The Highland Council
No.10 2025/2026

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 30 October 2025 at 9.35 am and reconvened on Thursday 6 November 2025 at 4.00pm.

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

Meeting on Thursday 30 October 2025.

Present:

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

Meeting on 6 November 2025

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

In Attendance:
Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive - People
Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Joint Democratic Services Managers

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence, for 30 October 2025 were intimated on behalf of Mr W Mackay and Ms C Ramsay and, for 6 November 2025, on behalf of Dr C Birt, Mr M Green, Mr P Logue, Mr T MacLennan, Mrs M Paterson and Mrs M Ross.

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, Mr A Graham paid tribute to former Councillors, Jimmy Thomson and Ann Glynne-Percy who had sadly passed away. The hard work and dedication of both councillors was recognised. In this regard, the condolences of the Council were conveyed to each of their families and friends.

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

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

Item 3 – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg
Item 4 – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg
Item 5 – Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmondson, Mrs M Ross
Item 6 – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg
Item 7 – Mr K Gowans
Item 14.ii – Mr A Christie
Item 16 (Motion 3) – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg
Item 16 (Motion 5) – Mrs S Atkin

3. Medium Term Financial Plan Update
Cunntas às Ùr mun Phlana Ionmhais Meadhan-ùine

There had been circulated Report No. HC/30/25 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- a key benefit of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was the ability to manage the Council's finances on a planned basis and spread recovery actions over the term of the Plan;
- mitigation and recovery plans were in place to reduce the Quarter 1, 2025/26 net forecast overspend of £12.6m by between £2.3m and £5.5m;
- a number of factors contributing to the increase in the forecasted budget gap had been outwith the Council's control or could not have been foreseen such as reduced Waste pEPR levy funding and pay award costs;
- the Council through its improved financial systems had full visibility, scrutiny and control of budgets at a core level than previously at this stage of the year and while there was still time to take corrective action based on informed decisions;
- in the next cycle of meetings Strategic Committees would review and scrutinise service budget recovery plans in detail and there was confidence an improved position would be reported in the next update to full Council in December 2025;
- it was queried as to why data for Quarter 2 could not have been provided in the report given the improved financial systems in place;
- there was concern that the Council's grant settlement would not be confirmed until well into January 2026 due the inconsistencies in the timing of the UK Government's budget;

- it was suggested a special meeting of Council be held in January 2026 to allow Members to discuss and review the budget, the Council's grant settlement, feedback from the budget consultation exercise and impact on the Highland Investment Plan. This would enable Members to make informed decisions based on up-to-date information;
- the above meeting should also consider the opportunities that existed to fund the Poverty and Equality Commission from April 2026 as opposed to April 2027;
- the essence of the work of the Poverty and Equalities Commission was to engage with communities and identify with partners the best way forward in terms of funding;
- meetings of the Strategic Committees, Corporate Resources Committee and full Council would be held prior to the budget meeting in March 2026 and therefore Members would have many opportunities for review without a special meeting being required;
- the HC/NHS Joint Monitoring Committee's approach to the projected £19.8m overspend on the Adult Social Care budget was outlined and ongoing consideration of an alternative to the current lead agency model would be reported to full Council at the appropriate time;
- the significant pressures Adult Social Care was placing on NHS Highland and the Council were acknowledged and further clarity was sought on what the additional funding provided by the Council had delivered in terms of transformation and savings, the detail of the budget recovery plan and potential future funding requirements;
- the process for developing a budget recovery plan for Children's Services was outlined as was the tracker for each placement type. This would be presented to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee in November 2025;
- the recovery plans being put in place at this stage of the year were not sufficient to meet the challenges. The report highlighted overspends, rising pay pressures, unknown grants, and no provision for key national policies. This was not good news for Members and the communities they served and concern was expressed at the impact on taxpayers in Highland;
- it was questioned how the Administration proposed to engage with the public and those most likely to be impacted by any budget proposals over and above tried and tested methods;
- there was concern the Council had failed to engage with communities and businesses on changes to Corran Ferry fares, parents and teachers on the allocation of resources in respect of pupils with additional support needs, and third sector organisations, CABx, foodbanks and others on setting up the Poverty and Equalities Commission;
- a significant part of the overspend on the Economy and Infrastructure budget was due to repairs to the Corran Ferry and there had been regular meetings of the steering group; the Council was supporting communities with major investment in new ferry improvements, and the model of engagement going forward was to be discussed with Local Members;
- an assurance was sought that all options for a new Corran Ferry would be explored to deliver best value. Members were reminded that in purchasing a new ferry, the Council was subject to procurement rules and regulations;
- an assurance was sought, and provided, that all options for second homes and long-term empty properties were being discussed and would be included in the budget consultation;
- the impact on the budget due to the underfunding of national policies was highlighted and there was a need for representations to be made to both Governments on this issue;

- there was a lack of clarity from the Scottish Government on the costs to the Council of reducing class contact time in schools and this information needed to be provided at the earliest opportunity;
- there was concern at potential cuts in services due to the above underfunding and the need to reiterate the Council's policy of no compulsory redundancies;
- climate change had to be included in the MTFP as a risk given its impacts were being experienced with increasing frequency and intensity and with storm damage becoming an increasingly significant cost to the Council; and
- an assurance was sought, and provided, that considerations around the reinstatement of air services at Wick Airport would form part of the budget process going forward.

Following summing up, Mr R Bremner seconded by the Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT,** Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr D Gregg, moved to add a new recommendation vi to agree that a special meeting of Council be held in January 2026 to discuss and review the following:

- Any changes to the Budget gap of £36.7m as laid out at section 7.2.
- To review the grant settlement for the Highland Council following the publication of the Scottish Government Budget on 13 January 2026.
- To receive initial feedback from the Budget consultation exercises as detailed in sections 10.8 to 10.10.
- To receive interim recommendations or thoughts from the Poverty Commission to enable funding to be considered at the Budget Meeting of 6 March as opposed to allocating funding in February/March 2027.
- To consider any impacts to the Highland Investment Plan as a result of the Scottish Government Budget.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 36 votes, the **AMENDMENT** received 31 votes, and there was 1 abstention. 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 I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, 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 G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, 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 S Cameron, 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, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Mr M Reiss, Mr J McGillivray, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

Abstention:-
Ms K Willis.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **NOTED** the update provided regarding the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) as set out in the report;
ii. **NOTED** the updated financial gap forecast with a minimum estimated level of £36.7m over three financial years;
iii. **NOTED** the range of risks, assumptions and uncertainties as related to the MTFP, and related actions and mitigations;
iv. **AGREED** the timetable as set out in section 10 of the report; and
v. **AGREED** that a further MTFP update report is considered by the Council at its meeting on 11 December 2025.

4. Highland Community Planning Partnership 2024 – 2025 Annual Report Aithisg Bhliadhnail 2024–2025 Com-pàirteachas Planadh Coimhearsnachd na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. HC/31/25 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the world had changed vastly since 2017 so it was a good time to review and plan for the future to be more reflective of current challenges;
- the work of Highland Property Partnerships would be crucial going forward;
- attention was drawn to the progress around models of childcare and the excellent work of the Suicide Prevention Plan;
- the biggest challenge faced in Highland was depopulation, with a decline in overall population and an increase in the population of older people. It was suggested that the Community Planning Partnership was not doing enough to tackle the problem of depopulation, particularly in the areas of transport, healthcare, housing and employment, although the work being done on childcare was commended;
- it was proposed that, in consideration of the risk depopulation posed to Highland, particularly in remote and rural communities, this issue be more fully addressed with clearer interventions identified by the Community Planning Partnership, in particular linking into the strategic framework of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan on the areas of jobs, housing and transport; and this was accepted;
- attention was drawn to the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan which included the employment of two officers, further information was sought on their activities and the Chief Officer, Communities and Housing undertook to provide Cllr Reiss with this information;
- there was a huge amount of work being done to tackle depopulation, increase jobs and retain young people within the Highlands while making sure they had the ability to increase their skills without having to go away to Edinburgh or Glasgow;
- attention was drawn to the various ways in which the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan, supported young people, including support with careers advice, support and apprenticeships through Skills Development Scotland, Workforce Highland, Careers North; and activities delivered through schools to tackle social isolation and improve physical and mental health and wellbeing;

- praise was given to the Highland Whole Family Wellbeing Programme which had at least funded 51 projects for children and families;
- the importance of increasing the supply of housing of all types and tenures was emphasised and it was highlighted that housing was a key issue in all three areas of the HOIP, Place, People and Prosperity as well as being an important factor in addressing population decline and poverty;
- long periods living in temporary accommodation could have significant long term effects on children's education and wellbeing so the HOIP's specific target to reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation was vital and while progress was already being made through the work of the housing team, this would remain a challenge without a greater supply of housing;
- the need for housing in rural areas was highlighted, and it was explained that while it was more expensive to build houses in rural areas, in many communities a small number of houses would make a significant impact;
- it was queried whether there were being any additional resources committed to help achieve the targets set out in the HOIP;
- attention was drawn to the difficulties with health and social care access, digital inclusion and transport barriers faced by the older population, especially those in rural areas;
- it was queried, what evidence there was that partnership working was improving the lives of older residents, how the Community Planning Partnership was ensuring age friendly priorities, such as accessible transport, care integration and digital inclusion and, whether an Age Friendly Highlands could be made a cross-cutting theme in the Highland Opportunity Improvement Plan 2027-2037 with clear, measurable indicators on healthy aging and community participation;
- the need for an older people's policy and more intergenerational proposals, was expressed;
- the aging population should have been viewed as an asset and not a challenge;
- it was suggested that Age Friendly Communities and issues concerning older people should be included in Integrated Impact Assessments;
- the detrimental impact on peoples' health caused by the loss of the maternity hospital and lack of GPs in Caithness, was highlighted;
- although there was not a lack of available housing in Caithness, many of the available homes needed to be upgraded;
- a plan for the repopulation of Caithness and Sutherland was requested;
- it was queried, when the Health Inequalities Report would be provided;
- the report mentioned many projects that had been launched but more information about the outcomes of these projects, including figures and statistics, was needed and, assurance was sought that key performance indicators and outcomes would be included in future reports;
- thanks were extended to the Community Planning Partnership team in Badenoch and Strathspey for their hard work to encourage partnership working;
- the needs of each partnership area were being identified locally;
- the importance of the arts was emphasised both for young people and the older population;
- the life expectancy in Highland was longer than in the rest of Scotland but there was still a large difference in life expectancies between the richest and poorest people which emphasised the importance of working to reduce poverty;

- although the provision of foodbanks and free sanitary products was often viewed as a positive, the fact that they were needed was a negative as this was due to poverty. Many food banks were receiving fewer donations as people were less able to afford to donate and attention was drawn to the two community fridges in Dingwall and Seaforth ward that were originally set up to tackle food waste and were now being used to tackle food insecurity;
- hope was expressed that provision would be made in the upcoming budget to prepare for the recommendations of the Poverty Commission;
- concern was expressed about the Sutherland Community Planning Partnership, which after being very successful for many years was now in decline; and about the continued funding of the Kyle of Sutherland development trust whose support had been vital in allowing Members to lead work on housing and poverty in the area;
- many Community Planning Partnership meetings had declining attendance and low engagement from Community Councils, with many partners not having the availability to attend meetings due to staffing and resource pressures;
- the Council would need to accept that there would be a financial loss associated with the provision of childcare;
- the importance of reengaging with communities and Community Councils was emphasised;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that there was great excitement within industries for the work of Workforce North and that they were engaging with other local authorities to work of the development and attraction of jobs in a wider area;
- Community Planning Partnerships were a good way for bringing together statutory services and third sector organisations and provided valuable opportunities for networking;
- the importance of third sector organisations and the need to work closely with them within Community Planning Partnerships, was emphasised;
- the Children and Young People's Participation Strategy and the work done within the Council on the Promise to make sure that cared for young people were kept as close as possible to their communities and support networks, were commended;
- it was requested that the Employment Delivery Plan included links to the Armed Forces Covenant;
- attention was drawn to the lack of childcare provision outside of school hours in Ardesier, Croy and Smithton;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that a total of 51 projects had been funded and it was then queried where the outcomes for these projects would be reported and scrutinised;
- clarification was sought on the third Place outcome and it was suggested that an additional outcome be added to future reports to look at the health, quality of life and support requirements of the older population, as age itself was less important than health, fitness and mobility in older people;
- thanks were extended to Sandra Brown of the Whole Family Wellbeing team, the Green Health Partnership for running a very successful event at the Botanic Gardens and the Creating Hope in the Highlands suicide prevention team;
- the difficulty of addressing poverty and inequality with limited money and resources was emphasised;
- disappointment was expressed by that lack of mention of the Net Zero Strategy in the report;

- the importance of establishing a corporate identity for Community Planning Partnerships was highlighted, as members of the public were aware of the activities of the partner organisations but often had little knowledge of the partnerships themselves;
- attention was drawn to the issue of volunteer fatigue, with many volunteers feeling over stretched and losing hope, it was further emphasised that many volunteers were older people which could further add to these challenges;
- the importance of reports being comprehensible to the public was emphasised;
- in response to a suggestion that funding for Community Councils be increased, the Leader of the Council explained that money needed to be channelled in various directions to make things work and encouraged all Members to engage in the budget-setting process;
- it was suggested that a report or a Members' briefing be provided on the work being done to tackle depopulation by organisations such as the Convention of the Highlands and Islands; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Community Planning Partnerships had complete autonomy at local level within the framework of the HOIP.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **NOTED** the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan Annual Update for 2024-2025 which could be found at Appendix 1 of the report;
ii. **AGREED**, in consideration of the risk depopulation posed to Highland, particularly remote and rural communities, to request that this issue be more fully addressed with clearer interventions identified by the Community Planning Partnership, in particular linking into the strategic framework of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan on the areas of jobs, housing and transport; and
iii. **AGREED** that a briefing be arranged, as part of Members' training and development sessions, on the work being undertaken by agencies to address depopulation.

5. Highland Investment Plan – Progress Update
Plana Tasgaidh na Gàidhealtachd - Cunntas Adhartais

There had been circulated Report No. HC/32/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. The Chief Officer – Property and Assets gave a presentation in amplification of the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the excellent report and presentation, and the significant amount of work taking place;
- the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) and funding mechanism had been agreed by the Council in May 2024, and the progress to date as detailed in the report was welcomed;
- it was good to see the combined impact of the core Capital Programme and the HIP;

- there was a lot going on in several areas throughout Highland, and the Council Leader was keen to see progress being reported in respect of the current phase of the HIP as well as preparation for future phases. He was also keen that Local Members were briefed regularly about projects in their areas and, as indicated by officers, the team was committed to that;
- in relation to Phase 1 schools, there was concern in communities regarding potential slippage, and reassurance was sought that the delivery dates in the report to the Council on 27 March 2025 were still on track. With regard to Beauly Primary School in particular, the delivery date that had been specified was January to March 2028 but a site had yet to be agreed, and it was hoped the preferred location would be confirmed at the forthcoming stakeholder meeting. It was added that people in Beauly simply wanted a safe, secure, warm school, but Beauly Primary School was now referred to in the report as a new build Community Point of Delivery (POD) and discussion was required in that regard. In response, it was explained that officers, in conjunction with the Council's delivery partner, Hub North Scotland, were working hard to achieve the dates previously set out, and Members would be updated as design teams were fully engaged and accommodation schedules were pulled together, enabling a more definitive timeline to be provided;
- in relation to the Highland Housing Challenge, the majority of the 250 sites identified were in Inverness or the Inner Moray Firth, and it was proposed that a report be submitted to the next Council meeting on schools in that area, including their capacity, condition and future role pressures. It was also proposed that the problem of developers not having the appetite to build houses in rural areas and small urban areas and towns such as Fort William needed to be addressed. If the Council was serious about tackling depopulation in such areas it was necessary to come up with better ways of encouraging developers to build housing, and a report setting out innovative solutions to be presented to the Special Council meeting on 6 March 2026 should be forthcoming. Other Members added their support, commenting that it was necessary to disperse development rather than allowing it to be driven by developer preference, resulting in disproportionate growth in Inverness and leaving other areas deprived and depopulated;
- there was sometimes disbelief in communities that projects would come to fruition, and it was necessary to consider how to communicate to the communities where planned developments had not yet started that they would happen – for example, by sharing what was happening in areas that were further ahead, such as Nairn and Tain;
- the proposed investment in sports facilities was welcomed, and it was suggested it was next necessary to look at investing in the arts and culture. Other Members added their support for investment in the arts, particularly in more remote and rural areas so people did not have to travel to Eden Court;
- in relation to the Thurso workstream, thanks were expressed for the engagement that had taken place with the groups detailed in the report. The next stage was to bring the public along and it was important to get the message across that the POD was going to happen as there was disappointment in the community that the anticipated NHS health hubs had been paused for two years by the Scottish Government. It was added that Thurso Community Council had now been reestablished, and it was expected there would be a lot of questions for officers at the next meeting;

- the progress being made in respect of the Broadford Primary and Dunvegan Primary projects was welcomed, as was the strategic approach being taken to the two projects which allowed for exploring opportunities for cost savings in terms of economies of scale;
- there was a need for new and upgraded sports facilities throughout Highland, and it was necessary to review the Community, Sports and Leisure Facility Strategy as soon as possible. This needed to be aligned with the School Estate Strategy that was being developed, and it would be helpful to understand the timescales for these strategies;
- the proposed allocation of funding to enable Tain Royal Academy Community Complex (TRACC) to be retained for up to five years was welcomed. The results of the community consultation in that regard had to be honoured, and Councillors Ross and Dundas were commended for the reflective and proactive way they had worked with the community to get to the current stage. Local Members added that TRACC had been a cornerstone of the community for over 50 years and could not be allowed to close when the new campus opened without the opportunity of putting a new sports facility in place. Such facilities helped combat obesity, heart disease and more and, at a time when NHS waiting lists were challenging and the mental health crisis was deepening, they were preventative tools. Beyond physical health, the social impacts were profound. Young people needed a safe and structured environment and TRACC provided that, keeping them away from anti-social behaviour and engaged in something positive. It taught discipline, teamwork, resilience and built confidence, and it was also inclusive, welcoming everyone from toddlers, children, young adults, pensioners, athletes and those with disabilities. It was a place where people felt they belonged, which was priceless at a time of rising loneliness and isolation. Thanks were expressed to officers for their support and willingness to listen and provide information to enable the current position to be reached;
- the proposed Construction Skills Academy and the stakeholder involvement in that regard were welcomed. £100bn of investment was expected across the Highlands and Islands, particularly in renewable infrastructure, and the Skills Academy was critical to addressing the workforce challenge to take advantage of what was a once in a generation opportunity. It would deliver hands-on training, apprenticeships and career pathways to equip local people with the skills needed for the future. However, other Members questioned how the requirement for an estimated 16,250 additional people would be met given only approximately 3000 people were currently unemployed in Highland. In addition, concern was expressed that new private sector jobs would draw staff away from the public sector, thereby impacting the delivery of vital public services. Furthermore, every person that arrived in Highland cost the Council money as it did not get suitable recompense from the UK Government;
- the current St Clement's School building had 10 rooms whereas the proposed new building had eight rooms, and there was concern amongst stakeholders that the new school was not going to be big enough and that rooms intended for other purposes would have to be used as classrooms. It was essential to ensure that there was sufficient space in the new school building and that stakeholders were kept fully updated;

- the proposed Centre for Excellence for Disability Sport at the Dingwall Community POD together with an upgrade of Dingwall Leisure Centre would make a huge difference for the people of Dingwall and the surrounding area. However, it was important to remember that other communities, such as Conon Bridge, Maryburgh and Muir of Ord, had sports facilities they were seeking to upgrade, and others, like Tore, had none;
- in relation to the proposed Community Benefits Plans for each project, information was sought, and provided, as to what the criteria would be and what mechanisms were in place for including what communities wanted. It was added that if the Council did not get this right, communities would be speaking directly to developers and vice versa;
- it was necessary to encourage the redevelopment of brownfield sites for housing;
- disappointment was expressed regarding the negative narrative that there was uncertainty about projects given there could be a change of Scottish Government, with different priorities, in 2026, or a new Highland Council Administration in 2027. The HIP presented solutions to problems that had been wrestled with for a number of years, and Members were encouraged to get behind it and engage in a positive and innovative manner;
- dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the lack of investment in East Sutherland in comparison with other areas such as Tain, Invergordon and Inverness. Particular reference was made to the poor condition of Brora Community Centre, Helmsdale Harbour and the PE facilities at Dornoch Academy, as well as the risk to seafront properties in Golspie due to coastal erosion, and issues with childcare provision in Brora;
- the Climate Change Impact Assessment was a core component of the Integrated Impact Assessment tool for all Council projects and activities and played a critical role in ensuring the Council met its statutory obligations in relation to climate change. It was queried whether Climate Change Impact Assessments had been undertaken for all HIP projects; whether the Climate Change and Energy Team (CCET) were fully involved in the design and procurement phase of each project; whether whole life carbon costs were being considered at the initial project design stage or were projects still focused on best value at the procurement invoice stage; and, in relation to TRACC and the proposed new LPG boilers, whether the CCET had been consulted regarding sustainable, low carbon alternatives. In the long term, the Council would reap benefits and cost savings when Net Zero, sustainability and circularity were embedded in every project, and involving the CCET in the design and procurement phases would ensure that was the case and avoid issues arising at a later stage that would lead to increased costs. It was added that the Council's Net Zero Strategy set out a clear commitment to embed climate change considerations into all aspects of decision-making, and it was questioned whether that was happening. In response, it was confirmed that the CCET was and would continue to be engaged with the design proposals, and that buildings were being designed to the Passivhaus standard in respect of energy efficiency. A model of whole life costing was already in place for Learning Estate Investment Programme projects and that would be applied to HIP projects. There were also technical standards to be met, and Members were assured that the team was well versed on what needed to be done to deliver low carbon buildings for the future. The Council Leader added that he was happy to meet with the Chair of the Climate Change Committee to discuss any improvements that could be made in terms of involving the CCET in the design phase of HIP projects;

- Fortrose Academy Associated School Group (ASG) had little in the way of sport and leisure facilities, and reassurance was sought that the proposed new synthetic sports pitch at Fortrose Academy would not be impacted by the opportunities that had arisen to provide synthetic pitches elsewhere;
- the Council was a member of KIMO, which had campaigned against microplastic runoff from artificial grass, and reassurance was sought that all proposed synthetic pitches would be designed in accordance with KIMO's guidelines for design and procurement specialists. In addition, information was sought, and provided, regarding public access to the new pitches, the importance of which was emphasised, and it was requested that research be carried out to ensure the pitches were suitable for all sports, as many sports could not be played on 5G pitches. It was explained that discussions had taken place with the Scottish Football Association regarding potential alternatives to traditional synthetic pitches that were currently being trialled in Scotland, and officers undertook to keep Members apprised in that regard;
- with reference to the Social Values Charter for Renewables Investment and SSEN's proposal to build worker camps which could then be demolished and handed over to the Council as fully serviced vacant sites for housing, it was queried whether the Council had asked SSEN to build accommodation which could be handed over as housing which only required modification and improvement. In response, it was explained that a report to the next meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee would provide detail on the types of housing delivery that would be provided by SSEN, which included not only worker camps but new build and refurbishment of existing stock;
- the proposed funding allocation in respect of Queens Park running track was welcomed, as was the proposal to upgrade the Aquadome and Leisure Centre. In relation to Queens Park in particular, Inverness Harriers was likely to lose its registration to host regional events if the track was not resurfaced. The club had recently celebrated its first Olympian, Megan Keith, who had also been selected to represent Team Scotland at the Commonwealth Games, and losing this registration would have a negative impact on runners throughout Highland. Other Members added their support for the resurfacing of the running track, emphasising the need for urgency;
- ensuring people in Highland communities lived well and independently for longer was fundamental to the Council's ambitions, and support was expressed for any improvements to sport and leisure facilities in Highland. However, it was necessary to make informed decisions based on the best information available. In 2019, the City of Inverness Area Committee had agreed a proposal to use developer contributions towards an all-weather pitch at Inverness Campus. It had also been agreed to progress a feasibility study on a sports facility in east Inverness that would meet the needs of a fast-growing population from the campus to the new town at Tornagrain. The Community, Sports and Leisure Facility Strategy that had been reported to the Education Committee in 2023 had stated that the ASG proposals would not be a suitable strategy for the city of Inverness. A strategy for sport in the city had not progressed since then and was desperately needed, but a Highland-wide strategy that took into account the needs of all communities and areas was even better. It was necessary to understand what sports had relevant facilities and support and where there were gaps. Football, shinty and rugby, for example, appeared to be well supported, but there were no dedicated training facilities for basketball and gymnastics, both of which were currently showing great success in Highland. There were many other sports that would thrive with additional support and recognition, and the proposed Centre of Excellence for

Disability Sport was a great example of what could be achieved. The proposed review of the Community, Sports and Leisure Facility Strategy was therefore welcomed, and it was hoped this could consider all sports and facilities, including both public and private, professional and amateur clubs, and all offerings of community fun and fitness in village halls and community spaces;

- Members praised the work taking place in respect of Inverness High School;
- the inclusion of the Lochaber Care project was welcomed, and a request was made that recommendation vii, regarding the proposed preparation of a masterplan for the Blar Mhor site in Fort William, be amended to include the immediate establishment of, and ongoing consultation with, a community liaison group, and the exploration of a community development model for care as part of the considerations. In response, it was explained that the proposed masterplan related solely to physical infrastructure planning. The future model of care was being dealt with separately, and Members were assured that public engagement and consultation would be a key part of the process;
- it was queried whether there was flexibility within the HIP to incorporate upgrades to the B9006 road, particularly at narrow pinch points. The road was used as a secondary route to Inverness from the east, and there had been several accidents on the A96 in recent months that had heavily impacted it. It was extremely difficult for two articulated lorries to pass each other in places, and this was going to cause more problems in the future. In response, it was explained that the established way of dealing with such projects was through the allocation of roads capital funding to Area Committees, and it was suggested it be raised prior to the next City of Inverness Area Committee item on the Roads Capital Programme so it could be planned into the budget;
- many people with children in unsuitable school buildings were not concerned with matters such as Net Zero and simply wanted new schools to be built as quickly as possible. The need to work at pace and pull back any slippage was emphasised, particularly given the level of construction inflation, and it would be helpful for the Council to reaffirm its commitment to the agreed timescale for delivery;
- disappointment was expressed that the report did not include an update on the Highland Football Academy, which needed investment to sustain and upgrade it. Although the Football Academy was based in Dingwall and Inverness, it was for the whole of Highland and was well used and loved. An update was requested in advance of a meeting on 25 November 2025, which officers were invited to attend. Other Members added that some families had to travel considerable distances to attend the Football Academy, and there was a need for football facilities in other parts of Highland such as Caithness;
- attention was drawn to the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) vision for Highland as detailed in section 13.4 of the report, and proposals were sought on how it was intended to provide housing in the more remote and rural areas in north and west Highland such as Bettyhill, Tongue, Durness, Scourie and Assynt. It was recognised that building houses was more costly in such areas, but it was vital. Other Members queried whether the reference in the LHS vision to a “quality home” related only to new builds or would existing houses be upgraded;
- there was a need for a running track in Wick as many runners in the area had to run on unlit single-track roads;
- in responding to the points raised regarding housing, the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee highlighted that, at the next meeting of the Committee, there would be a report on Masterplan Consent Areas, some of which would not be in Inverness. In terms of rural housing, Albyn Housing Association had agreed to build many hundreds of homes in rural areas, and

there were energy efficient designs for new homes so heating would be more affordable. The Council was also looking to upgrade its housing stock in rural areas and, in terms of planning, was looking at rural exception sites, whereby developments that might not normally get planning permission could be looked upon sympathetically;

- the proposed investment in a new floodlit synthetic playing field at Inverness Campus was welcomed, as was the opportunity to provide a new synthetic pitch at Invergordon Academy. In relation to the latter, an assurance was sought that planning consent would be requested this year so preparations were in place to secure external funding for next year;
- in relation to the Alness and Invergordon workstream, it was suggested that Local Members had not been sufficiently consulted to move to the detailed work and engagement stage, and it was requested that be addressed as a matter of urgency. In addition, clarification was sought, and provided, as to when it was anticipated community engagement would commence;
- reference was made to a situation that had arisen in the Cromarty Firth ward due to a lack of communication and timely engagement which had resulted in undue pressure being put on Local Members. Similarly, it was commented that Lochaber Members had been unaware of the proposed masterplan for the Blar Mhor site prior to publication of the papers for today's meeting, and it was requested that an effort be made to proactively engage with communities and Members at an early stage going forward, including cross-ward briefings where necessary. However, the volume of engagement required due to the number of projects was acknowledged;
- getting both the UK and Scottish Governments and partners to unlock many of the financial barriers to building new homes in rural areas would make a significant difference, and it was queried what had been done to progress the call, at the previous meeting of the Council, for a rural housing deal;
- appreciation was expressed regarding the delivery of the new Nairn Academy building which was scheduled to open in August 2028, and Nairn Members looked forward to contributing to the proposed review of community, sports and leisure facilities; and
- leisure facilities had not had the profile they needed at Council and Committee level due to day-to-day management being undertaken by High Life Highland. In relation to the Aquadome in particular, the vortex flume, which was an important part of the facility, had been closed since August 2023, and it was hoped that would be addressed in the near future.

During summing up, the Council Leader reiterated the importance of ensuring Local Members and communities were well-informed and engaged, and he encouraged Members to notify senior Members and officers of any concerns in that regard going forward. In terms of the proposed amendment, it was important not to task Full Council with the work of strategic committees. Different officers were dealing with different aspects of the HIP, and the points the amendment focused on could be incorporated in the work of the appropriate committee. The Highland Housing Challenge was considering how to overcome the challenges of the cost of house building and development in rural areas, and the matter had been raised at COSLA.

Thereafter, Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A Baxter, moved additional recommendations viii and ix as follows:-

viii. recognising that the call for development sites to address the Housing Challenge has identified 250 sites of which the vast majority are in Inverness and the inner Moray Firth, that a report on all Inverness and Inner Moray Firth schools including their capacity, condition and future role pressures be presented to the next Council Meeting; and

ix. that to address the difficulty to encourage house building outside the inner Moray Firth and in more remote and rural areas that a report be prepared that shows innovative solutions to address that issue to be considered as part of the Special Council Meeting Budget reports of 6th March 2026.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 39 votes, and the **AMENDMENT** received 30 votes, with no abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore carried, the votes having been cast as follows:-

Motion:
Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, 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 G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

Amendment:
Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr S Cameron, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs L Saggers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

Decision

The Council :-

i. **APPROVED** the continuing work on progressing Phase 1 of the Highland Investment Programme (HIP), the procurement and delivery of the major projects, conducting place-based reviews and developing masterplans, all as outlined in sections 6 to 8 of the report;

ii. **AGREED** that capital funding totalling £2.6M was allocated to Community, Sports, and Leisure projects and developments as set out in paragraphs 9.2 to 9.7 of the report;

iii. **AGREED** that capital funding of £1.2M was allocated to enable the Tain Royal Academy Community Complex (TRACC) to be retained as a separate, standalone building for a period of up to 5 years once the new Tain Campus building was operational as set out in Section 10 of the report;

iv. **APPROVED** the work to date in developing a Community Benefits Plan as set out in Section 11 of the report;

v. **APPROVED** the work to date in considering the potential development of a Construction Skills Academy as set out in Section 12 of the report;

vi. **APPROVED** the work to date in progressing various strategic initiatives related to the Highland Housing Challenge as set out in Section 13 of the report; and

vii. **AGREED** that, to support the delivery of the Lochaber Care project, a masterplan be prepared for the Blar Mhor site in Fort William to identify available development land and infrastructure constraints as set out in Section 14 of the report.

6. Developing a Future Operating Model for the Highland Council
A' Leasachadh Modail Obrachaidh do Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd airson an Ama ri Teachd

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

There was commentary on the report by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate and referred to the case for change which had led to the Council developing a progressive approach to how it delivered services with its key partners, whereby each local area would benefit from a network of services, as well as physical hubs where citizens and staff could connect. This approach was referred to as the Future Operation Model (FOM). It was explained what would be delivered: defining the FOM; how the FOM would be delivered; and next steps: rolling out the FOM. It was highlighted that public consultation was influencing service delivery; there was a clear vision and drive for improvement; and that the Council was at the forefront of innovation and transformation.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- reference was made for the need to change the way the Council delivered its services, as the demands on the public sector were increasing. There was a need for better use of technology to enable the public to interact with Council services. There had been extensive research and engagement to develop a progressive approach to delivery of service and the FOM would be taken forward through a range of pilot projects. The FOM would enable more joined up services, more support for charities and other bodies to access the Council's facilities or deliver local services. There would be more jobs devolved across the Highlands, which would help more people to stay and work in remote and rural communities. The FOM was at the heart of the type of Council, this Council aspired to become and communities that it wanted to prosper;
- Merkinch area of Inverness was 8th in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, one of the most deprived areas in Scotland, with worst access to services, least jobs, lowest incomes, most crime, least access to Education and worst Housing. It was essential that the Council invested in this area and it was a priority for the Inverness Community Partnership. It was queried how much money would be invested in this area and how would the Community Partnership be involved in planning this investment. There was also rural deprivation and there were studies that could be looked at to target these areas and measure the extent of deprivation better;
- this report was a first step in honouring commitments to make sure all communities benefit from the Highland investment plan and the FOM approach to make Council facilities come alive for the benefit of communities. There was also a need to help staff who travelled large distances benefit from Council facilities more, such as increasing their access to digital technology and welfare facilities, which would bring them closer to the Council and help connect the Council with its staff and communities;

- there was a need for various mediums for people to engage with the Council. For older people their preference was often to do this by telephone or face to face contact and this should be done in an acceptable timeframe. Young people were more likely to use services by e-mail or webchat. There was a need to change the culture of staff, communities and residents for this FOM to work;
- in relation to the aspiration to improve town centre vacancy rates, it was unlikely that this would be achieved quickly, for example, in Inverness and Fort William. There was a need to look at different uses for some of these vacant premises;
- using Schools as a place where the public could access services in communities should be considered and there would be a need for upskilling of staff to be able to multitask to provide services that people wanted;
- in relation to a review of policies for booking arrangements for facilities, complaints had been received about young children climbing the fence to access the all-weather pitch in Merkinch. The pitch was available to everyone in the community, via a booking system operated by High Life Highland. However, there had been problems with this system and therefore people had been unable to access the pitch. It was hoped these problems could be resolved, saving money in the long term;
- it was highlighted the concept of more devolution to communities in the way Council services were delivered, opportunities for local people to be more involved in certain decision making and services being more responsive to the needs of local people was very positive;
- there was a need to ensure that where efficiencies could be made through the FOM, the social and societal costs of these were understood, and that efficiencies were not to the detriment of people the Council were providing services for. The need for integrated working between different teams, such as Amenities and Roads teams and to look at prioritising work was highlighted and
- outsourcing some Council services could save the Council money. Also, there was a concern that more use of digital technology in the provision of services would leave behind some of the older population which was projected to increase.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **NOTED** the work and progress undertaken to date;
ii. **AGREED** the definition, vision and design principles for the Future Operating Model (FOM) as detailed in section 7 of the report;
iii. **APPROVED** the FOM Assessment Framework for assessing service delivery and service change with alignment with the FOM as detailed in section 7 and Appendix 4 of the report;
iv. **NOTED** the range of related policies as detailed at Section 8 of the report designed and updated since 2024 to support the delivery of FOM;
v. **NOTED** the appointment of a Programme Manager and that three dedicated teams would be created and located across Highland supported by the funding (£0.500m) approved by Members on 6 March 2025;
vi. **AGREED** the initial series of sites and projects for FOM as detailed at Section 8 of the report;
vii. **APPROVED** further discussions to take place with Ward Members to inform the rollout of FOM across all areas; and

viii. **NOTED** the initial performance metrics as detailed at Section 9 of the report to support project evaluation, governance and scrutiny and that these would continue to be reviewed as informed by the ongoing engagement and delivery of FOM.

