

Motions: 30 October 2025

1. Council notes that for many years there has been a growing debate about the effectiveness, accountability, and local responsiveness of the Highland Council in its current structure. Time and again, votes within this chamber on this issue have been close reflecting both the strength of feeling and the absence of clear consensus among elected members.

It is therefore right that this decision should not rest solely with councillors. The time has come for the public themselves to have their say on the future of how the Highlands are governed and tax payers money is spent.

Accordingly, this Council agrees:

1. To hold an advisory referendum on the future structure of local government in the Highlands.
2. That this referendum will ask the people of the Highlands the following question: "Should The Highland Council be reorganised into smaller local authorities?"
Voters will be asked Yes or No.
3. That the referendum will take place on the same day as the next scheduled local government elections, to ensure maximum participation and to minimise additional costs.
4. Results will be published on a ward-by-ward basis as well as for the Highlands as a whole.
5. That officers be instructed to prepare the necessary arrangements and report back on the practical steps required to give effect to this advisory referendum.

Signed: Mr R Stewart Mrs B Jarvie

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion **is** anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

A financial assessment has been carried out in conjunction with input from the Elections Team and the estimated cost to the Council would be in the region of £0.188m to £0.631m based on assumptions made and reflected as a number of scenarios. A common cost across all scenarios would be the need to provide for the costs of printing and mailing of ballot papers and poll cards.

Scenario 1 – The estimated cost should the Advisory Referendum take place on the same day as the next scheduled Local Government Election. This scenario assumes additional staffing and other costs. Cost estimate £0.188m.

Scenario 2 – The estimated cost should the Advisory Referendum take place on the same day as the next scheduled Local Government Election. This scenario assumes further additional staffing and other costs compared to scenario 1, to provide for extended count timescales. Cost estimate £0.225m.

Scenario 3 – The estimated cost based on Standalone Advisory Referendum. This reflecting input from Elections team on some practical considerations, including a manual rather than ecount approach (see below). Cost estimate £0.631m.

All scenarios reflect the Advisory Referendum being carried out via a manual count as at present the input from the election team is there is no electronic provision for First Past the Post count systems. This may however be subject to change in the foreseeable future should such software be developed or further research identified a solution. Based on election team input, Ecounts and supporting software are currently only possible for the Single Transferrable Vote system used in Local Government Elections, therefore in Scenarios 1 & 2 there would be logistical and resourcing implications to hold two concurrent separate counting methodologies, hence the reflection also of the cost of scenario 3.

There may be a need to seek further legal and other advice as relates to legislation and referenda, which may have additional officer time or cost implications which have not been estimated within this assessment.

The figures provided are best estimates at this time and may be subject to inflationary price rises.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

Area for Assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	No impact
Poverty	No impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights	No impact
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/Island	No impact
Climate Change	No impact

Summary of Assessment:

A summary of the integrated screening is outlined above. There is no direct impact as a result of the proposed motion to hold a referendum.

AMENDMENT

To replace the motion with the following amendment:

This Council reaffirms its commitment to resilience, economic sustainability, and equitable support for all communities across the Highland region. We recognise the vital role The Highland Council plays in delivering essential services and infrastructure, supported by revenues derived from concentrated tax bases. These revenues are crucial in reflecting the social values and aspirations of our region, enabling the provision of services such as education, health and social care, infrastructure maintenance, and significant capital investment.

The Council acknowledges that key strategic projects—including the Corran Ferry replacement, Naver Bridge, Uig Linkspan, the School Capital Programme, and future investment in Green Freeports—are among many initiatives that could be jeopardised by proposals that risk destabilising our current governance and funding model.

We further recognise the advantages of the current structure, with The Highland Council being one of Scotland's largest local authorities. This scale provides political influence and economic leverage at both Scottish and UK levels. Any move toward smaller, fragmented authorities would likely erode these benefits, reduce economies of scale, and further strain already limited financial resources.

It is reasonable to conclude that the public would not support a scenario where more of their council tax is diverted to fund the significant additional bureaucracy that would result from further division of governance and accountability.

Accordingly, this Council agrees that holding an advisory referendum on this matter—at an estimated cost of between £200,000 and £650,000—would represent an unjustifiable expense to the Highland taxpayer at this time.

Consequently, this amendment proposes the direct negative to the Motion 1.

Signed: Mr K Gowans

Ms K Willis

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion is not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

Area for Assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	No impact
Poverty	No impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights	No impact
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/Island	No impact
Climate Change	No impact

Summary of Assessment:

A summary of the integrated screening is outlined above. There is no impact from the proposed amendment.

