

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