7. Visitor Levy Update Report
Aithisg Ùrachaidh mu Chìs Luchd-tadhail

There had been circulated Joint Report No. HC/34/25 by the Assistant Chief Executives – Place and Corporate.

The Visitor Levy had been under discussion since 2018, with legislation passed in 2024. Members were advised that the scheme aimed to address longstanding underinvestment in tourism infrastructure and provide a sustainable funding mechanism. An independent economic impact assessment was nearing completion and would be shared with Members. Legislative changes were expected to be considered in future, including the possibility of introducing a flat rate option. A full paper was to be submitted to the December Council meeting to support informed decision-making.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- concern was expressed that the Administration had already formed a view on the matter, despite the Council having previously agreed to await further information before making any decision. Reference was made to the Minister's letter of 18 September 2025, which confirmed that the Scottish Government was open to legislative change. Members argued that the Council should pause until such changes were confirmed, to ensure that any future scheme could take full advantage of potential new flexibilities. Disappointment was expressed that the Council appeared to be prioritising revenue generation over sector engagement;
- over 1,200 Highland businesses had expressed opposition to the current percentage-based model, while remaining open to the principle of a levy. Members emphasised the importance of securing broad industry support and ensuring that any future scheme reflected the specific circumstances of the Highland area. Concerns were raised about the absence of a clear reinvestment framework and the need for transparency in how any revenue generated would be used to support tourism infrastructure and local communities;
- an amendment was proposed by seeking to delay any decision on the Visitor Levy until the Scottish Government's position on legislative changes had been clarified. Members expressed concern that the current legislation was not suited to the Highland context. Specific reference was made to the administrative burden placed on small accommodation providers, with some reporting that the proposed scheme could threaten the viability of businesses. The need for a simpler flat rate model was highlighted, along with calls for greater engagement with the tourism sector to ensure any future scheme was workable and widely supported. Members questioned why the proposed legislative amendment could not be made via statutory instrument within the current parliamentary term, given its simplicity. It was suggested that the Council should actively engage with the Scottish Government to explore this option;

- concerns were raised regarding the impact on residents travelling within the Highlands, particularly for hospital appointments or essential shopping and the need to exempt local residents from any levy. Members stressed that residents should not be treated as tourists when moving within their own region; and
- concerns were expressed about the suitability of the legislation for rural areas. The current framework appeared overly complex and not well aligned with the needs of Highland communities. A flat rate model was considered more practical and manageable for local businesses. Reference was made to examples from Liverpool and Manchester, where visitor levies had been successfully introduced through industry led approaches. Members called for a similar model in Highland, co-designed with the tourism sector to ensure broad support and effective implementation.

At this point, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A Baxter, **MOVED** that Standing Order 34 (the six-month rule) be suspended to allow debate on the amendment proposing that no decision be taken on the Visitor Levy until legislative clarity had been confirmed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, the Leader of the Council, seconded by the Convener, **MOVED** that Standing Orders should not be suspended, on the basis that the Council had already agreed on 18 September 2025 to receive a further report in December 2025 before making any decision.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 34 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 33 votes, with 2 abstentions. In accordance with Standing Order 36, a two-thirds majority of Members present and voting was required to suspend Standing Order 34. As this threshold had not been met, the **MOTION** was **NOT CARRIED**, and Standing Orders remained in effect.

The votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr S Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Cross, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs M Ross, Mrs L Saggers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart.

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 M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, 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, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Ms K Willis.

Abstentions:
Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy.

Following the outcome of the vote, the Convener confirmed that the matter would be considered further at the next Council meeting in December 2025 and proceeded to the next item of business.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the report as agreed by Council on 18 September 2025 and **AGREED** that a further report be submitted to the Council in December 2025, setting out the findings from the economic impact assessment and consultation analysis, including recommendations on the way forward for a Visitor Levy in the Highland area.

8. Review of the Scheme of Delegation
Cunntas às Ùr mun Sgeama Thiomnaidh

There had been circulated Report No. HC/35/25 by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the changes to the Scheme of Delegation as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

9. Annual Review of Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings
Ath-sgrùdadh air Òrdughan Seasmhach a' Buntainn ri Stiùireadh Choinneamhan

There had been circulated Report No. HC/36/25 by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought on the provision for substitutes at Planning Applications Committee (PAC) meetings. It was highlighted that the current wording could imply that a substitute would attend the entire next meeting, whereas the intention was that substitution should only apply to the relevant item that had been carried forward from the previous meeting and the Standing Order should be amended accordingly to reflect this. It was also clarified by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance that the existing quorum for PACs would continue to be applied to planning applications that were currently in the process of being considered;
- it was confirmed that the review of Standing Orders was undertaken annually and the report reflected the discussions that had been held at the Governance Review Steering Group. In addition, a glossary had been prepared and circulated as an appendix to assist Members which was welcomed;
- Standing Order 21.2 referred to roll call votes, which were no longer used, and it was suggested that this should be amended to replicate current voting practice by specifying that a point of order could not be taken once the Convener had announced that a vote was to take place;
- concern was expressed that there was no clear provision for emergency motions. Members considered that the 21-day notice period for Notice of Motions was too restrictive and that a mechanism for urgent motions should be included, subject to the Convener's discretion. However, it was indicated that urgent motions could be considered under Standing Order 8 as items of urgent business at the Convener's discretion;

- Members stressed that where urgent business was refused, this should be recorded in the minutes along with the reasons for refusal to ensure fairness and transparency, and that this should be incorporated into Standing Order 8;
- only 20 responses had been received to the recent Member survey on the trial Notices of Motions process. It was indicated that the survey would be recirculated to encourage wider feedback. It was confirmed that meeting invites for the Governance Review Steering Group would be circulated to all Members;
- questions were raised about Standing Order 11 and the extension of the notice period for questions to 21 days. Members expressed concern that this could prevent timely scrutiny and emphasised the need for urgent questions to be allowed at the Convener's discretion. In addition, Members highlighted frustration that answers provided were often not substantive and sought assurance that responses would address the questions fully;
- Members highlighted issues with Standing Order 15.3 on Notices of Amendment in Planning Applications Committees, particularly the requirement to secure 40% support before the end of the meeting. It was considered that this was impractical and should be reviewed. It was suggested that suspending the meeting could allow time for Members to secure the necessary support for a Notice of Amendment. In addition, concern was raised that the restriction on using communication devices during planning meetings (except for reviewing planning materials) made it even more difficult to obtain the required support within the limited timeframe;
- concerns were raised about the impact of current arrangements on democratic accountability and the ability to respond to emerging issues in view of the timescales for questions and Notices of Motions. It was clarified that the current process for Notices of Motions and amendments was a trial and would remain in place until further feedback was received and considered by the Governance Review Steering Group to inform future recommendations; and
- reference was made to the lack of flexibility in the current process for Notices of Motions and amendments to these, as the current arrangements did not allow compromise between competing proposals at the meeting. It was suggested that this should be addressed in future revisions.

Following discussion, the Convener, seconded by Mr R Bremner, **MOVED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr C Ballance, seconded by Mr R MacKintosh, **MOVED** that the recommendations should not be agreed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 48 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 11 votes, with 8 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:
Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Mr R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Ms J McEwan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mrs T Robertson, Mrs M Ross.

For the Amendment:
Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mr S Coghill, Mrs H Crawford, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs L Saggers, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

Abstentions:
Mr S Cameron, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Dr M Gregson, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr M Reiss.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **APPROVED** the revised wording of Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings as set out in Appendix 1 of the report subject to:
   a. the wording in respect of substitutions for Planning Applications Committees at Standing Order 4.3 be amended;
   b. Standing 6.4 be amended to clarify that the existing quorum (one quarter of the membership) would continue to be applied at PACs for applications that were currently in the process of being considered and determined;
   c. if a request for an item to be considered as urgent business is declined, the reasons for refusal must be recorded in the minutes;
   d. reference to roll call voting be removed from Standing Order 21.2;

ii. **NOTED** that the survey on the Notices of Motions trial process would be recirculated to encourage wider Member feedback. Thereafter, the feedback and trial process would be reviewed by the Governance Review Steering Group and any revisions would be submitted to a future meeting of the Council for approval; and

iii. **NOTED** that non-members were welcome to attend the Governance Review Steering Group meetings and invites would be issued to all Members.

10. Membership of the Council
Ballrachd na Comhairle

The Council **NOTED** that Ms Sarah Fanet had tendered her resignation as a Highland Council Member with effect from 20 October 2025 and a By-election for Ward 21 (Fort William and Ardnamurchan) would be held on 11 December 2025.

The Council also **NOTED** that following By-Elections for Wards 7 (Tain and Easter Ross) and 11 (Caol and Mallaig) held on 25 September 2025, the undernoted were elected as Members of the Council:

Ward 7: Ms Connie Ramsay
Ward 11: Mr Sammy Cameron

The political make-up of the Council was now as follows:-

SNP – 19 / Highland Independent – 16 / Scottish Liberal Democrats – 16 / Highland Alliance – 9 / Scottish Conservative and Unionist – 6 / Scottish Green Party – 3 / Labour – 2 / Alba – 1 / Non-Aligned – 1 / Vacant – 1.

The formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees was now 5/4/4/3/2.

11. Membership of Committees, etc
Ballrachd air Comataidhean, msaa

The Council **AGREED**:-

i. the appointments to Committees as tabled; and
ii. Mrs Maureen Ross be appointed as Vice Chair of Climate Change Committee.

12. Deeds Executed
Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

There had been circulated a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 18 September 2025 which was **NOTED**.

13. Confirmation of Minutes
Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais

There had been circulated Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council held on 18 September 2025 and the Meeting held on 18 September 2025 as contained in the Volume which were **APPROVED**.

14. Minutes of Meetings of Committees
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan Chomataidhean

Minutes of Meetings not included in the Volume were as follows:-

i. Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board 10 June 2025 (approved by the Board on 7 October 2025) – **NOTED;**
ii. Community Planning Board 6 June 2025 (approved by the Board on 19 September 2025) – **NOTED**;
iii. Investment Sub Committee 26 September 2025 – **APPROVED**; and
iv. Area Committees Review Working Group 17 September 2025 and 9 October 2025 – **APPROVED.**

15. Question Time Booklet A
Àm Ceiste

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

Public Question

1. Mr D MacKenzie

To the Leader of the Council

What are the costs to Highland Council for the Academy Street proposals; broken down by staff time, consultant fees and legal costs to defend the judicial review?

The response had been circulated.

Member Questions

1. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

Please can you provide a list of all current contracts that are in place that had an original duration of over twelve months and a value over £500K, showing the value of the awarded contract, nature of the work commissioned and expiry date of the contract. This should be for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, which contracts created local jobs and how were these measured.

In response, the Leader advised he would investigate this and circulate a response to the Council.

2. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

In relation to the remedial works at Rose Street Car Park what is the full schedule of works recommended to be carried out and the cost and duration for each phase?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried why the necessary repairs at the Rose Street car park in Inverness were taking so long.

In response, the Leader agreed to review the matter and a response would be provided prior to the deadline for the submission of Questions to the next meeting of the Council on 11 December 2025.

3. Mr M Reiss

To the Leader of the Council

On March 6 2025, the Leader of Orkney Islands Council, Heather Woodbridge, wrote to you in response to concerns raised to her by Orkney Members about the risks of landslips on the A9 north of Inverness. She indicated “that you may be looking to pursue the improvement of safety on the A9 at the next meeting of the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (CoHI)”

She went on to offer her full support to you and highlighted the grave economic consequences of a closure of the A9.

As a Caithness Member you will be aware of the recent landslides on the A9 at Scrabster, as well as a previous one in Sutherland near Portgower.

What actions have you undertaken as a result of the Leader of Orkney Islands Council’s letter, and the concerns she raised therein?”

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, when approximately, did you reply to the Leader of Orkney Council's letter dated 6 March 2025.

In response, the Leader advised he did not know the exact date of the reply but he would be able to discuss the matter directly with the Leader of Orkney Council at the forthcoming meeting of the Convention of the Highlands and Islands. Feedback would be provided on the outcome of the discussion.

4. Dr M Gregson

To the Leader of the Council

Will the Council be commemorating the sixty anniversary, on November 1, of the establishment of the Highlands & Islands Development Board, the forerunner of Highlands & Islands Enterprise? This initiative, by a Labour Government in 1965, marked a significant commitment to address the economic and social problems facing our region.

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

5. Mrs J McEwan

To the Leader of the Council

When and how are we going to start paying the 2 billion Highland Investment load back?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried how long it would take to pay the £2billion Highland Investment back.

In response, the Leader advised that it was a fluid and evolving payment programme but he was willing to arrange a meeting to enable further discussion and understanding on the payback system.

6. Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

Following the BBC Panorama investigation into the Castle Hill Care Home Inverness, will the Chair provide Members with an update on the current situation and what actions are being taken by the Council and its partners in response to the programme's alarming findings?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, given the serious issues highlighted at Castle Hill Care Home, it was queried whether the Council, in partnership with others, would carry out a wider review of adult care provision.

In response, the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing, agreed to review the question and come back to the Members with a fuller answer.

7. Mr A Graham

To the Leader of the Council

Please provide total number of staff employed by Highland Council for each year since 2007.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, following the savings of £200m made over the last 10 years, it was queried how the staff count had increased by approximately 800.

In response, the Leader stated that this Administration had made every effort to protect as many jobs as possible within Highland Council. A proportion of the figures reflected this; however, he could not comment on decisions of past Administrations.

8. Mr J Edmondson

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Two bridges in Ward 6 need replacing or extensive repairs. The Lealty Bridge [U19900010] is a lifeline bridge, there are no other alternative routes, it requires replacement or extensive repairs. The Achnagarron bridge [U19210010] where a temporary bridge has been installed, but a permanent bridge is required. Both replacements were promised for the summer of 2025. When will these bridges be replaced with a permanent solution?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether there had been any indication as to when the vital bridges required in Ward 6 would be repaired/completed.

In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure indicated that Autumn 2026 was the earliest a permanent bridge would be in place at Lealty which was currently at the preliminary design stage. Achnagarron Bridge was scheduled for replacement in April 2026.

9. Mrs B Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

Could the Leader of the Highland Council please update Members on the proposed" Moray FLOW- Park" wet storage site for numerous floating offshore assets sited within the Moray Firth. This is currently being developed by the Offshore Solutions Group. Could the update include a detailed timeline of any discussions/plans both past, present and future including Highland Council kindly requesting from OSG, an informative public consultation/presentation, including to all relevant Ward Area Committees that surround the Moray Firth.

https://offshoresolutionsgroup.com/moray-flow-park/

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether the Leader of the Council would ensure that the Highland Council was meeting its obligations under Section 10 of the Community Empowerment Scotland Act 2015.

In response, the Leader requested that he be provided with a copy of the question in full in order a comprehensive answer could be circulated.

10. Mr D Gregg

To the Leader of the Council

Please list the 3rd parties the council currently shares personal data with under GDPR regulations.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, could a review be undertaken to determine whether an automatic data sharing agreement could be put in place with relevant partners such as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Scottish Water and SSEN, to allow older adults to access services more easily.

In response, the Leader acknowledged the issue and agreed that a review would be requested.

11. Ms K Willis

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

In the March 2025/26 Budget, Members agreed to introduce a blanket mandatory charge for motorhomes and campervans in all Council carparks, and to increase the costs of all parking permits by 5%, in order to maximise income from visitors and increase income generated for the maintenance of carparks. One of the benefits identified in the 2025/26 budget was the splitting of income with Area Committees. With the introduction of the mandatory charge for motorhomes and campervans in Council carpark and the 5% increase is parking permits, how much income has been generated across Highland and specifically for each Area Committee this year?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, clarification was sought as to whether the 5% increase applied to parking permits on the 1 April 2026 would follow the 50/50 strategic/local split as agreed in the Council Parking Strategy.

In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure commented that dialogue in respect of this was still ongoing and it would be inappropriate to pre-empt the outcome of these discussions.

12. Mr R Stewart

To the Leader of the Council

Given the ongoing issues and confusion surrounding the Council's poorly implemented voluntary motorhome scheme, what active enforcement and monitoring are actually taking place in council car parks between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.? In particular, what steps are being taken to ensure that issues such as:

- "No overnight parking" restrictions are properly enforced and not ignored; and there
- Motorhomes are confined to the designated Overnight Stay Bays (OSBs) rather than using general car park spaces.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether the Highland Campervan and Motorhome Scheme would be ceased.
In response, the Leader advised that the scheme would continue.

13. Mr A Baxter

To the Chair of Communities and Place

Given that climate change projections indicate more frequent and severe storm systems affecting the Highlands, what preventative maintenance programme, including dedicated staffing resources, does Highland Council have in place for proactive management of the council's tree estate rather than reactive emergency response?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, assurances were sought regarding the proactive management of tree estates where properties were at risk.
In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure commented that a Tree Policy had gone to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, and a copy of this could be circulated.

14. Mr C Ballance

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Earlier this summer Stagecoach gave Dumfries and Galloway Council the minimum 28 days notice that it was closing its local depot and ceasing all services based in the region.

Does Highland Council have any contingency plans in case Stagecoach accept they can't run a reliable service and pull out of Highland at short notice?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether the Stagecoach service review would include improvements to public transport serving Aird and Loch Ness.

In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure stated that discussions were ongoing and Stagecoach was proposing a new plan for January 2026. No details were available at this time, but it was hoped that this would include provision for Aird and Loch Ness.

16. Notices of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid

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

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 taxpayers' 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

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

Speaking in support of the Motion, Mr Stewart believed that the people of Highland should be offered the right to decide the future structure of their local government. He highlighted that some Highland communities felt distanced from decision making, and that a local connection had been lost.

Speaking in support of the Amendment, Mr Gowans felt it was the strength of the current Council structure that had secured the endorsement of the Highland Investment Plan, attracted the Inverness and Cromarty Green Freeports and helped to amass major funding such as the Corran Ferry, Inverness Castle, City Region Deal, Uig Linkspan, and Caol Flood Protection. It also helped to attract and develop close partnerships with Moray and Aberdeenshire Councils.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the current Council structure made larger investments possible, and it was difficult to imagine smaller Councils generating the same revenue. Further, smaller communities currently benefited from many of these investments;
- reference was made to a discussion of this matter in 2021 and it was highlighted that the opinions of some Members had changed. This was questioned;
- concern was expressed in terms of the cost to the Council as outlined in the assessment of financial implications;
- political pressure should come from the people;
- local views were important and it was asked why locals should not be offered the opportunity to decide. However, it was also felt that this should come from Scottish Government level;
- a decision for change did not necessarily mean reverting back to County Councils; and

- Ward Business Meetings worked well and decisions could be made at Area Committees. The Area Committees Review Working Group had reconvened on 17 September 2025 and it was hoped that positive changes would result from future meetings.

In his summary, Mr Gowans was not aware of a groundswell of opinions demanding the breakup of Highland Council. He felt that breaking into smaller Councils would result in substantial additional bureaucracy and an ongoing cost burden to residents. Highland had a relatively small population but a large geographical area and the current structure better placed Highland to navigate financial challenges, as well as sharing skills and resources. The Highland Council had attracted significant funding and investment, and it was felt that this would not have been possible with a plethora of smaller Councils.

In his summary, Mr Stewart expressed his intention to give the people of Highland the opportunity to choose whether they wanted to restore smaller, more locally focused government areas, or retain the current structure of the Council. Having spoken with residents throughout Highland, he felt that there was less support for the Highland Council to remain as it was and it was suggested that residents in Caithness and Lochaber did not wish to be governed from Inverness. A response was then provided to concerns regarding financial implications.

Thereafter, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mrs B Jarvie, **MOVED** approval of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr K Gowans, seconded by Ms K Willis, moved the Amendment as detailed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 22 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 36 votes, with 7 abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:
Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr S Cameron, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mrs A MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs J McEwan, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr R Stewart.

For the Amendment:
Mrs S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Mr R Cross, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D 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 G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Millar, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

Abstentions:
Mr J Bruce, Mr L Fraser, Mr J Grafton, Ms M MacCallum, Mr D McDonald, Mr H Morrison, Mrs L Saggers.

Decision

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

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

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

Speaking in support of the Motion, Mr Cross wished to call on the Scottish Government to commit to dualling the A9 between Tore and Dornoch Bridge roundabouts. He anticipated economic growth in terms of the Highland Investment Plan and Green Freeport, and emphasised the importance of future planning. He also expressed concern about existing accident blackspots and stressed the significance of the route.
Speaking in support of the Amendment, Mr Ballance also emphasised the importance of safe, efficient and reliable travel. However, where full dualling of the A9 in the Far North might take decades, he felt that practical and strategic measures to address accident blackspots could be implemented within the next 2 to 3 years. He also underlined the need for a balanced spend between road and rail, particularly

when there had been no significant investment or improvement to the Far North Rail Line for some time.

During discussion, the Leader of the Council highlighted that both the Motion and the Amendment were important and this was felt by others.

It was felt that dual carriageway roads were safer in general, and concern was expressed in terms of various dangerous junctions throughout this stretch of road. It was reported that the financial cost of a death on the A9 was circa £1M, however, the human and emotional cost far outweighed this.

Thereafter, Mr R Cross, seconded by Mr M Reiss, **MOVED** approval of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr C Ballance, seconded by Ms K Willis, moved the Amendment as detailed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 54 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 9 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:
Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Mr M Cameron, Mr S Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Edmondson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr R Gale, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Ms M MacCallum, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Mrs L Saggers, Mr R Stewart.

For the Amendment:
Mrs S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mrs T Collier, Ms C Gillies, Ms M Hutchison, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Ms K Willis.

Abstentions:
Mr L Fraser, Mr T MacLennan.

Decision

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

3. The 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

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 NHSH 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

The Council **NOTED** that Mr D Gregg had withdrawn his Notice of Motion.

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

Decision

The Council agreed the Motion as set out.

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

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

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was important that schools were places where learning and teaching could take place safely and securely and to recognise that the increase in incidents of classroom violence was an issue;
- due to a better understanding of why incidents of dysregulated behaviour occurred, action was already being taken to tackle it, and the Council was actively involved in supporting schools, staff members, pupils and parents who had to deal with challenging behaviours;
- an Improving Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Action Plan had been brought to the Education Committee earlier in the year;
- there was already a zero-tolerance policy for violence against staff in schools, supported by an understanding of additional support needs and the many other challenges faced by young people at home and in school;
- staff did not have the ability to pick and choose which pupils they worked with and therefore could not refuse to teach certain pupils because of their behaviour. Attention was drawn to the Integrated Impact Assessment where it was stated that marginalising pupils as a consequence of their behaviour would contravene the Human Rights Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and that teachers refusing to teach certain pupils could disproportionately affect vulnerable groups;
- updated Assure and Pupil Staff Incident systems had been agreed with unions and put in place to improve recording and communication of incidents;
- adequate staff training in dealing with challenging behaviour was a key element in bringing about change and, the Council's Educational Psychology Team and Positive Relationships Team offered this training;
- the expectation was that support for staff who experienced incidents of violence was in place through line management and the Health and Wellbeing Team and officers and school leaders would be asked to ensure that there was consistency across all schools and that this support was available to anyone who needed it;
- recent statistics had shown a reduction in the number of pupil staff incidents reported to the Highland Council since 2023-2024;
- management of challenging behaviour needed to be consistent and holistic and needed to engage with all individuals around the child;
- there were risk assessment training, protocols and guidelines in place as well as training on de-escalation awareness and techniques;
- violent and abusive behaviour in schools had become a serious problem both for staff and pupils whose learning was being disrupted;
- the Council had a duty to prevent its staff from harm, and the Education Scotland Act placed a duty on parents to ensure that their children attended school and followed the rules. This created a partnership between home and school based on mutual respect and accountability which had sadly been diluted by recent national guidelines which focused almost entirely on inclusion without addressing the potential consequences;
- attention was drawn to the fact that minor disruptions to learning could have a serious impact on pupils' learning and attainment and in situations where there was a persistently disruptive pupil in a classroom, the attainment of the whole class would decline;

- pupils were not being provided with the support needed to help them manage their behaviour and teachers were not equipped to deal with behaviour that became violent;
- it was suggested that not all instances of verbal and physical aggression from pupils towards staff were being recorded;
- the challenges faced by schools due to staff absences were emphasised;
- it was highlighted that not all additional support needs that children might have were due to medical conditions or disability, there could be other reasons such as going to school hungry due to poverty or not getting a good sleep due to being a young carer;
- the difficulty of balancing children's rights to an education and employees right to a safe workplace was highlighted;
- the work done with young people at The Place in Alness was commended, and it was suggested that the Council should give financial support to this, and similar, organisations;
- it was recognised that school staff worked hard, sometimes in difficult circumstances;
- assurances were given that incidents of violence and aggression were taken seriously;
- it was highlighted that the number of incidents of pupil violence or aggression involving pupils with additional support needs or pupils and Primary One and Two and the numbers drop off steeply as children mature and develop; and
- increasing the number of senior officers did not necessarily make things easier for teachers in the classroom.

Thereafter, Dr M Gregson, seconded by Mr R Gale, **MOVED** approval of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr D Millar, moved the Amendment as detailed.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 25 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 31 votes, with 3 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:
Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr S Cameron, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs J McEwan, Ms C Ramsay, Mr M Reiss, Ms T Robertson, Mrs L Saggers, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart,

For the Amendment:
Ms S Atkin, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Ms I Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms L Dundas, 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 Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Ms M Reid,

Abstentions:
Mr C Ballance, Mr A Jarvie, Mr S Mackie

Decision

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

The meeting ended at 6.05pm on the 30 October 2025 and 4.50pm, following the Special Council meeting, on 6 November 2025, earlier that afternoon.

The Highland Council
No. 11 2025/26

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 6 November 2025 at 2:00 pm.

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

Present:

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

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

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr C Birt, Mr M Green, Mr P Logue, Mr T MacLennan, Mrs M Paterson and Mrs M Ross.

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

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Home Office Plan to Accommodate Asylum Seekers at Cameron Barracks
Plana Oifis na Dùthcha Luchd-siridh Comraich a Chumail aig Taigh-feachd nan Camshronach

There had been circulated Report No. HC/37/25 by the Chief Executive which detailed the Home Office Plan to accommodate Asylum Seekers at Cameron Barracks, Inverness. This Special meeting had been called to give Members information known so far about the Home Office plan, timeline of events, risks and other matters to be considered such as community impact and resources and to agree some next steps. Members were given the opportunity to raise questions and concerns in order that these could be communicated to the Home Office.

It was acknowledged that Members had received many queries and concerns from members of their communities and the lack of information on the plan did not help the Council being able to answer these or allay their concerns. There had been no proper engagement or consultation with the Council on this matter and attempts to get clarification had been challenging. The Council had been told this was happening and the Council had little or no influence on the plan.

There were many questions still outstanding, such as why Cameron Barracks had been chosen as a site for Asylum Seekers, given that it was located in a residential, town centre location and was not suitable for residential use and in need of refurbishment; the Council were informed, but it was not confirmed, that it would be for only 12 months; if there were concerns about individuals on the site, how would this information be shared; what additional resources would come to this area to ensure local services provided by the Council and its public sector partners were not impacted; Home Office plans to ensure community reassurance; and any other plans to place Asylum Seekers in Highland that had not yet been shared with the Council. The Council would continue to pursue answers to these questions and Members would be updated accordingly.

Further, the location was far from where Asylum Seekers applications and legal representation would be processed and other locations would be more suitable. A point was made that the processing times for these applications was far too long and the Home Office should explain how moving Asylum Seekers to Inverness would expediate their applications.

The potential impact on community cohesion was highlighted and it was important that accurate information was provided to the public so that they were well informed and to allay any fears. It was felt that using Barracks instead of hotels would not save money for the Government and would only re-traumatise those individuals who had to stay in them.

Reference was made to the fact that Highland had always welcomed people to the area and had been very successful with resettlement schemes and the wellbeing of the individuals involved, many of whom would have experienced trauma of some kind. The importance of Asylum Seekers having access to health services funded by the Home Office was highlighted. In particular, a number of these individuals would have travelled through countries with high tuberculosis risks and it was queried how this would be managed. The Council had a duty to help those individuals who had fled war and persecution for their own safety.

There were concerns that there had been no risk assessment, no equality impact assessment, no clarity on planning with the Cameron Barracks building, no safety plan and community concerns regarding security. It was therefore requested that there should be an immediate pause on the plan until full answers were provided; proper assessments conducted and until meaningful consultation took place. In this respect an amendment containing additional recommendations was tabled.

It was noted that a weekly Operational meeting between Home Office Officials and local partners had been established. It was important that a Council representative attend these meetings in order that regular updates could be provided to elected Members. It was queried if the minutes of these meetings could be made available to Members. The cost of collecting and disposing of general waste from Cameron Barracks and the impact on Raigmore hospital should be raised at these meetings. It was also suggested that there should be a public meeting with the Home Office on this matter.

Reference was made to Local Authorities in England having failed in an attempt to judicially review the decision of the UK Government to use military bases to house Asylum Seekers. The Courts cited that it was an emergency situation. It was queried what constituted an emergency under Planning legislation.

The Home Office communication with the Council as detailed in the timeline was raised and it was queried how the initial communication was not actioned immediately. An assurance was sought that a communication protocol with the Home Office was in place. It was confirmed that the initial communication with the invitation to a meeting had gone to the Chief Executive's Service generic e-mail mailbox and the details of the meeting were opened almost immediately. It was not felt this was a safe and secure mechanism for such an important communication with the Council.

Thereafter, the Leader of the Council, seconded by Mr A Christie **MOVED** the recommendations detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mrs I MacKenzie, moved the following additional recommendations to those contained in the report:-

i. that the Council condemns the unilateral decision by the Home Office to proceed without appropriate local consultation or consent;

ii. the Council calls on the UK Government to pause all plans to bring Asylum Seekers to the Highlands and engage with residents and their representatives to find solutions that work;
iii. that the Council acknowledges the fundamental right of Highland residents to raise and express legitimate concerns regarding the potential community impact and safety implications of these proposals; and
iv. that the Council agrees, should the Home Office continue to take actions that undermines the safety and stability of our communities, a report be presented to the December meeting of Council providing a full impact assessment and update on the situation.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 44 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 18 votes, with no abstentions, and therefore the **MOTION** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:
Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance; Mr Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Edmondson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, 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 G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr P Oldham, Ms J McEwan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Ms C Ramsay, Mrs M Reid, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie.

For the Amendment:
Ms S Atkin, Mr J Bruce, Mr A Baxter, Mr S Cameron, Mr S Coghill, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Cross, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr D McDonald, Mr D Macpherson, Mr S Mackie, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Sinclair, Mrs L Saggers, Mr R Stewart.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **NOTED** the Home Office intention to use Cameron Barracks for temporary accommodation for asylum seekers;
ii. **NOTED** that the Council had a limited role and powers in regard to the proposals;
iii. **NOTED** that the Council had an obligation to work with other public partners and agencies to minimise community concerns and the risk to community cohesion;
iv. **NOTED** that the Council Leader had raised concerns about the scale of the proposals and in the location identified in his letter to the Home Secretary; and
v. **APPROVED** that the Council Leader, Convener and Leader of the Opposition write to the Home Secretary seeking urgent clarity on the precise detail of the implementation plan for this proposed scheme, including relevant impact assessments undertaken.

4. Timetable of Meetings
Clàr-ama Choinneamhan

The Council **AGREED** the following meetings:-

i. North Planning Applications Committee on 17 December 2025;
ii. South Planning Applications Committee on 18 December 2025; and
iii. Joint Planning Application Committee on 18 and 19 February 2026.

The meeting ended at 3.45p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in **Courtroom, Grantown Courthouse, Grantown-on-Spey/Remotely** on 3 November 2025 at 10.30 am

Present:

Mr J Bruce
Ms M Cockburn
Mr R Jones
Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Ms C Mackenzie, Principal Housing Officer
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Traffic Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Inspector C Johnson, Police Scotland
Area Group Commander K Stevenson, SFRS

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

Business

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Police - Area Performance Report
Poileas - Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/19/25 by the Area Commander (South Highland Area Command), Police Scotland.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the hard work of the police in Badenoch and Strathspey was commended as the increase in detection rates was due to an increase in police activity;
- concern was expressed about the increase in fraud and the anxiety it was causing in communities and, it was queried whether the police could monitor social media regarding fraud and scams;
- it was queried whether there would be resource to provide education for young people on the prevention of hate crime;

- information was sought and provided on the activity undertaken by the Harm Prevention Officer, and the possible reasons for the increase in breach of bail conditions offences;
- it was a retrograde step to provide such widespread statistics which made it difficult to see what was happening locally;
- the increase in drug offence arrests was welcomed;
- it was understood that it was very difficult for Police Officers to attend Community Council meetings and this meant that there was not much communication between the Police and communities;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that mobile patrols in Badenoch and Strathspey did not carry defibrillators although defibrillators were carried in roads policing and armed response vehicles; and
- the work of the wildlife officer was commended and, in response to a question, the Inspector undertook to provide details of the wildlife and domestic animal offences during the reporting period.

The Committee **NOTED** 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 01 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Area Performance Report
Aithisg Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/20/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- thanks were extended to former Senior Chief Officer, Nick Nethercott for his work with the Committee and best wishes were extended to him for his new role;
- it was important to highlight the fact that the reporting of deliberate fires had increased and that as summers became hotter and longer, the setting of deliberate, outdoor fires was something everyone should be concerned about;
- the public appreciation for the work done by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was emphasised;
- the community engagement work undertaken during the summer was commended;
- information was sought and provided on virtual reality driving courses, and the ongoing work to update the Community Asset Register; and
- the praise for game keepers, local estates and communities for their help during wildfires was welcomed.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

5. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025
Aithisg Choileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais R2 2025/26

There is circulated Report No BSAC/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought and provided on the reasons for the increase in the number of homeless presentations;
- concern was expressed that during quarters one and two no houses had been allocated to anyone on the general housing list and, the Principal Housing Officer undertook to provide Mr Lobban with more information on the reasons for this;
- it created a feeling of despair when people who had been on the housing list for an extended period of time felt like they had no chance of being allocated a house;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the number of homeless presentations in Badenoch and Strathspey were in line with the rest of Highland;
- the low number of antisocial behaviour incidents was welcomed and the housing team was commended for their hard work in this area, although the importance of continuing to support tenants was highlighted; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the housing team were working to build relationships with local police and conducting joint visits concerning antisocial behaviour where appropriate.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.

6. Badenoch and Strathspey Area Place Plan Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlana Àite Sgìre Bhàideanach is Shrath Spè

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/22/25 by the Chief Officer, Housing and Communities.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the amount of detail in the housing part of the paper was commended and it was suggested that this level of detail should be included in housing reports;
- the importance of looking at the information in detail to decide what next steps needed to be taken was emphasised;
- the importance of linking the Area Place Plan with the NHS Highland District Plan for Badenoch and Strathspey and insuring the public had an understanding of both plans and how they would affect them, was highlighted;
- although the population of people 65 and older in Badenoch and Strathspey was increasing the population of children was declining steeply. It was vital that something was done to help increase the working-age population otherwise some schools would no longer have a sufficient number of pupils to remain sustainable;
- it was requested that future versions of the report included a focus on small businesses, as ensuring that Badenoch and Strathspey was an attractive place for people to set up and run small businesses would encourage younger people to move to, or remain in, the area; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the report would be shared with Community Councils.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** to adopt the Badenoch and Strathspey APP, using it as a tool to inform and support decision making about Badenoch and Strathspey;
ii. **AGREED** to support and promote the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other plans, strategies, development and funding opportunities across or impacting the Badenoch and Strathspey area; and
iii. **NOTED** the next steps for progressing the work set out in the plan.

