

## The Highland Council No. 8 2025/26

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 18 September 2025 at 9.30 am.

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

#### **Present:**

Ms S Atkin	Mr R Gunn
Mr M Baird	Mrs J Hendry
Mr C Ballance	Ms M Hutchison
Mr A Baxter	Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)
Dr C Birt	Ms L Johnston
Mr B Boyd	Mr S Kennedy
Mr R Bremner	Ms E Knox
Mr I Brown	Ms L Kraft
Mr J Bruce	Mr B Lobban
Mr M Cameron	Mr P Logue (Remote)
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr A Christie	Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs M Cockburn	Mrs A MacLean
Mr S Coghill	Ms K MacLean
Ms T Collier	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Ms H Crawford	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R Cross	Mr D McDonald
Ms L Dundas	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Mr J Edmondson	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Ms S Fanet	Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson	Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mr D Fraser	Mr P Oldham
Mr L Fraser	Mrs M Reid (Remote)
Mr R Gale	Mr M Reiss
Ms C Gillies	Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Gowans	Mr K Rosie (Remote)
Mr A Graham	Ms M Ross
Mr M Green	Mrs L Saggars
Mr D Gregg	Mr R Stewart
Dr M Gregson	Ms K Willis

#### **In Attendance:**

Chief Executive  
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate  
Assistant Chief Executive - People  
Assistant Chief Executive – Place  
Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance  
Chief Officer – Housing and Communities  
Joint Democratic Services Manager

**Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Grafton, Mr A Jarvie, Mr R Jones, Ms M MacCallum, Mr W Mackay, Mr G MacKenize, Mr S Mackie, Mrs J McEwan, Mrs M Paterson and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Council **NOTED** that there were no declarations of interest.

## **3. Review of the Highland Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils 2024/25**

### **Ath-sgrùdadh de Sgeama Stèidheachaidh na Gàidhealtachd airson Chomhairlean Coimhearsnachd 2024/25**

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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- after a previous motion at Council, Members had been made aware of several instances of Community Councils having difficulties surrounding the Code of Conduct;
- disappointment was expressed that only 10 comments had been received during consultation, and it was queried why 8 out of 10 comments were not within the legislative framework. It was clarified that there had been greater engagement during the first phase of consultation and that those comments that were not within the legislative framework concerned sanctions;
- information was sought, and provided, on the legal difficulties regarding sanctions;
- the plans for training for Community Councils were welcomed and it was queried whether Community Council Members could sign up to a Code of Conduct as their role was very important currently, especially in respect of Planning;
- the plan to write to the Scottish Government concerning sanctions was welcomed;
- there appeared to be some inequity as Community Councils had their constitutions chosen for them, but they did not get support from the Council when needed;
- it was important for the Council to communicate well with Community Councils and to look at the financing of Community Councils as they often felt that they were being asked to do more with less;
- it was highlighted that there had been problems with Thurso Community Council which had fallen into abeyance twice due to unresolved Code of Conduct issues. Guidance was needed on the Code of Conduct and what to do when a Community Council fell into abeyance;
- the work done by Community Councillors was commended; and
- in response to a question, it was clarified that although the Council had, in the past, organised public liability insurance for Community Councils, a change in legislation made them unable to continue to do so and the grant received by Community Councils had been increased to reflect this.

**Decision**

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the feedback received during the phase 2 consultation as part of the review of the Community Council Scheme; and
- ii. unanimously **AGREED** a new Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils in Highland which was set out at appendix 2 of the report.

The meeting ended at 9.50 am.

**The Highland Council  
No. 9 2025/2026**

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 18 September 2025 at 10:00am.

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

**Present:**

Ms S Atkin	Mrs J Hendry
Mr M Baird	Ms M Hutchison
Mr C Ballance	Mr A Jarvie (Remote)
Mr A Baxter	Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)
Dr C Birt	Ms L Johnston
Mr B Boyd	Mr R Jones
Mr R Bremner	Mr S Kennedy
Mr I Brown	Ms E Knox
Mr J Bruce	Ms L Kraft
Mr M Cameron	Mr B Lobban
Mrs I Campbell	Mr P Logue (Remote am)
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr A Christie	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr S Coghill	Mrs A MacLean
Ms T Collier	Ms K MacLean
Ms H Crawford	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr R Cross	Mr D Macpherson
Ms L Dundas	Mr D McDonald
Mr J Edmondson	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Ms S Fanet	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson	Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Mr D Fraser	Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mr L Fraser	Mr P Oldham
Mr R Gale	Mrs M Reid (Remote)
Ms C Gillies	Mr M Reiss
Mr K Gowans	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Graham	Mr K Rosie (Remote)
Mr M Green	Ms M Ross
Mr D Gregg	Mrs L Saggars
Mr M Gregson	Mr R Stewart
Mr R Gunn	Ms K Willis

**In Attendance:**

Chief Executive  
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate  
Assistant Chief Executive - People  
Assistant Chief Executive – Place  
Chief Social Work Officer  
Chief Officer – Corporate Finance  
Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance  
Joint Democratic Services Manager

### Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Grafton, Ms M MacCallum, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mrs E McEwan, Mrs M Paterson and Mr A Sinclair.

#### Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Convener encouraged Members to submit a response to the Member Survey. In addition, the Convener and Members of the Council paid warm tribute to the late Councillor Gregor Rimell who had been extremely hard working and recognition was given to his valued service and the positive contributions he had made in his community. In this regard, the condolences of the Council were conveyed to his family and friends.

#### 2. **Declarations of Interest / Transparency Statements** **Foilseachaidhean Com-pàirt / Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

The Council **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

- Item 5 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
- Item 6 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
- Item 7 – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg and Mrs J Hendry
- Item 8 – Mr M Green
- Item 10 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
- Item 18 – Mr A Baxter (Question 12)
- Item 19 (Motion 1) – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg
- Item 19 (Motion 3) – Mr K Gowans and Mrs I Campbell

#### 3. **Recess Powers** **Cumhachdan Fosaìdh**

The Council **NOTED** that the recess powers granted at the meeting on 26 June 2025 did not require to be used in relation to the full Council.

#### 4. **Presentation - Poverty and Equality Commission** **Taisbeanadh - A' Stèidheachadh Coimisean Bochdainn is Co-ionannachd**

An update was provided by the Joint Chairs of the Poverty and Equality Commission, Ms Cunningham and Dr McCormick.

Dr McCormick advised that the Commission had commenced its work following an initial planning session in Balintore and outlined its remit to identify effective responses to poverty and inequality in Highland. He explained that the Commission comprised Elected Members and external experts, all acting independently and collectively. Its work would focus on six thematic areas: Access, Housing, Public Service Culture, Fair Work, Early Years and Education, and Financial Security, with cross cutting themes including Climate, Equality and Diversity.

Monthly evidence sessions were scheduled to take place across Highland, beginning in Fort William on 10 October 2025. A final report, containing calls for action and transformation, would be submitted to the Council in June 2026, with interim updates provided to the Community Planning Partnership Board.

Ms Cunningham highlighted the challenges of rural poverty and expressed her commitment to the Commission's work. Members welcomed the update and supported the proposal for a face-to-face meeting with the Joint Chairs.

The Council **NOTED** the presentation.

**5. Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2024/25  
Aithisg Àrd-Oifigear Obrach Sòisealta 2024/25**

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-**

**Mr A Christie – in his capacity as a Non-executive Director of NHS Highland  
Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/24/25 by the Chief Social Work Officer.

The Chief Social Work Officer gave a presentation on the annual report for 2024-25, which covered the following areas: Children and Families, Justice, Adults, Mental Health Services, and the Emergency Social Work Service. Attention was drawn to the care home and care at home inspections that had taken place, as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report, and to the ongoing workforce challenges.

The Chair of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing (HSCW) Committee corrected information on the hourly cost of care at home provision which had been in the media in the previous week. The rate of £2,400 per hour had been quoted, when the correct figure was around £50 per hour. He thanked staff for their dedication, commitment and achievements, and sought the Council's support for strategic actions to deliver meaningful outcomes for communities. He drew attention to areas of increasing demand, the need to provide sustainable services, to invest in staff wellbeing, and to the excellent work by the initiative Bairns' Hoose and the development of respite services. Reference was made to ongoing work by the Council, NHS Highland and the third sector, through the Joint Monitoring Committee, to enforce strategies and move to a more sustainable model of care delivery. Vacancy levels, which although still challenging, had reduced, and an update on Castlehill Care Home was sought and provided.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to the £50 cost of Adult Social Care (ASC) and suggested that some of this could be better used to increase the rate of pay of the frontline staff. Given the significant challenges faced, he indicated his intention to move an amendment calling for a special meeting of the HSCW Committee, and he queried the adherence to the Strategic Plan, given the misalignment with the strategic vision, as referred to in the report. He called for the Council's Administration to lobby the government regarding the national care home funding model, pointing out that the remote and rural nature of the Highlands should be properly accounted for, and that 50-bed care homes were often not achievable for rural areas. Concern was expressed at the four large scale investigations that were detailed in the report, the challenges around safe and sustainable staffing levels, and the high levels of unmet need.