2. A9 Dualling, Tore to Dornoch Bridge

Highland Council calls on the Scottish Government to commit to dualling the A9 trunk route from Tore roundabout north to Tain and the Dornoch Bridge.

Upgrading the existing infrastructure to a dual carriageway is key to unlocking the benefits of the Cromarty Firth Green Freeport. It will not only improve traffic flow but also enhance overall safety for all road users. The increased capacity will alleviate congestion arising from increased employment related traffic and abnormal load movements from the Cromarty Firth ports of Nigg and Invergordon in addition to peak travel periods due to tourism, the NC500 and the impact of centralised potato crop processing and grain harvesting.

Dual carriageway roads are safer than single carriageway roads. Additionally, such a development will reduce journey times to/ from the Far North, increasing the attractiveness of some of our most remote areas and improving access to Inverness based health and other services.

Such a commitment would also inform the anticipated housing developments along this route, most notably north east of Alness from Milnafua to Mossfield, and at Tain, in addition to eliminating accident blackspots at Tomich and Tain. This residential expansion is likely to create substantial communities divided by the A9 as evidenced already in identified development sites, underlining the need for informed infrastructure planning.

The section of the route between the Cromarty Bridge and the Evanton junction is a dangerous “pinch point”, which, if blocked effectively isolates the North and Northwest mainland.

There is significant concern and frequent debate regarding the difficulties of recruiting skilled personnel, notably but not exclusively health professionals. The benefits of this proposal will not only unlock the potential economic boost from the Green Freeport, but it will enhance the attractiveness of the area to incoming skilled workers, and also support the traditional tourist economy.

In summary this section of the A9 is key to achieving the benefits of the Cromarty Firth Green Freeport initiative which will result in....

Increased heavy traffic resulting from industrial activity.

Increasing occurrence of abnormal loads servicing onshore renewables development and maintenance.

Substantial increases in domestic traffic from residential areas to industrial sites at Nigg, Invergordon, Alness and Evanton.

The route includes the “pinch point” between Cromarty Bridge (Ardullie roundabout) and Evanton which, if blocked by accident effectively isolates the north and northwest.

Enlarged residential areas at Alness, Invergordon, Evanton and Tain must be designed accordingly, taking a holistic view.

Accident blackspots at Tomich (by Invergordon) and the north and south junctions at Tain can be eliminated through fully informed design.

Signed: Mr R Cross

Mr M Reiss

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion is **not** anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

Area for Assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	No impact
Poverty	No impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights	No impact
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/Island	No impact
Climate Change	No impact

Summary of Assessment:

A summary of the integrated screening is outlined above. The motion calls on the Scottish Government to dual the A9 trunk route from Tore roundabout north to Tain and the Dornoch Bridge. Whilst there would likely be wider impacts if the motion was successful, the motion asks the Council to write to the Scottish Government. Therefore, there is no direct impact.

AMENDMENT

Invest in the Far North Line

From

“Highland Council calls on the Scottish Government to commit to”

DELETE ALL and replace with;

“... prioritise investment in the Far North Rail Line.

“The significant increases in travel requirements caused by the growth of the Free Port areas cannot be solved just by building more roads, but have to be managed through improved public transport.

“Highland Council welcomes the recent £11m spend on replacing worn out track on the Far North Line, but believes significantly more must be spent to improve journey time and reliability, to encourage use of rail rather than road, as per the Government's Travel Hierarchy.

“In particular this Council notes that a rail journey from Wick to Glasgow currently takes as long as a journey from London to Glasgow **and back**; notes that the lack of dualling and insufficient passing loops causes regular delays; notes that it is 112 years since any significant investment was made in the line.

“Council therefore calls on the Scottish Government to work with Scot Rail to prioritise investment in the Far North Line and Inverness Station.

“Additionally, Council calls on the Scottish Government to investigate what can be done by design in the immediate future to eliminate particular accident blackspots on the A9.”

Signed: Mr C Ballance Ms K Willis Mr R MacKintosh

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion is **not** anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

Area for Assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	No impact
Poverty	No impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children’s Rights	No impact
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/Island	No impact
Climate Change	No impact

Summary of Assessment:

A summary of the integrated screening is outlined above. The amendment calls on the Scottish Government to prioritise investment in the north rail line. Whilst there would likely be wider impacts if the motion was successful, the motion asks the Council to write to the Scottish Government. Therefore, there is no direct impact.

