The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Monday 18 August 2025 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance
Mr B Boyd
Mr I Brown
Mr M Cameron
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair
Mr A Christie
Ms H Crawford
Mr D Fraser
Mr D Gregg
Dr M Gregson
Mrs J Hendry
Ms E Knox
Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr R MacKintosh
Mr A MacKintosh
Ms K MacLean
Mr D Macpherson
Mr D McDonald
Mrs M Reid
Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Sinclair

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager
Mr G Ralph, Housing Repairs Manager
Ms S Lamb, Project Officer, Community Regeneration
Mr D Lamont, Amenity Services Manager
Mr M Gemmell, Principal Repairs Officer
Mr A MacDonald, Bus Operations Manager
Mr D Summers, Principal Transport Officer
Mr S Grant, Roads Operation Manager
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Inspector P Sutherland, Police Scotland

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

Mr C Ballance in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr K Gowans and Mr A Graham.

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

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

Item 4 – Mr A Christie, Mr D MacPherson, Ms H Crawford, Mr D Gregg
Item 5 – Mr A Christie
Item 6 – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg
Item 7 – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg
Item 10.a, b and c – Mr A Christie
Item 13.i – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 26 June 2025 had not been exercised in relation to the business of this Committee.

4. Police – Area Performance Report
Poileas – Geàrr-aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item 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 Inverness Bid Ltd and as a Non-executive Director of NHS Highland
Mr D Gregg as an employee of NHS Highland
Mr D Macpherson as a family member was employed by Police Scotland
Mrs H Crawford as a retailer

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/27/2025 by the Chief Inspector Area Commander.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- in relation to shoplifting, it would be helpful to understand the different reasons people stole, and it was acknowledged that this might differ in different types of shops. Members suggested the police could monitor shoplifting offenders for a period of around two weeks to obtain further data. It was clarified the crime was theft, not 'shoplifting'. Particular concern was expressed in relation to organised theft from shops;
- in relation to hate crime, the reported increases were concerning, although it was acknowledged that the reporting method had changed and this might have influenced the statistics. Members emphasised the importance of working together to ensure the Highlands remained free of hate crime, and the work outlined by the police, including joint initiatives with partners, to tackle it was welcomed;
- in response to concern about how traffic incidents on the A96, and other trunk roads, were managed, with particular reference to the problems of diversion through rural settlements, information was provided, including on the dynamic and unique nature of each incident;
- in relation to speeding in 50mph zones, and elsewhere, Members and the public were urged to report incidences to the police to ensure situations could be monitored and resources provided appropriately;

- concern was expressed about anti-social behaviour in the city centre, and its impact on residents and businesses. Joint work being undertaken between the Police and the Council with communities was welcomed, as were the QR codes for reporting issues. Additional signage and regular monitoring of problem areas was urged, as well as community initiatives to promote positive behaviour;
- attention was drawn to the shoplifting and other challenges being experienced outwith Inverness city centre, and the unique challenges facing rural retailers. It was hoped they might participate in the deployment plan to seek additional funding, and the importance of empowering retailers to gather and share information and evidence was emphasised;
- an explanation was sought and provided for the detection rate statistics in the report;
- the useful role of CCTV in crime prevention and detection was summarised, and consideration given to the methods of examining CCTV footage, as well as the resources required. Movement trigger cameras were useful, and it would be beneficial to source funding streams for additional CCTV coverage. Gaps in CCTV coverage would be further considered outwith the meeting;
- feedback on an incident involving an attack on a police vehicle could be provided to Mr Macpherson outwith the meeting;
- information on the reporting method for domestic crime, and possible double reporting thereof, could be provided outwith the meeting. It was clarified that crime was labelled domestic if it took place between current or ex- relationship-partners;
- the police were thanked for their attendance at recent community meetings in Raigmore, and for their ongoing work with communities. While it was disappointing that officers were no longer able to commit to attending all community council meetings, attention was drawn to their presence going forward at the community council forum;
- information was sought and provided on the national and international efforts to tackle online fraud; and
- on behalf of local residents, speed monitoring was requested on various roads in Inverness, and these were noted. Further requests could be made outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2025.