7. Aviemore Primary School – Developer Contributions
Bun-Sgoil na h-Aghaidh Mòire – Tabhartasan Luchd-leasachaidh

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

The Committee **AGREED** that this item be withdrawn pending further discussion between Members and officers.

8. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

During discussion it was stated that an increase in the amount of money available in the ward Discretionary fund would be welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Ward Discretionary Fund applications had been approved since the last meeting of the Committee:-

Applicant	Project Title	Amount Paid
KHS Parent Council	All-terrain Wheelchair	£318
Fèis Spè	October Fèis Week 2025 – Loch Insh water sports	£1,250

9. Invitation to Pay Income
Teachd a-steach bho Chuireadh gus Pàigheadh

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/24/25 by Chief Officer Operations and Maintenance.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- in response to a request, the Principal Traffic Officer undertook to provide Members with information on the income of shared carparks with Forestry Land Scotland, the compulsory charged carpark in Aviemore and on street parking;
- information was sought and provided on the reasons for the annual loss of £350 from Ardvonie carpark in Kingussie and the Principal Parking Officer undertook to liaise with Members to address several concerns about the carpark and to arrange a site visit;

- attention was drawn to the high income from car parking in Carrbridge and the low income from the carpark in Grantown, although it was often very busy, and more information on this was requested; and
- a future update was requested on the Spey Street carpark was requested.

The Committee **NOTED** the earmarked funds for this Committee from the Invitation to pay Parking of £2,546.51.

10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated the Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 4 August 2025 which were approved by the Council on 18 September 2025, which were **NOTED.**

The meeting concluded at 11.30am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held r**emotely** on Monday 3 November 2025 at 10.00 am

Present:

Mr R Gunn
Mr A Jarvie
Mr S Mackie
Ms J McEwan
Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie
Mr W Mackay

In attendance:

Ms P Tomalin, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms C Maciver, Community Development Manager
Ms A Banks, Principal Housing Officer
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Ms R Robertson, Project Co-ordinator
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Traffic Officer
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Inspector D Livitt, 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 A Jarvie in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There was an apology for absence from Mr R Bremner.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statements.

3. Police – Area Performance Summary
Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No CC/18/24 by the North Area Commander.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- in response to complaints received in relation to the noise made by boy/girl racers it was explained that there would be a mix of legal and illegal exhaust systems on these vehicles and concerns on this issue would be passed onto the relevant officers;

- the reduction in figures for drink/driving offences were excellent and demonstrated Police Scotland was responding to public concerns on this and other road traffic matters;
- confirmation was sought and provided that drug driving cases lost in court due to delays in laboratory analysis was not an issue of concern in the North Division;
- the reduction in the number in missing persons be welcomed and it was hoped this would continue going forward;
- the implications for Police Scotland associated with the proposed SSEN worker camps, noting that no particular issues had been observed with a similar camp in Alness and that contractor responsibility was also key;
- local concerns in relation to the volume of speeding traffic on the back road from Thurso to Dounreay via Shebster which might have partly been caused by the installation of average speed cameras on the A836. An assurance was provided that for an increased focused on this road would be passed onto the relevant officers;
- in response to a query, further clarity was provided that while there had been an increase in the figures for the theft of motor vehicles in Caithness the number of incidents involved was low; and
- an update was sought and provided on the latest incident of vandalism at the public toilets in Wick and action that could be taken in relation to local information as the possible perpetrators.

Thereafter, 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 01 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.

4. Housing Management Performance Report – 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025
Aithisg Dèanadais Stiùireadh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2025 gu 30 an t-Sultainn 2025

There had been circulated Report No CC/25/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, further clarity was sought and provided on;

- the process for families who had to move out of employer accommodation, applying to the Highland Housing Register and the subsequent assessment undertaken;
- that persons in private accommodation whose homes had been repossessed could present as homeless and thereafter a decision would be made as to whether they were homeless and whether the Council had a duty to house them; and
- concern in relation to the number unkempt gardens in housing estates and an assurance was provided that officers were undertaking an increased number of visits in this regard and offering support to tenants including signposting.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.

5. Short Term Let Control Area
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-Ùine

There had been circulated Report No CC/26/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, it was suggested given the healthy condition of the housing market in Caithness in the context of short term lets, it was not considered necessary to reconsider the evidence base regarding short term lets prevalence in area with a further report brought to the Area Committee in 12 months' time. As an alternative, Members indicated their support for recommendation iv. to be amended to read as follows:

'agree to keep a watching brief on Short Term Let prevalence, with the option to bring this item back to a future meeting if members feel the need'.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the evidence presented demonstrating the degree of prevalence of short term lets within Caithness;
ii. **NOTED** that this evidence, at this time, did not demonstrate that the housing market within Caithness specifically, was subject to any significant pressure caused by Short Term Lets at this time, that would warrant regulation through a Short Term Let Control Area;
iii. **AGREED** that the Caithness Area Committee did not at this time wish to progress with the process of considering the introduction of a Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of the Caithness Area; and
iv. **AGREED** to keep a watching brief on Short Term Let prevalence in Caithness, with the option to bring this item back to a future meeting if Members felt the need.

6. Bereavement Services – Project Updates
Seirbheisean Bàis – Cunntas às Ùr mu Phròiseactan

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

During discussion, Members welcomed the project updates which outlined the challenges to Members and the public with a number of burial grounds in the area and expressing support for the work being undertaken. It would be helpful for further updates on any progress with Wick and Thurso Mount Vernon Burial Grounds to be provided going forward.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

i. current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Caithness area; and
ii. challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development.

7. Invitation to Pay Income
Teachd-a-steach bho Chuireadh gus Pàigheadh

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

In discussion, a point was raised in relation to the potential to improve the signage at Reiss Beach Car Park to encourage more people to pay in this location.

The Committee **NOTED** the earmarked funds for this Committee from the Invitation to Pay Parking of £10,876.19.

8. Allocation of Invitation to Pay Income in Caithness
Riarachadh Teachd-a-steach bho Chuireadh gus Pàigheadh ann an Gallaibh

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

In discussion, reference was made to the opportunity in future to use funds from the strategic pot to improve signage in Invitation to Pay car parks in Caithness, including an indication of how the income generated was used in the area.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the Invitation to Pay income from 2024/25 and the current balance of funds to date; and
ii. **AGREED** to **DEFER** allocating Invitation to Pay funding to allow the establishment of a strategic pot to be used for future projects.

9. Wick Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige

a. Invitation to Pay Parking Scheme
Cuireadh Cosgaisean a Phàigheadh

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

The Committee **AGREED** that:

i. £2,933.91 costs incurred by the Council's Parking Enforcement Team to operate the invitation to pay parking scheme at the Wick Common Good sites was charged against the Wick Common Good Fund; and
ii. the costs of signage maintenance be recovered from the Wick Common Good Fund in the financial year 2026/27.

b. Quarter 2 Monitoring
Sgrùdadh Ràith 2

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

In discussion, it was confirmed that further clarity would be provided on what comprised miscellaneous costs listed under expenditure.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 2 2025/26 monitoring statement for the Wick Common Good Fund.

10. Thurso Common Good Fund - Quarter 2 Monitoring
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Theòrsa - Sgrùdadh Ràith 2

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

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 2, 2025/26 monitoring statement for the Thurso Common Good Fund.

11. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2025 – 15 October 2025

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved for the period 1 April 2025 – 15 October 2025.

Caithness Youth Pipe Band – Edinburgh Tartan Parade	£1000.00
Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Home Start Caithness – Summer Day Trip for Families in Need	£960.00
Highlife Highland – Active Schools Coaching & Equipment	£1,500.00
Thurso Football Academy – Professional Football Coaching Sessions	£750.00
Community Food initiatives North East – Fareshare in Highland	£2,314.00
Association of Caithness Community Councils – Village Officer Fund	£2,000.00
The Flow Country Partnership – Flowing Forward	£531.77

Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2025 – 15 October 2025

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved for the period 1 April 2025 – 15 October 2025

Caithness Youth Pipe Band – Edinburgh Tartan Parade	£1,000.00
Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Newton Park Parent Council – Newton Park Breakfast Club	£242.98
Highland Council – Step Forward Wick Youth Summer London Visit	£1,500.00
Thrumster Parent Council – ELC Container	£1,400.00
Royal Burgh of Wick Community Council – Town Works	£761.72
Community Food initiatives North East – Fareshare in Highland	£3,128.00
Association of Caithness Community Councils – Village Officer Fund	£3,500.00
The Flow Country Partnership – Flowing Forward	£531.77

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 4 August 2025 which were approved by the Council on 18 September 2025.

Arising from item 5 of the Minutes, the Chair advised that he would follow up with the relevant officer on Members request for a brief update on the readiness of the winter fleet for the winter season and ensuring the winter gritting fleet were equipped with the right tyres.

The meeting concluded at 11.25am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely on 3 November 2025 at 11am.

Present:
Mrs I Campbell
Mr P Logue
Ms L Kraft

In attendance:
Ms M Ross, Assitant Housing Manager
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Traffic Officer
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:
Station Commander Mr J Douglas, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Ms L Kraft in the chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Dr C Birt.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/20/25 by the Local Senior Officer for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Station Commander Mr J Douglas, provided an overview of performance data for Quarters 1 and 2 of 2025/26, highlighting that accidental dwelling fires, deliberate fires and non-domestic building fires remained below the three-year average. No fatalities or casualties were recorded and home fire safety visits were offered in all relevant cases.

During discussion, Members welcomed the reduction in incident numbers and commended the proactive work of prevention and operations teams. Reference was made to the positive recruitment figures for retained personnel, particularly in rural areas. It was confirmed that joint mobilising arrangements had been implemented between Torridon and Kinlochewe to address staffing challenges, and that new personnel had recently joined stations in Lochcarron, Glenelg and Applecross.

Further clarification was sought regarding the location of road safety courses for older and younger drivers. The Station Commander undertook to liaise with the Community Safety Department and provide details to Members.

Members expressed appreciation for the efforts made to improve station availability and staffing levels and acknowledged the importance of partnership referrals in supporting post-incident engagement and fire safety advice.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report and **AGREED** that further clarification would be provided regarding the location of road safety courses for older and younger drivers.

4. Housing Management Performance Report – 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025
Aithisg Coileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2025 gu 30 Sultain 2025

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members welcomed the strong performance in rent arrears, which remained significantly below the Highland average. It was confirmed that tenancy sustainment continued to underpin the team's approach, with early intervention and support offered to vulnerable households. Members acknowledged the low number of antisocial behaviour complaints and acknowledged that complex cases often required multi-agency involvement.

Clarification was sought on the rehousing process following eviction and it was confirmed that tenants were offered housing options interviews and could present as homeless depending on individual circumstances. Members also raised concerns about heating affordability and property condition. It was confirmed that while energy tariffs were outwith the Council's control, tenants were signposted to relevant advice services and maintenance checks were arranged where appropriate. A referral to the relevant service lead was offered regarding property upgrades.

Further questions were raised about cross-authority housing allocations. It was confirmed that no national network existed, but advice and assistance were provided where possible.

Members expressed appreciation for the holistic approach taken by the housing team and acknowledged the importance of their work in addressing housing need across the area.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025 and **AGREED** that the Assistant Housing Manager would request the relevant service lead to provide further information regarding property upgrade budgets.

5. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members expressed support for all five projects and acknowledged the effort made by applicants in preparing their submissions. Reference was made to the alignment of the proposals with local place plans and community priorities. Particular enthusiasm was conveyed for the housing initiative in Applecross, the Wester Loch Ewe land purchase and the Wester Ross Radio upgrade, which were considered to offer strong community benefits.

It was acknowledged that the Gairloch Museum Roundhouse project had requested to defer its application to a future meeting to allow further development.

Members also welcomed the inclusion of the Kyle public convenience refurbishment, recognising the operational issues experienced during the previous tourist season and the importance of completing the works ahead of next summer.

Appreciation was conveyed to the officer for the quality of the assessment and for offering to facilitate contact between Members and project leads where further engagement was desired.

The Committee **AGREED** that funding be awarded from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

- Wester Ross Radio (broadcasting as RWR) - £30,000.00
- Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust - £63,839.32
- Wester Loch Ewe Trust - £40,000.00
- Applecross Community Company - £17,955.00
- Torridon District Community Association (TDCA) - £35,000.00

6. Invitation To Pay Income
Teachd-a-steach bho Chuireadh gus Pàigheadh

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

The net income allocated to the Area Committee from car park charges totalled £24,417.31, with a breakdown by individual car park provided in line with policy. These funds were earmarked for the area and once allocated, applications for use of the funds were managed through the Community Support process. It was

acknowledged that the procedure was similar to the Ward Discretionary Fund, requiring applicants to submit a form and set out the intended use of funds within the community. Members welcomed the opportunity for communities to benefit and recognised that similar applications had been received in previous years for a range of local projects.

The Committee **NOTED** the earmarked funds from the Invitation To Pay Parking of £24,417.31.

7. Short Term Let Control Area
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/24/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee received an introduction of the report from the Principal Planner, Dr M Maguire, who presented evidence on the prevalence of short-term lets within Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh and the associated impact on housing availability and affordability. It was explained that a short-term let control area would have required planning permission for any future conversion of housing to short-term lets but would not have applied retrospectively and would have excluded existing short-term lets, second homes, guest houses, B&Bs, annexes and pods. The process involves statutory consultation and Scottish Ministers' approval, with an estimated timescale of 12 -18 months. Evidence from the Housing Need and Demand Assessment showed high levels of short-term lets in the area (11% in Ross and Cromarty West and 18% in Skye and Lochalsh), low housing market containment and significant affordability pressures, with 71% of local residents unable to afford average sale prices. Local Place Plans had highlighted community concerns.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- Members acknowledged strong community support for the proposal, including a formal letter from Plockton and District Community Trust, which had long advocated for a short-term let control area. They stressed that any public consultation must be clear, structured and supported by an evidence-based statement of reasons, similar to approaches used elsewhere, to ensure informed responses;
- clarification was sought on several issues: the weight that public opinion would carry in the decision-making process, whether the designation could restrict new residents purchasing homes for permanent occupation and the implications for crofting diversification, given previous government encouragement for crofters to supplement income through tourism. It was confirmed that the policy would not affect permanent occupation or existing short-term lets and that crofting proposals for pods or conversions of long-term empty structures would generally comply with planning policy. It was acknowledged that purpose-built tourism accommodation already requires planning permission;
- concern was expressed about displacement effects if boundaries were drawn too tightly, with Members acknowledging the risk that applications for short-term lets could increase in areas just outside the designated boundary

before implementation. Ms M Maguire advised that setting an overly narrow boundary could undermine the policy's effectiveness, given the 12 - 18 month lead-in period;

- Members debated whether the designation should apply to the whole ward or selected areas. While recognising the diversity of the ward, Members considered evidence of high prevalence and rapid growth of short-term lets across multiple locations, alongside affordability pressures and endorsed that a wider boundary was preferable to avoid unintended consequences;
- the importance of balancing housing needs with support for the tourism economy was emphasised. Members acknowledged tourism as a major employer and economic driver but highlighted the need to protect housing stock for local communities and workers. It was reiterated that the measure was not a ban and that purpose-built holiday accommodation would continue to be supported through the planning process; and
- reference was made to early indications from Badenoch and Strathspey, where similar measures had reportedly improved housing availability and affordability, reinforcing the potential benefits of introducing a control area in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the evidence presented demonstrating the degree of prevalence of Short Term Lets within Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh;
ii. **NOTED** that this evidence, demonstrated that the housing market within parts of Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh, was subject to significant pressure, exacerbated by high rates of potential dwellings being converted to Short Term Lets;
iii. **NOTED** that the designation of any new Short Term Let Control Area would have no retrospective impact on existing Short Term Lets where no material change of use had occurred at the time of establishment, and would therefore only require planning permission from new Short Term Lets established after a Short Term Let Control Area comes into force;
iv. **NOTED** that should the Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee formally commence the process of introducing a Short Term Let Control Area, this would initiate a process of further evidence gathering and public consultation with communities;
v. **AGREED** that the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Committee therefore seek to progress with the process of considering the introduction of a Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area; and
vi. **AGREED** that progressing with consideration of a Short Term Let Control Area enabled communities within the area to participate in that consultation at the appropriate stage.

8. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Fund applications had been approved from 1 June – 30 September 2025:-

- Artic Convoy Museum - Space to Curate - £2,000.00
- CFINE - Fairshare in Highland - £693.00

9. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 4 August 2025, which had been approved by the Council on 18 September 2025.

The meeting concluded at: 12:25pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Wednesday 5 November 2025** at **9.30am.**

Present:

Ms S Atkin
Mr B Boyd (remote)
Mr R Bremner
Mr I Brown
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair
Mr A Graham
Mr R Jones
Mr S Kennedy (substitute)
Ms M MacCallum
Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr R MacKintosh
Ms A MacLean
Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr D McDonald
Ms J McEwan (remote)
Ms M Ross
Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Mr J Finlayson (remote)
Mr R Gale (remote)
Ms C Gillies (remote)
Dr M Gregson
Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mrs T Robertson (remote)

Tenant Representatives in Attendance:

Mr A Dick
Ms L Richardson

Officials in Attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr F MacDonald, Chief Officer – Property and Assets
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing & Customer Services
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning & Estate Strategy
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead Finance (Place)
Ms H Cameron, Housing Development Manager
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates Management)
Mr A Dempsey-Reid, Principal Accountant
Ms S Boardman, Principal Tenant & Customer Engagement Officer
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair in the Chair

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

There were apologies for absence from Mr S Cameron and Mr L Fraser.

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

The Committee **NOTED** there were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

4. Property & Facilities Management Services Revenue Monitoring Statement to 31 August 2025
Aithris Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Sheirbheisean Rianachd Cuid-seilbh & Ghoireasan gu 31 An Lùnastal 2025

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern that the financial monitoring statement provided to Members did not cover the full period of Quarter 2 due to the reporting deadlines for the Committee and at the loss of Member scrutiny if this was to be the case for future reports;
- an explanation was sought and provided for the forecasted year-end underspend on the Catering, Cleaning and Facilities Management (CCFM) Service budget;
- further information was sought and provided on the recruitment challenges and staff turnover within CCFM, concern being expressed at the impact on cleaning standards in schools and other buildings. It was explained that all options were being considered including service redesign and having more flexibility across the Service in terms of roles and filling of posts;
- an assurance was sought and provided that managers were supporting staff who may be required to take on additional work as a result of vacancies and this issue would also be considered as part of the service redesign; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that Members would be provided with information on the pressure points within the Service in respect of schools.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the budget position to the end of August 2025/26 (Period 5), and the estimated year-end position, as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report; and
ii. **NOTED** the update provided regarding budget savings delivery as set out at Appendix 3 to the report.

5. Property Capital Monitoring Statement and Progress Update
Aithris Sgrùdaidh Calpa Seilbhe agus Cunntas às Ùr air Adhartas

There had been circulated Report No HP/36/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the progress with the new accommodation units at the Gypsy Travellers Site, Longman Park, Inverness be welcomed and confirmation that arrangements would be made for any Member wishing to visit the Site;
- further information was sought and provided on the rationale for the overall suitability and condition ratings for Thurso High School;
- an update was sought and provided on progress with the flexible approach being taken to deliver accommodation for permanent and visiting staff on Rum and other remote locations;
- it was hoped the next financial monitoring report would show expenditure against the Highland Investment Plan priority projects detailed in Appendix 2;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the anomaly between the school roll figures reported to the Scottish Government and planning capacity shown in respect of Kinmylies Primary School.
- information was sought and provided on the assessment process being undertaken with the Education Service for allocating the space vacated by the nursery at Kinmylies Primary School;
- In response to a query, it was clarified that school roll figures for primary schools did not include nurseries although this was being considered;
- further clarity was sought and provided on the process for calculating developer contributions to fund capacity increases in schools;
- an assurance was sought and provided that a detailed condition survey of Crown Primary School was to be carried out and an update on the findings and recommendations brought to the next Committee, with consideration being given to the short, medium and long term requirements; and
- it would be helpful if the figures for condition ratings C and D were presented separately in the report to provide greater clarity.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED**:-

i. the capital budget position at the end of the second quarter of 2025/26, including project progress, the estimated year-end position, and the main financial variances outlined in the report; and
ii. progress in the exercise to establish how the Council's previously stated intention to bring all our school buildings up to at least a "B" rating for condition and suitability could be achieved.

6. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Non-HRA Budget Monitoring Statement 1 April to 31 August 2025
Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais agus Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Neo-thaigheadais 1 An Giblean gu 31 An Lùnastal 2025

There had been circulated Report No HP/37/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- more detailed information was sought and provided on what constituted resettlement activity and how the government grant for resettlement programmes was used, including on staff costs. It was confirmed a response would be provided to Mrs A Maclean in relation to third sector funding for resettlement work; and
- the number of properties currently being leased to private landlords and why these were not being rented out to those on the Highland Housing Register waiting list. It was confirmed that figures would be provided to Mrs J McEwan and that the Service was seeking to reduce its reliance on the private residential sector.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2025/26 as set out in the report and appendices to the report; and
ii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed.

7. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report to 31 August 2025
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais gu 30 t-Sultain 2025

There had been circulated Report No HP/38/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the fact £9.1m of funding had been secured through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) funding for projects across Highland for 2025/26 was a good news story for tenants and commending all the staff involved;
- more detailed information was sought and provided on the sum of £0.825m that had been ringfenced for an energy efficiency project, subject to confirmation of funding from the Scottish Government's Net Zero Infrastructure Fund;
- in response to a query, an assurance was provided that the intention was to progress further house purchases through the Rural Keyworkers Fund while highlighting the challenges involved;
- it would be helpful to have cross service and Member discussions within the Council on the opportunities to address delays in the planning process and on the basis this would provide assurance there was a willingness to tackle issues;

- caution as to how the above in respect of Council related items may be perceived externally and an assurance that this work would not involve any part of the quasi-judicial planning process;
- noting that work had commenced on the 2027 – 2032 Housing Capital Programme and Members would be provided with more information during the course of next year with workshops and ward briefings to be arranged going forward;
- the need to make it clear to tenants that ECO funders had control over the houses to receive energy efficiency upgrades while noting that a large part of the Capital Programme was focused on energy efficiency works regardless of any funding the Council attracted; and
- in response to a query, it was explained that insulation works were included as part of a fabric first approach and full measures projects and work was ongoing to make this clearer in the Service's reporting.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the expenditure to 31 August 2025 and the projected outturn for the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2025/26.

8. Establishing a Financial Strategy for the Housing Revenue Account and Rent Strategy for 2026-2031
A' Stèidheachadh Ro-innleachd Ionmhasail airson a' Chunntais Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais agus Ro-innleachd Màil airson 2026-2031

There had been circulated Report No HP/39/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Council was facing significant and complex housing challenges and ensuring there was a strong and sustainable HRA that delivered priorities was essential in terms of how it wished to shape the housing stock going forward;
- Members at this stage were being asked to approve a set of principles and the tenant rent consultation and the decision on rent levels for 2026/27 would be taken by the Committee on 28 January 2026 based on Member and tenant feedback;
- the report and consultation showed tenants the scale of investment that could be realised through a 5-year rent strategy and enabled them to feedback their views on the proposals; there was the ability to make assessments once responses had been received and to further engage with tenants if required;
- highlighting the importance of the Strategy in tackling the current Highland Housing Register waiting list and upgrading properties including heating systems and other energy efficient works to reduce tenant costs;
- local Members and the Tenant Participation Team had an important role in ensuring as many tenants as possible engaged with the consultation and confirmation was provided that the consultation period would be extended to 5 January 2026 to allow more time for responses;
- the need to consider the significant financial impact of the proposals on older sheltered housing tenants who might also have to pay additional service charges and whether a poverty and equalities impact assessment had been carried out. It was confirmed that further work would be

undertaken on this issue and included in the report to the Committee on 28 January 2026;

- concern at the impact historical HRA debt was having on the ability to build new housing and invest in the existing housing stock and that the Council continue to work with COSLA in relation to debt write-off;
- concern the options for rent increases of 8%, 9%, and 10% included in the consultation would result in a large increase in rents over a period of five years and place many working tenants on low incomes and those not on full benefits into poverty. This was in the context of the increased cost of living and use of foodbanks and the proposals being well above the level of pay rises tenants could expect;
- an amendment was therefore proposed that the Committee agree to tenants being consulted on a wider range of rent options than proposed starting at 3%, 5%, 7% and 8%;
- whilst Council rents were now one of the lowest when compared with other local authorities, the need to take into account that income levels were in the main lower in the Highlands and the cost of living much higher than in other parts of Scotland, including energy costs;
- it was accepted that Council house rents should cover improvements and repairs, however it was unfair to place the burden of funding new housing programme on tenants including that required to service the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport;
- it was understood that housing need and demand in respect of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport formed part of the Highland Investment Plan to be funded through Council Tax;
- the Council had to be upfront and clear in the tenant consultation about what each of the rent increases would deliver, allow tenants to put forward alternatives in terms of their affordability and to listen to their views in this regard;
- an assurance was sought that improvements to the homes of existing tenants would be prioritised over building new houses. It was noted that the consultation would be made clear as possible so that tenants advised the Council of their priorities for the future;
- the Strategy and methodology used was welcomed and as in the past, forward planning and investment in new Council houses was required and it was not considered improper for existing tenants to make some contribution to the future delivery of new housing;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Council had a duty to set its rent levels on an annual basis and this would provide an opportunity for review should there be fundamental changes to inflation, economic or social conditions over the five-year period;
- the baseline budget assumptions of a projected 2% pay award for 2026-2031 be considered carefully as recent pay awards had been above this level;
- it would be helpful for Members to be circulated with more information on how a rent increase of 8% would achieve a total increase in the revenue budget of £8.917m; and
- in relation to the reducing the loan charge ratio, it was suggested the actual amount of debt proposed was to increase by over £100m over the five-year period to finance the new build programme with no plans to reduce the level of debt or repay the capital.

The Tenant Representative commented that the Scottish Government should be providing additional funding to local authorities to raise the standard of housing to an adequate level or give them powers to raise their own income. Tenant rents should not be subsidising new builds, and an annual increase of at least 8% over five years could not be supported on the basis of affordability. Further explanation was required in relation to the principle and benefits relating to reducing the loan charge ratio and it was hoped progress could be made through COSLA on the issue of HRA debt write-off going forward.

Thereafter, and on hearing from the Council's Section 95 Officer, Members were advised that any proposal to consult on rent increases below the level of inflation might as a consequence result in cuts and reductions in the housing budget. In addition, the Chair reminded Members that as advised by officers a rent increase of 5% was below the 5.5% increase required for a standstill budget.

Following summing up, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair seconded by Ms S Atkin **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT,** Ms J McEwan, seconded by Ms M MacCallum, moved the recommendations in the report subject to tenants being consulted on rent increases starting at 5%, 7%, and 8%.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 9 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 8 votes, and there no abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the motion: Ms S Atkin, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr S Kennedy, Mr R Mackintosh, Mr D McDonald, Ms M Ross.

For the amendment: Mr A Graham, Mr R Jones, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mrs A Maclean, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs J McEwan, Mr R Stewart.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the context which sets out the current and historical position of the HRA and the rationale for establishing a Financial Strategy;
ii. **APPROVED** the principles of the Financial Strategy, which would also guide the 5-year Rent Strategy which would enable the expansion of the social rented housing stock alongside improving the financial sustainability of the existing HRA estate;
iii. **APPROVED** the tenant rent consultation which would commence by 17 November and run until 5 January 2026; and
iv. **NOTED** that the Financial Strategy, including the 5-year Rent Strategy, would be submitted to Committee in January 2026 for approval and that this would include details on how the rental increase would be allocated in the 2026/2027 HRA budget.

9. Strategic Housing Investment Programme 2026-2031
Pròg ram Tasgadh Taigheadas Ro-innleachdail 2026-2031

There had been circulated Report No HP/40/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on the work ongoing with partners to deliver the new build programme in the context of high tender costs and significant increase in build costs, particularly outwith Inverness. Members were advised that the Scottish Government had increased subsidy levels and that potential alternative funding models and opportunities to purchase houses from developers at lower cost were being considered;
- whether there was a benchmark figure for the value to the Council of purchasing houses from developers on the open market compared to new build costs;
- further information was sought and provided on progress with the delivery of 20 units at Clachnaharry, Inverness;
- noting that the Committee would be provided with an update on progress through COSLA and with the Scottish Government in respect of the Council's historic housing debt write-off;
- an assurance was sought and provided that options were being considered to combine projects to make them more attractive to developers and work was ongoing through the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership to improve delivery in rural areas;
- it would be helpful for a report to be brought forward to the Committee or Council as appropriate on local development planning policies and how the Council could better facilitate small rural developments through a holistic approach;
- an update was sought and provided on the current status of national initiatives to assist first time buyers in the housing market; and
- confirmation that officers would provide Ms M Ross with an update in respect of an area within her Ward identified as a site for potential housing development.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) as attached as Appendix 2 to the report, for submission to the Scottish Government;
ii. **NOTED** that local projects would be discussed with Members in Area Business Meetings;
iii. **AGREED** the indicative planned investment programme to 2031 contained in Appendix 3 to the report; and
iv. **NOTED** that a full review of the SHIP would be undertaken in 2026 to take into account the agreed HRA Financial Strategy and findings from the Housing Need Demand Assessment.

10. Empty Homes Strategy
Ro-innleachd Thaighean Falamh

There had been circulated Report No HP/41/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the need to understand the reasons why properties remained empty and the work being undertaken to establish whether properties were listed or had planning or landlord licensing issues to help guide decision making across the Council to facilitate properties being brought back into use;
- bringing the current number of empty homes back into use this would have significant benefits for the Highland Housing Challenge and provide much needed housing in communities,
- the importance of a clear strategy being in place and action taken on empty homes and of the Council making representations to the Scottish Government on the potential to improve the policy on compulsory purchase orders;
- it should be recognised that empty homes cases were often complex and involved challenging and intractable issues and the need to understand the effect of the Council tax payable for these properties;
- it would be helpful for local Members to be provided with more regular updates on empty homes at a ward level and the potential for more community engagement on this issue; and
- a report to be brought to the next Ward Business meeting on the unoccupied steward's house at the Cameron Youth Centre. Mr A Dick, Tenant Representative and as Chair of the Cameron Youth Centre, advised that negotiations with the Council were ongoing to have the building demolished and he would provide updates to the Chair on progress.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the Empty Homes Strategy as detailed at Appendix 2 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the outcomes of activities in 2024/25 as set out in Section 7 of the report; and
iii. **NOTED** that recruitment was underway for an additional Empty Homes Officer to assist with delivery of the Strategy actions, as agreed at Housing and Property Committee on 13 August 2025.

11. Domestic Abuse Housing Policy
Poileasaidh Taigheadais Droch-dhìol Dachaigheil

There had been circulated Report No HP/42/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members welcomed the report and referred to the importance of early intervention by officers in relation to incidents of anti-social behaviour given these might involve domestic abuse. It was important to highlight the number of homeless presentations that involved women and families experiencing domestic abuse and the impact this had on victims and their children. It was further highlighted that the Housing Team in conjunction with third sector parties such as Women's Aid worked sensitively to relocate those experiencing domestic abuse.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the Domestic Abuse Housing Policy as set out in Appendix 2 to the report;

ii. **NOTED** the alignment of the policy with the Council's statutory duties and expectations set out in the Housing Scotland Bill; and
iii. **NOTED** that implementation of the policy would be supported by staff training, service development and partnership working.

12. Tenant Participation Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Chom-pàirteachadh Luchd-màil

There had been circulated Report No HP/43/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the processes in place and level of digital and other forms of engagement was reassuring and encouraging. It was important going forward that as new initiatives occurred, tenant feedback formed part of the Council's own planning going forward, a central part of being a social landlord;
- the potential to arrange in person meetings and drop-in sessions for tenants in the Badenoch and Strathspey area; and
- commending the work of the tenant participation officers and welcoming a recent event held in Dingwall for tenants involving officers, welfare rights and other parties and the intention to hold these regularly.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the ongoing activities and commitment to tenant engagement demonstrated by tenant volunteers and officers; and
ii. **AGREED** the progress made on the Tenant & Customer Engagement Action Plan detailed in the report and at Appendix 1 to the report.

13. Housing Performance Report 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025
Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2025 – 30 t-Sultain 2025

There had been circulated Report No HP/44/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** that this item would be considered at the next meeting on 28 January 2026.

14. Delivery Plan
Plana Lìbhrigidh

There had been circulated Report No HP/45/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED** that this item would be considered at the next meeting on 28 January 2026.

15. Performance Monitoring Update
Cunntas às Ùr mun Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh

There had been circulated Report No HP/46/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** that this item would be considered at the next meeting on 28 January 2026.

16. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

17. Housing Development Initiatives
Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/47/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

18. Property Transactions Monitoring
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/48/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

19. Land and Property
Fearann agus Seilbh

There had been circulated Report No HP/49/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting was closed at 1.15pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 5 November 2025 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Ms S Atkin
Dr C Birt
Mr J Bruce (Remote)
Mr S Coghill (Remote)
Mr J Grafton
Mr A Graham
Dr M Gregson (Remote)
Ms M Ross (Vice Chair)
Ms K Willis (Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Mr C Ballance (Remote)
Ms C Gillies (Remote)
Mr R MacKintosh (Remote)
Mrs T Robertson (Remote)

In attendance:

Mr P Reid, Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Project Manager
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
Mr G Ralph, Repairs Manager
Ms I MacMillan, Programme Manager
Ms R Burbaite, Project Manager
Mr A Morgan, Climate Change Co-ordinator
Mr J Bennett, Climate Change Co-ordinator
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

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

Ms K Willis in the Chair

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair congratulated Ms M Ross on her appointment as Vice Chair of the Committee, and expressed thanks to the outgoing former Vice Chair, Ms S Fanet.