During discussion, further issues were raised as follows:

- given the scale of the challenges, communities deserved assurance that action was being taken, and the Council was urged to set out concrete plans and timetables. It was queried what was being done to ensure care home viability and to tackle delayed discharges to reduce the level of unmet need, especially in remote and rural areas. Information was sought on whether a care home strategy and commissioning plan would be developed, and assurance was provided that this would be reported on in future;
- the need for public, staff and Member engagement on the move to a new model of integration with NHS Highland was emphasised, and the establishment of a Council and NHS Highland Steering Group to progress this work was summarised;
- attention was drawn to the Highland Inclusive Living Group, a new lived-experience forum to put the voices of older and disabled people at the centre of shaping inclusive communities across the Highlands, and it was hoped this forum would be considered by the Council in future;
- it was suggested that the level of Delayed Discharge at Raigmore, while still high, had reduced;
- the need to be proactive, rather than reactive, with regard to ASC was highlighted, as was the need to reduce reliance on costly agency staff, and to invest in frontline care. Doubts were expressed in relation to the effectiveness of the national care plan, particularly to meet remote and rural needs;
- information was sought and provided on the Self-Directed Support payment and administration system;
- it was queried how transformational change would be delivered with regard to locality and community ownership, and attention was drawn to the hub system that was being implemented to assist with this;
- while the increasingly long life-expectancy was to be celebrated, reference was made to the need to prioritise pensioners over prisoners, noting the cost of the new prison in Inverness, while other Members pointed out the importance of providing a care-based prison system. Attention was drawn to the high cost of a patient being delayed in an acute hospital bed, compared to the much lower cost of providing a care home bed or care at home service. Investment in care homes and sheltered housing was called for, and work to progress this was summarised;
- the importance of enabling older people to live their best lives and to remain in their own homes for as long as possible was emphasised;
- the emergency teams deployed to Castlehill Care Home were praised;
- attention was drawn to some examples of successful smaller care homes in remote and rural Highland locations, and to the useful work being undertaken in the area of technology enabled homes;
- it was queried whether the provision of traditional care related services, rather than Self Directed Support, was more beneficial to the providers in terms of remuneration and rates of pay;
- work to improve respite facilities was welcomed, and it was queried how many of current care facilities were able to provide respite beds;
- it was important to distinguish between paid and unpaid carers;
- information was sought, and provided, on the required notice period for care homes to cease service provision, which was a minimum of 13 weeks;
- work being done to support asylum seekers was welcomed, and the emergency social work team were thanked;
- Members were urged to do all they could to influence changes to the national care contract, noting the vast differences between care provision in the Central Belt, versus in remote and rural Highland settlements;

- concern was expressed at the high number of hours of unmet care need and the stress this caused to families. Early intervention and support for unpaid carers was vital;
- it was clarified that not all delayed discharges were awaiting care packages, and a breakdown of waiting times by area was suggested for a future report;
- the detail in the report on the Adults with Incapacity (AWIs) and guardianship orders was welcomed. More detail on the increased need for safeguarders in relation to AWIs was sought, and provided, as was clarity on some of the abbreviations used in the report. The Chief Social Work Officer could speak to Dr Gregg outwith the meeting about some of the issues raised. The AWI audit results could be provided once they were available;
- it was suggested that the issue of downsizing was being regularly considered by the Housing service and, while this was welcomed, it was suggested that one-bedroomed homes could be isolating;
- attention was drawn to the importance of place-based planning and the need to provide support to families during periods of crisis in relation to care provision, including both elderly people and younger adults with disabilities;
- further information on the role of the social worker assistant and possible career paths was sought and provided;
- the increased uptake of Self Directed Support was queried and explained, with particular reference to the challenges in remote and rural areas;
- it was disappointing that private care homes were not able to offer higher salaries, and other challenges to recruitment, such as housing provision, were highlighted;
- information was sought, and provided, for the provision of social work services in the new Inverness prison;
- the positioning of the report early on the agenda was welcomed, given the importance of the issues contained in it;
- many of the challenges being faced were the consequence of lack of investment 20-30 years earlier;
- the high cost of and importance of tackling delayed discharges were emphasised;
- the Council's commitment to the provision of care homes, not only care at home, was urged;
- the need for joined up working within the care system was emphasised;
- the Council Leader summarised the various arenas where he and / or the Council's Convener had raised the Council's national care contract concerns in relation to the specific needs of the Highlands, such as longer travel times, recruitment challenges and economies of scale being harder to achieve;
- the continued success of the 'Grow your own' Social Worker trainee programme across Highland was welcomed; and
- tie in with depopulation initiatives was key.

Following a summary of key points by Mr D Fraser and Mr A Christie, Mr D Fraser, seconded by Mrs M Cockburn, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A Baxter, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, that the following recommendation be added to those detailed in the report:

- (ii) That a special meeting of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee be held by 30 November 2025 to discuss the report and to make any necessary recommendations.



On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 34 votes, and the **AMENDMENT** received 29 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore carried, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the motion:**

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross.

**For the amendment:**

Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

**Decision**

The Council **NOTED** the issues raised in the annual report and the implications for Social Work and Social Care services within Highland Council and NHS Highland.

**6. Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 – 2028/29  
Plana Ionmhasail Meadhan-Ùine 2026/27 – 2028/29**

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-**

**Mr A Christie – in his capacity as a Non-executive Director of NHS Highland  
Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/25/25 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the policy of adopting a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) made the Council more aware of and better able to respond to future changes and risks and the Plan would continue to be monitored by the Council and Corporate Resources Committee going forward;
- the proposal at recommendation iv. of the report made good sense given the opportunities and challenges that existed in the Highlands such as the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and Highland Housing Challenge;
- whether the timing of the UK Government's budget setting and impact on the Scottish Government's budget carried risks for the Council in terms of setting its budget in March 2026. An assurance was provided that the Scottish Government would be well sighted on the budget timescale for local authorities and sufficient precedent existed from the past on dealing with late confirmation of the grant settlement without the need for a contingency plan;

- there were concerns in relation to the overspend on the Corporate Revenue and specific Service budgets at this stage of the financial year, the forecasted future budget gap of £13m, that reserves might need to be used to balance the budget at the end of the financial year and at the quality of some of the public services the Administration was presiding over;
- it was therefore proposed that a report on the MTFP be considered by the Council in October 2025 and every Council thereafter, including a refreshed financial gap forecast so Members could closely monitor and scrutinise the financial position and positively engage in addressing the budget challenges;
- areas of concern going forward included the level of savings that had to be delivered, the items highlighted at section 6.3 of the report and the uncertainty around the future funding and flexibilities; it was suggested there might be a significantly higher future budget gap of potentially £66m;
- the MTFP should therefore be presented to the Corporate Resources Committee going forward with more external speakers being invited to attend. This would facilitate more robust scrutiny and a more constructive and inclusive way forward in dealing with the budget and budget gap;
- in response to a query, clarification was provided on the core loan charges detailed in the report and that consideration would be given to more context being provided in future reports;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, on the general power of competence available to local authorities in the UK, except in Scotland. The Council had responded to a Scottish Government consultation to encourage legislation to be brought forward so that Scottish local authorities had equivalent powers;
- whilst a general power of competence would bring opportunities, a cautious approach was required given the financial difficulties of some English local authorities undertaking commercial activities;
- it was highlighted that focused action was being taken to address the forecasted overspend and budget recovery actions being put in place;
- it was clear from the report that updates on the MTFP would be brought to the forward meetings of the Council and that information on the budget gap would be articulated further at the Council meeting in October 2025;
- it should be noted the Council was balancing its budget, receiving good reports from Audit Scotland, had set a lower Council tax than in many other parts of Scotland while still providing good services to the public; and
- under the Scheme of Delegation, the Corporate Resources Committee had responsibility for all financial affairs of the Council including corporate monitoring of the revenue and capital budgets and an assurance this would be done at its meetings.

Mr P Oldham, seconded by Mr S Kennedy, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

As a **FIRST AMENDMENT**, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mr J Bruce, moved that an updated Medium Term Financial Plan report was considered by the October Council and every Council thereafter, including a refreshed financial gap forecast.

As a **SECOND AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A Baxter, moved that at the meeting of the Corporate Resources Committee to be held on 20 November 2025 an updated report be presented on the position regarding section 6.3 and any other relevant matters and that the relevant staff were available to attend.

On a vote being taken, the **FIRST AMENDMENT** received 6 votes, the **SECOND AMENDMENT** received 26 votes, and there were 31 abstentions. The **SECOND AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the First Amendment:**

Mr J Bruce, Mrs H Crawford, Mrs B Jarvie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs L Saggors, Mr R Stewart.

**For the Second Amendment:**

Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr A Baxter, Mrs B Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Ms C Gillies, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr P Logue, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr J McGillivray, Mr H Morrison, Mrs T Robertson, Ms M Ross.

**Abstentions:**

Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr M Reiss, Mr K Rosie, Ms K Willis.

Thereafter, and on a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 38 votes and the **SECOND AMENDMENT** received 24 votes, and there was 1 abstention. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the motion:**

Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Ms M Ross, Ms K Willis.

**For the Second Amendment:**

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr J McGillivray, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggors, Mr R Stewart.

**Abstention:-**

Mr M Reiss.

**Decision**

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the assumptions and forecasts within the existing March Medium-Term Financial Plan as at March 2025;

- ii. **AGREED** to commence the refresh and update of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan to cover the new rolling three-year period 2026/27 to 2028/29;
- iii. **NOTED** the key risks, assumptions and forecasts that might have implications for, and need incorporated within, the refreshed Medium Term Financial Plan;
- iv. **AGREED** to the development, in parallel with the Medium-Term Financial Plan, of supplementary financial and other data to support a longer-term consideration of the Council's financial position and to capture some of the longer-term economic changes and opportunities taking place in the Highlands; and
- v. **AGREED** that an updated Medium Term Financial Plan report be considered by the October Council, including a refreshed financial gap forecast.