3. Council commits to:

- Designating a named lead Highland Council contact for each care home in the area to act as a clear point of contact for residents and relatives to contact with concerns, issues or question.
- Creating a document which explains the rights of residents and relatives within a care home. This document should include clear information on how concerns can be raised to the council and external regulatory bodies (Care Inspectorate, professional regulators, Disclosure Scotland, police).
- All relatives/residents within the relevant care home, and all councillors, to be notified of the publication of Care Inspectorate reports within 7 working days of that report being received by the council.
- All relatives/residents within the relevant care home to be notified that a Large Scale Investigation has commenced within 7 working days, and all councillors to be notified at the next full council meeting.
- All Care Inspectorate reports to be formally presented to the Health & Social Care Committee, in public or private session at discretion of the committee chair, with councillors being given chance to ask questions on the report.
- When a care home ceases to be under an improvement notice from the Care Inspectorate, a 'Lessons Learned' report will be presented first to the Health & Social Care Committee and then before the full council to detail what improvements were made while under the Care Inspectorate improvement notice, and any recommendations which should be made to improve practice across Highland care homes.

Signed: Mr D Gregg

Mr A Christie

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion **is** anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

The motion introduces new and additional workload and actions for the Council, in aspects of activity which under the Lead Agency Model for Adult Social Care would currently be a function of NHS Highland. For actions which are new and additional on Council officers, this would represent additional time commitments. Given under the Lead Agency model staffing with responsibility for Adult Social Care wholly transferred to NHS Highland, it is assumed that to provide the appropriate capacity, knowledge and specialism within the Council to fulfil the motion, would result in an additional staffing and cost impact. At this stage there is uncertainty as to what level of resource may be required, but with over 60 care homes for Adults across the Highlands, and circa 1900 residents, as a minimum it is considered that planning for 2FTE as an additional staffing provision would be appropriate, the cost of which is estimated as being £0.115m incl oncosts. There would be a need for further review and assessment to assess on an ongoing basis whether the level of resource is appropriate based on level of contact from residents and relatives with concerns, issues or questions.

Other aspects of the motion are assumed to be actions that would be fulfilled by NHS Highland staff under the Lead Agency Model for Adult Social Care, and may not be action which would need directly be for Council officers. These may also represent an additional time or cost commitment on staff involved. Given the Council provides funding to NHS Highland for Adult Social Care provision, any additional resource burden on NHS Highland might result in NHS Highland seeking additional funding from the Council. Such discussions would need take place once it was determined if the motion was proceeding and more detailed discussion between the Council and NHS

Highland regarding how the proposed actions would best be taken forward and the role of Council and NHS Highland staffing in fulfilling these actions.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

Area for assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	Positive impact (Age, Disability); otherwise, no impact <i>Summary of Assessment</i> The impact on 1,900 older people and people with disabilities resident in 64 Care Homes in Highland will be positive. The proposal will enable residents and their relatives to raise any concerns or issues regarding their care with a named Highland Council contact and/or with external regulatory bodies. They will also have access to information regarding their Care Home including that relating to Care Inspectorate visits and investigations and the implementation of any required improvements. These measures will help to maintain, and where required, improve the standards of care and service in Care Homes in Highland.
Poverty	No impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights	No impact
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/ Island	No impact <i>Summary of Assessment</i> The impact will be the same across Highland, including in island and rural communities.
Climate Change	No impact

AMENDMENT

To replace the motion with the following amendment:

Under the Lead Agency Model it is NHS Highland that deliver Care Home services for adults by commissioning the private sector and providing inhouse care homes. They also commission the care at homes services. The regulator is the Care Inspectorate. Although adult social care is delegated to NHH as part of the Lead Agency Model, the Chief Social Work Officer maintains statutory responsibility and accountability for the delivery of social work and social care services . With regard adult protection, governance and assurance is through the Adult Protection Committee. This then reports into the Highland Public Protection Chief Officers Group for the overarching governance across Highland.

Councillors receive twice annually assurance reports through the Health and Social Care Committee. The Chief Social Work Officer Annual report comes to Full Council and includes the care Inspectorate grades for all Care Home and Care at Home Services. Under the lead agency model the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) is key in terms of overseeing all partnership business and much of this material is provided there at the quarterly meetings.