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mrs I Campbell, Mr P Logue and Ms L Niven.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

4. Net Zero Programme
Pròram Neoni Luim

i. Net Zero Programme Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phròram Neoni Luim

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

In introducing the report, an update was provided on two of the milestones referred to in section 5.2 of the report, specifically, the development of carbon budgeting tools and the trial of lifecycle investment tools, which were key to embedding Net Zero into the Capital Programme. Onboarding with one provider to trial their whole life carbon assessment platform had been successfully completed on 30 October, and the carbon budgeting pilot had been extended and expanded to model long-term carbon impacts. This would include inputting data for projects within the Capital Programme trial.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was highlighted that the longer-term rent strategy referred to in Appendix 1 of the report would be the subject of consultation with tenants, the outcome of which would inform the decision on the rent strategy at the Housing and Property Committee in January 2026, and that the level of investment in energy efficiency measures would be dependent on the level of rental income;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the Key Performance Indicators referred to in section 5.2 of the report would be reported to Strategic Committees; and the anticipated carbon budget setting process. It was confirmed that further updates would be provided as carbon budgeting work progressed;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that future reporting on Scope 3 emissions would include the purchasing of the food by the Council. Members commented that, worldwide, food production was the second biggest cause of emissions after energy production, and it might be the leading cause in Scotland given energy production in Scotland was now largely carbon-free;
- the authority had a responsibility to ensure its ambitious Net Zero targets were being met, and the need for culture change was emphasised;
- a report to the August meeting of the Committee had referred to a cross-service pilot project aiming to reduce waste in schools, and an update was sought in that regard and on the Food in Schools project. The Climate Change and Energy Team Manager explained that a report on the Food in Schools project had not been available at the time of publication of the Committee papers. The Chair referred to previous requests for a report and emphasised that the Climate Change Committee's remit was oversight of the Council's Net Zero transition. The Food in Schools project, which cut across many services, had a key role in that regard, and it was important that a report was brought to the Committee so Members could see how Net Zero was being embedded in the project;
- Members commended the retrofit works to housing stock in Caol and Balintore, and information was sought, and provided, as to when such works were likely to be rolled out more widely;

- in relation to recycling infrastructure improvements across the Council estate, it was saddening that challenges remained due to the lack of funding to support internal infrastructure for recycling within Council premises; and
- much of the slippage referred to in section 5.2 of the report appeared to relate to work that was required across services and, given the Council had undergone a restructure, it was queried whether the current Net Zero thematic groups needed reevaluating. It was added that many of the reports coming to the Committee were from the Place service cluster, and the Committee did not have oversight of how Net Zero was being embedded in activity in the Corporate and People clusters, and it was questioned whether there was a risk of siloed working rather than a whole-Council approach. In response, it was confirmed that all three service clusters had a key role to play in delivering on the Council's Net Zero Strategy, and the governance model needed to reflect that. Work was currently underway in terms of evaluating the governance model, and it was suggested a first step would be to review the membership and Terms of Reference of the Net Zero Strategy Group. It was highlighted that changes might also be required as a result of a report on Climate Change and Sustainability that was being presented to the next meeting of the Audit Committee. The Chair looked forward to further updates as work progressed.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **NOTED** progress to date as outlined in the report and Appendix 1 of the report; and

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

ii. Net Zero Thematic Group Interim Update – Built Estate and Energy
Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim - Oighreachd Thogte agus Lùth

There had been circulated Report No CCC/26/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the cost implications in respect of the Market-wide Half-Hourly Settle programme;
- congratulations were expressed to officers in respect of the school heating savings that had been achieved, and the associated press coverage which had resonated with the public; and
- with reference to discussions regarding the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) at the recent Full Council meeting, clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether the Passivhaus standard was an energy efficiency standard or a Net Zero standard. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Climate Change and Energy Team was currently on the project team for two out of approximately 18 to 20 HIP projects, and there had been partial engagement in respect of another two to three projects. Further discussion ensued, during which the need to embed Net Zero across all Council activities was reiterated, and the importance of the CCET being involved in a greater number of projects was emphasised. Officers added that there was a clear need to consider sustainability from the start of a project, rather than building it in at a later stage, and work was underway in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the contents of the report; and
ii. that a detailed update on the work being progressed through the Built Estate and Energy Thematic Group would be presented to the Climate Change Committee in January 2026.

iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Social Housing and Housing Revenue Account
Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim - Taigheadas Sòisealta agus Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the retrofit works carried out in Caol and Balintore, which had transformed the properties and led to a significant reduction in electricity bills. Local Members welcomed the community benefits in respect of the Balintore project, which included fencing around the playpark, solar panels at the Scout Hut and more energy efficient lighting at the Seaboard Centre;
- information was sought, and provided, on the external wall insulation used in retrofit works, including what it was made of, how much it cost, and whether it was equally effective on all types and ages of houses; whether the Council was working with partners such as Cairn Housing Association and Albyn Housing Society regarding collaborative energy efficiency works; and, in relation to the Blar Mhor development in Fort William, whether the NHS Highland decision not to proceed with a heating network had any implications in terms of the Council's Net Zero plans, and whether there was any scope to implement a heating network retrospectively; and
- the significant amount of external funding that had been leveraged in respect of the Energy Efficient Homes projects was commended, and it was hoped this would demonstrate to other Council services the funding avenues that could be opened and what could be achieved if Net Zero was incorporated into projects at an early stage.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Social Housing and Housing Revenue Account Thematic Group.

5. Annual Report under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties 2024/25
Aithisg Bhliadhnail fo Dhleastanasan Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde nam Buidhnean Poblach 2024/25

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the Council's in-house bus service had had an impact on the emissions figures; and whether the revised annual emissions reduction figure of 13.8% was considered to be achievable;

- the use of hydrotreated vegetable oil as fuel was a good news story that would resonate with the public;
- views were sought regarding the extension of the landfill ban deadline;
- reducing food waste in schools would lead to considerable emissions reductions. In that regard, the need to work collaboratively across services and with partners such as NHS Highland was emphasised, as was the need to educate children and parents. In addition, reference was made to the findings of the recent EAT-Lancet Commission report on sustainability within the food system, and it was suggested it was necessary to think carefully about which guidelines to follow. The Chair added that the Council would be working with NHS Highland and others in the near future to develop the Good Food Nation Plan for Highland.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** the Highland Council's draft Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** progress against the organisation's emissions reductions targets; and
* iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the current carbon reduction targets be maintained until the evaluation of the carbon budgeting and analysis tools was complete. This would ensure future targets were informed by robust, data-led evidence, accurately reflecting the full impact of operational activities and avoiding the risk of setting unrealistic targets that could undermine engagement and progress toward Net Zero.

6. Climate Change Impact Assessment Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuaidh Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a request, it was confirmed that officers could look at providing examples or case studies of proposals that had not progressed to a Full Impact Assessment that perhaps should have;
- some proposals would have more climate implications than others, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether it was possible to take a scale-based approach to impact assessments; and
- information was sought, and provided, as to how the impact assessment process might identify potential strategic or upstream impacts as opposed to downstream impacts; the level of awareness amongst contractors and those undertaking the day-to-day management of projects of climate resilience targets and the need for mitigation; and, with reference to the resource implications at section 3.1 of the report, what resources would be needed to implement the recommendations in the report, and was the reason many proposals were not progressing to Full Impact Assessments related to staffing.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the contents of the report; and
* ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval of the project brief template in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

7. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update Q2 2025/26 – Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio - Net Zero Delivery - Heat Networks
Sgrùdadh Buidseit agus Cunntas Adhartais Plana Lìbhrigidh R2 2025/26 – Neoni Lom, Tasgadh Lùtha agus Cùram-roinne Ùr-ghnàthachaidh – Lìbhrigeadh Neoni Luim – Lìonraidhean Teasa

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

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** progress to date as outlined in the report.

8. Energy Benchmarking of Non-Domestic Property Estate
A' Dèanamh Comharrachadh-measaidh air Lùth ann an Oighreachd Seilbhe Neo-Dhachaigheil

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Council met the energy costs for High Life Highland properties, which it was suggested might not encourage efforts to reduce consumption;
- information was sought, and provided, on the types of properties included within the "Miscellaneous" category;
- properties such as schools, libraries, museums and art galleries appeared to be becoming much more efficient in terms of their electricity use, which was commended, and information was sought, and provided, as to what the significant reductions could be attributed to; and
- with reference to the heat performance table at section 6.5 of the report, clarification was sought regarding the 282% increase in respect of Piers/Harbours. The Energy Manager explained it was possible it was a data issue, and he undertook to revert to the Chair in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED** the refreshed Energy Benchmarking Tool, which now incorporated 2024/25 data.

9. Performance Monitoring Report - Q2 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh - R2 2025/26

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

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

The meeting concluded at 3.25 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 6 November 2025 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance
Mr J Bruce
Mr S Coghill (remote)
Ms T Collier (Substitute)
Mr R Cross
Mr L Fraser
Mr A Graham
Mr M Green
Mr R Gunn (remote)
Mrs J Hendry
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Ms M MacCallum
Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr S Mackie
Ms K MacLean (remote)
Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr M Reiss

Non-Members also present:

Mr J Finlayson
Ms C Gillies
Mr R MacKintosh (remote)
Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Ms M Ross (remote)
Mrs L Saggers (remote)
Mr R Stewart

In attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer – Operations and Maintenance
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead - Finance
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead – Transport and Logistics
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager
Mr D Lamont, Amenity Services Manager (remote)
Ms C MacIver, Community Development Manager
Ms J Ross, Customer Service Delivery Manager
Ms L Gray, Chief Registrar
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms L Gow, Area Commander and Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Business

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr D Millar.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Highland Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report for Q1 and Q2 2025/26.

Lynne Gow, Area Commander and Local Senior Officer, was welcomed to her first meeting of the Communities and Place Committee and provided a summary of the key areas in the report including domestic fire safety, road traffic collisions and road safety, deliberate outdoor fires, non-domestic building fires, unwanted fire alarm signals, operational resilience and readiness, and improving wildfire prevention and response.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the continuation of Members' briefings and visits was welcomed;
- information was sought, and provided, on what follow-up took place after hotel fires to prevent them from reoccurring, and the Area Commander undertook to provide further details on the nature of the nine hotel fires that had taken place within the reporting period;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that information about wildfire prevention was available online and public engagement would start in the spring with leaflets being made available;
- it having been queried when there would be a full complement of staff at Cannich Fire Station, the importance of which was emphasised, the Area Commander undertook to provide further detail on how recruitment was progressing. The Chair requested that any information provided by the Area Commander be shared with all Members of the Committee via the Chief Officer – Housing and Communities;
- attention was drawn to the lack of availability in Ward 1: North, West and Central Sutherland, with a shortage of 59 personnel across eight stations, and the lack of availability in Tongue and Bettyhill causing crews to have to travel up to 50 miles from Thurso under emergency conditions;
- firefighter training was regarded as onerous and inflexible and it was queried whether it was possible to introduce a degree of flexibility, particularly in rural areas where there were issues in terms of availability. As an example, breathing

apparatus training was a two-week course yet many firefighters had never used their breathing apparatus in the course of their duties;
- thanks were extended to Group Commander Jamie Thrower for his support of the Easter Ross Community Partnership;
- the new wildfire vehicles and equipment in Invergordon and Ullapool were welcomed;
- the term “wildfire” implied a natural phenomenon when the vast majority were caused by people;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that developing ways of working with external partners and landowners would form a vital part of the debrief process after recent wildfires, and Members were asked to promote and encourage the use of the Community Asset Register within their communities;
- the hard work, dedication and passion of the firefighters at Fortrose and Cromarty Fire Stations was commended. However, there was a sense of burnout amongst the crews, and it was queried what support could be put in place to alleviate this;
- the Biker Down training programme was commended;
- it was suggested it might help firefighter recruitment if the public was made more aware of the flexibility and inclusivity of the role;
- gratitude was expressed for the work done to control the wildfires on the Dava Moor;
- concern was expressed regarding the reduction in availability of the second appliance in Nairn, and information, was sought, and provided in that regard;
- attention was drawn to an upcoming partnership networking event in Nairn, and it was confirmed that representatives from SFRS would attend;
- having more information on the nature of injuries sustained in an incident would be helpful to all emergency services, it was queried where the statistics in the report came from and what could be done to ensure more information was provided;
- it was queried what the reduction in the number of unwanted fire alarm signals could be attributed to;
- in response to a question, the Area Commander undertook to provide information on any trends in respect of the increase in vehicle fires;
- information was sought, and provided, on the use of helicopters during wildfires, and it was queried whether there was any possibility of having helicopter operators on call to save time;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that, apart from the closure of three dormant stations, there were no planned fire station closures in Highland; and
- information was sought, and provided, in relation to whether SFRS in Highland had sufficient resources to deal with a fire at a Battery Energy Storage System, particularly in a rural area, and the Area Commander undertook to provide more information to the Committee as it became available from the National Prevention Directorate. Members added that part of the solution might lie in the role of Community Response units.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report.

5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report to 31 August 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach

There had been circulated Report No CP/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the central support charges referred to in section 6.4 of the report; the reasons for the overspend on fleet and plant; what the Future Operating Model budget line related to and why there had been no spend to date; and which waste streams were most pressure driven;
- in relation to the use of agency mechanics in the Fleet service, and in response to a question, it was confirmed that although there had been difficulties in recruiting mechanics there were currently five apprentices within the service; and
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the underspends in respect of Public Health and Bereavement Services and Community Spaces were a result of staff vacancies and, if so, what was being done to support staff facing added pressure due to the additional workload caused by these vacancies.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the current financial position for Quarter 2 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
ii. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendices 1 and 2 report;
iii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
iv. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery.

6. Capital Monitoring Report for the period Q2 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Calpa airson R2 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No CP/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on which facilities the £100,000 Public Conveniences budget would be spent on;
- in response to a question regarding vandalism to the new public conveniences in Wick, it was explained that vandalism repairs were classed as revenue maintenance repairs and could not be covered by the Capital Budget;
- in relation to the overall underspend in the Capital Budget, officers were hopeful that the full budget allocation would be spent by the end of the financial year;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the works at Inverness Crematorium, which it was confirmed were due to be completed in December 2026;
- it having been queried whether the work on play areas was due to be completed over the winter, it was explained it was weather dependant. However, the associated funding could be carried forward to the following year provided it was already committed; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Members' visits could be arranged to the new Waste Transfer Stations in Inverness, Lochaber and Portree, including a demonstration of the waste shredder at Longman Waste Transfer Station when it was operational.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for the year 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendix 1 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
iii. **AGREED** that Members' visits to the Waste Transfer Stations in Inverness, Fort William and Portree be arranged, including a demonstration of the waste shredder at Longman Waste Transfer Station when it was operational.

7. Participation and Engagement Update
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Chom-pàirteachaidh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Rate Your Estate walkabouts gave residents a sense of pride and the feeling they were a valued part of the community. However, they resulted in extensive action lists, and the timescales involved in addressing some of the issues raised detracted from the merits of the process. During further discussion, the importance of acting upon the issues raised by residents, whilst also managing expectations, was emphasised. In response to a question, the Chief Officer – Housing and Communities undertook to circulate a list of planned Rate Your Estate walkabouts to Members;
- the importance of working in partnership to progress projects in Local Place Plans, was emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, on what signposting was in place for local communities in terms of participation and engagement;
- the draft Participation and Engagement Strategy was welcomed, and it was requested that the second paragraph of the introduction be amended to include a reference to access for all to sports facilities and green spaces;
- the importance of Community Councils as vehicles for community consultation was emphasised and, in response to a question about the possibility of increasing funding for Community Councils, the Chair explained that, as indicated at the recent Full Council meeting, this could be considered as part of the budget setting process; and
- communities did not feel their opinions were considered during the planning process, and it was queried how community influence on planning decisions could be improved. The Senior Community Development Manager undertook to discuss this with planning colleagues and revert to Mr C Ballance.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the update on the work ongoing to increase participation and engagement with communities in Council activity across Highland;
ii. **AGREED** the Annual Participation Request report for the Scottish Government set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
iii. considered the draft Participation and Engagement Strategy set out at Appendix 2 of the report and **AGREED** that it be circulated for wider engagement before being finalised, subject to the proposed addition to the introduction regarding access for all to sports facilities and green spaces.

8. Community Benefits from Procurement – Annual Report
Buannachdan Coimhearsnachd bho Sholar – Aithisg Bhliadhnail

There had been circulated Report No CP/24/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In response to a question regarding the Integrated Impact Assessment screening, the Chief Officer – Housing and Communities undertook to provide Mr C Ballance with information on the potential negative Climate Change impacts.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** the annual Community Benefit update; and
ii. **NOTED** the next steps in terms of undertaking a review and evaluation of the Community Benefit Policy following the first year of activity.

9. Enforcement Policy for Environmental Health and Waste Services
Poileasaidh Co-èigneachaidh airson Seirbheisean Slàinte Àrainneachdail is Sgudail

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

The Committee **APPROVED** the updated Enforcement Policy for Environmental Health and Waste Services.

10. Joint Health Protection Plan 2025-2027
Co-Phlana Dìon Slàinte 2025–2027

There had been circulated Report No CP/26/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The inclusion of Lyme Disease, which was a devastating disease, in the Joint Health Protection Plan was welcomed, and it was proposed that a small, short-life working group on Lyme Disease be formed to try to address some of the issues raised in the paper. The Chair undertook to liaise with officers in that regard and propose a way forward.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the Joint Health Protection Plan 2025-2027; and
ii. **AGREED** that consideration be given to the creation of a small, short-life working group on Lyme Disease to try to address some of the issues raised in the paper.

11. Area Place Planning – Progress Update and Next Steps
Planadh Àite Sgìreil – Cunntas air Adhartas agus na h-Ath Cheumannan

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there was confusion among members of the public as to the difference between Area Place Plans and Local Place Plans and where these sat in the planning hierarchy;
- information was sought, and provided, on the Highland Investment Prospectus referred to in section 7.3 of the report;
- Members welcomed the Area Place Plan for Easter Ross, which had helped communities in the area to map a way forward; and
- the need for ongoing support for communities to develop Local Place Plans was highlighted.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the annual report, recognising the extensive engagement carried out across communities; and
ii. **AGREED** to support the targeting of service programmes and external funding to meet the Area Place Plan priorities when appropriate.

12. Fleet Traffic Commissioner Follow-up
Iar-aithisg Coimiseanair Trafaig Cabhlaich

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

The Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management provided an update on the progress that had been made against the action plan appended to the report, including that 86 staff had received Operator Licence Awareness training; improvements were being made to the driving licence checking system used within the Council; a new process had been implemented for impounding vehicles that were breaching any level of compliance; a member of staff had been identified who could be trained to be a Transport Manager and who could become a named person on the Operator Licence; monthly compliance toolbox talks had been implemented; and weigh pads had been purchased to overcome overloading issues.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the post of Transport Manager would be promoted to from within the service; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to what was meant by vocational drivers and high-risk occupations in terms of the new formal drugs and alcohol policy and the introduction of random testing.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the audit as supplied to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland; and
ii. the action plan included and steps being taken to improve compliance.

13. Waste Management Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Stiùireadh Sgudail

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the temporary regulatory position concerning the use of landfill and whether the spend of £1.9M on landfill restoration referred to in the Capital Monitoring Report would still go ahead;
- Members welcomed the Reuse and Repair Fund, which would help communities to build their knowledge and skills in order to reduce waste. However, disappointment was expressed that the maximum grant award had been reduced to £50,000 as some larger organisations, such as New Start Highland, could make good use of a larger amount;
- food waste collection uptake in Fort William had been high, and an assurance was sought that sufficient fleet and staff resources were in place should participation increase; and
- it having been suggested that follow-up leaflets and bin stickers be provided to remind people of waste collection details and which bins to use, it was confirmed there would be a focus on communication and enhancing awareness now that the service rollout was complete.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the progress that had been made to both Fort William and Portree Waste Transfer Stations and the role the new infrastructure played in delivering improved services and meeting the Council's statutory obligation;
ii. the position on the introduction of Industrial Waste Shredders; and
iii. the timescale for launching the Highland Re-use & Repair Fund.

14. Public Conveniences and Comfort Scheme Agreements 2026-2029
Aontaidhean airson Goireasan Poblach is Sgeama Cofhurtachd 2026–2029

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was suggested that more prominent signage and publicity was needed for Comfort Scheme providers as many were not easily noticeable to members of the public. The Chief Officer – Operations and Maintenance explained that Comfort Scheme providers were promoted on the Council's website and stickers were provided to display in premises. However, she undertook to look at whether there were opportunities to increase awareness;
- on the point being raised, it was clarified that Nairn Community Centre could be a Comfort Scheme provider if the nearby Council-operated public conveniences were to close, which would require discussion with Local Members. Whilst it was recognised that Comfort Schemes were not generally offered within close proximity to Council facilities, Members suggested there was a need for flexibility as the Community Centre was a more welcoming environment for tourists, was staffed for 12 hours a day, had baby changing facilities and the toilets were more easily accessible to those with a disability;
- information was sought, and provided, on the process for approving new Comfort Scheme providers and whether there was scope within the budget to add premises to the list for 2026-2029; whether any charges had been brought against the individuals responsible for vandalism of facilities; and the different levels of funding

offered to Comfort Scheme providers. In relation to the latter, the Chief Officer – Operations and Maintenance undertook to provide Mr J Finlayson with the scoring matrix;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the budget of approximately £1.3M covered the entire service cost;
- the importance of public conveniences, particularly in busy tourist areas such as Skye, was emphasised. Reference was made to potential developments in Portree town centre and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that initial discussions had taken place about the possibility of expanding public convenience provision there; and
- the provision of public conveniences and Comfort Schemes was a good example of how a relatively small sum of money could make a big difference, and the Council was commended for not cutting the service, which was not a statutory requirement, in the current challenging financial climate.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the update from the Public Convenience team and the most recent survey of Comfort Schemes providers; and
ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the proposals for the new 3-year Comfort Scheme Agreements from 2026-2029.

15. Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages - Annual Report
Clàrachadh airson Breith, Bàs is Pòsadh – Aithisg Bhliadhnail

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- congratulations were extended to Annemarie MacAlpine, Customer Services Operations Manager (North), on her appointment as President of the Association of Registrars, and to Carol Littlewood and Claire Lyall, Assistant Registrars, for passing the examination for the Certificate in the Law and Practice of Registration in Scotland;
- the Depute Provost and Depute Leader of Inverness spoke to their attendance at citizenship ceremonies and commended the staff involved for ensuring they were memorable and enjoyable occasions for participants. Discussion ensued in that regard, during which it was commented that local civic leaders had previously been invited to ceremonies involving their constituents but that no longer seemed to be the case. It was requested that clarification of the process in terms of notifying Local Members of citizenship ceremonies be sought as practice appeared to vary across Highland;
- the draft Marketing Strategy was welcomed, particularly the emphasis on the qualifications and professionalism of Registrars, and Members looked forward to seeing the results in next year's report. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on whether a competitive pricing policy was in place, and it was confirmed that marriage and civil partnership fees were available on the Council's website; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the steps being taken to promote the use of Inverness Town House as a wedding venue; and the provision of signposting to support for parents registering still births.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the work and performance standards achieved by the Registration team across the Highland area;
ii. **NOTED** the continued efforts to modernise and promote the registration service, ensuring Highland Council offered a cost effective, efficient, but professional service to the public in all aspects of registration business;
iii. **NOTED** the details of the draft marketing strategy as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report; and
iv. **AGREED** that clarification of the process in respect of Local Members being notified of citizenship ceremonies be sought and provided to all Members of the Committee.

16. Sustainable Business Travel - Update on Progress 2024/25
Siubhal Gnothachais Seasmhach – Cunntas air Adhartas 2024/25

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

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. progress to date on reducing fleet, miles and emissions;
ii. progress with Pathfinder 2 and the indicative timescale for implementation in Highland;
iii. the updates to the action plan detailed within Appendix 1 of the report; and
iv. that future reports would continue to align progress monitoring with the Net Zero, Energy Investment and Innovation Portfolio to ensure consistency in reporting and performance management.

17. Growing our Future: Annual Community Food Growing Report
A' Fàs ar n-Àm Ri Teachd: Aithisg Bhliadhnail Fàs Biadh Coimhearsnachd

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

On the point being raised, the Community Development Manager undertook to look into how the Growing Our Future Strategy fit with the Good Food Nation Plan, and the Chair requested that information in that regard be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress made to implement the Growing Our Future strategy and deliver the community food growing action plan; and
ii. **AGREED** that information on how the Growing Our Future Strategy fit with the Good Food Nation Plan be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

18. Performance Reporting for Q2 June 2025 - September 2025
Aithriseadh air Dèanadas airson R2 Ògmhios 2025 – Sultain 2025

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in relation to inspection and sampling of private water supplies, there was increasing concern amongst constituents regarding PFAS chemicals in water supplies due to leading edge erosion of wind turbines and other industrial equipment, and an assurance was sought that such chemicals were being tested for. The Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services explained that officers followed set sampling suites in accordance with regulations, and he undertook to check what was included and revert to Mr R Stewart;
- there was a significant amount of pressure across the Council and other public bodies as a result of the increasing number of Freedom of Information requests, and it would be helpful to understand if there were particular themes members of the public and the media were requesting information on. The Chief Officer – Housing and Communities confirmed that information in that regard would be included in the report to the January Committee;
- the informative and constructive approach to pursuing late invoice payments was commended;
- the substantial increase in the percentage of household waste recycled was welcomed. It was assumed this was a result of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements, as well as the new Waste Transfer Station in Inverness, and it was hoped there would be continued improvement;
- concern was expressed that the percentage of adults satisfied with street cleaning was only 64%. It was suggested a contributing factor was the discarding of food and food packaging, particularly near schools, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether there was scope for more targeted street cleaning or some form of voluntary effort to improve satisfaction levels. Reference was made to the use of suction devices in other local authority areas, which appeared to be a quick and efficient method of street cleaning, and it was queried whether there was any potential to use such devices in Highland. In response, the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations confirmed that suction devices were employed in some rural areas in Highland, and he undertook to explore whether there was any merit in extending current provision. In addition, Members welcomed the use of a machine to remove chewing gum from streets, particularly pedestrian areas, and information was sought, and provided, on the qualifications needed to operate small street cleaning vehicles; and
- it was highlighted that volunteers teaching English as a second language, who had previously been paid travel expenses by High Life Highland, were no longer being recompensed since adult learning had transferred to the Council. An assurance was sought, and provided, that the matter of travel expenses for volunteers would be looked at and, if possible, included in the budget and the draft framework for community volunteering.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

The meeting concluded at 12.15 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee** held **remotely** on Monday 11 November 2025, at 10.00 am.

Present:

Sarah Atkin
Sinclair Coghill
Tamala Collier
Richard Cross
Laura Dundas
John Edmondson
Lyndsey Johnston
Morven-May MacCallum
Connie Ramsay
Maureen Ross

Participating Officials:

Mr P Tomalin, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms C MacIver, Community Development Manager
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mr M Hilton, Project Manager, Energy Investment & Innovation
Ms P Betts, Common Good Fund Officer
Mr R Cheng, Property Surveyor
Mr A Byrne, Principal Housing Officer
Mr M Culbertson, Project Officer (Community Regeneration)
Ms A Tanner, Community Heritage Officer
Ms F Cameron, CRF Programme Manager
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner, Development Planning
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in Attendance:

Mr D McAulay, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (Item 3)

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

Ms L Johnston in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

Transparency Statement
Item 10 – Ms L Dundas

Declarations of Interest
Item 3 – Ms C Ramsay
Item 10 – Ms M MacCallum, Ms M Ross

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Services Area Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

Declaration of Interest – Ms C Ramsay declared an interest in this item as an on-call paid fire fighter and left the meeting for this item.

There was circulated Report No BIER/27/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised

- the work of the fire officers, the innovation with regard to recruitment, and the engagement with young people by the service, were welcomed;
- information was sought and provided on why Cromarty and Balintore did not have reported availability charts, and on the definitions and reporting of outside fires;
- it was suggested the term wildfire gave the impression of a natural phenomenon, rather than caused by humans;
- it was queried the extent to which outdoor fires were the result of reduced grass cutting around housing estates;
- the level of road casualty incidents was concerning; and
- assurance was sought and provided on work being undertaken with partners and nationally.

The Committee **NOTED** the attached Area Performance Report.

*The Committee **AGREED** to consider Item 5 before Item 4 due to officer availability.*

5. Short Term Lets Control Area
Smachd air Màil Gheàrr-ùine

There was circulated Report No. BIER/29/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following a presentation, the following issues were raised:

- the level of granular evidence in the report was welcomed;
- although 150 properties was a low number across the whole area, it would be an issue if the majority were concentrated in one small settlement. The logistics and challenges of creating a small Short Term Let Control Area were summarised;
- the methodology for defining short term lets was explained;
- the inclusion of certain rural areas was queried, and the boundaries for the potential control area were explained;
- it was queried whether, given the length of time it took to create a control area, it would be advisable to create one in case it was required in the future, and the reasons why this was not advised, and was unlikely to be accepted by the Scottish Government, were summarised; and
- it was clarified that the decision to delegate this matter to the Area Committees had been made at full Council.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the evidence presented demonstrating the degree of prevalence of Short Term Lets within Black Isle and Easter Ross;
ii. **NOTED** that this evidence, at this time, did not demonstrate that the housing market within Black Isle and Easter Ross specifically, was subject to any significant pressure caused by Short Term Lets at this time, that would warrant regulation through a Short Term Let Control Area;
iii. **AGREED** that the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee did not at this time seek to progress with the process of considering the introduction of a Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area; and
iv. **AGREED** to reconsider the evidence base regarding short term lets prevalence in Black Isle and Easter Ross within a further report brought to the Area Committee again at a future period, in 12 months' time.

4. Proposed Utility Scale Solar PV Array
Arraigh PV Grèine Meud Goireis ga Moladh

There was circulated Report No. BIER/28/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following a presentation, the following issues were raised during discussion:

- the report and project were welcomed and the benefits highlighted;
- explanations were sought and provided for some of the logistical problems around transporting electricity from the site, notably the prohibitive expense of crossing the railway line;
- it was requested that income be ring fenced for specific Common Good Fund projects and that the consultation should clarify the benefits of the project to the CGF;
- assurance was sought that the remainder of the land could continue to be used for grazing;
- an explanation was sought and provided on why there was no benefit to a larger project, this being mainly the challenges and significant expense of transporting additional power from the site;
- a summary of the proposed consultation process was sought and provided;
- a rough estimate of potential income from the project was sought and provided;
- it would be helpful for the public and for Members to include a Q&A and / or a case study with the consultation;
- many of the issues raised would be properly covered during the planning application process, should the project go ahead; and
- Members clarified that they wished to agree to the consultation and that any information sought about the project at this stage was for the benefit of the community and not an indication of their approval of the project.

The Committee, with the exception of Mr John Edmonston, who asked that his abstention from the decision be recorded,:

i. **NOTED** the contents of this report and decision by the Economy & Infrastructure (E&I) Committee Members;
ii. **AGREED** for Officers to bring forward a detailed proposal to Members for the long-term benefits to the Tain Common Good, once available;
iii. **AGREED** to run a Common Good Consultation on the change of use of both parcels of land for generation of renewable solar energy and report back to this Committee the outcomes of the consultation; and
iv. **AGREED** to investigate with the Council's Legal Services the ringfencing of income should the Solar PV Array go ahead following consultation.

6. Housing Management Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais

There was circulated Report No. BIER/30/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the detail and clarity of the report was welcomed;
- while acknowledging the complicated challenges around collecting rent arrears, it was important to find ways of communicating with people who were not engaging with the service, perhaps because of other needs which were not being met;
- it was important people were encouraged to always report incidents of anti-social behaviour in order to build up evidence;
- several Members expressed concern about the practice of, at times, encouraging tenants to remain in a property beyond the date on which they'd been asked to depart by the landlord, in order to avoid a homelessness claim. This could alienate landlords and risk reducing the willingness of a landlord to provide their properties for private rentals. It was noted that the Council's aim was to reduce the incidents of homelessness, but Members felt this policy required further scrutiny;
- assurance was sought that tenants facing arrears were provided with advice and potential referral to the Council's welfare team and / or Citizen's Advice Bureau; and
- the issue of the timing between rent being due and the payment of universal credit was at times problematic, and information was sought and provided on the automated rent arrears letters that were sent to tenants who missed deadlines. While it was acknowledged that those letters were sent at a cost to the Council despite being automated, and that it could be distressing for a tenant to receive one when the delay in rent payment was due to the universal credit payment system, the letters could prove a useful mechanism for tenants to contact the Council and discuss payment plans.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.

7. Common Good Fund Consultations
Co-chomhairleachaidhean Maoin Maith Choitchinn

a. Fortrose Golf Club Car Park
Pàirc-chàraichean Raon-goilf na Cananaich

There was circulated Report No. BIER/31/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate and the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members welcomed the well negotiated position which would benefit the Fund. It was hoped work could continue to resolve the parking issues raised by the community and that any progress made to date on this would not be affected.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the process and outcome of the consultation as contained in section 6 and 7 and Appendix 1 of this report.
ii. **NOTED** the representations and responses as set out in Appendix 2, taking them into account whilst having regard to the views of the inhabitants of the former Burgh of Fortrose and Rosemarkie during the decision-making process;
iii. **APPROVED** subject to Sheriff Court consent; and
iv. **APPROVED** the responses to the representations in Appendix 2 for publication on the Council's website.

b. Rosemarkie Caravan Park
Pàirc-chàraichean Raon-goilf Ros Mairchidh

There was circulated Report No. BIER/32/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate and the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

It was explained that, despite the rental figures being protected from publication due to their commercial sensitivity, the tenants of the Caravan Park had given permission for the rental amounts to be made public, following considerable public interest, and these were revealed to be a one-off upfront Lease Premium of £75k, and £43k annual rent to be paid to the CGF, the latter to be reviewed every five years.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- gratitude was expressed to the tenant for making the negotiated rent public following public interest, and to the officers for their work on the matter;
- public contributions to the consultation were acknowledged and their comments recognised; and
- the need for the Common Good Fund to receive a fair level of income from its assets to provide funding for projects to benefit the community was emphasised; and
- it was disappointing that some public comments wrongfully suggesting that the correct legal framework had not been followed appeared on the website, and it was emphasised that the correct legal process had been followed.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the process and outcome of the consultation as contained in section 6 and 7 and Appendix 1 of this report;

ii. **NOTED** the representations and responses as set out in Appendix 2, taking them into account whilst having regard to the views of the inhabitants of the former Burgh of Fortrose and Rosemarkie during the decision-making process;

* iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to Full Council (see section 8 of the report) that the proposal should be **APPROVED** subject to Sheriff Court consent; and

iv. **APPROVED** the responses to the representations in Appendix 2 for publication on the Council's website.

c. East Church Hall
Talla na h-Eaglaise an Ear

There was circulated Report No. BIER/33/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate and the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the public were thanked for their responses and officers for their work, and the project was welcomed as of great benefit to Cromarty, and a good use of the building; and
- Members requested that, if in future a Community Asset Transfer for the Hall was applied for, a new consultation be undertaken. Only the lease of the Hall was to be approved at present.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the process and outcome of the consultation as contained in section 6 and 7 and Appendix 1 of this report.

ii. **NOTED** the representations and responses as set out in Appendix 2, taking them into account whilst having regard to the views of the inhabitants of the former Burgh of Cromarty during the decision-making process;

iii. **AGREED** to dispose (by lease) and change the use of East Church Hall subject to Sheriff Court consent, but to **DEFER** any decision on a future disposal (by sale), pending a new common good consultation at that time if a Community Asset Transfer request is submitted; and

iv. **APPROVED** the responses to the representations in Appendix 2 for publication on the Council's website.

8. Common Good Funds
Maoin Maith Choitchinn

a. Cromarty Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Chromba

There is circulated Report No BIER/34/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of CCGF Fund as shown in the 2025/26 Quarter 2 Monitoring Statement.

b. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann na Cananaich agus Ros Maircnidh

There is circulated Report No BIER/35/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of FRCGF Fund as shown in the 2025/26 Quarter 2 Monitoring Statement.

c. Invergordon Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain

There is circulated Report No BIER/36/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, clarification was sought and received on the staff costs associated with the administration of the Bouchardon Bust. A Ministerial decision was awaited.

Members **NOTED** the Quarter 2 25/26 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund

d. Tain Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich

There is circulated Report No BIER/37/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion it was pointed out that further additional repair expenses might be required and this would be considered in the first instance at a Ward Business Meeting.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the Quarter 2 2025/26 monitoring statement for the Tain Common Good Fund; and
ii. **APPROVED** a revised budget for 2025/26 for Tain Common Good Fund.

9. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

There was circulated and **NOTED**, details of the Discretionary Budget applications that had been approved.

Cromarty Firth Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1st April 2025 – 31st October 2025

Alness Gala & Events – The Alness Gala	£2,000.00
Saltburn & Westwood Community Council – Annual Community Flowers	£700.00
Invergordon Lunch Club – Invergordon Lunch Club	£400.00

Highland Action for Little Ones – Bright Futures	£1,000.00
Community Food Initiatives North & East – Fareshare in Highland	£3,340.00
Poppy Wreaths	
Kiltearn Parish Church – Hot Water Upgrade	£224.93
	£600.00

Tain and Easter Ross Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1st April 2025 – 31st October 2025

Tain YMCA – Assistance for Running Costs	£1,500.00
Tain Task Force – Tain Environmental Improvements Worker	£3,000.00
Seaboard Memorial Hall – Village Care Assistance Scheme	£3,500.00
Tain Gala Association – Talk Car Rally & Gala	£2,000.00
Community Food Initiatives North & East – Fareshare in Highland	£164.00
Poppy Wreaths	£128.57

Black Isle Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1st April 2025 – 31st October 2025

Cromarty & District Community Council - Reed Loop Path Maintenance	£700.00
Go Flourish - Community Open Days	£773.00
Fortrose Academy - Young Enterprise Team Scottish Finals	£823.00
Black Isle Cares - Fortrose Community Larder	£400.00
Black Isle Cares - Meals at Home service	£300.00
Cromarty & District Community Council - Tidy up Townland	£580.00
Knockbain Community Council - North Kessock Community Youth Art Project	£950.00
Ferintosh Community Hall – Fence Replacement	£700.00
Raddery House LTD – Business Plan	£582.00
Killearn Public Hall – Upgrading Public Hall EPC Survey	£126.00
Community Food Initiatives North & East – Fareshare in Highland	£1,000.00
Chanonry Sailing Club – Accessibility & Changing Room Upgrade	£920.00

10. Community Regeneration Fund
Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd

Transparency Statement:
Ms L Dundas made a transparency statement as a director of the Seaboard Centre, Balintore. This role was on a voluntary basis, with no remuneration and despite the connection, having applied the objective test, she did not feel there was an interest to declare.

Declarations of Interest:
The following Members made declarations of interest and left the meeting during discussion of those items:

- Ms M MacCallum, as a council representative and trustee for Cromarty Courthouse, and having provided a letter of support for their funding application; and
- Ms M Ross, as a voluntary director for Friends of Fearn Abbey and Seaboard Memorial Hall.

There was circulated Report No BIER/38/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members queried the possibility of giving an additional grant of £1,000 to one of the applicants. It was advised that this would involve further considerations such as additionality, and should be progressed through the CRF change request process in line with agreed governance, bearing in mind that it was likely that other organisations were likely to submit applications for the remaining funds, and a fair screening process was required to be followed for all applications.

Following consideration of each application, the Committee:

i. **NOTED** that an approval of funding should detail the amount approved and outline any conditions of funding that Members wish to attach to the approval over and above the required technical conditions. A deferral would allow an applicant to resubmit the current application at a future date with updated information or for the project to be approved subject to further funding becoming available. A rejection would mean that the application will not proceed and any future application to the fund should be brought forward initially as a new expression of interest; and
ii. **AGREED** the approved CRF grant award, with no additional conditions, for each application as follows:

Organisation	**Project Title**	**Grant Requested**
Cromarty Community Development Trust	Renovation of East Church Hall Cromarty	£ 88,415.85
Rosemarkie Amenities Association	Grounds Maintenance Equipment	£ 10,862.80
Evanton Community Trust	Village Green Improvements including Public Convenience	£ 44,484.00
Trustees of Tore Hall	Planning Permission for Tore Hall Redevelopment	£ 29,049.00
Resolis Memorial Hall Community Centre	Re-roofing of Hall Extension	£ 31,437.00
Inver FC	Pitch Levelling	£ 17,000.00
Fearn Abbey	Multi-faceted Abbey Promotion & Marketing	£ 15,000.00
Seaboard Memorial Hall	Flooring	£ 31,000.00
Cromarty Courthouse Trust	Cromarty Museum	£ 19,200.00

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** minutes of the meeting of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee held on 11 August 2025, which was approved by the Council on 18 September 2025.

The meeting ended at 2.20pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, and remotely on **Monday, 10 November, 2025 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr S Cameron
Mr J C Grafton
Mr T MacLennan
Ms L Saggers
Ms K Willis

Officials in attendance:

Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner, Place Service
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Officer Traffic & Parking (Acting), Place Service
Ms E Wilkinson, Principal Housing Officer, Place Service
Mr P Nevin, Legal Manager (Conveyancing & Commercial), Corporate Service
Mr M Albiston, Solicitor (Litigation & Advice), Corporate Service
Ms T Batchelor, Solicitor (Conveyancing & Commercial), Corporate Service
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry, Place Service
Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry), Place Service
Mr A Maciver, Principal Engineer, Place Service
Mr M Culbertson, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager (West & Mid Highland)
Mr J Maclean, Bereavement Services Project Manager, Place Service
Ms R Robertson, Project Co-ordinator, Place Service
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Also in attendance:

Inspector K Duncan, Police Scotland (item 3 only)

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

Ms K Willis in the Chair

At the start of the meeting, the Chair on behalf of the Committee welcomed Councillor S Cameron, Caol and Mallaig Ward, to his first meeting of the Lochaber Committee.

The Committee also extended their best wishes to former Councillor Sarah Fanet who had left the Council in October. Sarah was thanked for her contributions to the Council and Ward business over her time as a Councillor. Sarah would be very much missed and the Committee wished her well for the future.

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declaration of Interest:-

Item 12 – Ms K Willis

3. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/27/25 by the Area Commander, Police Scotland.

Following commentary on the report by the Area Commander, the following main points were raised by Members and responded to:-

- in terms of hate crimes, Police Scotland were fully committed to dealing with such crimes and had a zero tolerance approach to any hate crimes. The Police worked to ensure the wellbeing of the victims of such crimes and this was an ongoing process. In terms of detection rates, hate crimes could cover a wide range of incidents and the Police would deal with the evidence presented to them when investigating crimes of this nature;
- the Home Office had announced that Asylum Seekers would be located in the Highland area, and it was queried if this would have any impact on Police Scotland Officers in the Lochaber area. It was advised that there was no information about Asylum Seekers being located in the Lochaber area and therefore it was not anticipated that there would be any impact on Police Officers in this area at this time.
- Police Scotland were not aware of any reports of fraudulent schemes involving parking meters in this area.
- the issue of anti social behaviour and vandalism was raised and the focused efforts by Police Scotland in dealing with this. The role of the Childrens' Panel and Procurator Fiscal in taking robust action to deal with individuals behaving in this way was highlighted. Reports in the media stated that vandalism across the Highlands had cost £100,000 in the last year. Police Scotland understood the impact of this behaviour on communities and they would always deal with such incidents robustly and working in partnership with other agencies and parents of young people involved in this behaviour. Some of the work and resources available to tackle this problem was detailed.
- Police Scotland working with partners tried to address the problem of young people using electronic cigarettes or vapes, such as through education in schools, test purchasing. Alcohol was also a contributing factor in anti social behaviour and there was a focus on addressing the problem of underage drinking.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.

4. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh Coimhearsnachd

There was circulated Report No LA/28/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

The report detailed one community regeneration fund application received for consideration from Mallaig Community Hub and Shop. There was a request for funding of £50,000 with an available budget of £600,197.08. The application was eligible for support.

Following a summary of the assessment of the application, it was queried and advised that the current lease of the property was to the end of 2027 and the organisation had a commitment from the Landlord to extend the lease for another 5 years from end 2027. The organisation would have up to one year to spend the grant, but there were no concerns that this project would take a year to complete.

It was noted that a further nine local community regeneration fund applications are currently in progress, targeting the first Lochaber Area Committee of 2026, with an additional two still to confirm if they wish to go forward. The current indicative value of these applications was approximately £425,000.00. There may be still time for other applications to come forward for consideration at that meeting, but this would need to be reviewed on a case by case basis. There would be flexibility to carry forward an underspend to a future meeting.

Further, a new website was about to be launched for the Community Regeneration Fund, called 'Be Connected'. Community Groups would be able to put their ideas for projects on the website, and it could be monitored how they were developing.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** the application from Mallaig Community Hub and Shop for Community Regeneration Fund grant award and the grant requested.

5. Short Term Let Control Area
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine

There was circulated Report No. LA/29/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

In discussion, Officers were thanked for all their hard work into producing the report. This was an important and significant report for the Lochaber area. An opinion was expressed that short term lets were having a detrimental impact on local communities. For some time there had been a significant increase in the number of properties being purchased for the purpose of turning into short term lets. In particular, property developers and companies from outwith Lochaber were purchasing homes in the area for this purpose. These were not community based investors with the consequence that homes were being taken out of the local housing stock. The report highlighted that 10% of homes were now short term lets in Lochaber and 40% of house buyers were from outside the Highlands. Local people were finding it increasingly difficult to purchase or rent homes. While tourism was vital to Lochaber, however short term lets were having to much of a detrimental impact on communities that action needed to be taken to resolve this. It was important to note that a short term let control area would not have retrospective impact on existing short term lets, but would only apply to new short term lets. A short term let control area would help ensure there were more homes available for living in to the benefit of local communities.

In response to a query, it was advised that if someone built a new property they would require planning permission. If they subsequently turned their old property into a short term let, this currently did not require planning permission, unless the property was in a short term let control area. If annexes were tied to a dwelling and not separate units, and the property was to be sold, the property would require to be sold with the annex.

Clarification on the consultation process was provided and the importance of making the consultation informative and accessible to the public was highlighted. Feedback on the outcome of the consultation would be provided to local Members.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the evidence presented demonstrating the degree of prevalence of Short Term Lets within Lochaber;
ii. **NOTED** that this evidence, demonstrates that the housing market within parts of Lochaber, is subject to significant pressure, exacerbated by high rates of potential dwellings being converted to Short Term Lets;
iii. **NOTED** that the designation of any new Short Term Let Control Area will have no retrospective impact on existing Short Term Lets where no material change of use had occurred at the time of establishment and will therefore only require planning permission from new Short Term Lets established after a Short Term Let Control Area comes into force;
iv. **NOTED** that should the Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee formally commence the process of introducing a Short Term Let Control Area, this will initiate a process of further evidence gathering and public consultation with communities;
v. **AGREED** that the Lochaber Area Committee seeks to progress the consideration of a Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of the Lochaber Area; and
vi. **AGREED** that progressing with consideration of a Short Term Let Control Area enables communities within the area to participate in that consultation at the appropriate stage.

In terms of Standing Order 9, with the consent of the meeting the following item was taken after item 4 on the agenda.

6. Fort William Common Good Fund – Parking Costs
Maoin Math Coitcheann a' Ghearasdain – Cosgaisean Parcaidh

There was circulated Report No. LA/30/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place. Members were invited to agree that £4249.55 costs incurred by the Council's Parking Enforcement Team to operate the paid parking scheme at the Fort William Common Good site is charged against the Fort William Common Good Fund.

Following commentary on the report by the Principal Officer Traffic & Parking (Acting), a view was expressed that before the Committee agree to this recharge, confirmation was requested whether all of the outstanding works requested by Members as custodians of the Common Good Fund from the Parking Management Service had been completed, namely:-

sections of the car park were poorly surfaced/badly lined which made the car park quite hazardous once it was dark early in winter months; the results of an assessment of the sea wall containing the West End car park; the Common Good Fund was not in place for the whole of 2024/25 and therefore clarification was required as to the duration the Common Good Fund was being charged; an explanation of how the 55%/45% split in income/costs between the Common Good Fund and the Council for the West End car park, was arrived at; clarification

on whether the Common Good Fund would be liable for any major future repairs to the sea wall containing the West End car park; and ongoing management and maintenance plans of the Common Good Fund assets and how funds would be dispersed.

Further, there was an area in the West End carpark mainly used by Council staff. It was queried if this would be formalised into a long term agreement. An undertaking was given to provide information on this to Members.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the costs incurred to operate the paid parking scheme and the charge against the Fort William Common Good Fund;-
ii. **AGREED** not to approve this recharge until all the following outstanding matters about the West End Car park previously raised by Members were resolved:-

- Information on when would maintenance on sections of the car park that were poorly surfaced/badly lined be undertaken ;
- Information be provided on the results of an assessment of the sea wall containing the West End car park;
- clarification on whether the Common Good Fund would be liable for any major future repairs to the sea wall containing the West End car park;
- the Common Good Fund was not in place for the whole of 2024/25 and therefore clarification was required as to the duration the Common Good Fund was being charged for parking costs;
- an explanation of how the 55%/45% split in income/costs between the Common Good Fund and the Council for the West End car park was arrived at;
- information be provided on management and maintenance plans for the Common Good Fund assets and how funds are dispersed.

7. Invitation to Pay Income
Teachd a-steach bho Chuireadh gus Pàigheadh

There was circulated Report No. LA/31/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on income generated in the area via the Invitation to Pay scheme in Council operated Car Parks.

In response to a query it was advised that there were 80 parking bays in Mallaig, West Bay Car Park, with a £53 per bay cost allocated to the car park. There was also a £400 cost per ticket machine and there were two ticket machines in that car park. Therefore, annual costs for this car park were £5,040, excluding transaction fees. It was requested that this information be provided in future reports to the Committee. Further, it was advised that Parking Services did not have revenue or capital budgets for car parking maintenance. The income from costs referred to above would go into a corporate budget.

It was recognised as good practice that income raised in a particular ward is allocated to that ward so that the public could see the practical benefits of the scheme.

The Committee **NOTED:-**

i. the earmarked funds for this Committee from the Invitation to pay Parking of £8,593.91; and
ii. that in future reports there would be a detailed explanation of income and costs associated with the invitation to pay scheme in Mallaig West Bay Car Park.

At this point the meeting adjourned for a comfort break and it resumed again at 12.20 p.m.

8. Bereavement Services Project updates
Cunntasan às Ùr mu Phròiseact nan Seirbheisean Bàis

There was circulated Report No. LA/32/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the work being undertaken on burial ground capacity and new and/or extended burial grounds in the Lochaber area.

In discussion, it was welcomed that works were ongoing to extend the existing Glen Nevis burial ground given the pressure on space left in the burial ground. An update was sought regarding storm damage to Duror burial ground. An update would be sought and information provided on this to Councillor T MacLennan.

In relation to Kinlochmore burial ground it was advised that there was under 2.5 years capacity at this site and there was capital funding approved for a new site. Ground testing for the proposed new site would be required and the results of this would be shared with Members. If the ground tests showed the site was not suitable, alternative sites would need to be identified in South Lochaber. If the tests were successful it was anticipated that the new site would be ready by end 2027. Any new extensions would cover at least 25 years capacity.

The challenges in some areas with burial ground provision with it becoming increasingly difficult to identify available land for development of extensions or for new burial grounds was recognised. In Ward 11 there were a number of burial grounds now closed and it was queried what the future provision would be for these areas. All opportunities were investigated where there may be potential for new burial ground sites.

Kilmonivaig burial ground was closed to new purchases, but it was still maintained. An undertaking was given to fix the gates to the burial ground.

The Committee **NOTED**:

i. the current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Lochaber area; and
ii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development.

9. Housing Management Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Càraidhean Thaighean

There was circulated Report No. LA/33/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. The report provided information on how the Housing Service performed in

relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 September 2025.

In discussion, there had been cases where private residents had been moved out of their homes by private landlords due to anti social behaviour. They had then been housed in Council accommodation. It was felt that if there had been Social Services intervention this may have prevented the tenants being moved from their private rented accommodation. Members were advised that the council had an anti social behaviour officer and referrals could be made to this officer by local housing teams.

The number of housing allocations to homeless presentations had increased considerably and it was queried what the effect of this was on housing waiting lists. It was advised that when allocations were made, consideration was given to those on the general waiting list, housing transfer list and homeless list. A breakdown of homeless presentations that were urban and rural would be shared with Members.

In terms of there being a lack of adapted accommodation for disabled people, it was advised that when properties became vacant, opportunities to future proof these homes for use as disabled accommodation was considered. The same approach applied to existing tenancies where their homes could be adapted to their specific needs, if the property allows for this.

An update was requested on the travellers site on Locheilside. Information on this would be provided to Members.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.

10. Corran Ferry Update
Cunntas air Aiseag a' Chorrain

There was circulated Report No. LA/34/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme, the Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel and Corran Ferry Service operations.

In discussion, reference was made to the marshal project which had gone well and had been welcomed by the community. Some feedback on the trial was provided particularly relating to the Corran side, such as marshals should be more proactive working at the top of the slipway leading onto the A82 so that they were also at the back of the queue as well as the front of it.

At the last meeting of the Committee, it was queried why the ferry service budget information in the report had not been included in budget papers to the Council budget meeting in March, 2025, when it was proposed to increase ferry fares and introduce a foot passenger fare. Information on this was to have been provided to the Committee. It was advised that this information had not as yet been provided to the Committee and an undertaking was given to do so now.

Further, at the last meeting of the Committee consideration was to be given to introducing a road traffic order on the Corran side of the Corran ferry and it was queried what progress had been made with this. Information on this would be provided to Members.

In relation to the introduction of foot passenger fares, it was queried when these fares would start. Also, in terms of the projected £20,000 income from these fares, given the fares were being started late in the year it was queried if this income would be achieved. It was advised that the foot passenger fares were effective from 10 November, 2025 and therefore income from these fares would now be projected to be half the original estimate for the 2025/26 financial year.

It was queried what were the community consultation plans on the Corran Ferry ahead of next year's budget. Community Councils in particular were prepared to have a discussion with the Council about the long term fare structure on the Corran Ferry. The Operations Manager, Corran Ferry undertook to attend the next Ward Business meeting to discuss engagement plans on next year's budget for the Corran Ferry.

It was queried what progress had been made to the long term aspiration of a fixed link across the Corran narrows. It was advised that all efforts had gone into the Corran Ferry infrastructure improvement scheme and ferry replacement scheme. The Council was working with Transport Scotland on a fixed link. However, Transport Scotland declined to include the fixed link in their Strategic Transport Projects Review 2. The Council did not have any funds for a fixed link and would need funding from Government. This aspiration had been fed into the Scottish Government's Islands connectivity plan. The response to this would be shared with Members.

In response to a query, it was advised that the new electric ferry would be part of the small vessels replacement programme and it was expected to be delivered by the end of 2028/early 2029. Further, the application for SSEN shore power supply to charge the new Corran vessel overnight had been accepted and paid with an estimated date for delivery of November 2028.

A view was expressed that from a period of many years when there was no action on replacement ferries, there was now a commitment to build new infrastructure and ferries which was very positive progress.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme & Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel updates; and
ii. Corran Ferry Service update.

11. Ward Discretionary Fund 2025/26
Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund grant awards since the last Committee meeting:-

Ward 11
CFINE - Fairshare in Highland - £1,200.00

Lochaber Live - free family day - £600.00
Achnacarry Bunarkaig & Clunes Community Group – New village hall project - £2,100.00
Astley Hall Trust – Restructure of Hall Trust - £1,286.00

Ward 21
CFINE - Fairshare in Highland - £530.00
Fort William Marina & Shoreline CIC - Wrapping Fort William Pontoon Facility - £2,915.95
Lochaber Live - free family day - £900.00
HC Gaelic Team - Additional ferry crossings Mod - £1,000.00

Mr J Grafton, Vice Chair of the Committee took the Chair for the next item.

12. Notice of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid

Declaration of Interest: Ms K Willis declared an interest in this item as her partner was an employee of Mowi. Ms Willis left the meeting for this item.

The following Notice of Motion was received by the Chief Officer Legal and Corporate Governance –

Escape of Farmed Salmon from Gorsten Fish Farm, Loch Linnhe

The Lochaber Committee expresses its deep concern at the recent large-scale escape of an estimated 75,000 farmed salmon from the Mowi-operated Gorsten Fish Farm in Upper Loch Linnhe following damage to the site during Storm Amy.

This incident represents one of the most significant escapes in Scottish aquaculture in recent years. Experts have warned that even a small proportion of these fish surviving in the wild could have a long-term impact on Lochaber's delicate river systems, including the Sallachan, Kaichnish, Lochy, Lundy, Loy and Nevis, by:

- introducing maladapted genetic material into already endangered wild salmon stocks;
- spreading disease and parasites such as sea-lice; and
- competing with native species for food and habitat.

The Committee notes that:

- The BBC and scientific experts have highlighted the risk that inter-breeding between farmed and wild salmon could cause "major genetic changes" in wild populations;
- Previous Scottish Parliament committee reports have identified under-regulation of fish farming, a lack of transparency, and the need for a robust penalty system for escapes—yet such measures are not expected to be implemented until 2026/27;
- Similar incidents at Colonsay, Kames and Loch Shin demonstrate that lessons are not being learned across the industry.

Accordingly, the Committee resolves that:

1. The Area Chair should write to Mowi Scotland requesting:
full disclosure of the number, size and age of escaped fish;
details of the company's emergency and preventative procedures;
what steps are being taken to recover escaped stock and mitigate the ecological impact.
2. The Area Chair should write to Marine Scotland, NatureScot, SEPA, and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to ask what investigations and enforcement actions are under way and how they intend to strengthen monitoring of aquaculture operations in Lochaber.
3.The Leader of The Highland Council should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands urging that:
the Scottish Government bring forward its planned penalty regime for farmed fish escapes without delay; greater resources be provided for environmental inspection and regulation; any proposals for new or expanded aquaculture developments in Loch Linnhe be paused pending a full environmental assessment of cumulative impact.

The Committee further agrees to refer this issue to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for wider consideration of the implications for marine environmental management and regulatory reform across the Highlands.

Signed: Mr A Baxter Mr J Grafton

In discussion and by way of context, the Motion had been tabled following conversations with wild fishery stakeholders in Lochaber, constituents and discussions with Mowi. The aim of the motion was to create some additional democratic scrutiny and not to condemn the fish farming industry as it was recognised how vital Mowi was to Lochaber's economy and community. Storm Amy caused a significant release of fish into the loch and river systems. Due to climate change, storms would increase and the risk of future significant releases would grow and the wild salmon required some consideration.

The Proposer of the Motion had further discussions with Mowi and the following key points were highlighted: - the Gorsten fish farm was now fully secured and confirmed that 75,000 farmed fished had been released during the storm; they would upgrade the fish pens at Gorsten; Mowi had co-operated with the River Lochy Fisheries Association and agreed a 3 year study to look at the impact fully funded by Mowi and the results published; Mowi would sample rivers at the various salmon development stages; Mowi had offered the opportunity of continued community engagement in order to strengthen environmental protection and fish farming standards.

In light of Mowi's planned infrastructure improvements, point 3 of the motion was amended to delete the following wording - "any proposals for new or expanded aquaculture developments in Loch Linnhe be paused pending a full environmental assessment of cumulative impact."

The Committee **AGREED** the Motion as amended by the Proposer.

Decision

Escape of Farmed Salmon from Gorsten Fish Farm, Loch Linnhe

The Lochaber Committee expresses its deep concern at the recent large-scale escape of an estimated 75,000 farmed salmon from the Mowi-operated Gorsten Fish Farm in Upper Loch Linnhe following damage to the site during Storm Amy.

This incident represents one of the most significant escapes in Scottish aquaculture in recent years. Experts have warned that even a small proportion of these fish surviving in the wild could have a long-term impact on Lochaber's delicate river systems, including the Sallachan, Kaichnish, Lochy, Lundy, Loy and Nevis, by:

- introducing maladapted genetic material into already endangered wild salmon stocks;
- spreading disease and parasites such as sea-lice; and
- competing with native species for food and habitat.

The Committee notes that:

- The BBC and scientific experts have highlighted the risk that inter-breeding between farmed and wild salmon could cause "major genetic changes" in wild populations;
- Previous Scottish Parliament committee reports have identified under-regulation of fish farming, a lack of transparency, and the need for a robust penalty system for escapes—yet such measures are not expected to be implemented until 2026/27;
- Similar incidents at Colonsay, Kames and Loch Shin demonstrate that lessons are not being learned across the industry.

Accordingly, the Committee resolves that:

1. The Area Chair should write to Mowi Scotland requesting:
full disclosure of the number, size and age of escaped fish;
details of the company's emergency and preventative procedures;
what steps are being taken to recover escaped stock and mitigate the ecological impact.
2. The Area Chair should write to Marine Scotland, NatureScot, SEPA, and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to ask what investigations and enforcement actions are under way and how they intend to strengthen monitoring of aquaculture operations in Lochaber.

* 3.The Leader of The Highland Council should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands urging that:
the Scottish Government bring forward its planned penalty regime for farmed fish escapes without delay; greater resources be provided for environmental inspection and regulation.

The Committee further agrees to refer this issue to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for wider consideration of the implications for marine environmental management and regulatory reform across the Highlands.

13. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 11 August, 2025 which were approved by the Council on 18 September, 2025, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

14. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

15. Amenity Issues – Middle Street, Fort William
Cùisean Goireis – Sràid a' Mheadhain, An Gearasdan

There was circulated to Members only Report No. LA/35/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. The report updated the Committee regarding amenity issues at Middle Street, Fort William and have the Committee select an option for dealing with the Site.

Following commentary on the report by officers and consideration by Members, the Committee **AGREED** to proceed with Option 2 as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 1.55p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of the meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 12 November 2025 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mrs M Cockburn
Mr R Cross
Mr D Fraser
Mr R Gale
Mr J Grafton
Mrs B Jarvie
Ms L Johnston
Ms L Kraft
Mrs I Mackenzie
Mrs K MacLean
Mr P Oldham (sub for Dr Birt)
Mrs M Paterson
Ms C Ramsay
Mrs M Reid
Ms M Ross

Non-Members present:

Mrs T Collier
Mr J Finlayson
Ms C Gillies
Ms M Hutchison
Mrs A MacLean
Mr T MacLennan
Mr J McGillivray
Mr R Stewart

NHS Highland representatives:

Ms J Davies, Director of Public Health
Ms L Bussell, Director of Nursing
Mr S Steer, Director of Adult Social Care
Ms A Johnstone, Interim Chief Officer

Third sector representatives in attendance:

Dr G Rodger, Inspiring Young Voices
Ms K Wilczynska, Connecting Carers

Also in attendance:

Ms L McBain, Youth Convener

Participating Officials:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Ms F Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer, Health and Social Care
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer, Integrated People Services
Mr I Kyle, Lead Officer Strategy, Performance and Quality Assurance
Mr J Libby, Transition Head of Children & Justice
Ms C McLaughlan, Programme Manager, The Promise
Ms D Henderson, Strategic Lead, Care and Support
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mr D Fraser in the Chair

Preliminaries

The Chair welcomed Third Sector Rep, Ms K Wilczynska, from Connecting Carers, and Ms L McBain, Youth Convener, to their first meeting.

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

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Dr Birt, Mr R Gunn, and Mr A MacKintosh.

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

Item 5 – Ms L Johnston (Transparency Statement)

3. Service Achievements
Coileanaidhean Seirbheis

The Committee **NOTED** updated on the following achievements, the details having been circulated to Members in advance:

i. Justice Service
ii. Children and Young People's Participation Strategy
iii. Whole Family Wellbeing Programme
iv. Mental Health Officer (MHO)
v. Orchard-Celebrating the Opening of Our New Short Breaks Service
vi. Thor House
vii. Skye (Taigh Blabhain)

The Committee also congratulated Heather Allan, who this year celebrated 50 years since beginning her nursing career. Her commitment, compassion, and professionalism had made a lasting impact on countless lives, and she continued to be a valued and inspiring member of the Inverness Central Team.

4. Revenue Budget Monitoring
Buidseat Teachd-a-steach

There was circulated Report No HCW/19/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- a summary of progress with updated recruitment practices was sought and provided, including the current situation with regard to trainee Social Workers. It was queried what could be learnt from the trainee process that could help with staff retention. The challenges of Highland having 2-3 times higher levels of vacancies than the national average was highlighted, and attention was drawn to the strategy in place to tackle this, which included the 'grow your own' approach, due to limited success in attracting experienced workforce from elsewhere. Although the approach was successful, challenges had been faced with regard to supervision and working terms and conditions for newly qualified social workers;
- the increase in kinship care was welcomed and assurance sought that kinship carers were encouraged to apply for statutory status and receive any payments they were due, noting that a number of unpaid carers were on lower income brackets. It was queried what promotional work the Council was undertaking in relation to kinship and foster carers. The difference between formal and informal kinship care was summarised, and the appointment of a kinship

project manager was highlighted. Attention was also drawn to difference in attitudes toward kinship versus foster carers;

- the improvements made to the transition process from children's to adult services were welcomed, and concern was expressed about whether the administration team for Self Directed Support reviewing was sufficiently robust to deal with the pressures of the work;
- with reference to risk implications and impact assessment, information was sought and provided on provision for budget variances and overspends, the impact on the final budget if savings were not realised, contingency plans, and whether the final overspend would be taken from reserves;
- actions taken to manage budget pressures were queried, as was the detail around the increasing costs of independent and third sector placements, and the outcome for NHS Highland in terms of their overall budget should their £40m overspend be realised, this latter point being a matter for NHS Highland. Further monitoring statements could be provided to Mrs M Reid and Mrs I MacKenzie if required to set out more detailed spending ;
- savings related to car club cancellations were queried;
- assurance was sought and provided that mental health and neurodiversity services were not being unfairly targeted as a result of overspends;
- attention was drawn to need for milestone and outcome tracking, and it was highlighted that these were detailed in the report to facilitate an appropriate level of scrutiny;
- an explanation was sought for the budget management implications of filling all the vacancies which were helping to balance the year end budget. Assurance was provided that these vacancies were not used for budget planning on a recurring basis;
- with reference to examples from the Children's Hearing system, it was suggested that at times negative parenting patterns continued through generations, though it was also pointed out that with intervention and support, the generational transfer of negative parenting practices could be prevented;
- the Chair supported the sharing of experience and practice through the Committee; and
- the Chair emphasised that the Children's Services Recovery Plan aimed to address budget pressures without compromising care and protection. He highlighted the shift towards more local kinship, fostering and residential placements to reduce out-of-area care, and noted ongoing investment in kinship support and fostering improvements. The commitment to achieving the best outcomes for vulnerable children within limited resources was summarised.

Thereafter, the Committee:

i. **AGREED** the forecast financial position for the year as set out in the report and appendices attached to the report;
ii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed;
iii. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery;
iv. **NOTED** and **AGREED** the Children's Services Recovery Plan; and
v. **AGREED** that there should be regular reporting to Committee in terms of the numbers of children accommodated by the Council and the nature of those placements.

5. Adult Social Care Assurance and Strategic Update
Barantas Cùram Sòisealta Inbheach

Declaration of Interest: Ms L Johnston made a transparency statement as an employee of Connecting Carers but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No HCW/20/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- officers were thanked for the provision of the hospital Delayed Discharge codes and it was highlighted that hold ups due to the lack of power of attorney being set up for patients were significant. Further publicity should be given to this to encourage families to arrange power of attorney, including by the Council and NHS Highland Communications Teams;
- it was queried whether the Self Directed Support administration team had sufficiently strong links with social workers and sufficient support for the level of work being tackled. The trend towards the use of SDS Option One was highlighted;
- attention was drawn to Carer's Rights Day on 20 November 2025;
- concern was expressed at the increasing pressure on Adult Social Care, and further understanding on how the improvement plans were delivering change was sought. An update on the change of integration model with NHS Highland was requested, and would be provided to full Council in due course, as that work was ongoing at present. The problem of higher taxation on overseas staff and the need to expand capacity and recruitment were highlighted;
- contingency plans in the event of the closure of another independent sector care home were queried;
- work to reopen Moss Park Care Home in Lochaber was welcomed by the local community and it was hoped it would return to full capacity soon, although it was explained that the current cap on capacity was the result of Care Inspectorate regulations following a change in management. It was hoped steps could be taken to avoid a similar occurrence elsewhere;
- staff were thanked for their work for the Sutherland care at home service, following the lifting of service restrictions by the Care Inspectorate; and
- figures for the funding allocated to unpaid carer support was queried and would be provided to Kasia Wilczynska and Committee members outwith the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

6. Promise (Local Perspective)
Gealltanas (Sealladh Ionadail)

There was circulated Report No HCW/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the values contained within The Promise were praised and the cultural change for Looked After Children was welcomed. Significant progress had been made with The Promise in Highland and required further roll out across Scotland;

- examples of personal experiences as a long-term Children's Hearing Panel Member were provided along with views on the impact legal representation could have on outcomes; and
- with reference to the Council having committed to a trauma-informed approach, the use of appropriate language was highlighted as important.

Thereafter, the Committee:

i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
ii. **NOTED** areas of challenge and areas of progress across service delivery; and
iii. **AGREED** to support services to Keep The Promise.

7. Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Scotland Consultation Report
Aithisg Cho-chomhairleachaidh Clann (Cùram, Eòlas Cùraim agus Planadh Sheirbheisean) na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No HCW/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair expressed concern that the consultation period had fallen over summer recess and that there had been insufficient engagement with professional bodies before publication of the Bill. While the Bill's aims were commendable, it required proper resourcing for additional expenses, without pooling resources from existing services. He expressed support for the aims of the Bill, and acknowledged the element of urgency from the Scottish Government, given the forthcoming election period. However, given the importance of the Bill and its implications, full and proper engagement was important and should not have taken place during the recess.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:

i. to homologate the consultation response; and
ii. the Council would continue to engage with all opportunities to inform the Bill's development as it progressed through Parliament.

8. Delivery Plan – Person Centred Solutions (PCS) Q2 2025/26
Aithris mun Phlana Lìbhrigidh

There was circulated Report No HCW/23/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- concern was expressed about challenges recruiting foster carers, noting the rising costs and rigorous processes, which were acknowledged as essential. It was asked if there was an opportunity to decrease the level of need for fosters carers, with reference to projects such as the family wellbeing programme;
- assurance was sought and provided that in relation to the exit strategy for the four workstreams which were funded via the Families First Approach, no redundancies were intended;
- it was queried whether local care models included young person short break houses, and the benefits of short breaks for families with additional needs were

highlighted. Attention was drawn to the use of the transformational reserves in this regard, and to the work of the third sector and NHS Highland;
- reference to the positive impact of the handyperson repair scheme in the report was welcomed; and
- it was queried whether a similar event to the Children's Care Conference in England took place in Scotland, and while there was not an exactly similar event, attention was draw to the Vision event which it was hoped could be expanded.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Delivery Plan Project updated provided in the report.

9. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – Q2 2025/26
Aithisg Choileanaidh

There was circulated Report No HCW/24/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the report was welcomed and the service congratulated on the mental health officer recruitment.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. Service's performance information; and
ii. last quarterly report combined both Performance and Delivery Plan reporting, these would now be reported separately.

10. Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report
Aithisg Bhliadhnail a' Phrìomh Oifigear Obrach-sòisealta

There was circulated Report No HCW/25/25 by the Chief Social Work Officer.

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

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes were circulated and **NOTED**:-

i. Highland Council / NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee held on 13 March 2025, approved on 25 September 2025;
ii. Child Protection Committee held on 20 March 2025; and
iii. Highland Violence Against Women Partnership held on 15 July 2025.

Closing Remarks

The Chair thanked officers for the report and Members for the engagement and debate. He congratulated Simon Steer, the NHS Highland Director of Adult Social Care, for this service over many years and wished him well on his retirement.