**7. Annual Corporate Performance Report 2024/25  
Aithisg Choileanaidh Chorporra Bhliadhnail 2024/25**

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-**

**Mr A Christie – in his capacity as a Non-executive Director of NHS Highland  
Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland  
Mrs J Hendry – on the basis of her expertise in digital marketing, as set out in the Register of Interests**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/26/25 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the report demonstrated the good progress that had been made by teams across the Council in delivering the Council Programme. There was much to be proud of, with 22% of Performance Indicators (PIs) or actions having been completed over the year, 44% on target and 29% ragged as Amber. There were obvious improvements, with only five PIs ragged as Red in 2024/25 compared with nine in 2023/24. Targets were being exceeded in key areas such as building new homes, supporting people into work and improving transport. However, it was recognised there was room for improvement in some areas, and efforts continued to be made to meet challenging targets;
- reports from Audit Scotland had presented a positive picture in terms of how the Council's finances were being managed, its leadership and the approach being taken to transformation;
- recruitment of foster carers had been challenging, even after a national campaign, and the PI in respect of the number of foster carer approvals was currently ragged Red. The Council was currently listed fourth on the Google search for foster care in Highland, and it was welcomed that consideration was being given to a digital approach to move the Council higher in the rankings. It was urged that consideration be given to additional marketing online if costs allowed. Reference was also made to a new strategy whereby existing foster carers would be asked if they would take part in events in their localities to share their experiences. Confidence was expressed that these new approaches, as well as the work underway to speed up the assessment process, would lead to improvements over the next year. The Chair of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee added that word of mouth made a huge difference and he encouraged Members to do anything they could to support the recruitment of foster carers in their local areas;

- it was welcomed that the PI in respect of the number of new Modern Apprenticeships/Paid Placements and Youth Traineeships was ragged Green. In contrast, the percentage of unemployed people assisted into work was ragged Red. However, it was suggested there were mitigating circumstances as the target was the Scottish average which did not take into account rurality and the lack of businesses that would assist young people into work;
- with reference to the action to ensure a percentage of wind production remained within the region as a local investment, whilst the Social Values Charter for Renewables Investment was welcomed, passing the Charter had not ensured the action was carried out as it was dependent on the relationship between the Council and the developers, and it would be interesting to see the results of the Charter in terms of delivery. The Chief Executive confirmed that an update report on the Social Values Charter had been presented to a recent meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, and a copy would be provided to Mr C Ballance. Other Members added that the Social Values Charter was quite modest, and attention was drawn to independent research by Equitable Energy which indicated that community-owned Ben Aketil Wind Farm on Skye paid community benefit of £275k per MW, 55 times as much as a typical commercial wind farm in Highland. If that level of community benefit was received in Caithness, for example, it would pay for a new secondary school within one to two years;
- whilst the action to develop a strategy to map funding opportunities aimed at community energy projects had been completed, the number of community projects which had found funding appeared to have decreased from 19 to 6;
- the action to increase areas identified for food growing and ecological benefit had been marked as completed, but it was questioned whether this had resulted in any additional areas being put aside for food growing. Information was also requested on the next steps, as this action would be important going forward as Highland developed its Good Food Nation Plan;
- it was queried what the action to deliver Inverness Active Travel Network schemes, which had been marked as completed, referred to, as the Beauly to Inverness Active Travel Project, which had been planned for many years, had stalled;
- lack of affordable accommodation had been identified as one of the issues contributing to the difficulties in recruiting care at home workers, and it was queried what was being done to try and address the lack of affordable housing;
- in response to a question regarding Solar PV, it was confirmed that funding was in place to enable the Council to meet its one-megawatt (MW) target in the current financial year;
- working with Highland People's Power would help to achieve the objectives in terms of a percentage of wind production remaining in the region, and supporting community energy projects;
- in relation to achieving the Council's Net Zero targets, the report stated that the annual reduction target was 7.5%. However, the Chair of the Climate Change Committee highlighted that, due to slippage in previous years, the annual reduction target was now 10.9%, as reported to the Climate Change Committee in November 2024, and it was hoped this could be corrected. The Chief Officer – Business Solutions undertook to check the current position;
- attention was drawn to the assessment of school heating systems undertaken by the Climate Change and Energy Team which had found that a number of heating systems had remained on over the school holidays. It had been calculated that switching them off would achieve an annual saving of approximately £48k, which was just the start of helping the Council establish energy savings, interventions and consumption reduction;

- concern having been expressed that the Inverness Railway Station project was in slippage, it was confirmed that a draft Masterplan report was currently being reviewed and would be brought to the City of Inverness Area Committee in the near future. Other Members added that an update had been provided at a recent HITRANS briefing, and both Transport Scotland and Network Rail were fully on board and putting resources behind the project;
- Members praised the work of the Roads team in light of a substantial repairs backlog. Particular reference was made to the re-surfacing works that had been carried out on the U1207 from Loch Garry to Loch Quoich. However, concern was expressed regarding the number of potholes in Inverness city centre;
- Órla Ní Eadhra, who had attended Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in Inverness, was commended for her performance in the Great British Sewing Bee, and thanks were expressed to the GME service;
- thanks were expressed to all officers involved in the production of the report, and it was suggested it would have been helpful for the Assistant Chief Executives and Chief Officers to answer Members' questions so there was direct input from those managing the services. In that regard, it was confirmed that Members could call on senior officers at any time, and that performance reports covering relevant PIs and actions were presented to Strategic Committees for scrutiny. All Members' questions would be noted and, if it was not possible to answer them during the meeting, responses would be provided as soon as possible thereafter;
- with reference to the PI in respect of household waste recycled, it was disappointing that the target figure was not yet available and that the 2024/25 figure was yet to be verified. It was hoped that, when the figures were available, they would be reported to the Communities and Place Committee;
- in relation to school attendance rates, concern was expressed that approximately 10% of pupils in Highland were absent on any given day, twice the historic average. Whilst it was recognised that the issue was not confined to Highland it was requested that concrete measures be brought forward to tackle it. The Chair of the Education Committee assured Members there was a focus on attendance and it formed part of the Raising Attainment Strategy which had been discussed at the recent meeting of the Education Committee. In response to a question, it was confirmed that teachers had a legal duty to take class registers;
- concern was expressed that the pace of progress was not keeping up with the pace of decline. Road maintenance was cited as an example, Highland consistently being in the bottom five performing local authorities in Scotland. Approximately £233m was required to address the backlog, but that money was not making its way into the system. Other Members added that, whilst the Council had committed to spending £60m on roads over the next three years, over £90m was required to maintain a steady state, and it could be argued the budget gap was increasing by £1m per month because the roads were deteriorating at that rate;
- Highland residents were concerned with issues such as education, roads, and waste collections, and unwanted renewable energy developments were causing anxiety and resentment;
- the Council was stretched too thin, and it was suggested it was necessary to do less, but do less better;
- only 5.2% of unemployed people had been helped into work, a decrease of approximately 40% compared to the previous year and far below the Scottish average of 12.1%, and it was questionable whether the significant amount of funding allocated to employability had been well spent. Other Members queried what was being done to improve performance and encourage more unemployed people to engage with the employability service, and whether it was necessary to upscale the service. It having been commented that it was not known how long those assisted stayed in

employment, it was confirmed that Skills Development Scotland collected data on sustained positive destinations;

- with regard to care at home, 9.1% of adults were in receipt of Self-Directed Support (SDS), which appeared to be positive. However, this was primarily due to the absence of other delivery models and, whilst SDS could be an empowering way to help people live longer in their own communities, it was essential to provide other options;
- the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey only looked at 10% of minor roads, and it would be helpful to understand the mechanisms in place locally to assess whether the investment being made was actually improving the condition of the roads in Highland;
- Lochaber Committee Members had been informed of the capital funding available for roads, the repairs that could be carried out and what remained unfunded, and over £6m of road repairs remained unfunded in Lochaber in the current financial year. Reference was made to a previous decision suggesting that such information be provided to every Area Committee, and Members looked forward to that being actioned;
- when Argyll and Bute Council had significantly increased expenditure on road repairs, it had moved from 28<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> in the local authority rankings within two or three years, and it was questioned why Highland was not seeing such marked improvements despite additional investment;
- it was welcomed that the PI in respect of P1/4/7 pupils achieving in literacy was ragged Green. The remaining Education PIs were ragged Amber and, on scrutinising the figures, showed that the decline in standards had been stopped. Members looked forward to seeing further improvements in next year's report. In response, the Chair of the Education informed Members that more up-to-date information had been reported to the recent meeting of the Education Committee. Some of the headlines were that pass rates had risen at both National 5 and Higher level; positive progress had been made in terms of closing the attainment gap; and for learners from the most deprived areas, attainment had improved at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher level, and the percentage of pupils gaining three awards at Higher level had increased by 5.8%. In terms of Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence data, improvements in both literacy and numeracy were anticipated. The Education Improvement Plan would be presented to the November meeting of the Education Committee for approval and would set out ambitions to continue to improve attainment and achievement across all schools in Highland. It would also include refreshed indicators and targets to ensure progress could be scrutinised. There would be an opportunity to feed into the Plan at the Members' Seminar scheduled to take place in November 2025, and it was hoped that next year's Corporate Performance Report would show an improved position;
- with reference to the PI in respect of the number of Council and public Electric Vehicle chargers, which was ragged Red, it was queried whether improvements were anticipated as a result of the decision to work in partnership with neighbouring local authorities, and how secure the funding and delivery of the additional 150 sites referred to in the commentary was;
- in relation to the average number of days to process new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax, a target had been set which the Council had failed to meet, and the accompanying commentary was questioned. However, other Members commented that the target had been missed by 0.6 days, and suggested the rag rating should be Amber rather than Red. Additionally, the Council was joint first in Scotland for administering changes in circumstances which, given the geographical spread of communities in Highland, was commendable;