In partnership with the NSH Highland as lead agents the Council undertakes to carry out a full review of the reporting structures related to the regulated services i.e. care homes and care at home. The review will articulate what and where governance currently lies and how this can be improved. One of the issues that will be looked at is how various committees and boards are given assurance when governance lies elsewhere and how the attendees then report back to other boards and committees. The review will also look at opportunities to share learning across Highland with a view to improving the overall standard of care. The report will include a section on access information about the Regulated Services and how the escalate concerns about a service.

The draft report will be discussed at the February 2026 meeting of the Health & Social Care Committee and a final draft report will then be taken to Full Council. The Final Report will be agreed at JMC.

Signed: Mr D Fraser

Mrs M Cockburn

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion is not anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council

Integrated Impact Assessment:

Area for Assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	No impact
Poverty	No impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights	No impact
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/Island	No impact
Climate Change	No impact

Summary of Assessment:

A summary of the integrated screening is outlined above.

The amendment proposes a review is undertaken of reporting structures and how to improve reporting arrangements and the opportunities to share learning with a view to improving the standard of care. At this stage there is therefore no impact from the amendment but the proposed review should consider impacts as part of that process and report this as part of the report to committee.

4. This motion asks that the Leader of the Council writes to the Scottish Government and the Lloyd's Banking Group in the strongest possible terms regarding the closures of Branches of the Bank of Scotland in Dingwall, Gairloch, Nairn and Tain. Tain branch, for instance, is "the last Bank standing ". Once upon a time there were eight Banks in Tain. From January 2026, Tain will have no Bank. According to the consumer group Which? more than 6,400 banks across the UK have closed since 2015. That equates to more than 60% of the UK's banking network, at a rate of around 53 closures every month. Closing these branches fails to recognise the unique needs in our rural communities. Access to cash and in-person banking remains vital for many, particularly older residents, small businesses, and those who are less confident with digital banking. The Bank of Scotland must think again. Reducing bank branches has a disproportionate impact on rural communities where public transport is increasingly limited and town centres are struggling with declining retail and limited private sector investment. The Federation of Small Businesses is right to warn of the impact of bank closures on small businesses, not least the loss of face-to-face interaction and a reduced ability to manage cash flow. The establishment of Banking Hubs – owned by the not-for-profit company Cash Access UK and funded by nine high street banks to provide easy access to face-to-face cash and banking - are welcome innovations but agrees with Age UK that it is unacceptable for there to be long delays between the last branch closing and a banking hub opening.

In conclusion:-

1. This Council calls for the rapid establishment of Banking Hubs to ensure the banking services they provide are accessible before any community suffers a bank closure.
2. Asks that if they do not voluntarily fund the banking hub network that a levy is imposed on bank profits to finance the hubs
3. Calls for the commissioning of an independent review on the effectiveness of the regulatory functions of the Financial Conduct Authority with regards to protections of cash deposit and withdrawal services

Signed: Mr M Baird

Mr R Gale

Mr A Graham

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion is **not** anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

Area for Assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	No impact
Poverty	No impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights	No impact
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/Island	No impact
Climate Change	No impact

Summary of Assessment:

A summary of the integrated screening is outlined above. The motion calls for the Leader to write to the Scottish Government and to Lloyd's Banking group regarding the closure of bank branches across Highland, including a call for banking hubs to be established. If the outcome of the correspondence were to be successful, there would be clear positive impacts for individuals, both those with protected characteristics and experiencing poverty and for rural communities. However, the specific motion is to write to the Government and Banking Group and therefore there is no direct impact as a result of the proposal.

5. To strengthen protections for school staff against violent and abusive behaviour in schools; and to ensure that they are properly supported and enabled to get on with their jobs.

Council notes:

- There is a serious problem of violent and abusive behaviour in schools. This has grown in recent years. The Scottish Government's *Behaviour in Scottish Schools* Reports confirm this unfortunate trend.
- There were 3170 incidents of classroom violence in Highland schools in 2024.
- School staff made an average of 16.7 reports a day – an increase of more than 500% in four years.
- Such incidents included physical and verbal abuse, particularly physical aggression, general verbal abuse and physical violence.
- In response to the same FOI, the Council was unable to say how many assaults on school staff or pupils took place, and how many times weapons or illegal drugs were confiscated in its schools.

Council further notes:

- The 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act places a responsibility on all employers to ensure the health and safety of employees.
- The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations require certain incidents to be reported to the Health and Safety Executive.