The meeting ended at 12.05pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 12 November 2025 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr M Baird
Mr C Ballance
Mr B Boyd (Remote)
Mr L Fraser
Mr A Jarvie
Mr R Jones
Mr G MacKenzie (Remote)
Mrs A MacLean
Mr D McDonald
Mr P Oldham
Mrs T Robertson
Ms M Ross
Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Ms C Gillies (Remote)
Mr D Macpherson
Mr H Morrison (Remote)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Mr F MacDonald, Chief Officer – Property and Assets
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Miss D Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk)
Ms D Henderson, Strategic Lead (Care and Support)
Mr A Denovan, Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Manager
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Programme Manager, Climate Change and Energy
Mr M Watters, Corporate Information Governance Manager
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager
Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Internal Audit
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Ms E Scoburgh, Audit Scotland (Remote)
Ms C Gardiner, Audit Scotland
Ms J McBride, Audit Scotland

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

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Sinclair.

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

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report
Ath-sgrùdaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais

There had been circulated Report No. AC/22/25 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

Prior to discussion, Members were provided with a general update with specific points highlighted. It was asked if an audit of Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeports Funding came under the remit of this Committee which was confirmed. In terms of a suspected theft allegation referred to at section 7.1 of the report, it was clarified that the theft was a relatively low sum.

Mr P Oldham, in his role of Employment Release Sub-Committee Chair, looked forward to meeting with the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk) regarding the review of exit packages.

a) Place – Climate Strategy & Sustainability (Reasonable Assurance)

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- more could be done to maximise funding opportunities and this would go some way to mitigate the costs of retro fitting Council Houses. Members looked forward to hearing of progress of delivering this commitment;
- match funding made a significant difference to the amount that could be attracted into the Housing Revenue Account insulation budgets, Place Based projects and the Council's assets generally;
- there were no Key Performance Indicators for funding bids although these were now being developed. However, with the target for this set as 31 March 2026, it was questioned why this required such a long lead-in time; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to why in paragraph 2.1 of the audit review, referring to the Identification of Funding Stream, stated that "This objective was fully achieved as there was a robust process in place to identify potential funding sources". However, on the Review of Corporate Risks HCR9 (Net Zero Programme), funding had been identified as being of high risk. In response, it was explained that no assurance could be given that the Council could obtain funding to meet it's full needs, hence the corporate risk.

b) Corporate – Wider review of internal controls following the Aberdeen City Council Tax Fraud (Substantial Assurance)

The Chair took assurance that the policies and procedures within this Council were operating as intended.

c) People – Children's Services transition arrangements (Reasonable Assurance)

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- evidence was sought in terms of the evolution and general impact of the transitions process;
- Members appreciated that a report was also prepared by NHS Highland Internal Audit Team in terms of their accountability and that both reports were to be provided to the Highland Council/NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee; and
- clarification was sought, and would be provided outside of this meeting, in terms of contact with home educated children.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the Final Reports referred to in section 5.1 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at sections 6 and 7, and the status of work in progress detailed at Appendix 1;
iii. **AGREED** the removal of the planned audit review of Fostering and Adoption (section 6.1 of the report); and
iv. **NOTED** that a new audit, "Review of exit packages" had commenced which would enable the Council to address the expectations of the Accounts Commission.

4. Internal Audit Action Tracking
Tracadh Ghnìomhan In-sgrùdaidh

There had been circulated Report No. AC/23/25 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

With 25 revised Action Dates it was suggested that perhaps too optimistic a view was being taken when determining Action Dates at the outset.

The Committee **NOTED** the action tracking information provided, including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions.

5. Failure to Prevent Fraud Offence
Coire Fàilligeadh Bacadh a Chur air Foill

There had been circulated Report No. AC/24/25 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

The report provided assurance that reasonable procedures to prevent fraud were in place. Policies had been reviewed and updated to reflect new legislative requirements. Robust processes and governance were in place although an area for improvement in terms of fraud risk assessments required consideration and this would be taken forward with the relevant Chief Officers. Information and further assurance was sought, and provided, regarding an audit of measures to safeguard against bribery and corruption, particularly within the departments of planning and contracts and how this aligned with the Social Values Charter.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** that the Council does already have reasonable fraud prevention procedures in place. However, as set out in sections 5.4 and 5.5 of the report, further work was being undertaken to enhance these; and
ii. **APPROVED** the revised Counter Fraud Policy at Appendix 1 and Whistleblowing Policy at Appendix 2.

6. Salary Overpayments Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phàighidhean Anabarrach Rola-pàighidh

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

A significant number of overpayments had been recovered and the majority of the overpayments created had been due to late notice to Payroll, most notably where current members of staff had changed roles within the Council. Members commended the actions taken and understood that this would continue to be an ongoing process. However, there was concern that a higher proportion of overpayments occurred within the People Cluster. An update was requested by the Chair as to performance to the period ending 31 December 2025 for the People Cluster be provided to the Chair, in addition to the recommendation at 2.ii.

It was asked if overpayments were recharged to the relevant Services and it was confirmed that was the case. It was also suggested that updates were provided to the relevant Committees for monitoring purposes after progress reports to the Audit Committee was agreed as no longer required.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress made including a payment accuracy rate of 99.91% for 2025/2026 for the period to September 2025; and
ii. **AGREED** that a report was taken to the Audit Committee on 27 May 2026 which would report on 2025/2026 performance.

7. Review of Corporate Risks
Ath-Sgrùdadh air Cunnartan Corporra

There had been circulated Report No. AC/26/25 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information and clarification was sought, and provided, in terms of HCR9 (Net Zero Programme). Concerns were expressed at the high likelihood and impact of this financial risk, especially with the continued increase in costs and no full picture of the total cost. In terms of carbon reduction, the risk was structured around the Council's statutory obligations although there was concern that the Council was not that much further forward and it was asked if there were annual indicators;
- in terms of replacement windows and doors, there was a regular ongoing programme;

- in terms of HCR1 (Financial Sustainability), clarification was sought, and provided, regarding partnerships and community support;
- in terms of HCR5 (Civil Contingencies – National Power Outage), and Storm Amy, which had left many residents without power for several days, concern was raised that the communication from Scottish and Southern Energy Networks had left residents vulnerable. Messages were sent to customers via social media however if residents' devices had no network or charge they would not gain the much needed information. Members were informed that the vulnerability of the communications system was not the responsibility of the Council, however, consequences were. There were no immediate solutions and significant investment would be required;
- in terms of HCR2 (Risk to Provision of Safe and Effective Property), and in response to a question, it was confirmed that properties owned by the Council and operated by High Life Highland were included within this risk. Clarification was offered in terms of Mitigating Action HCR2.1; and
- it was asked if it was possible for future reports to provide a data trend in order to view progress of the risks over time.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the Corporate Risk Register provided at Appendix 1; and
ii. the risk profile at Appendix 2.

8. Audit Scotland Reports - Highland Council: ISA 260 (report to those charged with governance) and the 24/25 Annual Audit Report, and, Highland Council Charitable Trust Funds: ISA 260 (report to those charged with governance) Aithisgean Buidheann-Sgrùdaidh na Alba - Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd ISA 260 (aithisg dhaibhsan a tha an urra ri riaghlachas) agus Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Bhliadhnail 24/25, agus Maoinean Urras Carthannach Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd ISA 260 (aithisg dhaibhsan a tha an urra ri riaghlachas)

a) 24/25 Report to those charged with governance (Highland Council); and 24/25 Highland Council Annual Audit Report

There had been circulated Report No. AC/27a/25 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance and the Council's External Auditors (Audit Scotland).

This report had been a significant undertaking for Council Officers and Audit Scotland. It was highlighted to Members that two adjustments had been necessary, however these did not impact the bottom line on the Council's budgeted position. The External Auditors had since identified one further adjustment which was not included in the report and an update would be provided to this Committee in due course.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- referring to the Council's annual accounts, it was suggested that a more detailed breakdown of the figures provided at Note 2 would have enhanced transparency of Table 3a. However, it was advised that the information requested related to staffing and in accordance with Data Protection requirements, could not be disclosed;

- the Chair of Corporate Resources welcomed the audit's conclusions and the benefits of the new financial system to budget holders;
- a detailed explanation was sought in terms of calculating pension liabilities and this would be circulated by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance outside of the meeting; and
- in response to a question, Audit Scotland would provide further details on their fee setting process after this meeting.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the audited accounts for signature;
ii. **AGREED** that the letter of representation be signed by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance (Section 95 Officer);
iii. **NOTED** the report to those charged with governance on the 2024/25 accounts; and
iv. **NOTED** the annual audit report findings, in particular the significant finding and key audit matters on pages 9-10 and the follow up of prior year recommendations at Appendix 1 of the report.

b) 24/25 Report to those charged with governance (Highland Council Charitable Trust Funds); and 24/25 Highland Council Charitable Trust Funds Annual Audit Report

There had been circulated Report No. AC/27b/25 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance and the Council's External Auditors (Audit Scotland).

Members were informed of a significant finding, namely a misclassification between restricted and unrestricted funds, but this did not result in any financial loss and the total funds remained the same. Clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the recovery of Value Added Tax (VAT).

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the audited accounts for signature;
ii. **AGREED** that the letter of representation be signed by the Treasurer on behalf of the Trustees;
iii. **NOTED** the report to those charged with governance on the 2024/25 accounts; and
iv. **NOTED** the annual audit report findings.

9. Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life / Standards Commission: Councillors' Code of Conduct - Investigation into Complaints 2024/25
Coimiseanair airson Inbhean Beusail sa Bheatha Phoblaich/Coimisean nan Inbhean: Còd Giùlain Chomhairlichean - Rannsachadh mu Ghearanan 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No. AC/28/25 by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the Ethical Standards Commissioner had investigated five complaints and, following investigation, the Standards Commission decided to take no further action; and
ii. following investigation by the Ethical Standards Commissioner the Standards Commission decided to hold hearings in respect of :-

a) Councillor Kate Willis. On conclusion of the hearing the Commission found that Councillor Willis had breached the Code and imposed a sanction of censure.

b) Councillor Michael Baird. On conclusion of the hearing the Commission found that Councillor Baird had breached the Code and imposed a sanction of suspension for two months.

10. Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act
Achd Riaghladh Chumhachdan Sgrùdaidh (Alba)

There had been circulated Report No. AC/29/25 by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that RIPSA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act) had been used by the Trading Standards Service on a number of occasions in the last 12 months, and, as result, a number of prosecutions had successfully been made.

The Committee **NOTED** the Council continued to make appropriate use of the powers and that a further report would be forthcoming to the May 2026 meeting.

The meeting ended at 3.50 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 13 November 2025 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr I Brown
Mr M Cameron (Remote)
Mr S Coghill (Remote)
Mr J Edmondson
Mr K Gowans
Mr M Green
Mr A Graham (Substitute)
Mr R Jones
Mr W MacKay (Remote)
Mr D Macpherson
Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mrs T Robertson
Mr R Stewart
Ms K Willis

Non-Members also present:

Mr D Fraser (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)
Mr R Gale (Remote)
Ms C Gillies (Remote)
Dr M Gregson
Mr M Hutchison (Remote)
Ms Liz Kraft (Remote)
Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Mr D Millar (Remote)
Ms M Reid

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer - Operations & Maintenance
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer - Facilities & Fleet Management
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads & Infrastructure
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead Finance
Mr T Stott, Development Plans Manager
Mr M Bailey, Programme Manager
Mr D Cowie, Principal Planner
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr A Tryon, Principal Engineer
Mr S Farrow, Principal Engineer
Miss J Maclennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

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

Mr K Gowans in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr P Logue and Mr A Sinclair.

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

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

Item 8 – Mr J Edmonson

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

Maid of Glencoul

The Maid of Glencoul, which continued to operate at Corran on behalf of Highland Council, had been placed on the National Register of Historic Vessels. This brought the vessel into a register of over 1,500 craft.

Construction Technology Prizegiving

On 31 October, Kimberley Young, a Roads Technician in Sutherland, received the Best Work-Based Evidence award for her Year 2 submission for the BEng Civil Engineering degree at UHI Inverness. Apprenticeships provide an opportunity to earn while learning with a strong focus on practical application, so recognition for this core aspect of the degree was considered especially rewarding.

Flow Country - UK National Awards Finalist

The Planning Team and Flow Country Partnership were confirmed as one of ten finalists in the Excellence in Plan Making category of the RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence for the Flow Country World Heritage Site Plan. The winner was scheduled to be announced at the national ceremony in London on 27 November.

Access Rangers - End of Season

The seasonal Access Ranger team completed another season of promoting responsible behaviour in the countryside. The team of 18 Rangers worked with communities, land managers and partner organisations to identify and address issues. Between June and October, they engaged with 22,632 people during 1,755 patrols, visiting 21,358 sites.

Feshie Bridge Repairs

In October, masonry parapets at Feshie Bridge near Kingussie, damaged by vehicle impact, were rebuilt. A temporary road closure was implemented for safety and the works were scheduled during the autumn school holidays to minimise disruption. The Council’s contractor, Strath Civil Engineering, completed the repairs within 15 days.

Highland Archaeology Research Conference

In September, the Council hosted the 31st Annual Highland Archaeology Research Conference, organised by the Historic Environment Team. Over two days, 18 speakers, including academics, professional archaeologists and community groups, presented research from projects across the Highlands. More than 170 delegates attended, with costs recovered through ticket sales.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:

- Members welcomed the update on the Maid of Glencoul but commented that the proposal to recognise the vessel had originally been intended to highlight its age and fragility. It was stated that while the Committee presented this as good news, communities in Lochaber, Nether Lochaber and the Ardnamurchan peninsula did not share that view and would prefer to see the vessel replaced;
- Members also queried the Council's approach to recovering costs for bridge damage caused by hauliers or transport companies. Questions were asked about whether the Council had achieved success in pursuing those responsible or whether the cost continued to fall on Highland taxpayers; In response, it was confirmed that the Council had insurance arrangements in place and that all incidents were investigated, with efforts made to ensure those responsible met the costs; and
- Members echoed positive comments regarding the repair of Feshie Bridge, acknowledging that local communities had been distressed by its condition and welcomed the contractor's timely work. It was highlighted that Tromie Bridge on the B970, a similar structure, had been damaged for over a year and appeared to have been missed during inspection. A request was made that repairs be prioritised, observing that the cost was not significant and that communities were concerned about the delay. In this regard it was confirmed that the matter would be looked into.

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News and **AGREED** that officers would investigate the condition of Tromie Bridge on the B970 and prioritise repairs where feasible.

4. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the period Q2 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach airson Ràithe 2 2025/26

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

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- concern was expressed regarding the projected overspend of approximately £6 million, with Members observing that this figure was not highlighted in the opening section of the report and emphasising the need for transparency in future reporting;
- reference was made to the overspend within the Climate Change and Energy Team, with clarification sought on whether external grant income had been considered. Officers advised that external grant funding did not affect the revenue position and confirmed that delays in implementing solar PV

schemes were the main cause of the overspend, although long-term savings were anticipated;

- concern was raised about the rising cost of achieving Net Zero targets and the perceived lack of measurable progress. It was suggested that the financial burden on taxpayers was unsustainable and that greater scrutiny of value for money was required;
- Members highlighted persistent issues with income targets, particularly in relation to car parking and harbour fuel sales;
- disappointment was expressed that the in-year budget recovery plan had not yet been presented to Committee. In this regard, it was confirmed that the plan was being prepared to improve cost control and operational efficiency without reducing essential maintenance;
- concern was expressed regarding proposed savings of £1.5 million from the roads maintenance plan. Members queried the potential impact on service delivery, including pothole repairs and winter resilience;
- reference was made to delays in implementing solar PV schemes and grid connection challenges, which were affecting projected income from renewable energy projects. Members questioned the reliance on these income streams and called for realistic forecasting;
- concerns were raised about the timeliness of financial reporting, highlighting that appendices were dated August and requesting that future reports provide more up-to-date information;
- observations were made regarding the need for improved processes to assess whether certain works should be delivered in-house or contracted externally, with suggestions that outsourcing could offer efficiencies in some cases; and
- issues relating to gully maintenance were highlighted, with Members citing examples of blocked drains contributing to flooding. Officers confirmed that gully emptying continued on a programmed basis and records were available for review.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for the material variances and actions taken or proposed;
iii. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery; and
iv. **AGREED** that the budget recovery plan and associated mitigation measures be presented to Committee at the earliest opportunity.

5. Capital Monitoring Q2 2025/26
Sgrùdadh Calpa R2 2025/26

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

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members welcomed the overall progress on capital projects but highlighted concern regarding the Uig Harbour position, remarking the significant cost increase since contract award. Assurance was sought that Highland

taxpayers would not bear the additional £1.5 million cost, and confirmation was requested that Transport Scotland funding would cover the overspend;

- reference was made to the recent pilot involving buses and refuse vehicles running on vegetable oil. Questions were raised about the capital cost of associated storage tanks and whether this represented value for money given higher fuel costs. In this regard it was confirmed that tanks were provided free as part of the pilot;
- a query was raised regarding Kinlochbervie Harbour and whether a site visit by the Harbours Board was necessary at the current design stage. It was suggested that a visit would be more appropriate once detailed plans were confirmed. Officers advised that reports outlining planned improvements and the wider masterplan would be presented at the forthcoming meeting, providing clarity on next steps;
- Members welcomed the reopening of Infirmary Bridge, emphasising its importance as part of Inverness's active travel network with usage estimated at around 40,000 crossings per month and requested that traffic monitoring be installed to provide accurate data for future investment decisions. Officers confirmed that repairs were scheduled for next year and undertook to explore options for deploying an active travel counter;
- concern was expressed regarding the potential underspend from the Timber Transport Fund, and Members requested that the B970 be considered for improvement should funds become available;
- an update was sought on the CCTV project intended to link Inverness with Wick, Thurso and the Kessock Bridge, highlighting its importance for public safety and emergency response. In this regard it was confirmed that the project was progressing and undertook to circulate a briefing to Members; and
- observations were made regarding recent capital investments in facilities such as the Bught Park Stadium and Northern Meeting Park. Members requested that all Councillors be invited to openings or pre-opening events to enable wider promotion of these projects within communities. It was clarified that invitations for certain events were managed by external funders under the UK Government Levelling Up scheme.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the financial position as of 30 September 2025, **NOTED** the estimated year end forecast and **AGREED** that updates on the Timber Transport Fund, Infirmary Bridge monitoring and the CCTV project be provided to Members.

6. Highland Local Development Plan - Progress Update
Plana Leasachadh Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd – Cunntas air Adhartas

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

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members acknowledged the technical nature of the report and welcomed the update on progress towards preparing a single Local Development Plan for Highland. It was observed that the revised timeline aimed to reduce the risk of the evidence report being rejected at the initial gate check stage and to allow for completion of national datasets and agreement from key agencies;

- concern was expressed regarding the challenges faced by community councils in preparing Local Place Plans. It was highlighted that some communities had access to community benefit funds to employ consultants, while others did not, creating a disparity. It was suggested that financial assistance be considered to ensure fairness and improve the quality of plans;
- the importance of infrastructure delivery alongside housing development was emphasised. Examples were cited of communities experiencing pressure on GP practices and other services despite ongoing housebuilding. It was stressed that a more joined-up approach with NHS and other agencies was required to ensure capacity was in place before further growth;
- observations were made regarding the need to accelerate housing delivery and avoid allocating sites that were unlikely to come forward. Members urged closer engagement with landowners to confirm intent and ensure that allocated sites were viable. Officers acknowledged this issue and confirmed that future plans would seek stronger commitments from landowners;
- concern was raised about planning decisions that appeared inconsistent with approved development plans, particularly where local communities supported proposals and no objections were received. Members called for greater alignment between decision-making and the content of adopted plans;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the consequences of failing to meet Scottish Government targets for plan adoption;
- questions were asked about the relationship between the Highland Local Development Plan and the Cairngorms National Park Plan. In this regard, it was confirmed that the plans were separate but data was shared and regular engagement took place to ensure compatibility of housing targets; and
- Members stressed that new housing should be accompanied by amenity and active travel infrastructure to avoid creating car-dependent estates. It was emphasised that future development must support quality of life and sustainable communities.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress to date on gathering, analysing, collating and reporting sufficient evidence to produce the new Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP), including public consultation on “topic” and “place” based evidence, further stakeholder engagement undertaken, the advancement of a number of key audits and assessments and progress on drafting of the Evidence Report itself;
ii. **NOTED** the next steps, including requirements for completion of the Evidence Report for approval by Committee and Full Council and subsequent submission to Scottish Ministers for independent Gate Check;
iii. **AGREED** the revised HLDP timeline as set out at paragraph 8.1 of the report, to be formally communicated through an updated Development Plan Scheme to be published by 31 January 2026; and
iv. **AGREED** that updates on infrastructure capacity and Local Place Plan support be provided to Members as work progresses.

7. Masterplan Consent Areas: Potential Sites
Sgìrean Aonta a’ Phlana Mhaighstir: Làraich airson a’ Chomhairleachaidh Phoblach Tùsail

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/36/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members welcomed the report and emphasised that Masterplan Consent Areas (MCAs) represented an important mechanism to accelerate housing delivery without bypassing planning processes, while ensuring full community involvement. It was highlighted that the approach was essential to meet the Council's housing challenge of 24,000 homes over the next decade;
- it was clarified that MCAs combined zoning, planning consent and a Section 75 agreement in one process, providing a streamlined approach to delivery;
- reference was made to the importance of effective consultation with communities. Members stressed that engagement must be meaningful and reflected in outcomes to maintain public confidence in the process;
- concern was expressed regarding the alignment of MCA proposals with the Notice of Motion agreed by the Highland Council meeting on 30 October 2025 relating to infrastructure planning along the A9 corridor. It was requested that this be reflected in the report to Full Council. In this regard, it was confirmed that the recommendations were for the Highland Council meeting decision and that infrastructure constraints would be addressed during master planning;
- Members questioned the inclusion of Inverness East in the long list, observing that the area was already subject to a development brief. It was suggested that this be reviewed rather than progressed as an MCA;
- clarification was sought on the scale of the housing challenge and the timeline for adoption of the Highland Local Development Plan. Concern was raised that the statutory process could delay delivery;
- observations were made regarding the need for an iterative review of MCA sites to avoid artificially constraining supply and inflating land values. Members suggested that future consideration include opportunities for remote and rural areas experiencing depopulation, not solely those linked to the Green Freeport;
- Members highlighted the importance of addressing infrastructure needs, including schools, health services and transport, alongside housing delivery. It was stressed that these factors must be integral to MCA planning;
- reference was made to the Embo site and its potential to support wider economic development linked to the Coul Links project, including housing, employment, transport and childcare provision. Members welcomed the opportunity for private sector-led investment to support community wealth building in fragile areas;
- concern was expressed about affordability of new council housing in rural areas and the need to ensure that investment was not concentrated solely in Inverness. Suggestions were made to link procurement for urban and rural projects to secure equitable delivery;
- MCA proposals had to remain flexible and subject to ongoing review, with clear communication to communities throughout the process; and
- concern was raised about funding for Freeport-related housing and whether this should be met by private investment rather than council house rents.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the corporate commitment, re-affirmed at Council in June 2025, to take forward three MCAs as part of the Highland Housing Challenge Partnership Action Plan;

ii. **NOTED** that the now published Call for Development Sites submissions to the Highland Local Development Plan process informed the selection of a "long-list" of potential MCA sites;

* iii. **AGREED** to recommend to Council the "long-list" of potential Masterplan Consent Areas as listed in section 8 and mapped at Appendix 1 of the report, with a firm preference to progress sites at Essich Road, Embo and Ardersier;

* iv. **AGREED** to recommend to Council that urgent work was carried out to identify a fourth preferred site on the west coast, in relative proximity to the Kishorn Yard, to support the ongoing investment in that area; and

* v. **AGREED** to recommend to Council that the Council's Scheme of Delegation with particular reference to the role of both E&I Committee and PACs be amended as set out in Appendix 2 of the report to reflect the proposed governance of the MCA process.

8. Road Structures Annual Report 2025
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Structaran Rathaid 2025

Transparency Statement: Mr J Edmonson made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as he regularly used a bridge listed. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/37/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Members received a presentation from the Principal Engineer outlining the scale and condition of the Council's road structures. Highland Council maintained almost 4,000 structures, including 1,900 bridges, making it one of Scotland's largest bridge-owning authorities. An ongoing inspection programme delivered condition scores and informed prioritisation based on technical risk and network impact. The current five-year capital programme included major schemes such as Naver Bridge (£11m), due to open Easter 2026, and planned refurbishment of Ness Bridge in 2026.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members welcomed the comprehensive presentation and suggested it be shared with Area Committees and Ward meetings to improve understanding of infrastructure challenges;
- concern was expressed about the disparity in funding between Highland Council and Transport Scotland, given the strategic importance of many local bridges. Members called for stronger lobbying of the Scottish Government for fairer funding;
- Members highlighted the social impact of bridge failures, particularly lifeline bridges where communities would be cut off, and supported clearer identification of these bridges in future reports;
- questions were raised about prioritisation criteria, including weighting of diversion length and whether social and economic impacts were considered.

In this regard, it was confirmed that technical data drove scoring, with lifeline bridges receiving the highest diversion score;

- some bridges had remained on priority lists for over a decade, reflecting funding constraints and inflationary pressures. Concern was expressed about escalating costs and the risk of managed decline;
- reference was made to heavy vehicle use, including timber haulage, and Members asked whether Forestry and Land Scotland and the Strategic Timber Transport Scheme (STTS) could contribute to repair costs;
- Members stressed the need for improved signage during closures, citing issues at Infirmary Bridge, and requested better communication with communities;
- queries were raised about maintenance practices, including the use of salt on metal bridges. Officers confirmed that salting policy varies by bridge type and undertook to review practices for vulnerable structures;
- Members requested updates on specific structures, including Bonar Bridge repainting (expected within two years), Waterloo Bridge and Raigbeg Bridge, and asked that ward meetings be briefed on bridges in managed decline;
- observations were made on the scale of the challenge, with calls for clearer communication of Highland's geographic context when lobbying for funds. Suggestions included comparing landmass and coastline to other UK regions to emphasise logistical pressures; and
- Members welcomed progress on Naver Bridge and commended officers and contractors for strong community engagement during works.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the current position in Highland in relation to the number of structures inspections undertaken as in section 6.2 of the report;
ii. the position of the Bridge Stock Condition Indicators in Highland as in section 7 of the report;
iii. the risks that were carried by the Council in relation to its road structure as in see section 3.3 of the report;
iv. that due to insufficient funding for bridge schemes, some structures were to be put into 'managed decline' leading to eventual closure as in see section 9.7 of the report;

and **AGREED**:-

v. that future reports identify lifeline bridges within priority lists.

9. Section 37 Interim Report on Flood Risk Management Plan Actions
Aithisg Eadar-amail Earrainn 37 mu Phlanaichean Gnìomha Stiùireadh Cunnart Thuiltean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/38/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members received an interim update on flood risk management and the challenges associated with delivering flood prevention measures across Highland. It was highlighted that flood prevention had become a critical issue for many communities, with increasing certainty of future flooding events and shortening timeframes. Reference was made to the significant potential impact

on areas such as Nairn, where flooding could result in loss of coastal assets and recreational facilities. Members were advised that remedial works following major flooding events elsewhere had cost in the region of £180 million, illustrating the scale of financial risk. Officers emphasised that current funding constraints presented a major barrier to progressing flood studies and implementing schemes, and that national funding remained limited.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- concern was expressed about the lack of national funding and the need for a strategic approach to flood prevention, including consideration of ring-fenced investment within future Council budgets;
- Members highlighted the importance of prioritising flood prevention given the cost of inaction and suggested that the Council explore innovative funding models for major schemes;
- questions were raised regarding the clearance of watercourses and the frequency of inspections. It was confirmed that inspections were carried out on a prioritised basis, ranging from monthly to annual, and that maintenance was undertaken where flood risk was identified. Larger works requiring mechanical clearance were scheduled with the Roads Operations team;
- Members queried the status of flood studies for communities listed in section 6.7 of the report, observing that several were not expected to progress within cycle two due to funding constraints. Officers advised that while these studies were likely to remain priorities, inclusion in cycle three could not be guaranteed and would be subject to review against emerging risks;
- reference was made to recent storm damage and tree fall, with suggestions that community involvement in removing debris could assist recovery efforts. Concern was expressed that unremoved debris could increase flood risk and impact future maintenance;
- Members stressed the importance of routine gully maintenance to prevent avoidable flooding and sought assurance that gully clearance would be incorporated into flood management plans; and
- observations were made regarding the need for clear communication with communities on flood risk and the limitations of current resources, to ensure realistic expectations and encourage local resilience measures.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the contents of The Highland Council Actions table in Appendix 1 of the report with progress made on the Actions within the current Highland and Argyll Local Flood Risk Management Plan and the Findhorn, Nairn and Speyside Local Flood Risk Management Plan;
ii. **AGREED** to make the Section 37 Interim Report for the Highland and Argyll Local Plan District available to the public on the Council's website; and
iii. **NOTED** that Moray Council would approve and publish the Section 37 Interim Report for the Findhorn, Nairn and Speyside Local Plan District.

10. Inverness and Highland City Region Deal - 2024/25 Annual Report
Cùmhnant Baile Roinne Inbhir Nis agus na Gàidhealtachd – Aithisg Bhliadhnail 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/39/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Members considered an update on the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal, which had reached year nine of its ten-year programme. The Deal was acknowledged as having delivered significant benefits for Inverness and the wider Highland area, with projects evolving over time to ensure broader regional impact.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members welcomed the progress achieved but emphasised the need for continued momentum on key projects, particularly Corran Ferry replacement vessels;
- concern was expressed regarding the future of air services for Skye, with reference to the safeguarding of the airfield in the Local Plan. Members sought assurances that delivery partners would raise concerns about any proposals that could compromise aviation use;
- questions were asked about the remaining funding within the deal and whether any balance would be retained for future projects. Officers confirmed that approximately 50% of the funding remained to be spent after March 2027, with the full allocation of £188.1 million secured for Highland;
- it was important to plan for the next phase beyond the current deal and called for early engagement with UK and Scottish Governments to secure successor funding. It was suggested that the Council should develop a clear vision for future investment, with proposals such as relocating Inverness railway and bus stations and improving strategic junctions cited as potential priorities;
- the Council should not adopt a passive approach and should actively lobby for a new regional deal or equivalent funding mechanism, given the unique challenges facing Highland, including infrastructure pressures and depopulation;
- Members acknowledged the political opportunities presented by forthcoming elections and stressed the need to position Highland's case strongly at national level; and
- engagement with UK Government officials was ongoing and that recent feedback had been positive regarding the Council's management of the current deal, which was considered a strong foundation for future negotiations.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the IHCRD Annual Report as a record of the activity and delivery during 2024/25 and **AGREED** that officers liaise with HITRANS regarding air access for Skye and report back on any implications for safeguarding aviation use.

11. UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Delivery Plan Progress Update 2025/26
Maoin Soirbheachas Co-roinnte na RA – Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/40/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Members were advised that this was the last year of UKSPF funding and that UK and Scottish Governments were developing new investment programmes, including Pride in Place and the Local Growth Fund.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members welcomed the update but queried why details of the Pride in Place Fund, announced in September, were not included on the agenda. The fund totalled £20 million over ten years and concern was expressed about rumours suggesting all funding would be directed to Inverness. Members requested confirmation of governance arrangements and timescales for reporting;
- clarification was provided that the Pride in Place Fund was a UK Government initiative, not directly managed by the Highland Council. The fund would be overseen by an independent chair appointed by an MP, with community engagement informing decisions. The Highland Council might have representation within the governance structure, but final decisions rested with UK Government;
- Members emphasised the importance of transparency and early communication with communities to manage expectations and avoid misinformation;
- reference was made to opportunities arising from the recent Gaelic Conference, with suggestions that media and film development could form part of future economic priorities alongside employability initiatives; and
- a question was raised regarding the Highland-wide mobility hub feasibility study. Officers confirmed that site information would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the update on the 2025/26 UKSPF Delivery Plan;
ii. **AGREED** that officers circulate details of sites under consideration for the Highland-wide mobility hub feasibility study; and
iii. **AGREED** that Members be kept informed of governance arrangements and timescales for the Pride in Place Fund as soon as further information becomes available.

12. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update Q2 2025/26
Sgrùdadh Buidseit agus Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh R2 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/41/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the report, including progress to date and next steps.

13. Performance Monitoring Report Q2 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R2 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/42/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Members queried the absence data for the quarter, and it was confirmed that the delay was due to system reporting timescales and that updated information would be available in the next report.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

14. Appointment to Outside Bodies
Cur an Dreuchd gu Buidhnean air an Taobh A-muigh

a) HITRANS Tier 1 Ferry Users Consultation Groups
Buidhnean Co-chomhairleachaidh Luchd-cleachdaidh Aiseagan Ìre 1 HITRANS

The interests of ferry users were previously represented by the Scottish Executive's Ferry Users Consultation Group. However, this was disbanded and a three-tier system was set up to cover issues at all levels from local through to national.

Following recent resignations by Members previously appointed to represent the Council on the Argyll, Lochaber and Skye, and Hebrides Ferry Users Groups, new appointments were required. Nominations were tabled at the meeting and considered by the Committee.

In this regard Ms C Gillies was nominated by Mr K Gowans to be appointed to the Lochaber and Skye Group, and this was seconded by Ms K Willis.

Mr A Baxter was nominated by Mrs T Roberston to be appointed to the Lochaber and Skye Group, and this was seconded by Mr J Edmondson.

In a vote between the two candidates, Ms C Gillies received 8 votes and Mr A Baxter received 6 votes - with no abstentions.

It was therefore **AGREED** that Ms C Gillies should be appointed to the Lochaber and Skye Group – the votes having been cast as follows:-

Votes for Ms C Gillies:
Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mr R Jones, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Ms K Willis.

Votes for Mr A Baxter:
Mr A Baxter, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Edmondson, Mr A Graham, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs T Roberston.

***** Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Council the appointments to the following Tier 1 Ferry Users Consultation Groups established by HITRANS:

i. Argyll Group – covering Oban, Colonsay, Iona, Lismore, Coll, Tiree, Barra, South Uist and Ardnamurchan – Mr T MacLennan;
ii. Lochaber and Skye Group – covering the Small Isles, Mallaig, Armadale, Raasay, Kilchoan and Lochaline – Ms C Gillies; and
iii. Hebrides Group – covering Barra, North and South Uist, Harris, Lewis and links to Skye – Ms C Gillies.

b) Flood Area Risk Management – Local Plan District Executive Steering Groups
Rianachd Cunnairt Cheàrnaidhean Thuiltean – Buidhnean Stiùiridh Gnìomhach Sgìre a' Phlana Ionadail

The Highland Council were designated as the Lead Local Authority for the "Highland and Argyll Local Plan District" and as a Responsible Authority within the "Findhorn, Nairn and Speyside Local Plan District", the latter Local Plan District being led by Moray Council. Executive Steering Groups for each Local Plan District help to direct and facilitate all work that results in the agreement of the Flood Risk Management Strategy and the delivery of the Flood Risk Management Plan.

Following the resignation of Ms S Fanet, the Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr M Green to serve on both Executive Steering Groups.

15. Membership of the Harbours Management Board
Ballrachd Bòrd Stiùiridh nan Calachan

Members were advised of the recent change to the political balance of this Board, which was now SNP – 3, Independent – 2, Liberal Democrat – 2, Highland Alliance – 2, with the final place tied between the Scottish Liberal Democrats and the Highland Independent. For information, details of the calculation were requested.

The Committee **AGREED** the membership of the Harbours Management Board to be as follows:-

- Mr I Brown, Mr J Edmonson, Mr M Green, Ms M Hutchison, Mr W Mackay, Mr D Macpherson, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mrs T Robertson; and

* • to **RECOMMEND** to Council the appointment of Mr R Cross.

16. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Planning Applications Committees (PAC) for:-

i. North PAC – 11 June 2025;
ii. South PAC – 18 June 2025;
iii. North PAC – 6 August 2025;
iv. South PAC – 22 August 2025;

and, **APPROVED**:-

v. Inverness Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group held on 2 September 2025.

The meeting ended at 1:15 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glen Urquhart Road, Inverness on Monday, 17 November 2025 at 10.00 am.

Present:

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

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager
Mr M Greig, Community Development Manager
Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Mr J Kelman, Programme Manager (Property)
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates Management)
Ms A Mitchell , Principal Housing Manager
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change Manager
Ms P Betts, Common Goods Find Officer
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr A McLean, Station Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue
Ms A Howie, Head Teacher and pupils (Cauldeen Primary School) (Remote)

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 I Brown in the Chair

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
Gair a' Chlàir agus LeasePlan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mr D Gregg, Mr A MacKintosh and Mr A Sinclair.

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

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

Items 5, 6, 7, 9b, 10, 12i, 12ii and 12 iii – Mr A Christie

3. Presentation – Cauldeen Primary School – Visit to 10 Downing Street
Taisbeanadh – Bun-Sgoil a' Challtainn – Tadhal gu 10 Sràid Downing

The Committee received a presentation from Ms A Howie, Head Teacher at Cauldeen Primary School, accompanied by a group of P7 pupils. The presentation was prepared by Jorgie-Jayne, Isabella, Caitlyn, Cassie and Emily. They outlined their experience of visiting 10 Downing Street and meeting the Prime Minister.

The group travelled from Inverness to London. Security procedures were explained, and pupils described seeing Larry the cat and learning about the rules for visitors. They attended the "Lessons at 10" session, created by Akshata Murty, where they learned about the role of Cabinet meetings and the layout of the Cabinet Room. The group met the Prime Minister in the garden during lunch and had a photograph taken with him. Pupils also shared learning about the Gunpowder Plot and its historical significance.

Members commended the pupils for an excellent and engaging presentation and thanked the Head Teacher for supporting the visit. It was acknowledged that the experience provided valuable insight into national government and encouraged interest in politics. Appreciation was expressed, and the Provost invited the pupils to visit Inverness Town House before Christmas, with an offer to arrange a tour and refreshments.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation from the pupils of Cauldeen Primary School and **AGREED** that arrangements be made for the pupils to visit Inverness Town House before Christmas.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – Area Performance Report
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba – Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/36/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highlands.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the report was welcomed and commended the work of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in prevention and community engagement;
- appreciation was expressed for initiatives such as BikerDown, which provided practical training for motorcyclists on how to respond at the scene of an accident. Members observed the high demand and positive feedback for the course;
- the young driver safety programme was praised for its importance in reducing road traffic collisions and fatalities. It was highlighted that the initiative was being rolled out across Inverness schools and might expanded to other areas;
- concern was raised about the continuing number of road traffic collisions and their emotional and financial impact. Reference was made to a recent fatal accident on the Road to the Isles and the need to review crash barrier standards;
- the significant cost of a fire-related fatality was discussed, confirmed as approximately £1 million per incident. It was observed that the service now responded to a wider range of emergencies, including road traffic collisions (RTCs), water rescues and rescues from height;

- support was expressed for the continuation of Community Safety Advocates and partnership working with Police Scotland and the Highland Council to address anti-social behaviour and improve community safety;
- a query was raised regarding the impact of vaping compared to smoking on fire-related incidents. Officers advised that vaping had overtaken smoking in prevalence but had not resulted in a noticeable change in fire-related injuries or casualties; and
- Members emphasised the importance of sustained funding and collaboration to maintain service capacity and deliver prevention programmes effectively.

The Committee **NOTED** the attached Area Performance Report.

5. Yearly Annual Report on Inverness City Centre Business Improvement Bid Aithisg Bhliadhnail mu Thagradh Leasachadh Gnothachais Meadhan Baile Inbhir Nis

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/37/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the contribution of Business Improvement District (BID) to city centre upkeep and community safety was commended. Reference was made to initiatives such as floral displays, hanging baskets, street pastors, taxi marshals, and seasonal campaigns including Easter and Christmas. BID's role in supporting events such as vintage car displays and improvements to the Victorian Market was highlighted;
- it was observed that BID had provided significant support to businesses during consultations on Academy Street proposals and had reflected Members' views to the Highland Council. Concern was expressed that a formal response from the Council had not yet been provided;
- the importance of BID in assisting tourists and visitors was highlighted. Concern was raised about the increase in graffiti across the city and surrounding areas, and it was suggested that a report would be brought back on options to address graffiti through partnership working;
- Members stressed the need for continued collaboration with BID to maintain a welcoming and attractive city centre. It was suggested that opportunities be explored for an in-person visitor information service following the closure of VisitScotland's Tourist Information Centre, recognising that not all visitors rely on digital platforms;
- the potential to expand the BID area or establish a new business district for the Longman was discussed. It was confirmed that BID boundaries were reviewed at renewal and that any new BID must be business-led;
- the need to embrace new technologies and consider initiatives such as a digital café was raised, alongside recognition of BID's role in supporting intergenerational activities and employment opportunities;
- the gull management project was discussed. Officers confirmed that work was ongoing with BID, Nature Scot and specialists to develop a plan for next year, with early action required to ensure delivery;

- concern was expressed regarding the cost of levy collection and the complexity of the process. It was observed that the Council provided a high level of service with collection rates above 90%, despite the administrative challenges; and
- Members emphasised the importance of securing sustainable funding to support BID and related initiatives, particularly in light of uncertainty around national funding streams such as the Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** that a Members Briefing was held on 9 October 2025 with BID representatives;
ii. **NOTED** the work detailed in the report;
iii. **NOTED** the ongoing development of partnership working in the key areas identified;
iv. **AGREED** that a report be brought back on measures to address graffiti across the city and surrounding areas; and
v. **AGREED** the future annual report format would include a presentation by representatives of the BID Board, in future. This would also be applied to any other relevant operational BIDs within the remit of the Committee.

6. Town House Feasibility Study Action Plan
Plana-gnìomha Sgrùdadh Iomchaidheachd Taigh a' Bhaile

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/38/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- several Members spoke of the importance of maintaining the Town House as an iconic
- historical and civic centre for the people of Inverness;
- concern was expressed that there were areas of dampness, gutters requiring maintenance, peeling paint and attention was drawn to the challenges of maintaining an old building, and to the maintenance programme that was in place;
- it was suggested that the intended £400k saving to the Council from removing office staff from the Town House had not been fully realised, and it was pointed out that the savings to the Council were a loss to the Inverness Common Good Fund, which owned the Town House, and of which all Council Members were trustees. Assurance was provided that correct governance had been followed in relation to all decisions regarding the Town House, including the decision by the Council to stop using it for office space. However, it was pointed out that since this decision, some space within the Town House had been used for short term office accommodation and Members urged that should the Council require office space in Inverness, that the Town House be considered;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, for Police Scotland using the building without paying rent, this having been part of a negotiated agreement, with benefit to the city centre of Inverness of having a localised police presence;

- with reference to the age of the building, many of the challenges to modern use of the it as office space were referred to, including lack of compliance with modern accessibility legislation and challenges around electrical cabling and the use of technology. The benefits of the use of the venue for weddings and other events were highlighted;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, for the proposed Project Board being officer-only at this stage and plans for wider community and stakeholder engagement and collaboration in future were summarised. Initial plans were for the Project Board to report to every City of Inverness and Area Committee;
- the Town House's proximity to the Castle was considered key to its future, and once the Castle Visitor Experience was operational, consideration could be given to possible complimentary uses of the Town House, including the provision of catering facilities, though attention was also drawn to the catering provided within the newly refurbished Victorian Market;
- there were many vacant office spaces for rent in and around the city centre, making the Town House a less attractive option for office use, given its drawbacks;
- recent Open Doors events at the Town House had been popular and were welcomed;
- the improvements to the external stonework of the building were welcomed and an explanation sought, and provided, of any implications for the future use of the building that might have arisen as a result of the external funding obtained for the exterior improvements;
- several Members considered that the use of the Town House for residential accommodation was not appropriate;
- information was sought, and provided, on the investment strategy work planned for the building the following year, which it was hoped would not interfere with taking advantage of any 'quick wins' for income generation;
- if the Town House was to be used as a tourist attraction, it was hoped that local people would not have to pay the same high entry fees etc, and that appropriate care was taken of the valuable artefacts within the building; and
- it was suggested that public money, in addition to Common Good Fund money, had been spent on the Town House.

Following discussion, officers explained many of the challenges with the Town House, including ongoing maintenance, accessibility, electrical and heating systems, and the many constraints as a result of the age of the building.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the factors considered when assessing the viability of current and future uses of the Town House;
ii. **NOTED** structure of the Feasibility Study and how the Town House has been broken down into zones each with their own business models in terms of future development;
iii. **NOTED** the resource implications for the Inverness Common Good Fund of the potential investment programme required to realise the vision in the feasibility study both in terms of recommended staffing models and refurbishment programmes;
iv. **NOTED** the recommendations of the Feasibility Study noting that a further report would be taken to the next appropriate meeting of the Committee updating on the potential of implementation and seeking budgetary approval for phased delivery of any works programme in accordance with available resources, noting that steps will be taken to ensure maximisation of available third-party funding sources;
v. **AGREED** to the setting up of an officer Project Board; and

vi. **NOTED** the need to reappraise the ICGF Investment Strategy in the light of any works that may be recommended for progress by the Project Board.

7. Housing Management Performance Report Q2 2025-26
Aithisg Coileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais – Q2 2025/26

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/39/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place. There was commentary on the report by Principal Housing Officer during which it was highlighted that the majority of rent arrear cases were below £500 and over the next 6 months targeted focus within the Housing team would be on the management of low level balances, identifying opportunities for early intervention and working with colleagues in the Welfare team.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- there had been an increase in homeless presentations. Housing Options Officers worked with service users to ensure they were being provided with the correct advice for their circumstances. In Highland and across Scotland one of the main reasons for homeless presentations was the difficulty in accessing the private rental sector;
- there had been an increase in housing allocations in Inverness this year mainly due to a number of new build developments. It was suggested that the Council could be a victim of its own success in sorting out homeless cases, as this could attract more homeless presentations. It was advised that the demand for allocations was mainly driven by local residents. Also, an opinion was made that the Council might want to be cautious about substantial rent increases in light of the high amount of rent areas.
- there had been an increase in anti-social behaviour cases, and it was queried if this was down to improved reporting of these incidents. It was also welcomed that there had been an increase in the number of anti-social behaviour complaints that had been resolved. There had been a focus on training of the Housing team on recording incidents in the system and tenants, through community engagement events, had been encouraged to make complaints which could account for some of the increase in anti-social behaviour incidents reported;
- more information was requested on the number of rent arrears cases that had been written off and the duration of rent arrears. In terms of homeless presentations, there was a shortage of larger types of accommodation and an analysis of the waiting list on what housing type was being requested was sought. This would help the Council decide on what type of accommodation to focus future housing investment;
- it was queried if the information in the report was shared with Tenant Associations and feedback on their ideas and suggestions would be useful. The Council's Tenant Participation Officers worked closely with Housing Management Officers and there were also tenants' newsletters with information on housing improvements and progress and inviting them to give their views on housing matters;
- it was queried how many rental arrears cases were due to universal credit payments not being made. An undertaking was given to provide Members with information on the proportion of rent arrears that were universal credit and by tenants that were working. It was recognised that the more rental that was paid in full the more money

there would be in the Housing Revenue Account for general repairs and improvements on the Council's housing stock;

- concern was expressed that more than half the tenants in Culloden and Ardersier were in rent arrears. Given the cost-of-living crises, it was difficult to see how this could be resolved. In terms of help provided to those tenants in rental arrears, it was advised that referrals were made to third sector agencies, for example, in order that they could get help with their energy costs. Referrals were also made to the Council's Welfare team. There was a need to ensure that rent arrears repayment plans were affordable and sustainable for tenants; and
- it was queried if the Council had a policy for employees who were in tied accommodation and what plans were in place to secure their future housing needs. It was advised that Janitors were able to stay in their accommodation after they retired. The Housing Options team would also assist employees if they were at risk of losing their home.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April – 30 September 2025.

8. Common Good Consultation on the Proposal to dispose, by lease, and change the use of an area of undeveloped land at the former landfill site at East Longman, Inverness
Comhairliche Math Comon air Moladh faighinn cuidhteas, tro aonta, agus cleachdadh atharrachadh a thaobh raon de thalamh neo-leasaichte air seann làrach lìonadh-talmhainn aig an Longman an Ear, Inbhir Nis

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/40/25 by the Assistant Chief Executives Corporate and Place in relation to the outcome of the common good consultation on the proposal to dispose, by lease, and change the use of an area of undeveloped common good land at the former landfill site at East Longman, for the development of a green hydrogen production facility. This was considered by the Inverness Common Good Sub-Committee with recommendations being put forward for approval to the City of Inverness Area Committee. The report responded to a request made by the Sub Committee to allow further opportunities with key officers for questioning at the City Committee prior to final decisions being taken.

In discussion, it was confirmed that the lease would be specifically for green hydrogen and if there was an attempt to put blue hydrogen into the mix this would require a change in lease. Also, as various objectors had requested, the strip of land which could be used for a coastal path be maintained, was not part of the lease.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the Sub-Committee considered the outcome of the common good consultation as contained in Appendices 1-4 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the minutes of the Sub-Committee meeting including recommendations; and **APPROVED** the proposal, subject to Sheriff Court consent.

9. Inverness Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

a) Financial Monitoring Q2 for 2025/26
Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail R2 airson 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/41/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- information was sought, and provided, regarding the Victorian Market operation variance figures, including the £100k subject to cost recovery and questioned the draw down from reserves of £225k. It was acknowledged the estimated variance column accounted for all income expenditure and was inclusive of the Victorian Market deficit;
- Members queried the Community Events budget monitoring, not stating which event the expenditure referred and queried whether an events plan for the remainder of the year could be made available. However, it was advised that the detailed reporting would release confidential details which involved payments to contractors which was exempt information. Nevertheless, it could be circulated confidentially to Committee Members; and
- questions were raised over the report highlighting recommendation to Part 8 when this was not part of the report. It was acknowledged this was reported in error and actually refers to Section 7.

The Committee:

i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the financial monitoring report to 30 September 2025 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
ii. **AGREED** the allocation of funds from the Victorian Market Maintenance budget to support the outlined in Section 8 of the report.

b) Grants Applications over £10,000
Iarrtasan Tabhartais os cionn £10,000

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director on NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/42/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members praised the work of Blythswood over the past 2 years acknowledging having a food bank as well as support from the Trussell Trust was great help to local communities. People having to rely on foodbanks was concerning and it was stressed funds might need extended in the future.

The Committee **APPROVED** the following grant applications for funding:-

(a) Blythswood Care - £25,000 (funded from the Winter Payments Budget but, in the event of insufficient funds, reserves would be used);

(b) Operation Respect Festive 2025 - £11,272 (funded for the Operation Respect Campaigns Budget); and
(c) Inverness in Bloom (Community Grow Project) - £69,429 (subject to the final decision by the City of Inverness Area Committee on 2 February 2026 once the Inverness Common Good Fund budget for 2026/27 was approved).

10. Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis - Part Time 20mph Speed Limit
Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis - Pàirt-ùine 20msu astair

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/43/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Members acknowledged the need to address the issue of speeding in the area but there were concerns over how this would be enforced. Due to the various local amenities, including a store, restaurant and school, members of the public, including school pupils, crossed at various points of the road. Enforcement wise, the use of flashing warning signs would encourage public awareness of a school being in the area.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the background to the proposed Part Time 20mph Traffic Regulation Order and the representations received;
ii. **NOTED** the objections made to "The Highland Council (Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis) (Part Time 20mph Speed Limit) Order 2025"; and
iii. subject to i) and ii) above **APPROVED** the making of the Part Time 20mph Speed Limit Traffic Regulation Order (TRO).

11. Invitation to Pay Income
Cuireadh airson Pàigheadh (Nì Cuairt-iomraidh)

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/44/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive-Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the earmarked funds for this Committee from the invitation to pay parking of £57,054.18.

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as Non-Executive Directors on NHS Highland and Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

i. City of Inverness Area Committee held on 18 August 2025 for - **NOTED**;

ii. Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 27 October 2025 - **APPROVED**;
iii. City Strategy – Stakeholder Working Group meeting held on 9 October 2025 – **NOTED**.

In relation to the City of Inverness Area Committee Minutes a request had been made for a report on Rural Bus Services. The Senior Community Development Manager undertook to investigate with colleagues when this would be available and to report back to Members.

13. Notices of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid

There had been circulated separately in Booklet A Notice of Motion and Amendment received by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance.

That the City of Inverness Area Committee request from Officers a report on the availability of public toilets in the City Centre, with a view to extending this availability.

The Council recognises:

- That the provision of public toilets is not a statutory duty of local authorities under the Public Health (Scotland) Act (2008). There has been a decline in the number of public toilets in Scotland over the last fifteen years.
- That the Council's Mealmarket Close toilets were closed in 2018.
- That many businesses and services provide toilets which are publicly available. Examples include the Victorian Market, Eastgate Centre, Eden Court, the Bus and Train Stations, and the Museum & Art Gallery. Cafes, restaurants, pubs and other businesses are also very accommodating of reasonable requests.
- Nevertheless, there remains a significant gap in provision, and there is a problem that lanes, vennels and doorways in the City Centre are unfortunately being used as urinals, presumably in emergency situations. This causes public health hazards and is damaging to the city centre environment in multiple ways.

The Council therefore resolves:

- To recognise the universal right to an adequate standard of living and sanitation under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
- To recognise that lack of access to public toilets, especially for older people or people with disability, can prevent them enjoying public spaces and enjoying community life. This lack applies equally to residents and visitors.
- And, in consequence, to seek to ensure access to clean, safe, and appropriate facilities that support human dignity and public health.
- To request that officers investigate issues regarding the availability of public toilets in Inverness City Centre and produce a report exploring mechanisms to increase provision.

Signed: Dr M Gregson Mr D Macpherson

An Amendment to this Notice of Motion had also been received as follows:-

To keep the motion to “reasonable requests”. Take out from “Nevertheless” and instead write:

The Council notes the number of toilet facilities currently available, as mentioned above, and recognises the valuable service, the cleanliness and availability to the public that these provide. That the Highland Council’s Comfort Scheme is promoted further to Inverness City Centre retailers and services, promoting the financial incentives as well as the potential commercial benefits of encouraging more footfall. That Council will help the public locate the businesses, with Comfort Schemes, by providing additional signage to accompany the existing stickers.

Signed: Mrs J Hendry Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- for those exploring the Inverness riverside it was some distance to walk to the Council’s public toilet facilities at Whin Park, which might or might not be open;
- Inverness promoted itself as a welcoming City and providing public toilets had an economic benefit as people would stay longer in the City Centre;
- the expansion of the Comfort Scheme would also benefit businesses as a result of increased footfall;
- as a consequence of the success of the Victorian Market’s refurbishment, there was often queues for the toilet facilities, further highlighting the need for city centre facilities;
- the problem of antisocial public urination could be, in part resolved, by increased CCTV and motion lighting;
- it was contended that there were at least 9 public toilets in the city centre offering warm, clean and accessible facilities;
- the Communities and Place Committee on 6 November had been advised that extending the Comfort Scheme across Highland would have a positive impact on both communities and visitors;
- although there was a cost implication to the Amendment, this was an initiative to attract more take-up;
- officers were already looking at cost effective ways of improving signage. In addition, there would be more finger-pointing signage for Inverness Castle, and these would include directions to city centre toilet facilities. Also, work was taking place between Facilities and BID regarding additional signage;
- BID were well placed to notify business of the Comfort Scheme, and their new app could perhaps direct visitors to available facilities. The Council itself could promote the Scheme through its Corporate Communication Team and social media;
- it was still suggested that a report come forward about possibilities beyond the Comfort Scheme, especially on the Cathedral side of the river, especially as it concerned public welfare;
- the possibility of keeping the Whin Park facilities open over the “closed” season was put forward. However, the issues of doing this was likely vandalism and the danger of frozen pipes;
- information was sought, and provided, as to the sources of funding for the Scheme; and
- for clarification, the term “Council” should be replaced with “Committee” as this related to Inverness solely.

Thereafter, the consensus was to incorporate the Amendment into the Notice of Motion, with the clarification that it related to the City of Inverness Area Committee.

The Committee **AGREED** the following:

- That the provision of public toilets is not a statutory duty of local authorities under the Public Health (Scotland) Act (2008). There has been a decline in the number of public toilets in Scotland over the last fifteen years.
- That the Mealmarket Close toilets were closed in 2018.
- That many businesses and services provide toilets which are publicly available. Examples include the Victorian Market, Eastgate Centre, Eden Court, the Bus and Train Stations, and the Museum & Art Gallery. Cafes, restaurants, pubs and other businesses are also very accommodating of reasonable requests.
- The Committee notes the number of toilet facilities currently available, as mentioned above, and recognises the valuable service, the cleanliness and availability to the public that these provide. That the Highland Council's Comfort Scheme is promoted further to Inverness City Centre retailers and services, promoting the financial incentives as well as the potential commercial benefits of encouraging more footfall. That Committee will help the public locate the businesses, with Comfort Schemes, by providing additional signage to accompany the existing stickers.

14. Approval of New Street Name, Ward 13 Inverness West
Headache Ainm Sràide Ùr, Guard 13 Inbhir Nis an Iar

There had been circulated Report No CIA/45/25 by the Assistant Chief Officer – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the street names as Fairweather Road and Lyall Court.

The meeting concluded at 12.40 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 19 November 2025 at 9.35 am.

Present:
Ms S Atkin
Mr A Baxter (Substitute)
Mrs I Campbell
Mr A Christie
Mrs M Cockburn
Mr R Cross
Ms H Crawford
Ms L Dundas
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)
Mr R Gale
Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Ms E Knox (remote)
Ms L Kraft
Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Ms C Ramsay
Mr R Stewart

Religious Representatives (non-voting):
Rev Dr C Caley
Ms S Lamont
Mr J Maxwell

Youth Convener (non-voting):
Ms L McBain

Non-Members also present:
Ms T Collier (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)
Ms C Gillies
Mr K Gowans (remote)
Dr M Gregson
Mr R Jones
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)
Mrs I MacKenzie (remote)
Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Ms M Ross (remote)
Mrs L Saggers (remote)

In attendance:
Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education
Ms B Martin-Scott, Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead – Resources
Mr D Martin, Strategic Lead – Operations
Ms F Shearer, Strategic Lead - People
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy
Mr I Kyle, Head of Performance and Improvement
Mr M Richardson, Principal Adult Learning and Youth Work Manager
Ms A Anthony, Senior Youth Development Officer
Ms F Dalgetty, Chief Executive, Fèis Rois (Third Sector) (remote)
Ms M Chemonges, Highland Parent Council Partnership (remote)
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:
Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland
Ms A Mason, Highland Archivist

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 J Finlayson 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 D Gregg, Mr D Macpherson and Mr J McGillivray.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 13: Mr A Christie

Ms H Crawford made a general Transparency Statement on the basis that a family member was employed within the Highland education sector. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

3. Good News/Outstanding Achievements
Naidheachdan Matha/Coileanaidhean Air Leth

A presentation on outstanding achievements by pupils and schools had been circulated.

Congratulations having been extended to all the schools involved for the wide variety of work and achievements that had been showcased, the Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

4. Statutory Consultation: Relocation of Beauly Primary School
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Gluasad Bun-Sgoil na Manachainn

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members unanimously welcomed the report, which would also be welcomed by teachers and parents, particularly the Parent Council, who wanted a safe, warm and secure school. Thanks were expressed to the Head Teacher of Beauly Primary School for her involvement, the school community and the wider community for their support and patience, and officers for the community consultation event that had taken place earlier in the year and for taking Ward Members' comments on board. It was highlighted that the aim was for the new

school to open between January and April 2028, and Members would continue to monitor the situation as work progressed. It was added that Local Members and their predecessors had been working towards achieving a new primary school for Beauly for many years, and it was welcomed that it would now be delivered as part of the Council's Highland Investment Plan. Since the disappointment of not securing LEIP funding, the opportunity had arisen to look at a new greenfield site and there would now be a better school without the disruption that would have resulted from rebuilding on the existing site;

- reference was made to the former Strontian Primary School building which had closed in 2017 and was still vacant, and reassurance was sought, and provided, that sight would not be lost of what was going to be done with the existing Beauly Primary School building when it became vacant, and that officers would work with Ward Members and the local community in that regard so a plan was in place when the new school became available;
- a new, modern school in Beauly would provide an improved learning environment and local growth. Staff would be able to teach in purpose-built accommodation, and Members looked forward to a tour in the future;
- the new Tain campus project was already over a year behind schedule and considerably over budget, and information was sought, and provided, as to what safeguards, oversight measures and project management processes would be put in place to prevent a similar situation from occurring in Beauly and to avoid placing unnecessary stress on staff, pupils, the community, Ward Members and Council finances;
- it was important that comparisons between capital projects were relevant and proportionate, and Beauly Primary School and the new Tain campus were fundamentally different in both scale and complexity. Planning for the Tain campus had taken place immediately pre and post Covid, and officers had continued to work on the project through a difficult period, committed to delivering it while costs rose exponentially. The campus had now been built and would be handed over to the Council imminently. It had been a challenging project, but robust financial monitoring and project management procedures were in place to ensure the Council's interests were protected. For Beauly Primary School, the Council was adopting a similar design and layout to that being used for both Broadford and Dunvegan Primary Schools. In addition, these three new schools were single storey so much less complex than the Tain campus. Whilst it was important to be aware of budgets, comparing the Beauly and Tain projects was not comparing like with like in terms of community, type of school and economic environment. The Beauly project was part of the Highland Investment Plan which was reported to Full Council, and regular reports were also presented to the Housing and Property Committee and further scrutinised at the Corporate Resources Committee. The Council had rightly insisted on all Passivhaus specifications being fully met prior to formal acceptance of the campus, and Members were asked to consider the potential long-term costs and risks had that not been the case. The Tain campus was the Council's first Passivhaus build, and it brought four schools into one campus, bringing community learning under one roof. In the construction process, there had been a significant effort to achieve a high standard of air tightness, and it would be a state-of-the-art facility providing a high-quality learning environment for the local community. The campus was also part of the Scottish Government's Learning Estate Investment Programme and would receive government funding for a 25-year period to ensure it remained in fit-for-purpose condition. In terms of future project delivery controls, the Council had engaged a delivery partner, Hub North Scotland, who would have responsibility for

ensuring new school projects and Community Points of Delivery were brought in on time, on budget and to the quality specified. Contractors would sign up to a suite of Key Performance Indicators to demonstrate project compliance against performance targets specified by the Council via Hub North Scotland. Each project would have a team of dedicated design consultants overseen by the Hub North Scotland Project Director, and the delivery process would be monitored by the Council's Property team. Other Members added that Tain was only one example, there being many examples of primary school builds that had run late and over budget; and

- the Chair highlighted that the final consultation paper in respect of St Clement's School would be published today, and the associated report would be presented to the Full Council in December.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation, based on the proposal attached to the report at Appendix 2.

5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach R2 2025/26

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- attention was drawn to the reported underspend of £0.833m, which it was suggested was not good news or indicative of strong budget management. There were currently 47 external vacancies in education advertised on MyJobScotland, and concern was expressed that no service could operate effectively with staffing gaps of that scale, and that posts were being left unfilled to balance the budget, leaving the remaining staff overworked and exhausted. Children were being impacted by reduced support in classrooms, early learning settings were stretched, and Additional Support Needs teams were being asked to do the impossible with increasingly fewer staff. There were overspends of £0.739m on Special Schools and £0.653 on Out of Authority Placements, driven by demand and insufficient capacity, and these were long-standing structural issues that had failed to be addressed. It was suggested that, instead of freezing posts and underfunding services, investment in frontline staffing and capacity-building was required to deliver improvement and better outcomes for children in Highland and prevent further decline in attainment. In responding to the points raised, the Chair emphasised that the underspend was less than 1% of the total budget. All Members shared the concerns regarding recruitment but it was extremely difficult to recruit to particular subjects and particular areas and, increasingly, the Council was competing with other industries. Assurance was provided that the importance of recruitment in schools, from ELC to the senior phase, was recognised, and the Council was committed to it;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether the underspends in respect of Adult Learning, Youth Work, and Crossing Patrollers and School Escorts were a result of vacancy management and, if so, the likely impact on service delivery. In relation to Crossing Patrollers in particular, it was queried whether there was any risk of impact on school safety;

- Education was a challenging service to manage, with issues such as falling school rolls and numerous vacancies that were outwith the Council's control, and officers were commended for their efforts; and
- further information was sought, and provided, regarding the underspend on early learning and childcare staffing, which the report indicated reflected work to deliver approved savings next year.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for Quarter 2 2025/26 as set out in the report and appendices;
ii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
iii. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery.

6. Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy
Ro-innleachd Com-pàirteachadh Phàrantach

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

The Chair explained that the purpose of the Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy (the Strategy) was to ensure that all parents, guardians and carers were encouraged and supported to engage as key partners in their children's education and, importantly, the life of the school.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the strengths of the Strategy were recognised, particularly the commitment to better communication, a stronger parental voice and family learning. However, it was suggested the Strategy ought to be measured by the improvements it delivered, and that it was lacking in outcomes and information as to how the Council communicated the progress and performance of learners to parents. The Parental Involvement Act gave parents the right to be informed about their child's learning so they could support it at home, but Members had heard from parents that there was a disconnect between school and what was happening at home. The Education Improvement Plan required schools to monitor the progress, behaviour, attendance and wellbeing of pupils every month, and it was suggested that, if such information was readily available, there should be more regular reporting to parents through report cards, emails or other means, thereby allowing early intervention when issues arose. A formalised reporting structure would strengthen the partnership between parents and schools, and a request was made that how to better communicate with parents be explored at a future meeting or workshop. The Chair confirmed that a workshop could be arranged. However, it was explained that many of the points raised in terms of communication with and reporting to parents already happened at individual school level;
- engaging with parents at all levels was vital, and the report was welcomed. However, concern was expressed that while there were some extremely well-organised Parent Councils they were often run by a small number of hard-working volunteers, and it was questioned how the Council was going to engage with the parents who were not currently involved and encourage them to volunteer and interact with the school. In addition, an example was cited of a Parent Council that

had been unable to go into abeyance as it was a registered charity, and it was suggested it was necessary to look at how the Council engaged with Parent Councils and provide guidance on governance. The Chair explained there were clear guidelines on the establishment and roles and responsibilities of Parent Councils, and it was suggested this should also form part of the proposed workshop;

- there appeared to be no mention of home-educated children in the Strategy, and concern was expressed that they were not getting the support they needed. The Chair suggested that home education also be included in the proposed workshop;
- it was necessary to empower parents to be part of the educational process, and reference was made to successful initiatives in local schools such as literacy and numeracy fairs with hands-on activities that were both fun and educational;
- the intention to identify parents and carers who might have barriers to access was welcomed, and further information was sought on how it was intended to do so;
- the explicit nature of the Strategy was commended;
- parents had a responsibility to get their children to school, and involving them in improving attendance was key;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how, and at what level, it was envisaged parents would contribute to decision-making;
- in relation to the possible formation of Area Parent Council Forums, parents tended to be concerned about their own children and their own local school. Concern was expressed regarding accountability and creating another layer of bureaucracy, and further information was sought, and provided, on the proposals;
- Members spoke to their own positive experiences of parental involvement, and commended teachers' willingness to answer direct questions and show parents the resources available to them to support their children. However, it was necessary to consider how to support harder to reach parents to ask such questions and guide them through the answers;
- the language used by education professionals could be difficult to understand, and a request was made that plain English be used wherever possible when engaging with parents. The Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years confirmed that, going forward, officers would engage more closely with the Parent Council Partnership around the use of language prior to releasing any documentation;
- Head Teachers and their colleagues could be somewhat exposed at Parent Council meetings when there was a particular issue at a school, and were placed in the position of balancing their duties to the Council and to parents. It having been queried what support was provided in that regard, it was confirmed engagement with Parent Councils would form part of the induction programme for new Head Teachers;
- the willingness of the Chair and officers to be open and transparent where there were difficulties within a particular school was commended. Meeting with Parent Council representatives and teaching staff in person did a great deal to ease the concerns of the school community, and it was requested this be replicated throughout Highland;
- tribute was paid to the Chief Officers responsible for primary and secondary education for the changes made in a short period of time in terms of engagement with Head Teachers, schools and parents;
- it was important to listen to parents and tailor communication based on their needs, and an example was provided of a school communicating with parents on a weekly basis by way of a closed digital group;

- the Council's whole family approach and close partnership working with the Children's Services team enabled parents to be identified who were not engaging with schools or who, for example, had support needs or young carers;
- change took time and one template did not fit all but a lot of progress had been made, and it was important to recognise the leadership of Head Teachers as well as the role of pastoral teachers in schools;
- where Head Teachers had communicated to Parent Councils how they intended to implement the Strategy, it had been well received;
- with reference to recent Head Teacher interviews, the successful candidates' ideas in terms of how to get parents, particularly those who were hard to reach, and the community involved had been impressive and inspirational, and Members were encouraged to visit their local Head Teachers to speak to them about their plans for engaging with parents;
- early diagnosis of neurodivergent conditions such as Autism or Tourette's Syndrome gave parents the capacity and knowledge to support their children and teach them coping strategies, increasing the likelihood of them thriving in mainstream education, and it was queried whether there was any scope for an increased focus on early diagnosis. In response, it was explained that only the Neuro Developmental Assessment Service, which was an NHS Highland responsibility, could provide a clinical diagnosis. However, the Council was working closely with NHS Highland in terms of how resources could be aligned to address the challenges being faced. It was added that it was important not to underestimate the professional knowledge of teaching staff who could sometimes recognise specific traits, and a significant amount of support was available ahead of diagnosis from specialist education services such as Educational Psychology and Speech and Language Therapy;
- the title of the Strategy implied it was just for parents and not the wider family, and it was suggested "Family Involvement and Engagement Strategy" would be more appropriate. Particularly in working families, it was often the grandparents who dropped off/picked up children at school and attended school events. In addition, reference was made to an instance of a grandparent being told they could not join a Parent Council, and it was suggested there was an opportunity for grandparental involvement on struggling Parent Councils. It was confirmed that grandparents could be co-opted onto Parent Councils even if they were not acting as the parent, and the Chair suggested the matter be discussed further at the proposed workshop;
- the demographics in Highland were such that parental involvement and engagement was easier to achieve in some school than others, and information was sought, and provided, as to how the Education Service was feeding into the Poverty Commission to try to increase the inclusion of parents and grandparents in the school community;
- with reference to the three-year Action Plan contained within the Strategy, it would be helpful for the Committee to receive an update report after six months so Members could track progress and see whether there was anything they could do at local level. It was confirmed an interim report could be provided, and there would be a further update within next year's Education and Learning Improvement Plan;
- communication, reporting and effectively collaborating with parents and families was important and valued across the teaching profession. However, this sometimes involved parents raising other issues, such as vacant teaching posts, with teachers, and the impact of long-term absence and vacancies on the remaining staff was emphasised; and

- Child's Plans were important instruments of collaboration between schools and families, and it would be helpful to receive a report in that regard including whether there were models of good practice in terms of the compilation of Child's Plans and whether targets were being met. The Chair emphasised the need for caution in terms of confidentiality issues. However, he confirmed consideration would be given to bringing a report to a future meeting on the inter-agency work that went into Child's Plans and their central role in the Getting It Right For Every Child agenda.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the content of the report;
ii. **APPROVED** the reviewed Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy 2025-2028 (the Strategy) (Appendix 2 of the report);
iii. **NOTED** that action to implement the Strategy would form part of the annual Education Improvement/National Improvement Framework Plan;
iv. **AGREED** that a Members' workshop be arranged to explore how to better communicate with parents; the establishment, roles and responsibilities of Parent Councils; and home education;
v. **AGREED** that an interim report on the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan be brought to the Committee after a period of six months; and
vi. **AGREED** that consideration be given to a future report on Child's Plans, specifically the associated inter-agency work and their central role in the Getting It Right For Every Child agenda.

