

## **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) Gealltanais (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:

- NOTED** the contents of the report;
- NOTED** areas of challenge and areas of progress across service delivery; and
- 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**:

- to homologate the consultation response; and
- 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 Libhrigidh**

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 drawn 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 Care 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.