5. City Strategy – City Centre Review
Ro-innleachd Cathair-bhaile – Ath-sgrùdadh Meadhan a' Bhaile

Transparency Statements: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item in his capacity as a Non-executive Director of Inverness Bid Ltd. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/28/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the review was welcomed, and many aesthetic and safety concerns with the city centre were highlighted;

- concern was expressed by many Members that the proposed workshop was for Members, which could give a false impression of decisions being made without full engagement, despite the intention to engage with stakeholders after the workshop. The importance of seeking the views of business owners, local communities, and disability, youth and other groups who would be affected by any changes, at the earliest stage, was emphasised. Some caution was expressed in relation to managing the input from a large group of people with potentially conflicting opinions, but it was pointed out that a similar stakeholder participation group had been undertaken, successfully, in relation to the refurbishment of the Victorian market;
- the map of the city centre used for the BID district was not as wide as the Council-defined centre;
- prior to asking private property owners to remove foliage growing on their buildings, it was advisable for the Council to ensure Council-owned properties were appropriately maintained;
- reference was made to the significance of the city centre to outlaying settlements and rural areas, with specific reference to the inclusion of Visit Inverness Loch Ness in the review; and
- it was re-iterated that the Committee would have the final decision on the review programme, and much of it would be dependent on funding. The Senior Community Development Manager would draw up terms of reference for the participation group.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the background to the opportunities to improve the built environment within the City Centre;
ii. **AGREED** to support the principle of supporting efforts to improve the built environment; and
iii. **AGREED** to establish a cross-party stakeholder participation group, including representatives from community organisations, local businesses, heritage bodies, and faith groups, alongside Members, to co-develop City Vision options and bring forward deliverable outcomes for this committee in the context of available resources.

6. Bus services in Inverness City
Seirbheisean Bhus Baile Inbhir Nis

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item 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 as an employee of NHS Highland

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

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- a similar report on rural bus services in the area was requested for a future meeting;
- the loss of routes operated by private bus companies was a concern and, in this respect, the reduction in the amount of the concessionary fare that was paid to the bus operator was disappointing, especially given that only people aged 23 to 59, and without a disability, were required to pay a fare;
- the reliability and regularity of bus services was highlighted as key factors in encouraging bus use and it was pointed out that the Highland Council in-house bus service was performing well in this regard;
- for the future, key issues included improving routes to key facilities, creating hubs for people to easily change buses, co-ordination of bus timetables with train times, considering express routes for commuters, and securing vital routes, with particular mention of routes that provided services to vulnerable people, for example care homes;
- information was sought and provided on possible bus routes to and from various places including Kilvean cemetery, Culloden battlefield, Fort George, and Milton of Leys;
- it was clarified that private bus operators were required to give 28 days notice of the withdrawal of a bus route;
- when consulting with the public, or providing information on bus routes, it was important to consider those without online access. In a similar vein, the provision of printed timetables by bus drivers was beneficial;
- Dial-a-Bus / On Demand bus services, especially for rural areas, was being reviewed;
- the transport team was thanked for their prompt action in sourcing an alternative service through Kingsmills and it was hoped that this would be maintained after the 6 month trial period;
- a summary was sought and provided of the history of the Council's in-house bus service, and how the vehicles had been obtained, as well as the intention to obtain at least one electric bus in 2026;
- the return of the provision of bus services to the public rather than the private sector was welcomed; and
- clarification was sought and provided on why some of Stagecoach's zero carbon vehicles were not being used in Inverness.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the recent changes to the Inverness bus service network and commented on the priority needs for bus services in the City;
ii. **AGREED** to passenger needs being researched, in collaboration with Stagecoach, to support the developing Bus Service Improvement Partnership; and
iii. **AGREED** to bring a similar report for rural bus services to a future Committee meeting.

7. Winter Service Plan 2025/26
Plana Seirbheis a' Gheamhraidh 2025/26

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item 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 as an employee of NHS Highland

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/30/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points which were responded to:-

