

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Redesign Board of the Highland Council** held in Committee Rooms 1 & 2, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on 20 November 2025 at 2pm.

Members present:

Ms S Atkin (sub for Mr Lobban)
Mr M Baird
Mr R Bremner
Mr A Christie
Mr D Fraser
Mr M Green
Mrs J Hendry
Ms B Jarvie

Mr R Jones
Mr G MacKenzie
Mr D Macpherson
Mr D McDonald
Mrs T Robertson
Ms L Saggars
Mr J Gibson, UNISON
Mrs C A Stewart, GMB

Non-Members present:

Dr C Birt
Mrs M Cockburn
Mr J Edmondson
Mr J Finlayson
Mr R Gale

Ms C Gillies
Ms A MacLean
Mr D McDonald
Mr D Millar
Mr P Oldham

Participating Officials:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive, Corporate
Mrs S Armstrong, Chief Officer - Revenues and Commercialisation
Mr J Shepherd, Chief Officer, Business Solutions
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer, Operations & Maintenance
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Mr R Bremner in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mr S Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr D Fraser, Mr B Lobban, Mr D Macpherson, and Mr A MacKintosh.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were none.

3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Board **NOTED** the minutes of the meeting held on 28 August 2025, which were approved by the Council on 18 September 2025.

4. Food in Schools Project Pròiseact Biadh ann an Sgoiltean

There was circulated Report No RDB/09/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- attention was drawn to the differing attitudes of children to school lunches, with some being fussier eaters, or having different appetites and needs than others. Some children might not be provided with an appropriate warm meal at home;
- information was sought and provided on why knives were not provided in school canteens;
- portion sizes were variable and some survey feedback suggested they could be too small for older children;
- full cost recovery was not achieved or aimed for. It was a subsidised service;
- some Members spoke in favour of providing healthier food, while others suggested children should be provided with food they would eat, even if that was a burger or pizza;
- feedback from a recent public health conference included the negative health impacts of eating red and processed meat. It was explained that the Council followed Scottish Government guidance on appropriate food to provide in schools;
- the need to change the culture and structure of food consumption in schools was highlighted, with suggestions to change the structure of the school day to facilitate unhurried sociable consumption of school meals. Attention was drawn to the educational pressures on the school day and timetables;
- many school eating halls were noisy, and the provision of acoustic walls to absorb sounds might be beneficial, particularly for neurodivergent children. The policy for new build schools was to create a separate, appropriate environment for eating. Attention was drawn to the vastly different sizes of school across Highland and the need to facilitate a sociable environment, and get away from the 'grab and go' approach, where pupils were provided with food to eat standing up in the playground;
- it was queried if self-service might reduce the amount of food waste, and clarification was sought and provided that when calculating food waste in schools, it was the amount of food being left on plate / tray, not the unused food that was left in the kitchen, for which a use was found;
- assurance was sought and provided that free fruit was provided in schools;
- consideration was given to the challenges of pre-ordering school meals days in advance, which was not the practice in secondary schools;
- with reference to plans to control the increasing number of deer on the hills in Highland, local-sourced venison would be a useful source of nutritious food for schools, although attention was drawn to the logistics of facilitating this. It would be helpful to know how to reduce the logistical barriers to using locally produced food, and this could be discussed with the catering team; and
- an example was provided of a school which bought a composter to make use of the food waste.
- