

## **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 Saggars (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:-

- NOTED** the annual report, recognising the extensive engagement carried out across communities; and
- 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 Traftaig 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**:-

- the audit as supplied to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland; and
- 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.