7. Education Improvement Plan and Raising Attainment and Achievement Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlana Leasachaidh an Fhoghlaim agus mu Bhith ag Àrdachadh Buileachadh is Coileanadh

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

The Chair referred to the recent seminar which had helped shape the Education and Learning Improvement Plan for 2025/26, and thanked all Members who had attended for their input on the day and after the event.

In introducing the report, attention was drawn to a data error at section 6.1.2 of the covering report. It was explained that the Combined Literacy figure for 2021 was 49%, not 53%, and for 2025 the figure was 69%, not 72%. This was still an improvement of 20%, and the correct data was set out in the graphs in the Education and Learning Improvement Plan itself.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the nature of education meant that, unlike some other Council services, change and improvement took a long time. However, it was difficult to see improvement in the report, particularly when looking at the key attainment trends in S4-S6 as set out in section 6.2.3, and it would be helpful to receive an explanation as to where improvements had been made;
- with reference to the senior phase attainment statistics in Appendix 3 of the report, attainment at SCQF Level 6 Numeracy in S5 had increased by 2% in Highland in 2025. However, the National figure had increased by 3% which indicated that

other local authorities had improved at a better rate. Attainment at SCQF Level 6 Literacy in S5 had decreased in Highland in 2025 so Highland was now below the Virtual Comparator. Other Members cited several other areas where Highland was below the Virtual and National Comparator;

- offers from universities were often unconditional or based on S5 Higher grades meaning that Advanced Highers rarely influenced admissions, and it was questioned what other local authorities were doing better than Highland, in terms of discipline and attendance, to improve performance in S6. In that regard, it was explained that an attendance policy had been implemented in secondary schools which included expectations around attendance in S6 and steps that would be taken if young people were not engaging. Work was also underway on a presentation policy, which it was hoped to bring to the next meeting of the Committee, which would set out firm guidance on the number of certificated courses pupils would be expected to be studying. With reference to the previous item, it was added that it was necessary to ensure parents understood the importance of children engaging fully with courses in S6 and supported them to do so;
- in response to a question, it was explained that, in accordance with the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment procedure, a full impact assessment had not been carried out as the screening had identified that the Education and Learning Improvement Plan would have only positive impacts on children and young people. A full impact assessment was only required where the screening identified negative impacts;
- with reference to the Combined Primary 1, 4 and 7 A Curriculum for Excellence (ACEL) data in section 6.1.2 of the report, the improvements in literacy and numeracy were significant and impressive, and information was sought, and provided, as to what the increases could be attributed to;
- page 52 of the papers referred to collective school attendance improving by 0.2%. However, it was contended this barely constituted an improvement, it being only 2 of every 1000 pupils;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how the poverty related attainment gap was identified and measured;
- it was suggested the report was glossing over the truth, which was that attainment, standards and the life chances of young people in Highland were declining. A society that could not teach its children to read and write with confidence was letting them down, and attainment in literacy had decreased in S4, S5 and S6. Attainment in S6, a vital gateway year, was decreasing, and particular reference was made to the significant reduction in the number of pupils achieving an Advanced Higher. Complementary Tariff Scores had also gone down and, whilst the report indicated that the attainment gap between the least and most disadvantaged learners in S6 had not changed significantly over the last two years, it was contended that was not the case as performance at both ends of the gap had deteriorated. The National Comparator figures were key, as they showed what students in Highland were up against when applying for university places, and they indicated that Highland was falling behind the rest of Scotland. Pupils and teachers in Highland were no less capable than elsewhere, and it was suggested the responsibility for the issues lay with the Education Committee. It was necessary to recognise there was a problem, raise standards and expectations, and reverse the negative trend;
- it was intended to move an amendment proposing that attainment statistics be reported quarterly to Full Council to allow further scrutiny and continual improvement. However, the Chair explained that attainment was reported annually

so quarterly statistics were not available, and the Council agenda was not a matter for the Committee to agree. Other Members added that the Education Committee was the appropriate forum to debate education matters, and all Members could attend the Committee if they so wished;

- in relation to improving performance amongst the lowest attaining 20% of pupils, it was necessary to focus on the early years into P1, identify disengagement with education at an early stage, and work with pupils at school level. In addition, it was questioned whether the leap from S3 to S4 was too much for some pupils, and whether the perspective of learners was evaluated at that stage;
- the S4 Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy figures on page 71 of the papers did not appear to correlate with the percentage of Highland pupils achieving 5+ awards at SCQF Level 5 in S4, and clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether Level 5 Numeracy included applications of maths, and whether Level 5 Literacy was a National 5 in English. It was added that if a pupil could achieve a National 5 in English they should be aiming to achieve several other National 5s in S4, and it was questioned whether learners were being sufficiently challenged to achieve;
- the recent Members' Seminar on raising attainment and achievement was commended, and it had been encouraging to see what was happening from strategic level down to classroom level;
- the importance of taking a bottom-up approach, working with parents and getting it right in the early years from birth was emphasised. As indicated earlier in the discussion, primary attainment in Highland had improved significantly, but these improvements would take time to move up through the system;
- appreciation was expressed for the direction provided by the Assistant Chief Executive – People over the past year, and to senior education officers for their efforts;
- the evidence in the report showed a sustained, persistent and systemic decline in senior phase attainment. Radical intervention was needed, and support was expressed for discussing the matter at Full Council;
- concern was expressed regarding the lack of meaningful debate at Committee, and that responses were only provided to specific, direct questions;
- the wider context was one of excellent teachers leaving the profession, unfilled vacancies, staff on long-term absence, and pupils who were struggling. Teachers were under pressure, and it was necessary to start talking about that in practical terms;
- as had previously been stated, young people in Highland were at a disadvantage when applying to college or university in comparison with those from other Council areas, and this should be cause for concern at Full Council level. In response, it was explained that destination data, including information on university applications for Highland, had been reported to the June meeting of the Committee, and the Chief Officer – Secondary Education undertook to re-share the report;
- the Covid pandemic and rurality were often cited as contributing factors to the decline in attainment in Highland. However, Covid had not only affected Highland, and rurality had not prevented Highland from being an exemplar of academic performance in the past;
- it had previously been asked if the Council could be partnered with a top performing local authority, as happened in other parts of the UK. In that regard, it was explained that the Council already had strong connections to the Northern Alliance but, over the past year and half, further connections had been made through collaborative improvement work at national level, and the Council worked closely with Stirling, Borders and Midlothian Councils;

- putting the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education, and ensuring equity and inclusion in all improvement activity, was important, as was the health and wellbeing of children and young people;
- the important of closing the attainment gap was recognised. However, every school and cohort had different learning needs and attainment, and it was necessary to take that into consideration;
- not all young people wanted to go to university, and it was important to ensure other opportunities, such as apprenticeships, were available, that young people were supported in whatever path they chose, and that they were encouraged to become fully rounded citizens;
- learning and training support for all educational staff was key;
- anecdotally, Members had heard that attendance was poor on Fridays, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether issues relating to rural transport and the shorter school day on a Friday were skewing the attendance figures;
- positivity was expressed regarding the way in which education had moved on in recent decades;
- Members spoke to their experience of participating in Children's Hearings, highlighting that a high proportion of those who came through the system were neurodivergent. Children were victims of their circumstances, and the importance of addressing the matter under discussion correctly was emphasised, as were the potential consequences of failing to do so;
- the need to work together, regardless of political persuasion, and to put children and young people first was emphasised;
- in responding to the points raised, the Assistant Chief Executive – People refuted any suggestion the report was anything other than factual, adding that it clearly set out where improvements had been made as well as where they had not. Whilst there had been a lot of discussion regarding the areas that had not improved, there had been less mention of the areas that had improved, and a summary was provided in that regard. In particular, it was highlighted that S5 Level 6 had increased by 2%; S4 Level 5 had increased by 5%, and 9% over the past five years; 5+ awards in S5 had increased by 2%; and 3+ awards in S5 had increased by 1%. It was also important to recognise areas that were not about SQA qualifications, such as the increase in Skills for Work and National Progression Awards which impacted hundreds of school leavers and included subjects that were important for Highland such as early learning and childcare, rural skills, hospitality, automotive skills, social services, construction, business and marking, scientific technologies, aquaculture and computer games development. It was emphasised that 96.5% of school leavers had positive destinations, which was the highest figure in five years and above the national position. These were all things to be proud of. However, the need for sustained improvement against every measure was recognised, and the attainment data had been appended to the Improvement Plan as the two things went hand in hand. Thanks were expressed to the Members who had attended the seminar which had helped inform the Improvement Plan, and it was hoped some of the feedback that had been provided was evident in the Plan. An assurance was provided that improving the educational outcomes and positive destinations of young people in Highland would continue to be a strong ambition, both centrally and at school level, but it was important to acknowledge where improvements had been made and the hard work of those involved.

The Committee:-

Notice of Amendment

i. **NOTED** the Education and Learning Annual Report for 2024/25;
ii. **APPROVED** the Education and Learning Improvement Plan for 2025/26 (Appendix 2 of the report); and
iii. scrutinised and **NOTED** Highland's Senior Phase Attainment for session 2024/25 (Appendix 3 of the report).

8. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report Q2 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanadh Ràitheil R2 2025/26

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there was value in the Committee being able to analyse trends in data, and it was proposed that, in future, all school inspection reports be presented to the Committee to improve scrutiny of service performance. This was accepted by the Chair, and it was confirmed discussions would take place as to the most appropriate means of presenting school inspection reports to the Committee. However, it was explained that school inspection reports were available online and were provided at Area Committee level. Other Members added that they had not received inspection reports at Area level, and an assurance was provided that this would be addressed;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Quarter 2 covered July, August and September, so the staff absence figures for that period had been impacted by the school holidays;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Council-wide statistics included all services;
- the importance of understanding the reasons for staff absences in order to better support staff having been emphasised, the Strategic Lead – Resources confirmed that information in that regard could be provided in future reports;
- staff were having to teach in difficult conditions, and long-term staff absences were putting additional pressure on the remaining staff; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the resource and time implications of processing Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Concern was expressed regarding vexatious requests, and it was questioned whether a discussion in that regard was needed at Full Council level. However, it was explained that all FOI requests must be dealt with unless an exception could be applied in terms of the Freedom of Information Act.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance information;
ii. **NOTED** the last quarterly report combined both Performance and Delivery Plan reporting. These would now be reported separately; and
iii. **AGREED** that discussions would take place as to the most appropriate means of presenting school inspection reports to the Committee.

9. Delivery Plan Monitoring and Progress Update – My Future Highland Q2 2025/26 Sgrùdadh agus Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh – Mo Ghàidhealtachd Ri Teachd R2 2025/26

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

The Chair stated that this was an important report, as education was about preparing young people for the world of work while supporting them to develop the skills required in an ever-changing society. It was currently a pivotal time in terms of investment in many different projects across Highland as well as the huge number of visitors coming to the area and, as such, it was necessary to support both skills development and engagement with employers to make sure young people took full advantage of the opportunities that were and would be available.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the exciting and positive report;
- the Digital School was an innovative project that could provide pupils with wider opportunities and could also potentially be used by home-educated children. Disappointment was expressed at the ongoing delays in its expansion, and an update was sought, and provided, in that regard;
- Members welcomed the increase in uptake of accelerated degree pathways as a way of inspiring young people to engage in S6; the increase in the delivery of Modern Apprenticeships; and the "Talking Tubs" initiative;
- it was queried whether S6 pupils could take different subjects at different schools to allow a wider range of subjects to be offered;
- the Creative Industries workshop provided by the production company behind "The Traitors" television programme was commended, and the importance of production companies who came to the area engaging with schools and young people was emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, on funding for hybrid school/college learning, and whether sufficient information was given to parents on what happened in terms of funding if a child chose to leave school and attend college part-time;
- many young people would be self-employed at some point in their future, and the attention being given to business skills was welcomed;
- the importance of preparing young people for life as well as for work was highlighted;
- concern was expressed regarding the apparent decline in rational thought in today's society, and it was questioned how that could be addressed in education;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding Foundation Apprenticeships, including whether they were offered in all schools and the criteria for acceptance; and
- attention was drawn to a possible future partnership between the Gro For You project, which specialised in creating grassroots solutions to addressing skills challenges, and Tain Royal Academy, and this was welcomed.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Delivery Project updates provided in the report.

10. Youth Convener Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Neach-gairm na h-Òigridh

Highland Youth Convener, Leah McBain, delivered a presentation on her priorities for the year ahead with a particular focus on Online Safety and Technology.

It having been queried whether the Committee would receive feedback and recommendations on the work around digital safety, the Chair confirmed that the Youth Convener would have the opportunity to feed back to the Committee towards the end of her term.

Having expressed thanks for the inspiring presentation and wished the Youth Convener good luck for her term in office, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

11. Community Learning and Development Plan 2024-2027: Annual Report, including Year 2 and 3 Review
Plana Ionnsachadh is Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd 2024–2027: Aithisg Bhliadhnail, a' gabhail a-steach Ath-sgrùdadh Bliadhna 2 is 3

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it having been queried whether there was a connection between the underspend on Community Learning and Development (CLD) and the HM Inspector's view that insufficient progress had been made against the two main action points identified in the original CLD inspection, it was clarified that the underspend related to the transfer of the budget from High Life Highland to the Council; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the provision of evening classes in schools and whether there was scope to reinstate these.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress, including key delivery achievements, made in year one of the Highland Community Learning and Development Plan 2024-2027.

12. Keeping The Promise in Highland
A' Cumail a' Ghealltanais sa Ghàidhealtachd

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

The Chair explained that an update report on how The Promise was being kept in Highland had been presented to the recent meeting of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee. However, he felt it was important that an update was also brought to the Education Committee.

Members welcomed the report, which was an important reminder of the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Attention was drawn to the "Language Bin" which had been created following consultation with young people, and Members were encouraged to reflect on the language they used when discussing children and young people as young people often considered it to be stigmatising and judgemental.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** areas of challenge and areas of progress across service delivery; and
iii. **NOTED** that all services would be supported to Keep The Promise.

13. High Life Highland Progress Report
Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd

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

There had been circulated Report No EDU/36/25 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

In addition to the report, the Highland Archivist gave a presentation on the work of the Archive Service, including public and school engagement.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- although there had been some initial concerns about the creation of High Life Highland, it had flourished since then and its existence had helped to protect important cultural and heritage services;
- information was sought, and provided, on the perceived greatest risks to High life Highland over the next five years; any geographical or socio-economic gaps in the provision of music tuition and how these were being managed; and income generation streams within the Archive Service;
- before the creation of the Archive Service significant and interesting documents had been stored in unsatisfactory conditions and had not been available to the public. The Archive Service had rectified this situation and its success was commended;
- the music tuition service, which at one point had been close to being cut completely as had been the case in other local authority areas, was commended and attention was drawn to the Gold Award for commitment to music recently awarded to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Port Rìgh;
- Members commended the Archive Centre in Portree, which was well used and respected by the community;
- the music tuition service concert at Eden Court had been a great success and thanks were extended to the many music tutors who had worked within both the Council and High Life Highland, some of whom were retiring soon after many years of service;
- the success in securing “Get Active Scotland” funding was welcomed, and it was queried how local communities could access this funding; and
- an update was requested on the roll out of the library van in the west Highland.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the performance of High Life Highland as detailed in its annual report in Appendix A of the report;

ii. the information provided in Appendix B of the report on customer satisfaction levels;
iii. the general updates provided in Appendix C of the report; and
iv. the information on the archives service in Appendix D of the report.

14. Minutes of Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee
Geàrr-chunntas Fo-Chomataidh Maoin Urras an Fhoghlaim

The Committee **NOTED** the draft Minutes of the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee on 8 September 2025.

15. Membership of Sub-Committees
Ballrachd air Fo-Chomataidhean

The Committee **AGREED** the revised membership of the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee and the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers as tabled.

The meeting concluded at 1.10 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday, 20 November 2025 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mr M Baird
Mr A Baxter
Mr R Bremner
Mr A Christie
Mr J Finlayson (sub for B Lobban)
Mr L Fraser
Mr K Gowans
Mrs J Hendry (sub for Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair)
Mr A Jarvie
Mr S Kennedy
Mr G Mackenzie
Mr S Mackie
Mr D McDonald
Mr P Oldham (Chair)
Ms M Reid (Vice Chair)
Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Mrs T Collier
Ms C Gillies
Mr T MacLennan
Mrs Trish Robertson

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Mrs S Armstrong, Chief Officer - Revenues and Commercialisation
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer - Corporate Finance
Mr J Shepherd, Chief Officer - Business Solutions
Ms M MacKenzie, Strategic Commercial Manager, Commercial and Procurement Shared Services
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mr P Oldham in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr B Lobban, and Mr M Reiss.

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

Declarations of Interest:

Item 4 – Mr L Fraser
Item 12 – Mr R Stewart

Transparency Statements:

Items 6, 8, 11, 12 and 13 – Mr A Christie

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as follows:

- Iona Fraser, Senior Paralegal, had been awarded Accredited Paralegal Status by the Law Society of Scotland;
- Catherine Mackintosh, Sarah Robertson and Rosie Maclean, Revenues' Service Delivery Team, had completed the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation course in Council Tax Law;
- The Council's Trading Standards Manager, David MacKenzie, had been appointed Chair of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute;
- The Council's Modern Apprenticeship scheme had been shortlisted in the category of Large Employer of the Year at the Highland and Islands Apprenticeship Awards;
- Calum MacTavish was a finalist in the Modern Apprentice of the Year category;
- David Cowie, formerly our Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, had been appointed as Service Lead for Safety, Health and Emergency Planning; and
- Helen Aird, the new Strategic Lead for Corporate Communications, and Barbara Alexander, Solicitor, were welcomed.

4. Late Submission of Expenses Claims
A' Cur A-steach airson Cosgaisean Anmoch

Declaration of Interest: Mr L Fraser declared an interest in this item as it related to his own expenses and left the room for the duration of the item.

During discussion, Members reiterated that the late submission of expenses claims was not acceptable and asked that the Convener send a letter to all Members to remind them of this. Clarification was sought and provided that it was not competent to refuse payment of the expense claim. The Chief Officer, Legal and Corporate Governance, advised that he could further check this if required.

The Committee **APPROVED** the claim from Mr Laurie Fraser for £163.80 for mileage in May and June 2025.

5. Appointment to Sub-Committees, Working Groups, etc
Cur an Dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidhean, Buidhnean-obrach is eile

The Chair advised that work was ongoing to achieve greater gender balance on the Appeals and Disputes Committee, with a view to the membership of this going to full Council for approval.

The Committee **AGREED** the appointment of Mr A Christie, to replace on Mr B Lobban, on the Central Safety Committee.

6. Corporate Revenue and Capital Monitoring Report to 30 September 2025 Aithisg Teachd-a-steach Corporra agus Sgrùdadh gu 30 An t-Sultainn 2025

Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

a. Corporate Revenue Monitoring and Forecast Report Quarter 2 of 2025/26 Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach Corporra 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No RES/34/25 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- with reference to slippage on tourism income being reported and monitored at the Income Generation Board, information was sought and provided on when this was reported to Members. The Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate) summarised the Board's focus on the scope of the delivery plan and its continued commitment to transparency;
- further information on the use of the £50k drawn-down from Investment INV 26 - Rural Poverty Commission was sought and provided;
- the appropriate presentation of progress with recovery plans to relevant strategic committees was queried, with specific reference to detail that had been requested at the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on impacts on the roads budget. It was suggested that if a budget was affected by, for example, unexpected storm damage, full disclosure of the impact of unexpected expenditure on the planned budget should be provided. In response, the Chair of Economy & Infrastructure Committee gave a brief overview of key Service budget issues, including the overspend on the Corran Ferry, and the high cost of repairing storm damage at times. He provided assurance there had been no cuts to roads budgets;
- the importance of early Member scrutiny of the recovery plans was emphasised, and detail on the reporting of the recovery plans was provided;
- the reduction in the projected overall overspend was welcomed and the impact of such a significant change to the projected outturn in future quarters was queried;
- the financial risks around Adult Social Care were significant and more detailed financial figures on this should be included in the report;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the high level of Cleaning, Catering and Facilities Management vacancies in the Housing and Property Service and the impact this was having on the Council's buildings;
- concern was expressed at the overspend on Fleet and it was suggested this should be a relatively easy budget line to control;
- continued expenditure on the net zero agenda in the Climate and Energy service was concerning and any unnecessary non-statutory expenditure should be stopped; and
- noting that there had been £5k of expenditure on the campervan and motorhome scheme, information was sought on the total related income that had been received from the scheme to date (£10,080), which was significantly lower than originally hoped.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

i. forecast financial position for the year as set out in the report and appendices to the report;
ii. explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed;
iii. improvement in forecasts from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2; and
iv. update provided regarding savings delivery.

b. Corporate Capital Monitoring Report for Quarter 2 2025/26
Sgrùdadh Calpa Corporra 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No RES/35/25 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the net spend for Q2 2025/26, the forecast year end outturn and funding profile.

7. Treasury Management
Rianachd Ionmhais

a. Treasury Management – Summary of Transactions to 30 September 2025
Stiùireadh Roinn an Ionmhais – Aithisg Meadhan Bliadhna gu 30 An t-Sultainn 2025

There had been circulated Report No RES/36/25 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 July 2025 to 30 September 2025.

b. Treasury Management – Mid Year Report 2025/26
Rianachd Ionmhais - Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No RES/37/25 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2025/26.

8. Corporate Cluster Service
Seirbheis nam Buidhnean Corporra

Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland, a Non- Executive Director of Inverness BID, and as Chief Executive of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau but, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

a. Revenue Budget Monitoring
Sgrùdadh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach

There had been circulated Report No RES/38/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED** the performance of the Corporate Cluster.

b. Performance Monitoring Q2 2025/26
Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Q2 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No RES/39/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED** the performance information for the Corporate Cluster.

9. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for Item 10 only on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

10. Inverness Castle Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Chaisteal Inbhir Nis

There had been circulated to Members only Joint Report No RES/40/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, and Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

11. Leadership and Management Toolkit
Pasgan-innealan Ceannardais is Stiùiridh

Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/41/25 by the Chief Executive.

The Committee **NOTED** the development of the Leadership and Management Toolkit.

12. Grievance and Resolution Policy and Guidance
Poileasaidh agus Stiùireadh Chùisean-gearain is Rèitich

Mr R Stewart declared an interest in this item as a family member was an employee of the Council, and he left the meeting for its duration.

Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/42/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair indicated that an update report would be submitted to the Committee in 12 months to review implementation of the policy;
- the challenges securing Members to sit on appeal panels was highlighted, as was the significant amount of work they required. It was queried whether all Members could receive the appropriate training;
- with regard to Trade Unions, it was noted that Unison supported the policy changes, while GMB and Unite opposed them;
- Members stated the importance of not creating a two-tier system, and queried why certain groups of staff, such as teachers, might have a separate procedure. It was explained that some staff groups had significantly different terms and conditions of employment;
- the Chair offered to provide Members with the Chief Officer's (HR and Communications) report on Third Stage Member Appeal Panel of the Disciplinary Policy, once it had been to the HR Sub Group;
- the grievance policy was non-punitive, whereas the disciplinary policy was punitive as it could result in action such as demotion and dismissal. As a trauma-informed organisation, it was important to reduce the time taken to resolve a grievance. The inclusion of a Chief Officer from a different Service cluster in stage 2 grievance panels was welcomed and attention was drawn to the proposed changes in the report to bring the Highland Council in line with ACAS guidance; and
- some Members felt that more thought was required to be given to some of the various scenarios that could arise, such as a grievance and disciplinary being lodged simultaneously or a collective grievance. It was therefore proposed to continue with the pilot, to enable further exploration of these issues to ensure no group would be disadvantaged, and defer a decision until the next meeting of the Committee.

Thereafter, Mr P Oldham, seconded by Mrs M Reid, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A Baxter, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, that a decision on the plan be deferred until the concerns raised in debate could be addressed in a future report to this Committee.

On a vote being taken, there were 9 votes for the motion and 5 for the amendment, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr R Bremner, Mr J Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Mr S Kennedy, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Reid.

For the amendment: Mr M Baird, Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie, Mr S Mackie, Mr D McDonald.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the findings from the trial implementation of the policy changes; and
ii. **APPROVED** the changes to the Grievance and Resolution Policy and Guidance as outlined in Section 7 of the report.

13. Annual Procurement Report 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Solair 1 Giblean 2024 – 31 Màrt 2025

Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item as a Non Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/43/25 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

During discussion, assurance was sought and provided that the strategy included reference to the procurement of Halal meat.

The Committee **NOTED** the content and publication of the Highland Council Annual Procurement Report 2024-2025 as circulated as Appendix A to the report.

14. Corporate Systems Update – HR & Payroll Programme
Cunntas às Ùr mu Shiostaman Corporra – Pròg ram Ghoireasan Daonna & Rola-pàighidh

There had been circulated Report No RES/44/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED** the updates and progress of the HR and Payroll Programme.

15. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update
Aithris Plana Lìbhrigidh

a. Income Generation
Togail Teachd-a-steach

There had been circulated Report No RES/45/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised: -

- the success of the Storr Centre, on Skye, was welcomed, and it set a standard for the future of other tourism-related income generation projects. Attention was drawn to the significant levels of local negotiation, procurement and employment which had been key to the project's success and which should be a starting point for other projects. Assurance was sought and provided that any expansion would involve analysis of the resources and staff required to administer it;

- the voluntary nature of the campervan and motorhome scheme had contributed to its lack of success, and reference was made to its possible negative impact on local businesses and its failure to meet expectation or targets. Attention was drawn to other benefits of the scheme, such as the provision of waste collection points, which helped to promote sustainable tourism and the future provision of black waste disposal and freshwater replenishment, both of which would be income generating; and
- there was a Members' workshop on Visitor Experiences that afternoon immediately following the Redesign Board meeting.

Mr P Oldham, seconded by Mrs M Reid, **MOVED** the recommendations as set out in the report. Mr R Stewart moved as an **AMENDMENT** to discontinue the Campervan and Motorhome scheme across the Highlands, but, having failed to find a seconder, his amendment fell, and the Committee **NOTED** the progress of each Income Generation Projects.

b. Corporate Solutions
Fuasglaidhean Corporra

There had been circulated Report No RES/46/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED** progress on the projects covered in the report.

16. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

The following Minutes of Meetings were:

i. **NOTED** – Appeals and Disputes Sub Committee on 11 September 2025;
ii. **APPROVED** - Central Safety Committee held on 29 September 2025;
iii. **NOTED** – Employment Release Sub Committee held on 9 and 29 October 2025; and
iv. **APPROVED** - Staff Partnership Forum held on 11 November 2025.

The meeting closed at 11.40am

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held in the Chamber, The Court House, High Street, Nairn on 24 November 2025 at 10.00 am

Present:

Mr L Fraser
Mr M Green
Ms B Jarvie
Mr P Oldham

In Attendance:

Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Housing and Communities
Ms S Lamb, Project Officer, Community Regeneration
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer, Democratic Services

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 M Green in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 5 – Mr M Green.

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the following items of Good News:-

- the Chair welcomed Lewis Hannah on his return to the Nairnshire Committee;
- the Nairnshire Newspaper have now appointed a local editor;
- congratulations to Barrow Campsite on winning two prestigious camping awards;
- Nairn's Countdown to Christmas event takes places on Saturday 29 November 2025; and
- congratulations to the Nairn Royal British Legion who were winners in the Best Kept War Memorial Competition 2025.

4. Nairn Common Good Fund Q2 2025/26 Monitoring Report
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Maoin Mhath Choitcheann Inbhir Narann Q2 2026/26

There had been circulated Report No NC/20/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed at the poor performance of the investment fund and it was explained that this was managed through the Pensions Committee Investment Sub Committee. In response to further questions about the monitoring and performance of the fund, the Community Development Manager offered to liaise with the Investment Sub Committee and include information on the fund in the next monitoring statement. Vigilance on maintenance and management charges was urged; and
- in response to a query about the apprenticeship levy detailed in section 5.43 of the report, it was explained this was a statutory payment. Staff costs related to the administration of the common good fund.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of the NCGF as shown in the Quarter 2 Revenue Monitoring Statement and **AGREED** further information on the investment fund be included in the next Common Good Fund monitoring statement

5. Short Term Let Control Area
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine

Mr M Green made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as owner of the Seaview Lodge, holiday apartment in Nairn. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No NC/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members noted the short term let rate of 11%, which was considered lower than expected;
- concern was expressed at the higher level of rented properties in the Fishertown area;
- with reference to the Local Place Plan, an impact assessment would be carried out by the Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE) within the next 12 months; and
- concern was expressed at the number of existing houses in the countryside surrounding Nairn being used as Short Term Lets.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the evidence presented demonstrating the degree of prevalence of Short Term Lets within Nairnshire;

ii. **NOTED** that this evidence, at this time, does not demonstrate that the housing market within Nairnshire specifically, is subject to any significant pressure caused by Short Term Lets at this time, that would warrant regulation through a STLCA;
iii. **AGREED** the Nairnshire Area Committee does not at this time seek to progress with the process of considering the introduction of a STLCA covering all or part of the Nairnshire Area; and
iv. **AGREED** to reconsider the evidence base regarding short term lets prevalence in Nairnshire within a further report brought to the Area Committee again at a future period, in 12 months' time.

6. Community Regeneration Fund Project Change Request
Iarrtas airson Atharrachadh air Pròiseact Maoin Ath-nuadhachaidh Coimhearsnachd

There is circulated Report No NC/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, it was welcomed that Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE) was taking forward the projects and it was hoped issues relating to the toilets would be concluded.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the Change Request put forward by the Highland Council for projects CRF4150 – Nairn Links Toilets and CRF4151 – Nairn Riverside Development Plan; and
ii. **AGREED** that Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE) be confirmed as the lead applicant organisation for the delivery of projects CRF4150 and CRF4151, subject to conditions being met.

7. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund payment which have been approved since the previous meeting of this Committee:-

Applicant	Project	WDF Award
Nairn Access Panel	Planning Application for path upgrades	£664.00
Millbank Primary School	Cooking Programme	£1414.12

8. Nairn Common Good Fund – Invitation to Pay Parking Scheme
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Sgeama Parcaidh Cuireadh gus Pàigheadh

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

Due to the officer not being present to respond to queries, the Committee **AGREED to DEFER** the item to the next meeting.

9. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

NOTED Minutes of the Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 25 August 2025 which were approved by the Council on 18 September 2025.

The meeting concluded at 10.45am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber/Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Dingwall on Thursday, 27 November 2025 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr S Kennedy
Mrs A MacLean
Mr G MacKenzie

In attendance:

Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Ms F Shand, Principal Housing Officer - Mid Ross
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager

Also in attendance:

Mr P Young, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs M Paterson.

2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn

There had been circulated Report No DSA/22/25 together with the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report by the Local Senior Officer for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the comprehensive nature of the report. In particular, the excellent availability for the first appliance, at 99.6%, was commended;
- it was confirmed that any incident of Road Traffic Collisions which the Service attended was recorded;
- a total of 47 Home Fire Safety Visits had been carried out. It was hoped that the introduction of a new Home Fire Safety Visit system would improve

how those most at risk would be identified. As a result, there was an initial decline whilst the new system and partnership referral pathways were embedded. However, the Service continued to offer a Home Fire Safety Visit after any fire;
- four Fire Audits had taken place at commercial premises;
- the Fire Service's community work involved all ages and this was commended. In fact, Dingwall Fire Station was a community hub;
- the first aid training at Dingwall Fire Station had been well received and it was hoped that this would be repeated;
- the definition of what constituted a "deliberate" fire was sought, and provided;
- there had been concern when the Fire Service had stopped responding to fire alarms at non-residential premises but this had actually worked smoothly and had significantly reduced unnecessary call outs;
- there had been another two collisions at the junction of the A835/B9163 and there were calls from the local community for action; and
- the Committee's appreciation and continued support was extended.

The Committee, having scrutinised, **NOTED** the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report.

4. Housing Repairs Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- a significant proportion of tenants were in rent arrears but the support of Housing Services was acknowledged. However, clarification was sought, and provided, as to the measures adopted when tenants did not engage with the help offered. Eviction, Members were informed, was the last option; and
- anti-social behaviour had a significant detrimental impact on people's lives and information was sought as to how the weekly Safer Ross meetings with Police Scotland and Housing Associations were helping to address this. Anyone with concerns were invited to contact the Housing Service but it was acknowledged that many felt intimidated and were afraid of potential repercussions if they did so. It was however suggested that, on the occasions were Police were involved, this should be sufficient evidence for the Housing Service to act.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.

5. Short Term Let Control Area
Smachd air Màil Gheàrr-ùine

There is circulated Report No DSA/24/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following a presentation, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the evidence presented demonstrating the degree of prevalence of Short Term Lets within Dingwall and Seaforth;
ii. **NOTED** that this evidence, at this time, did not demonstrate that the housing market within Dingwall and Seaforth specifically, was subject to any significant pressure caused by Short Term Lets, that would warrant regulation through a Short Term Let Control Area;
iii. **AGREED** that the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee did not at this time seek to progress with the process of considering the introduction of a Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area; and
iv. **AGREED** to reconsider the evidence base regarding Short Term Lets prevalence in Dingwall and Seaforth within a further report brought to the Area Committee again at a future period, in 12 months' time.

6. Dingwall Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Pheofharain

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

The Committee **NOTED** the position of Dingwall Common Good Fund as shown in the Quarter 2 Monitoring Statements.

7. Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary budget applications approved since last meeting
Iarrtasan buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàrd Inbhir Pheofharain agus Shìophort air an aontachadh bho choinneamh mu dheireadh

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved between 1 August and 14 November 2025.

i. Killearnan Public Hall - Upgrading Public Hall, EPC Survey - £126
ii. Dingwall Academy - Supporting Families in Crisis Project - £1,000
iii. Muir of Ord Men's Shed - Planning Fees - £1,000
iv. Dingwall Academy - Purchase of Volleyball Equipment - £500
v. Conon/Maryburgh Outdoor Bowling Club - SISIS Pedestrian Auto Slitter - £500
vi. Friends of Tarradale Parent Council - Upgrade Trim Trail Equipment - £800
vii. Inverness Young Archaeologists Club - Transport Costs, Dingwall Pupils - £200

8. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 25 August 2025 which were approved by the Council on 18 September 2025.

Following on from the minutes, it was requested that at the next Area Committee, a briefing be provided on how Dingwall 800 was progressing, especially regarding some of the projects due to take place. Also, it would be of interest to know how the proposed Dingwall Hub was progressing.

The meeting ended at 11.50 am.