activity Update and Performance Report

- (a) There was circulated to Members only Report No INV/9/25 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance. The report provided an update on pension fund investment matters for the quarter to 30 June 2025 and any significant events since that date.

The Pensions Manager provided commentary on the report and in particular referred to financial commitments to investments and money received back to the Fund from investments; training sessions for Members; an update on the investment strategy; investments in private equity; and a meeting with the Scottish Government's Investment Unit team who were collating data from Scottish Local Government Pension Scheme funds.

A point was raised that the Pensions Bill which currently only applied to England and Wales, might in future apply to Scotland, subject to agreement by Scottish Ministers. Members would be kept updated with any developments on this matter.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the report.

- (b) There was circulated to Members only Report No. INV/10/25 by the Fund's Investment Advisor setting out pension fund investment performance for the quarter ended 30 June 2025.

The Investment Advisor provided commentary on the report and in relation to a market summary for the quarter, this had been an eventful quarter, given US Government tariff changes. Markets fell during this time, but recovered strongly in June. This had been a positive quarter for the Fund, with a significant increase in value of investments from the previous quarter. Individual managers investment performances were also commented on.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the report.

At this point the Investment Advisor left the meeting.

- (c) Investment advisory and cost benchmarking services

There was circulated to Members only Report No. INV/11/25 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance. The report provided Members with information on the procurement of investment advisory and cost benchmarking services for Highland Pension Fund and invited the Sub Committee to approve the recommendations set out in section 2 of the report.

Following consideration, the Sub Committee **APPROVED** the recommendations in the report.

The meeting ended at 12.50p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Area Committees Review Working Group** held in the **Leader's Meeting Room, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness** on Wednesday 17 September 2025 at 11:30 am.

Present:-

Ms S Atkin	Mr B Lobban
Mr I Brown	Mr D MacDonald
Mr A Christie (Remote)	Mr P Oldham
Ms S Fanet (Remote)	Ms K Willis (Remote)
Mr R Gale	

In attendance:-

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Ms L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager

Business

1. Appointment of Chair

Having been duly nominated and seconded, Mr P Oldham was appointed Chair.

2. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Macpherson.

3. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

4. Remit of Working Group

The Working Group **NOTED** that the Council, at its meeting on 12 December 2024, had agreed the following Motion:-

“This Council acknowledges that Highland is geographically very large. It is important that Council recognises the importance of devolved governance to Area Committees in order to fully represent our diverse local communities and to deliver the support and services that people of the Highlands, quite rightly, demand. Therefore, this Council agrees to review the governance and funding arrangements of Area Committees so that they may better serve the needs of their local communities. The first step being to capture Member views in more detail with the establishment of a workshop and working group for the delivery of local democracy”.

5. Workshop Topics

Members in attendance were invited to give their views on the way ahead.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- a radical and meaningful approach was required to give Area Committees a purpose. It was acknowledged this would involve a review of the Scheme of Delegation. However, determining what powers Area Committees should have could not be made until their size and geography had been determined;
- there were benefits of the current arrangement but communities needed a change, and a flexible and adaptable approach was called for;
- a bigger geographical arrangement would give Areas a louder voice but also enabling Wards to do more at a local level. At present one Ward Area Committees were not working and were basically Ward Business Meetings. At a minimum an Area Committee should consist of two Wards. There were already examples where this worked well, Lochaber and Sutherland being cited as two examples;
- a Highland Council Audit report had highlighted the issue of single Ward Area Committee, an arrangement which was unique in Scotland. In such incidents, the Chair had the casting vote, meaning that their view was often dominant as a result of the small number of Members on the Committee;
- larger Area Committees could result in a fairer share of budget allocation and would be more strategic;
- at present there were 10 Area Committees and 21 Electoral Wards. There were considerable resources involved in serving the 10 Area Committees with many officers having to duplicate reports and presentations. The Council had a duty to ensure efficiency and value for money;
- the City of Inverness Area Committee should be redrawn so that the Committee represented solely the City boundary. However, in that context, consideration had to be given as to how the City would look like going forward;
- the City of Inverness Area Committee, given its size, had a louder voice than other Area Committees and there needed to be a more balanced approach;
- the current arrangements had been in place for some time and it was disappointing that the same remits were still there. A more innovative and strategic approach was required, with Ward Business Meetings then meeting the localism requirement;
- there were too many items on Area Committees for noting and there needed to be more requiring a decision;
- adequate funding for Area Committees was necessary. The City of Inverness Area Committee was in an enviable position in that it could use Common Good Fund monies but it was questioned if this was always appropriate;
- Community Councils and the public did not feel their voices were heard. It was important the work of the Area Committees was acknowledged in future;