- with reference to the PI in respect of people aged 65+ with long-term care needs receiving personal care at home, a decline of almost 10% was significant, and it was queried what was being done to address it;
- given the circumstances set out in the comments, it was questioned whether the actions to establish a pilot project regarding non-fatal overdoses in Inverness and deliver an active travel infrastructure project on Academy Street, Inverness, should have been marked as completed;
- with reference to section 3.5 of the report relating to Risk, it was commented that some initiatives worked and others failed, and support was expressed for a sensible level of risk. The Strategic Lead – Corporate Audit and Performance explained that the second sentence of section 3.5 should have stated “Any inability of the Council to demonstrate *it is meeting its statutory duties with regard to* Best Value represents a high-level reputational risk, with Best Value assessed annually by Audit Scotland, the Council’s external auditor.”;
- the Performance Report was difficult to read and explain to the public, and it was suggested it was necessary to take the elements that were of interest to residents, such as roads, attainment and care at home, and produce a summary report;
- whilst educational attainment had improved, it was not known if other local authorities had improved at a faster rate, which would mean that performance had worsened in terms of a national benchmark;
- attention was drawn to the PI in respect of the average number per annum of children and young people accommodated outwith Highland, which was ragged Green, and the associated savings of £21m since 2018;
- in relation to the proportion of properties receiving superfast broadband, many people who were paying for superfast broadband did not receive the expected speeds;
- it was necessary to look at building connectivity with communities, and it was queried whether there was any way, through the Community Wealth Building Strategy, to help Community Councils in terms of computer provision;
- it was queried whether, for a small fee, work such as gully-emptying, ditching, and cutting back overgrowth could be carried out by local farmers, leaving the Council workforce to concentrate on potholes and other road maintenance; and
- in responding to the contributions around roads, the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure emphasised that all capital funding allocated to roads had been programmed and would be spent. Getting best value from the roads budget was an iterative process and the roads budget was a constant feature at the Redesign Board, which all Members were welcomed to attend. It was highlighted that there were approximately 120,000 to 150,000 Council Tax payers and 7000 kilometres of roads in Highland. Given that 8.4 million visitors came to Highland every year, it was questioned whether it was fair that road maintenance was funded by Council Tax, and it was hoped that, if the opportunity arose to redress the balance, it would be supported by all Members.

## Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the report at Appendix 2 to the report which outlined the performance for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025;
- ii. **NOTED** that any data not yet available, including the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) would be reported to Council at a later date once published;
- iii. **NOTED** the reference table at Appendix 1 to the report - Delivery Plan Projects and Programmes that linked to Performance Plan Commitments; and



- iv. **AGREED** that responses to any Members' questions not answered during discussion would be provided as soon as possible.

**8. Short Term Let Control Areas  
Sgìrean Smachd Màil Gheàrr-Ùine**

**Mr M Green made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as the owner of a Short-Term Let property. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

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

Members commended the report, which was well researched and well written. The introduction of Short Term Let Control Areas was mostly supported. Communities were asking for help with long term housing and it was said that this introduction could be an opportunity to take action on the impact of Short Term Lets facing communities, such as the ability to retain workers, and the availability of housing across Highland. However, it was pointed out that the report noted the impact was slight.

Housing pressures varied within Wards as well as across Highland. Local knowledge mattered. There were several communities which would benefit from Short Term Let Control Areas and examples within Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh were given where, it was said, there was a problem with available housing for local people. It was also said that those purchasing houses from out with the area had an impact on the Gaelic speaking population.

A housing needs survey in Lochaber found that a lack of accommodation was seen as a main cause of recruitment and retention issues. In Aird and Loch Ness, just under 28% of houses were Short Term Lets. Most houses were sold to those out with Highland and it was believed that this was not linked to employment. In Skye and Raasay, young people wishing to remain in, or return to, Highland were desperate for affordable one or two bedroom homes. However, in the Cromarty Firth area, the inclusion of Short Term Let accommodation for workers was important.

The Chair of Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee believed that their Short Term Let Control Area was having the desired effect of providing affordable housing for local people to live in. A new housing development in Badenoch and Strathspey, which was currently under construction, was offering one, two, and three bedroom houses which would be for local people rather than for Short Term Lets. The area also boasted of the value of Short Term Let operators and it was felt that there was a healthy balance between holiday accommodation and local housing. Although it was acknowledged that Short Term Let Control Areas would not solve all local housing problems, it was hoped that they might help.

During continued discussion, the following further points were raised:-

- the Chair of the Highland Licensing Committee provided insight into the Short Term Let Licence application process and stated that the Short Term Let Licence legislation was in place to ensure premises were safe for people. He recommended that the Council should continue to monitor impacts and review in 12 months with a fuller evidence base. However, there was concern over the robustness of the Short Term Let legislation;

- some felt the report encouraged localism by recommending that any decisions were, first of all, taken locally by locally elected Members. Those Members knew best the pressures in their areas and many welcomed this. Not everyone felt the involvement of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee was necessary, and this was questioned;
- it was asked whether the determination of a Short Term Let Control Area would be the Ward as a whole or if individual communities could be considered, such as Inverness City Centre or an area with only a handful of houses;
- long term decisions should be guided by evidence. It was asked how easy it was to refresh the data in the report;
- the Highland Council could work with Scottish and UK Governments to tackle hurdles, examples of which were provided, and secure the finance to build more housing. In response, Members were informed that these discussions were already taking place;
- sustainable tourism was important and regulation would help to support this;
- in response to a question regarding rejected applications in the Badenoch and Strathspey Control Area, two had been successfully appealed;
- at least four properties which had been turned into Short Term Lets resulted in the provision of emergency accommodation at a significant cost to the Council;
- it was asked if it was possible to identify which Short Term Lets were offered as an additional room or a separate dwelling within an existing property, in cases where this did not impact housing availability; and
- it was suggested that the impact of rent control legislation had led to dependable and affordable long term rental landlords moving over to Short Term Lets.

Thereafter, it was proposed that the Council agree to a report to the next Economy and Infrastructure Committee and this was accepted into the motion.

### **Decision**

The Council:-

### **NOTED:-**

- i. the options available in relation to introducing Short Term Let Control Areas within Highland;
- ii. the potential resource implications along with the evidence requirements;
- iii. that further evidence would be gathered through the ongoing Highland Local Development Plan work; and

### **AGREED:-**

- iv. that it would be for the Area Committees to decide on whether to progress with the introduction of a Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of their area;
- v. that the Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee take the decision to formally commence the process with the evidence gathering and consultation;
- vi. that the E&I Committee, having taken into account the evidence and feedback, decide on whether or not to continue with the process;
- vii. the final decision to designate a Short Term Let Control Area was for E&I Committee; and
- viii. that a report be submitted to the next E&I Committee that explored the options for the Council to work in partnership with the UK and Scottish Governments to include Rural Housing in any new growth deal for the Highlands. This was with the aim to bring additional finance for housing delivery; identify and remove barriers across

public agencies that currently hindered development; act as an enabler for innovative community-led housing solutions; and unlock development opportunities where these were supported by local communities.

## 9. **Skye Reinforcement Project - Update** **Pròiseact Ath-neartachaidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich – Fios às Ùr**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/28/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate. The purpose of the report was to provide the Council with a planning and legal update following the grant of energy consent and deemed planning permission by the Scottish Ministers for the Skye Reinforcement Project on 9 June 2025. This decision was reported to, and noted by, both the North Planning Applications Committee and the South Planning Applications Committee.

Following a summary of the report by the Principal Solicitor (Planning), Members were reminded that the report was not about the planning decision in relation to the Skye Reinforcement project, but it was about the legal opinion received on the merit of pursuing a judicial review of the Scottish Ministers' decision. Counsels' Opinion was, whilst there were factual errors within the Scottish Ministers' decision, there were no grounds for judicial review which would have reasonable prospects of success. Therefore, no petition seeking a judicial review was lodged by the Council to the Court of Session and the Council was now outwith the timescale for lodging a petition.

A view was expressed that the people of the Isle of Skye and wider Highlands expected the Council to stand up for them and ensure their democratic voice was heard, given Scottish Ministers had not adhered to proper procedures in this case. Whilst the joint Planning Application Committees objected to the Skye Reinforcement Project, legislation stated that Scottish Ministers must hold a public local inquiry, which had not been done. Ministers claimed the objections were not received in time. However, a request for an extension of time for the Council to lodge objections was not acknowledged and the view was expressed that this Council had been ignored on this matter. Planning legislation existed to balance competing needs and ensure local voices were heard. Further, it was felt that in light of the Scottish Government's Energy Consent Unit's role in this matter, it should be closed down as it was not fit for purpose. More should be done to defend the Council's statutory role and it was suggested that a cross party letter be sent to Scottish Ministers outlining the Council's concerns in the way the Council and its communities had been treated.