- tribute was made to Mr Alan Johnston, Roads Officer who was retiring at the end of September. Mr Johnston had over 45 years experience and his service to his work with the Council was commended and the Committee wished him well in his retirement;
- the work of the Roads Operations team, who dealt with many challenges in a professional and efficient manner, was commended;
- there may be changes required in winter maintenance routes given some bus routes had changed;
- with the change in the climate, winter maintenance was becoming more than just dealing with ice and snow, but more often dealing with storms and flash flooding. Also, if there was more water and it froze this would make roads and footpaths treacherous. It was noted that a new gully emptier machine was on order, which would bring additional capacity to gully maintenance in order to prevent flooding. The gully emptying routes would be reviewed to take account of this additional capacity, which included the hiring of a drain Jetter. The ambition was for an annual clean out of each gully;
- MacDiarmid road was not on the winter maintenance route, but it was a school bus route. An undertaking was given to add this to the winter maintenance list;
- the availability of grit bins and the importance of keeping pavements well maintained to provide safe walking routes all year round was highlighted. The Roads team did work with other teams within the Council to maintain pavements and capital funding was being invested in this;
- it was requested that guidance be issued to Community Councils on the Community Self Help Scheme. This would encourage and inform them that it was possible to get help from the Council to support communities being more resilient in winter conditions. It was advised that information on the Community Self Help Scheme was available on the Council's website. The Roads Operations Manager would work with the Communications team to make the public aware of the scheme. Information on the scheme would also be provided at the next Community Council Forum;
- routes between Milton housing and Harris road and Drumossie Avenue and Sir Walter Scott drive were not on the pavement map for gritting. It was advised that these pavements were not adopted, but the Council did work with other agencies to support them with winter maintenance;
- the Raigmore bus gate was not on the winter maintenance route map as NHS Highland dealt with this;
- it was queried if there was capacity to evaluate whether McEwan Court supported accommodation should be added to the list for footpath maintenance. An undertaking was given to look at this;
- it was advised that contractors taking significant amounts of salt/grit from grit bins was theft as it was for the public's use and not commercial operations;
- it was requested when roads in a new housing development were adopted by the Council, Ward Members be informed so that they could advise residents. An undertaking was given to provide information to local Members on new developments that were nearing completion. The liability for an unadopted road was with the developer until the road was adopted; and

- information on the maintenance programme for the storm drains was requested. It was advised that the hired drain Jetter was being brought in to clean out storm drains and some of the storm drains were combined systems with Scottish Water.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2025/26, subject to MacDiarmid road being added to the winter maintenance list.

8. Ardersier Public Conveniences
Goireasan Poblach Àird nan Saor

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/31/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

It was queried that if a private individual came forward with an offer to buy or lease the Ardersier public convenience and at the same time a community group came forward with a proposal for a community asset transfer, how would it be determined which takes priority. It was advised that advice would be taken from the Estates team on this. However, in the past the Council had favoured the community application.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

i. the closure of the Ardersier public convenience from 31 August 2025; and
ii. to formal disposal of the asset, to allow the Ardersier public convenience be marketed for sale or made available for asset transfer.

9. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2025 gu 30 Ògmhios 2025

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/32/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points, which were responded to:-

- Culloden and Ardersier had a long relet time for houses and an improvement on this was sought given the high demand for houses in these areas;
- progress was sought on retrofitting houses for energy efficiency across the Highlands. It was advised that the Service was actively seeking properties in order to retrofit them for energy efficiency. This could mean properties having new technologies such as air source heat pumps, solar panels and cavity/external wall insulation being installed. Information on how many of the 83 properties that had been relet had been retrofitted would be shared with the Committee;
- while the statistics showed that the target for emergency repairs was being met, response times to carry out these repairs showed there had been a slip in performance this year. It was queried how response times could be improved. It was advised that part of the reason for this was trying to recruit trades to the Inverness area, which was ongoing, and had improved recently. It was hoped that the additional recruitment to fill vacant positions would have a positive impact in future quarters performance statistics. In instances when emergency repairs had been contracted out, there may be some discrepancies if contractors did not close the repair job off until they issued an invoice for the job, which did affect the performance statistics;

- further detail was provided in relation to the delivery output of the housing capital investment programme;
- a point was made that while some relet times for void properties had improved, they were still outwith the target, but the report did not explain why this was happening. It was advised that there were multiple reasons why voids could take longer, e.g. due to the complexity of them, travel time to rural houses and waiting on materials. An undertaking was given to look at what further information could be provided on this for future reports; and
- in terms of empty homes and voids, information had been provided by a member of the public that a Council flat in Fraser Street, Beauly had been empty for four years. An undertaking was given to look into this.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 June 2025.

10. Inverness Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

Transparency Statements: Mr A Christie declared a connection to items 10.a, b and c as a non-executive Director of Inverness Bid Ltd but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

a) Financial Monitoring – Q4 2024/25 and Q1 Financial Monitoring for 2025/26
Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail - Cairteal 4 2024/25 agus Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail Cairteal 1 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/33/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In response to a query, further clarity was provided on the element of the overspend on the Victorian Market Operations that would be recovered through rental income payable by the tenants. The element that related to an exceptional charge for electricity was being investigated.