- there were Elected Members and officers would had long term experience of the Area Committee system and it was suggested that their views be sought;
- it was important to consider how future arrangements aligned with operational and partnership working arrangements;
- one option would be for an Area Committee arrangement which did not necessarily align with Electoral Wards. However, this raised the question if, where a Ward was split, which Elected Members would sit on which Area Committee;
- another proposal would be, in addition to an Inverness City Committee, to have four larger Area Committees which, for example could meet twice per year with Sub Groups i.e. Electoral Wards;
- some communities had more affiliation than the Areas in which they were in – North Kessock having more in common with Inverness, similarly Tomatin and Badenoch and Strathspey. The public too had an emotional attachment to historic boundaries, Ross and Cromarty being one example. Whilst the perfect geographical set might be unachievable, a better arrangement than at present could be identified;
- there were also economic ties with certain areas. For example, many living in parts of East Sutherland worked at Nigg and, once the Green Freeport was up and running, with Invergordon. Consequently, a wider community approach was necessary to ensure a fairier degree of equity of opportunity;
- the amount of work ahead was acknowledged and it was unlikely any new arrangements would be put in place until after the next Council elections in 2027;
- careful consideration would be required as to how to structure the conversation with fellow Members. One approach would be to emphasise the purpose of Area Committees in terms of their Economic and Education remits; and
- it would be good to get a work programme in place and a set of dates for future meetings. Before any Member Workshop was arranged the Working Group would need to meet again.

Thereafter, the Working Group **AGREED:-**

- i. the Chief Officers of Legal and Corporate Governance and Housing and Committees prepare what 4 Area Committees, in addition to a City Committee, might look like;
- ii. the work done previously on the revision of Area Committees; and
- iii. a list of future meeting topics, based on discussion, be prepared.

The meeting ended at 12:25pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Area Committees Review Working Group** held in the **Leader's Meeting Room, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness** on Thursday 9 October 2025 at 3.00 pm.

Present:-

Mr I Brown	Mr B Lobban
Mr A Christie (Remote)	Mr P Oldham
Mr R Gale (Remote)	Ms K Willis (Remote)

In attendance:-

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Mr P Oldham in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms S Atkin, Ms S Fanet, Mr D Macpherson and Mr D McDonald.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

There had been circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Area Committee Review Working Group held on 17 September 2025.

4. Internal Audit Final Report – Review of Local Democracy

There had been circulated the Internal Audit Report concerning the review of Local Democracy, which had been considered by the then Audit and Scrutiny Committee of 28 September 2022. There had also been included, for information, an extract from the minute of that meeting.

Members felt that many of the points raised in the review continued to be relevant. Examples provided included the suggested success of larger committees over smaller committees, and conflicts of interest within smaller committees, however, views to the contrary were expected. There also continued to be growing costs in terms of the preparation of meetings.

It was not in the remit of Internal Audit to suggest actions to be taken in relation to the structure of Area Committees and actions were restricted to operational matters. Members were asked to reflect on the powers available to Area Committees, as well as their size and the areas covered.

Following discussion at the previous Working Group, Members were introduced to two initial options for reconfiguring Area Committees. These were based on the principles of: 1. Creating four or five larger Area Committees and 2. selected using geographical Wards. Example maps were presented.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- there were differing opinions in terms of what constituted Inverness City, and it was suggested that a different approach was needed for Wards such as Culloden and Ardersier, Inverness South, and Aird and Loch Ness.
- It was highlighted that Polling Districts identified communities, therefore it might be helpful to use these to determine the Area Committee boundary for Inverness City with the remaining Area Committees being determined by Wards. It was proposed that further work be undertaken in this regard to explore potential options. A list of Polling Districts would be shared with Members outside of the meeting;
- while some felt that keeping geographical Wards together was helpful and that rural Wards needed to stick together, others felt the change should be more radical. However, if Wards were split, it would have to be decided where Members aligned. The Geographic Information System (GIS) Team could be utilised to help with providing a range of different boundaries including a provision based on population;
- it was suggested that local considerations were important and should be part of any review. Families that lived in Fort Augustus, Beauly and North Kessock attended schools in Inverness;
- a new Area Committee structure would not be implemented until 2027;
- concerns were expressed regarding the large geographical areas in the options presented. However, reference was made to the success of previous committees with large areas, such as Caithness and Sutherland, and it was also suggested that it could be beneficial to expand this area further; and
- the task of the Working Group was to produce scenarios and it was felt that further different options needed to be explored. On that basis it was requested that a range of options along with maps be developed and submitted to the next meeting for review.

The Working Group:

- i. **NOTED** the findings on the audit; and
- ii. **AGREED** that further options be explored and presented to the next meeting in map format based on ward boundaries except for the Inverness area which would be based on polling districts.

5. Workshop Topics

These would be discussed further before introducing to Members.

6. Date of Next Meeting

Details of the next meeting would be circulated to Members as soon as possible once arranged.

The meeting ended at 3.35pm.