Concerns were expressed that the deadline for a petition for a judicial review had passed as an assurance had been given that a special meeting would not be required and this matter would be brought to a scheduled meeting of the Council to decide on whether to request a judicial review or not. Legal advice was sought and had been received in sufficient time to allow consideration of holding a special meeting. The special meeting did not take place as the legal advice was accepted.

The measures taken to minimise the risk of this issue happening again was welcomed i.e. that the Scheme of Delegation had been amended to enable Officers to lodge holding objections with the Energy Consents Unit, following consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant Planning Applications Committee. It was also felt the performance of the Scottish Government's Energy Consent Unit needed to improve given the errors that had been highlighted in this case.

There was significant disappointment locally regarding the lack of a public local inquiry. The report set out the background to this case and the tight timescales for lodging petitions was highlighted. A view was expressed that Officers did report to Committee as quickly as they could and they had managed this matter as best they could. It was felt the Council should support the recommendations set out in the report.

Given this matter impacted on so many communities across the Highlands, it was queried whether the decision of Scottish Ministers should have automatically come to a meeting of the full Council, rather than the Planning Application Committees, even though legal advice was that a judicial review was unlikely to be successful. On receipt of the legal advice, there would still have been time for this matter to be considered at the full Council meeting on 26 June 2025. This would have avoided the situation whereby the timescale for lodging a petition had passed.

By way of clarity, it was repeated that the decision of Scottish Ministers was reported to both the North Planning Applications Committee and South Planning Applications Committees in June 2025. The position was noted at these meetings, and there was no discussion about the decision. Concerns about the decision were then made in July 2025.

### **Decision**

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** that there were no grounds for judicial review which would have reasonable prospects of success;
- ii. **AGREED** that the Assistant Chief Executive – Place write to Scottish Ministers, following consultation with Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance and the Convener, to highlight the Council's concerns with the inaccuracies within the decision and to the lack of response which was forthcoming from the Energy Consents Unit in respect of the Council's request for an extension to report the further environmental information to the joint planning applications committee; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the Scheme of Delegation was amended by Council at its meeting on 27 March 2025 (Item 9) to enable Officers to lodge holding objections with the Energy Consents Unit, following consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant Planning Applications Committee which helped to minimise, as far as possible, the risk of this issue arising again in the future.

### **10. Highland Armed Forces and Veterans Covenant Report Cunntas às Ùr mu Chùmhnant Coimhearsnachd Feachdan na Gàidhealtachd**

**Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland, and Mr D Gregg in his capacity as an employee of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, neither considered that they had an interest to declare.**

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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in terms of grant funding being offered to cadets for equipment, adventure training and travel costs, clarification was sought on whether this should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). In response it was explained that military equipment would be covered by the MOD but other equipment such as tents etc were not covered for adventure training; and
- it was queried whether the amount of £10,000 was sufficient and it was hoped that the Council would support more funding in the future.

## Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the update on activities to support the Armed Forces Covenant; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the establishment of a Highland Cadet Grant Scheme.

### 11. Appointments to Outside Bodies Cur an Dreuchd gu Buidhnean air an Taobh A-muigh

The Council **AGREED** that Mr P Oldham be appointed to Scotland Excel Joint Committee.

### 12. Membership of Council Ballrachd na Comhairle

The Council **NOTED** that Mr Andrew Baldrey had tendered his resignation as a Highland Council Member with effect from 31 July 2025 and a By-election for Ward 11 (Caol and Mallaig) would be held on 25 September 2025.

### 13. Membership of Committees, etc Ballrachd air Comataidhean, msaa

The Council **AGREED**:-

- i. that Mrs J Hendry be appointed as Vice Chair of Pensions Committee;
- ii. that Dr C Birt be appointed to Climate Change Committee and replace Mr G MacKenzie on Pensions Board;
- iii. that Mr I Brown be appointed to Inverness Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group;
- iv. following the resignation of Mr M Reiss, Mr S Mackie was appointed as a substantive member of the North Planning Applications Committee with Mr R Gunn as the substitute; and
- v. that Mrs C Gillies was appointed to the Gaelic Committee, taking up one of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist places.

### 14. Timetable of Meetings Clàr-ama Choinneamhan

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- reference was made to the South Planning Applications Committee taking place on Friday 21 August 2026 and it was requested that this be reviewed;

- clarification was made to the agreement of compressing meetings on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday to allow Members to attend local committees on a Monday and spend time in their community on a Friday; and
- it was requested that, if possible, Fridays should not be used for timetabled meetings.

The Council **AGREED**

- the calendar of meetings from 1 October to 31 December 2026 as circulated; and
- in relation to meeting dates, that Fridays be avoided, where possible.

**15. Deeds Executed  
Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh**

The Council **NOTED** a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 26 June 2025.

**16. Confirmation of Minutes  
Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais**

The Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 26 June 2025, as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately, had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record and were **APPROVED**.

**17. Minutes of Meetings of Committees  
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan Chomataidhean**

There had been submitted for confirmation as correct records, for information as regards delegated business and for approval as appropriate, the Minutes of Meetings of Committees contained in Volume circulated separately as undernoted:-

Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee	30 June 2025
Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee	4 August 2025
Caithness Committee	4 August 2025
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh Committee	4 August 2025
Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee	11 August 2025
Lochaber Area Committee	11 August 2025
Housing and Property Committee	13 August 2025
*Climate Change Committee	13 August 2025
Communities and Place Committee	14 August 2025
City of Inverness Area Committee	18 August 2025
Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee	20 August 2025
Audit Committee	20 August 2025
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	21 August 2025
Dingwall, Seaforth Committee	25 August 2025
Nairnshire Committee	25 August 2025
Education Committee	27 August 2025
Gaelic Committee	27 August 2025
Comataidh na Gaidhlig	27 An Lunasdal 2025
Corporate Resources Committee	28 August 2025
Sutherland County Committee	1 September 2025
Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee	1 September 2025
Pensions Committee	4 September 2025

The Minutes, having been moved and seconded were, except as undernoted, **APPROVED** – matters arising having been dealt with as follows:-

**Climate Change Committee 13 August 2025**

**Starred Item: Item 6.i Net Zero Programme Update**

The Council **AGREED** the approval of the project brief templates in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

**Starred Item: Item 7 Climate Change Adaptation Strategy**

The Council **AGREED** the approval of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy set out at Appendix 2 of the report.

The Minute of Meeting of the Redesign Board, held on 28 August 2025 and not included in the Volume, was **APPROVED**.

**18. Questions Time**  
**Àm Ceiste**

**Mr A Baxter made a Transparency Statement in respect of question 12, as he has two children attending one of the schools mentioned in the answer to his question. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated separately in Booklet A, Public and Members Questions received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance.

**Public Questions**

**1. Mr D Anderson**

**To the Leader of the Council**

After a year of no progress after contacting the Highways department and councillors, would the council look into the safety of the residents of Clephanton, regarding the B9091, particularly to the east of the crossroads that run towards Nairn, this stretch of road is dangerous to walk along, for two specific reasons.

Number one, being that the majority of the cars speed excessively with no regard of the 20mph limit and the volume of traffic at weekday rush hour is high because is it used as a rat run from Nairn to Inverness, also with on going road works and regular accidents on the A96 it is the chosen diversion. Point two, there is no footpath through the village, so as a pedestrian, to walk to the path on the outskirts of the village to Cawdor or to the play area/playing field, residents have to walk up the road.

Could the council carry out a survey and look install traffic calming measures to reduce speed, such as speed bumps or a chicane type of passing place like the ones in Auldearn, Croy etc? Maybe a footpath?

It really does feel like an accident waiting to happen.

The response had been circulated.

## **2. Mr D MacKenzie**

### **To the Leader of the Council**

Following the recent community council convention, convened by Councillor Helen Crawford, when community councils representing the majority of rural highland residents called for a moratorium on any more energy projects, will Highland Council listen to the people and cease granting any further schemes?

The response had been circulated.

## **3. Mr M Ayre**

### **To the Leader of the Council**

Request For Explanation - Motion on Major Electricity Development Applications & Community Engagement

At its meeting on 19 September 2024 (reconvened on 30 September 2024), the meeting of Full Council approved a Motion under this title.

The section of that Motion relevant to my Question reads as follows:-

"Therefore this Council Agrees:

1 Real time mapping - To produce a real-time map, publicly available online, showing all the major renewable energy related developments within Council's knowledge, existing and proposed, including those which are or will come to the Council for planning and or the Energy Consents Unit, be they operational permitted developments or otherwise. [My italics]

Several energy-related developments of which the Council is fully aware are omitted from the current online map. These include, for example, proposed sites for large worker accommodation camps and lay-down & storage areas for windfarm components. I am aware of at least three such instances within 3km of the small village of Broadford, in South Skye, where I live. There may be others further afield of which I am not aware. The developers of these proposals have described them in their planning applications as being "integral" to associated renewable energy developments. The Council, as planning authority, has designated them as 'major developments'. Although such developments are not site-specific (i.e. they could be located elsewhere on other sites to fulfil their purpose) the only reason they would exist at all is to support renewable energy projects in the Highland Council's area.