In this context, the Council therefore resolves:

- To commit to a 'Zero Tolerance' policy for violence against staff at school.
- To commit to support staff by producing Risk Assessments for persistently disruptive pupils. In some circumstances, it may be acceptable for a member of staff to refuse to teach a pupil, if she or he felt that their personal safety was at risk.
- To commit to clear and well-understood procedures for recording and reporting incidents.
- To ensure adequate staff training in dealing with challenging behaviour and violent incidents.
- To ensure adequate support for staff who are victims of violent incidents.

Signed: Dr M Gregson Mr R Gale

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion is **not** anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

The preparation/implementation of a policy would have staff time implications but is not assessed as directly resulting in a financial implication. Insofar as the Education Service already has in place risk assessments, procedures, reporting arrangements and training, and any financial implications arising from which are met from the existing education budget, it is not possible at this time, based on the motion, to determine what if any change may result to those arrangements, or what (if any) financial implications may arise.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

Area for assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	No impact <i>Summary of assessment</i> The measures will impact young people, both positively and negatively, as outlined in the following sections. However, the impacts are related to their rights to education, rather than being a product of their age <i>per se</i>.
Poverty	Positive and potentially negative impacts in particular with reference to: Prospects and opportunities – the potential impact on people's life chances <i>Summary of Assessment</i> Measures which seek to protect teachers, other school staff and pupils from violent and abusive behaviour will promote a safer environment which is more conducive to learning leading to better outcomes for pupils. However, for those pupils marginalised as a result of their behaviour (which may be symptomatic of other issues beyond their control), the impact will be negative, and a poorer educational outcome may result in poorer lifelong socioeconomic outcomes for those individuals.
Human Rights	Positive and potentially negative impacts in particular in relation to: Right to education (Protocol 1, Article 2) <i>Summary of Assessment</i> Measures which seek to protect teachers, other school staff and pupils from violent and abusive behaviour will promote a safer environment in which the right of education is provided. However, pupils who are marginalised as a result of their behaviour may experience a diminished right to education. This can in part be mitigated through the proposed use of risk assessments, clear procedures and training for teachers to promote improved behaviour through the management of disruptive pupils.
Children's Rights	Positive and potentially negative impacts in particular with regards to: - Working in the best interests of the child (Article 3) - Children have a right to education (Article 28) <i>Summary of Assessment</i> Measures which seek to protect teachers, other school staff and pupils from violent and abusive behaviour will promote a safer environment which, by being more conducive to learning and leading to better outcomes for pupils, demonstrating working in the best interest of the child.

	However, for pupils marginalised as a result of their behaviour the impact will be negative, and poorer educational outcomes may result in poorer lifelong socioeconomic outcomes for those individuals. In this instance the proposed measures may not be in the best interests of those individual children and their right to education may similarly be negatively impacted. The negative impacts can be in part mitigated through the proposed use of risk assessments, clear procedures and training for teachers to promote improved behaviour through the management of disruptive pupils.
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/ Island	No impact <i>Summary of Assessment</i> The impact will be the same across Highland, including in island and rural communities.
Climate Change	No impact

Summary of Assessment

Given the likelihood of negative impacts, a full impact assessment is likely to be required if the motion is passed.

AMENDMENT

To replace the motion with the following amendment:

Given the national trend which shows an increase in the reporting of disruptive behaviour in schools across all authorities as well as a significant rise in the number of pupils with ASN and given the importance the Highland Council attaches to supporting and caring for all its school staff and pupils the Council will:

- continue to work with all school staff, parents, pupils, professional associations, and elected members to help understand the underlying factors that are contributing to the increase in dysregulated behaviours in our schools.
- continue to offer an inclusive education to all pupils and provide support, guidance, and training to all staff members to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing continues to be a key priority.
- continue to ensure that local and national policies and guidance are followed and staff members receive support and appropriate debriefing after any relevant incidents and are encouraged to record these incidents as per council policy to support all those involved.
- continue to ensure regular self-evaluation takes place at school level regarding the implementation of council and school policies which takes account of the unique circumstances pertaining to individual school settings and the pupils on their roll.

Signed: Mr J Finlayson

Mr D Millar

Section 95 Officer assessment of financial implications:

This motion is **not** anticipated to have a financial implication to the Council.

Integrated Impact Assessment

Area for Assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	No impact
Poverty	No impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights	No impact
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/Island	No impact
Climate Change	No impact

Summary of Assessment:

A summary of the integrated screening is outlined above.

The amendment proposes that existing practices are continued. There is therefore no direct impact as a result of the motion.