The Committee **NOTED** the final financial monitoring report as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report for the Inverness Common Good Fund for the year ended 31 March 2025 and also the financial monitoring report to 30 June 2025 as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report.

b) Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee Annual Report [2024/25]
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Fo-Chomataidh Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis [2024/25]

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/34/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the work of the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee was commended and reference made to the excellent presentation by Visit Inverness Loch Ness and ongoing excellent relations with Inverness BID Ltd.

Thereafter, concern was expressed at VisitScotland's decision to close its tourist information centre on High Street, Inverness, reference being made to the fact the valuable service the facility provided to visitors in this location could not be replaced by a focus on digital information and online resources.

The Committee **NOTED** the work of the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee as described within the report.

c) Grants Over £10,000 Report
Aithisg Thabhartasan Thar £10,000

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/35/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on the rationale for the Sub-Committee's recommendation that the application by Inverness BID Ltd be drawn down from the Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) allocation to Inverness and Area;
- in response to a query, confirmation that the above application could be approved without referral to the CRF Strategic Sub-Group as these were funds that had been allocated to the City Area for distribution; and
- it be emphasised to Visit Inverness Loch Ness that approval of the application was a one off and future applications would be considered on their merits and include justification for the grant being sought; feedback should also be provided on how the grant awards had been used.

During further discussion, it was suggested that a report be brought forward to Members providing further information on town twinning activities and a more concrete breakdown of the benefits derived to the City of Inverness from the twinning arrangements/visits. It was confirmed a report on this item would be brought to the Inverness Common Good Sub-Committee in the first instance.

Thereafter, reference was made to the value of the historic town twinning links and opportunities to review and derive further benefits from the existing arrangements. It was highlighted that the model for town twinning had changed since its inception and the Inverness Town Twinning Committee was actively focused on developing business and sporting alliance links which was invaluable. It was also seeking to recruit new members, particularly younger people, and any Member with an interest was invited to contact the Committee directly.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the following grant applications for funding:-
   a. Inverness BID Ltd - **£17,950** to be drawn from the Community Regeneration Fund allocation to Inverness and Area;
   b. Visit Inverness Loch Ness - **£20,000** to be drawn from the City Destination Projects Budget;
   c. Inverness: Augsburg Celebration of 70th Anniversary Reciprocal Exchange - **£12,000** to be drawn down from reserve balances;
   d. Inverness: Augsburg Sporting Alliance Exchange - **£14,350** to be drawn from reserve balances;
ii. **AGREED** that a report on town twinning be brought to the Inverness Common Good Sub-Committee in the first instance; and
iii. **AGREED** £0.030m be transferred from Other Grants to Poverty and Inequality.

11. Repurposing Place Based Investment Funds – Ward 19.
Ag Ath-adhbharachadh Mhaoinean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite – Uàrd 19

The Committee **APPROVED** the repurposing of £50k from the Place Based Investment Fund (PBIF), previously approved by the City of Inverness Area Committee in 2022, following support shown by Ward 19 Members for the use of their PBIF allocation.

The funds were originally intended to support the creation of an outdoor community facility on the UHI campus. However, UHI had since revised its proposals and had requested that the £50k PBIF allocation be repurposed for an indoor community project on campus instead.

The revised proposal was being brought forward for the following reasons:

i. an increase in costs associated with the groundworks required for the original project; and
ii. the revised project would provide a more accessible indoor space, enabling a wider range of activities to be delivered on campus. It would also support a more diverse group of users throughout the year.

12. Ward Discretionary Budget Applications
Iarrtasan Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** that the following City of Inverness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 19 May 2025:-

Ward 12
N/A

Ward 13
Central Primary School: Polycrub Project £3,904

Ward 14
Merkinch Football Academy: Merkinch Football League £1,500

Ward 15
Inverness Royal Academy: Belgium Battlefield Trip £747.67
Inverness Royal Academy: Iceland Field Study Trip Travel Costs £845

Ward 16
Walker Park Bins £348

Ward 17
Balloch Community Association SCIO: Radiator Replacement £3,144

Ward 19
N/A

13. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item 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 and as a non-executive Director of Inverness BID Ltd
Mr D Gregg as an employee of NHS Highland

The following Minutes had been circulated for noting or approval as appropriate:-

i. City of Inverness Area Committee held on 19 May 2025 - **NOTED**;
ii. Inverness Common Good Fund Grants Sub-Committee held on 6 August 2025 - **APPROVED**; and
iii. Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 7 August 2025 - **APPROVED**.

The meeting concluded at 2.30pm.