These developments clearly fall within the definition of "all the major renewable energy related projects" as described in the Motion. The purpose of the online map, as set out in the Motion, is to provide "a holistic overview" of all that is taking place in the Highland Council area with regard to electricity generation and transmission.

Will the Leader of the Council explain why some energy-related project developments, which are deemed both major and essential, are nevertheless being omitted from the map?



The response had been circulated.

## **Member Questions**

### **1. Mr A Christie**

#### **To the Leader of the Council**

With the establishment of the Poverty Commission, which I welcome, will the Leader confirm that the Administration will make significant funds available to support the recommendations and findings of the Commission?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was questioned how provision would be made in the budget for 2026/27 to support the recommendations and findings of the Poverty Commission, given that the Poverty Commission would not be reporting to Council until June 2026.

In response, the Leader of the Council undertook to review this and report back to Members.

At this stage, in response to a question from Mr Christie, the Convener confirmed that additional responses to supplementary questions would need to be provided before the deadline for submitting questions for the next meeting of the Council and that a system would need to be organised to ensure responses were provided timeously.

### **2. Mr A Christie**

#### **To the Leader of the Council**

At the last Council meeting as part of the Housing Challenge report it was stated that the 24,000 target for house building over the next 10 years will achieve investment of £3bn into Highland – ensuring a secure and sustained programme of building over this period. The report also stated that in the section "Call for Development Sites" most locations are across the Inner Moray Firth area, particularly Inverness where need and demand is greatest. Please could the Leader publish what plans the Administration has to mitigate the issues caused through rapid expansion in the Inverness area such as:

- Inverness Schools to be able to cope with extra students
- For houses to be quickly connected for utilities considering current difficulties facing developers.
- The supply and demand issues on insufficient GP Surgeries near some of the housing sites.
- The provision of sustainable public transport to service the new developments.
- The importance of protecting green space in and around the City.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried what message the Leader would give to residents who perceived that the plans did not address the pressure on education, health care and infrastructure caused by the extensive development in and around

Inverness.

In response, it was clarified that much of the detail included in the original response covered what the approach to these issues would be, and that there would be opportunities during the process for the public to make representations in terms of the masterplan consent and any other council development going forward.

### **3. Mr M Reiss**

#### **To the Leader of the Council**

What is the average financial cost during this Administration of by elections in the Highland Council area?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

### **4. Mr D Macpherson**

#### **To the Leader of the Council**

On 27th June 2024 Highland Council announced:-

“It is anticipated that 24,000 new houses will be required in Highland in the next ten years. This is around double that which would normally be built. The future demand for housing is based on an updated ten-year Housing Needs Demand Assessment, which incorporates economic modelling based on potential increases in jobs connected to the development of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Free Port”.

The Highland Council Leader and Chief Executive have repeatedly announced publicly that throughout the next 10 years the Highland Council area of responsibility requires to build 24,000 new homes to deal with the Council’s own stated ‘Housing Challenge’ (that’s equivalent to 200 completed new homes in each and every month for the next 120 months).

Can you please give an accurate estimate of how many new homes are expected to be built across the Highland Council area in this calendar year up to and including the 31st December 2025?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if the target figure of 24,000 new homes would be revised, and at what point it would be realised that this was not a realistic target, and a new achievable figure would be given.

In response, there had been two Housing Challenge Summits and the figure of 24,000 new houses had been reviewed by everybody who was involved in trying to bring forward a solution to the housing challenge. It was not possible to deliver 200 new houses a month initially and the position was fluid. However it was important to get the vision correct, which had been achieved. Only a short amount of time had passed since this target had been set and progress would continue to be monitored.

**5. Mrs I Campbell**

**To the Leader of the Council**

Will the Leader of Highland Council write to the Scottish Government to ask for funding to bring the Infrastructure to Kishorn Port and surrounding area fit for purpose in view of the £24 million invested by the Scottish Government to extend the drydock in Kishorn Port.

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**6. Dr M Gregson**

**To the Leader of the Council**

Can the Council Leader and Education Committee Chair please advise on progress towards the implementation of the Council's instruction to schools to consult with a view to remove mobile phones from classrooms?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**7. Mr R Cross**

**To the Leader of the Council**

Given that Invergordon appears to be recognised as a "deprived area" along with parts of Alness in my own ward, and in other recognised parts of The Highland Council area, what specific policies does the Council adhere to to address the deprivation?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, given that Park Primary School was still accommodated in temporary facilities at Invergordon Academy and given the ongoing housing development locally, it was queried whether it would be appropriate to have a moratorium on house-building in Invergordon until the education facilities were completely reinstated in a manner which would serve firstly the existing community allowing all residents including those classed as deprived to enjoy facilities which were fit for purpose and better able to engender community pride and self-esteem and be capable of cost effective expansion to serve the likely, but as yet unquantified, influx of residents.

In response, the Leader clarified that this was not something he was able to agree to and explained that there were processes within the Council that determined the service provision in all areas and those processes would need to be followed to determine the supporting services and infrastructure in all areas including Invergordon.

**8. Mrs I MacKenzie**

**To the Leader of the Council**

We have all heard of the closure of the Spectrum Centre. It is important to maintain community access to meeting and activity space.

What is the Council's plan to prevent this key city centre facility lying empty and how will they keep local members properly updated and involved?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether a more detailed timeline for the options proposal process for the Spectrum Centre could be provided and whether reinstating public access was being considered as part of the process.

In response, it was clarified that the ability to look at options for the Spectrum Centre was within the gift of the City of Inverness Area Members.

**9. Mrs H Crawford**

**To the Leader of the Council**

Update Request – Motion on Major Electricity Development Applications & Community Engagement

It is one year since the undernoted Motion was approved by this Full Council with the backing of over 60 Community Councils across The Highlands and cross-party support.

The Motion requires that you, as Leader, are obliged to engage with the Scottish Government to bring an end to what's known as "salami slicing". Specifically it requires you to "continue dialogue with the Scottish Government to ensure that the full cumulative aspect of developments, including the potential grid connection, is considered within the submission of an application under S36 of the Electricity Act for an energy generation station, and for all BESS applications of whatever scale, and the Leader to report regularly to Group Leaders regarding progress".

At Full Council on 27th March 2025, I asked you to confirm what action you have taken to discharge the requirement placed upon you. You replied, "I'll review the information we have and come back to you on that." I subsequently emailed an Open Letter to you on 6th May 2025 seeking this information. I have received no response to either my verbal or written requests for an update.

Can you please now confirm what dialogue you, as Leader of this Council, have had with the Scottish Government as required in terms of this Motion, including details of all relevant meetings, letters, emails and other communications, together with relevant dates, and when you intend to update our Group Leaders?

Note Referred To:

Motion - major electricity development applications & community engagement

This Council:

Notes there are a number of major proposed electricity generation, storage and transmission developments, which have been or are likely to be presented to The Highland Council for planning permission, or for a response as a Consultee, in the near future.

Acknowledges that, without prejudice to future determinations, such major infrastructure developments are very likely to have significant scheme specific and cumulative environmental and socio-economic impacts upon communities and landscapes within the Highlands.

Recognises it is desirable that communities across Highland are fully engaged in the consultation and planning process and are suitably empowered to respond on an equal basis given the resources deployed by the developers, SSEN and statutory consultees.

Notes that currently these major development applications are not considered in a Highland wide context, rather they are lodged individually in a piecemeal, fragmented fashion and therefore considered individually, without reference to the effects from the entirety of de3244444 showing all the major renewable energy related developments within Council's knowledge, existing and proposed, including those which are or will come to Council for planning and or the Energy Consents Unit, be they operational, permitted developments or otherwise. In so far as legally permissible, the map will also include an indication of anonymised approaches made to Highland Council for pre-planning advice. This map will therefore present a holistic overview of the applications that are currently in the pipeline, including but not limited to, all proposed electricity generation, storage and transmission developments, grid connection, energy generation stations, BESS, and wind farms.

## (2) The Approach To Applications

(i) The Leader will continue dialogue with the Scottish Government to ensure that the full cumulative aspect of developments, including the potential grid connection, is considered within the submission of an application under S36 of the Electricity Act for an energy generation station, and for all BESS applications of whatever scale, and the Leader to report regularly to Group Leaders regarding progress, and

(ii) If an increase in the MW threshold for applications under S36 of the Electricity Act is implemented so that some additional generating stations would fall within the Town and Country Planning Acts, the Council will update its Planning Guidance for such developments to ensure that the cumulative impacts are considered in full, including the grid connection aspects of a development.

## (3) Community Council Major Application Planning Training

To take urgent action to better equip communities regarding the planning process and how to present their case, by providing planning training to Community Councils by the Planning Advisory Service and external experts specifically regarding such major applications.

## (4) Community Engagement

Without ever expressing a prior opinion on the determination of any application, to engage with our communities regarding the anticipated environmental and socio-economic impacts, given that some within our communities are concerned about a wide range of issues, and to review what actions the Council can legally take to further ensure that local community views are considered in the planning process and for Officers to present a paper to the next Full Council for consideration.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, given that, through the Highland Energy Convention, over 50 Community Councils were asking for a pause of major energy applications, a pan-Scotland planning commission, a national energy plan and an economic impact assessment, it was queried whether the Leader would work with Mrs Crawford, as Chair of the Highland Energy Convention, to help secure a meeting between the Energy Minister and the Convention to discuss these Highland-wide demands.

In response, it was clarified that Cllr Crawford did not need the Leader to organise a meeting as she could do it herself, and that, as the Leader of the Council, he could not consider a moratorium on major energy applications.

**10. Mr S Coghill**

**To the Leader of the Council**

Given that members are charged with strategic oversight of the Highland Council when might members have sight of a full Highland Council staff structure to assist with both transparency and said oversight?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**11. Ms K Willis**

**To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure**

A ban on pavement parking came into force in Highland in December 2023. Please can the Chair provide a breakdown of the number of infringements and revenue raised in each area of Highland since the ban was introduced.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, information was sought on the Council's plans to collect outstanding pavement parking fines.

In response, it was clarified that outstanding parking charges were dealt with by a contractor and once they had exceeded their due date they were passed on to the Sheriff Officer for recovery and any additional costs were applied to the debtor.

**12. Mr A Baxter**

**To the Chair of Education**

Could you provide a breakdown of the number of unfilled teaching posts in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) listed by school and subject at the beginning of the current academic year(2025/26)?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried what the Chair of Education would say to the parents and pupils of one Highland School where last year a Maths teacher left within weeks of the term starting and the other substantive Maths teacher was ill for a substantial period of time, leaving pupils to be taught by cover staff, including their English teacher in the run up to this year's exams.

In response, it was confirmed that these concerns were shared by the Chair of Education and that the Council, while trying to recruit staff, could not make people come to Highland or apply for certain jobs, but was engaging with the probationer service. The Chair of Education explained that he understood the frustration of pupils and parents and would assure them that officers at both school and Council level were doing all they could to rectify the situation and that officers were happy to speak to Members individually about any concerns they might have.

### **13. Mr J Edmondson**

#### **To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure**

For each of the last five financial years, could you provide, broken down by Area Committee area, the total value of identified road repairs or programmed works requiring capital spending that remained unfunded within the budget allocation for that area committee?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, given that the estimated cost of road repairs was not broken down by operational area or ward, and that the current capital budget including the Highland Investment Plan represented a figure substantially less than what was needed to stand still, it was queried how the Council knew that the money for general roads infrastructure improvements and distribution of the roads maintenance budget, as outlined in the Members' briefing in March 2024, was being distributed equitably and efficiently for all in the Highlands.

In response, it was clarified that the Council had agreed a methodology for the distribution of resources using various factors which included the Scottish Roads Maintenance Condition Survey, road length and population. It was believed that this methodology would be effective and equitable, however options for amendment would be reviewed as a part of the roads redesign project and any changes proposed would be brought back to Members for approval.

### **14. Mr A Graham**

#### **To the Leader of the Council**

HRA (Housing Revenue Account) Debt.

Please provide, if possible in tabular form, for each year since 1996:-

Opening Balance, Amount Borrowed, Amount Repaid, Closing Balance.

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**15. Mr P Logue**

**To the Chair of Education**

For each of the last five academic years could you provide:-

- a.) The number of pupils with identified Additional Support Needs (ASN), broken down by Associated School Group; and
- b.) The total annual funding provision for ASN-associated staff in each of these years?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried what tangible improvements parents and pupils were experiencing that was commensurate with the increased level of investment in ASN staff.

In response, hope was expressed that improvement was not necessary and that four years ago, as now, the needs of all pupils in all schools were being met. The increase in spend did indicate that additional resource was being provided and confidence was expressed that the teachers and Pupil Support Assistants in schools were supporting young people with additional needs and those in mainstream.

**16. Mr R Gale**

**To the Chair of Education**

For each of the last five academic years could you state, the average waiting time for a child or young person to receive an Additional Support Needs (ASN) assessment following referral and the longest individual waiting time recorded in each of those years?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried how parents could be reassured that needs were being identified and met in a timely manner if the waiting time for Additional Support Needs (ASN) assessments could not be provided?

In response, it was highlighted that there was not a single ASN Assessment, as different types of assessments were needed to meet the needs of individual pupils, some of which could be administered by school staff while others needed other professionals. In terms of neurodiversity assessments, the NHS was the lead agency but a Joint Neurodiversity Board had been set up which would meet monthly and additional information about that could be provided.

**19. Notices of Motion  
Brathan Glusaid**

There had been circulated separately in Booklet A, Notices of Motion received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance.



## 1. Securing the Future of Social Care in the Highlands

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this Motion but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-**

**Mr A Christie – as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland  
Mr D Gregg – in his capacity as an employee of NHS Highland.**

Notwithstanding the current review of social care provision in Lochaber, the Highland Council agrees to take urgent action to address the deepening crisis in social care across the Highlands.

The Council recognises the following:

- The contribution to public debate of the comprehensive Highland Care Home Report produced by Angus MacDonald MP, following an 88% response rate to a survey of care home operators in the Highlands, and completed with the co-operation and assistance of the Highland Council and NHS Highland.
- The number of care homes for older people in the Highlands has fallen by 18% between 2014 and 2024, while the population aged 75 and over has increased by 71.9% over the same period, and is projected to rise by a further 34% by 2028.
- There are only 8 care homes remaining on the West Coast, with dangerously low capacity, resulting in a "social care desert" and long waiting lists for care placements.
- Delayed discharges in NHS Highland are at record levels, losing over 5,500 hospital bed days in December 2024 alone, costing millions annually (£22 million in delayed discharges last year) and placing further strain on the NHS.
- Staffing challenges are exacerbated by low pay, negative perceptions of the care sector, high living costs, and a chronic shortage of affordable housing for workers. For non-NHS (independent or private) care homes, staff challenges are further exacerbated by low pay.
- Care at home services are vital but cannot fully replace the need for a robust network of care homes to support those with complex and advanced care needs.

The Council therefore resolves to:

1. Reaffirm its commitment to a dual strategy of strengthening both care at home services and ensuring a sustainable, high-quality network of care homes across the Highlands, with particular focus on the West Coast where need is greatest.
2. Support the development of new large care home facilities with integrated staff accommodation in key locations such as Portree/Broadford, Fort Augustus, Ullapool, and Fort William to "future-proof" provision and retain skilled staff locally. The council will work with partners to commence the planning and design process for new care facilities in Lochaber to replace the Moss Park Care Home.
3. Call for a fundamental renegotiation of the National Care Home Contract to better reflect the true cost of providing care in remote and rural areas.
4. Seek measures to cap agency staff fees, to ensure that long-term financial sustainability is not undermined.

5. Advocate for the Care Inspectorate to streamline bureaucratic processes while maintaining quality standards, to support rather than hinder small and rural care providers.

Finally, the Council agrees to write to the Scottish Government to:

- Demand urgent financial support to fund the construction of new care homes and staff accommodation in the Highlands,
- Call for immediate financial relief to all social care providers, not just the NHS, to mitigate the rising cost pressures, including National Insurance increases and workforce costs,
- Press for a long-term, sustainable funding settlement for social care in the Highlands, recognising the acute rural challenges faced by our communities,
- Urgently address the linked crisis of delayed discharges and inadequate care capacity before the situation becomes irreversible.

The Highland Council further calls on COSLA and relevant national agencies to work in partnership with the Council to lobby for these necessary reforms.

Signed: Mr A Baxter Mrs T Robertson Mrs A MacLean  
Mrs I Mackenzie Mr M Reiss Mr R Stewart

## **AMENDMENT**

To replace the motion with the following amendment:

The Council agrees:

1. To continue to support the implementation of the Highland health & Social Care Partnership Adult Services Strategic Plan 2024 – 2027. The stated aim of that plan is to enable people to lead their best lives and be able to live at home and as independently as possible for as long as possible.
2. To support the development of nursing and allied professional care provision across Highland and work with our third sector partners to support people to live in their own homes and communities.
3. To continue to support the third sector in their work with communities in the delivery of the Strategic Plan.
4. To continue to call for changes to the National Care Home Contract to better reflect the true cost of providing care in remote and rural areas.
5. Advocate for the care Inspectorate to develop processes which support small and rural care services whilst maintaining quality standards.

Signed: Mr D Fraser Mrs M Cockburn

During discussion, Members acknowledged the urgency and complexity of the social care crisis across the Highlands, with reference made to the Chief Social Work Officer's report presented earlier in the meeting. It was emphasised that the issue extended beyond the West Coast and that strategic investment in care homes and staff accommodation was required, given the financial and human cost of delayed discharges and the need for a long-term funding settlement that reflected rural challenges.

Support was expressed for a preventative and person-centred approach, with reference made to national reports including the Christie Commission and the Feeley Review. It was argued that large scale care homes were not consistent with modern care models and that investment should focus on enabling people to remain in their own homes and communities.

Concerns were raised regarding the feasibility and affordability of the proposals, with recent developments in areas such as Ullapool, Tongue, Wester Ross and Lochalsh cited as examples of alternative care models already underway. The Care Inspectorate was referenced in relation to its flexibility in supporting transitions from private to public ownership.

Members stressed that both care homes and care at home services were essential and complementary. The importance of listening to care providers and frontline staff was highlighted, with reference made to the Angus MacDonald MP report and the forthcoming care summit in Fort William.

Further contributions focused on the role of unpaid carers, the need for improved legal preparedness such as power of attorney arrangements and the importance of community based care solutions. While the strategic plan aimed to shift the balance of care, operational pressures continued to challenge its implementation.

Thereafter, Mr A Baxter, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, **MOVED** approval of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr D Fraser, seconded by Mrs M Cockburn, moved the Amendment as detailed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 19 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 40 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the Motion:**

Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars.

**For the Amendment:**

Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr S Coghill, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

**Decision**

The Council **AGREED** the Amendment as set out.

## 2. Staffing Changes at Dornoch Service Point

That the Sutherland County Committee requests that the recent changes in staffing swiftly and recently imposed upon the Dornoch Service Point be reversed until a public consultation has been carried by Highland Council to fully explore the impact on the community.

Signed: Mr J McGillivray Mr M Baird Mr R Gale

### AMENDMENT

To replace the motion with the following amendment:

Council notes that all existing services continue to be accessed through the Dornoch Service Point and that Council has committed to a review of the Service Delivery Model in 3 months time.

Signed: Mr R Bremner Mrs M Ross

During discussion, Members acknowledged the strength of feeling within the Dornoch community regarding recent changes to the Service Point. It was recognised that the service, although limited in hours, had provided a valued and personalised point of contact for residents, particularly for those less comfortable with digital or remote channels. Reference was made to the experience and local knowledge of the Service Point officer and the importance of continuity and empathy in resolving community issues.

Members highlighted that the service had operated efficiently despite low footfall and that the quality of interactions was not fully reflected in the recorded data. It was suggested that the removal of the resource had impacted the perception of service accessibility in the area and that a review could help identify whether additional support could be reinstated.

In support of the amendment, Members emphasised that no services had been withdrawn but rather delivered through alternative methods. It was explained that residents continued to have access to core services via dedicated phone lines, library staff and appointment-based arrangements. Feedback from staff and service users was reported to be positive, with improvements in response times and service integration.

Concerns were raised regarding the comparison between Dornoch and Golspie and it was felt that the impact assessment had created unnecessary tension between communities. Members called for a broader review of service point provision across Sutherland to ensure equitable access and resource allocation.

Clarification was provided that the motion had been submitted by individual Members and was not the result of a formal decision by the Sutherland County Committee.

Thereafter, Mr J McGillivray, seconded by Mr M Baird, **MOVED** approval of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mrs M Ross, moved the Amendment as detailed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 20 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 36 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the Motion:**

Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr J McGillivray, Mr R Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggars.

**For the Amendment:**

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

**Abstentions:**

Mr C Ballance, Mr R MacKintosh.

**Decision**

The Council **AGREED** the Amendment as set out.

**3. Highland Visitor Levy**

**Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-**

**Mr K Gowans – as a family member was employed by Highland Council in this area  
Mrs I Campbell – in her capacity as a holder of a Short-Term Let licence.**

Highland Council notes the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 and the Council's current work towards developing a scheme for implementation.

Council acknowledges:

- That the primary purpose of a Visitor Levy should be to sustain, support and develop the visitor economy, improving tourism infrastructure, strengthening off-season demand, and supporting communities.
- The commitment made by Officers and Members to public consultation, and the constructive responses received from Highland residents, businesses and stakeholders.
- That while there is support in principle for a levy, significant concerns remain over the form and method of implementation as currently proposed.

Council further notes particular concerns raised by businesses and representative bodies, including:

- The administrative burden of collection placed on accommodation providers.
- The risks and inequities of a percentage-based levy compared with a flat-fee model.

- The need for clear exemptions, e.g. for those staying for business or hospital appointments.
- The potential unintended consequence of small providers being forced into VAT registration.
- The detrimental impact of unregulated overnight parking by motorhomes and campervans on licensed businesses and communities.

Council recognises that unless substantial changes are made, the proposed levy risks damaging the competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism and hospitality sectors in the Highlands.

Council therefore resolves to:

1. Pause further progress towards local implementation of a Visitor Levy until the outcomes of the independent Economic Impact Assessment and further consultation with the sector are available.
2. Engage constructively with the Scottish Government, the Visitor Levy Reference Group, business representative bodies, and community stakeholders to seek necessary changes to the legislation and scheme design.
3. Explore alternative approaches to collection and administration, including:
  - A digital Visitor QR Code payment system paid directly to the Council; and
  - A vehicle-based charging mechanism.
4. Bring forward a revised report to Council, following the above engagement and assessment, setting out options for a workable, fair and effective Visitor Levy for the Highlands.

Signed: Dr M Gregson Mrs T Robertson

### **AMENDMENT 1**

To replace the motion with the following amendment:

Recognising that more than 4,000 consultation responses were received to the consultation on the Visitor Levy, the Council resolves to bring forward a report to Council in October 2025. This report will detail an overview of the independent work currently being undertaken by the external consultants appointed by the Council to complete an Economic Impact Assessment, Financial Forecasting, an analysis of the consultation responses and engagement with the Visitor Levy Reference Group, together with an Integrated Impact Assessment.

A further report will be considered by the Council in December 2025, setting out the findings from that work, including recommendations on the way ahead for the Visitor Levy for Highland area. In the meantime, Officers will continue to engage with the Scottish Government and stakeholders.

Signed: Mr R Bremner Mr R Jones Ms S Atkin

### **AMENDMENT 2**

Highland Council notes the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 and the Council's current work towards developing a scheme for implementation.

Highland Council notes the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 and the Council's current work towards developing a scheme for implementation.

Council acknowledges:

- That the primary purpose of a Visitor Levy should be to sustain, support and develop the visitor economy, improving tourism infrastructure, strengthening off-season demand, and supporting communities.
- The commitment made by Officers and Members to public consultation, and the constructive responses received from Highland residents, businesses and stakeholders.
- That while there is support in principle for a levy, significant concerns remain over the form and method of implementation as currently proposed.

Delete all Following and Replace With:-

Council notes:-

That officers are analysing responses and preparing a report following the public consultation and requests that, in preparing their report for Council, officers consider:-

- the practicalities and potential costs of exempting stays essential for medical reasons and;
- alternative approaches to collection and administration and;
- any potential for small operators to be pushed into the VAT threshold.

Council further notes:

- the principle that VAT should not be charged on tax and therefore asks the Leader of the Council to engage with HM Treasury and our representatives at Westminster to lobby for an end to this anomaly.
- the benefits of a Point of Entry mechanism for charging and urges the leader to write to the Transport Minister at the Scottish Government to urge them to expedite legislation to extend the levy to all visitors arriving in Highland on, for example, cruise ships, planes, ferries, and in motorhomes/campervans.
- the potential improvements that could be made to public services, affordable housing for tourism staff, infrastructure, and facilities in the Highlands through the introduction of such a tax.

Signed:        Mr C Ballance        Ms K Willis

During discussion, Members considered the proposed implementation of a Visitor Levy in the Highland area, emphasising that the debate focused on the process and next steps, rather than a final decision on the levy itself. Reference was made to the extensive public consultation, which had generated over 4,000 responses and the importance of reflecting on the views expressed by residents and stakeholders across the region.

Concerns were raised regarding the potential impact on the tourism sector, particularly in fragile rural and island communities. Issues highlighted included price sensitivity, seasonal pressures and the administrative burden on small accommodation providers. The need for exemptions for medical related stays and for Highland residents travelling within the region was also discussed.

It was suggested that alternative models of collection, including flat rate systems and digital payment mechanisms, should be explored further. International examples were referenced and questions were raised about the suitability of the current legislative

framework for the Highland context. The possibility of vehicle based charging, including the use of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR), was mentioned, although it was clarified that such powers were not currently available to local authorities.

Similar concerns were expressed by other Members regarding the treatment of short-term lets, the potential impact on small businesses near the VAT threshold and the need for a fair and transparent system. Further analysis of these issues was considered necessary before any decision could be taken.

Some Members emphasised the importance of continuing the current process, including the economic impact assessment and further engagement with stakeholders. It was considered essential to allow this work to conclude to provide a robust evidence base for future decision making. Reference was made to similar debates in other local authorities and the need to maintain momentum in line with legislative powers.

The importance of presenting the findings of the consultation and associated assessments in a comprehensive and transparent manner was highlighted, to enable informed decisions to be taken in due course.

Following discussion, Mr Dr M Gregson, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, **MOVED** approval of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As a **FIRST AMENDMENT**, Mr R Bremner, seconded by Ms S Atkin, **MOVED** the Amendment as detailed.

As a **SECOND AMENDMENT**, Mr C Ballance seconded by Ms K Willis, **MOVED** the Amendment as detailed.

On a vote being taken between the **FIRST AMENDMENT** and the **SECOND AMENDMENT**, the **FIRST AMENDMENT** received 37 votes, and the **SECOND AMENDMENT** received 12 votes, with 8 abstentions, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the First Amendment:**

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Mrs L Sagers.

**For the Second Amendment:**

Mr C Ballance, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr M Reiss, Ms K Willis.

**Abstentions:**

Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie, Mr R Gale, Mr R Gunn, Mr P Logue, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs A MacLean, Mrs T Robertson.

In a second vote between the Motion and the First Amendment, the Motion received 16 votes and the First Amendment received 38 votes, with 3 abstentions, and the **FIRST AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-



**For the Motion:**

Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr P Logue, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson.

**For the First Amendment:**

Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Mrs L Sagers, Ms K Willis.

**Abstentions:**

Mr M Green, Mrs B Jarvie, Mrs I MacKenzie.

**Decision**

The Council **AGREED** the First Amendment as set out.

The meeting ended at 6.25 pm.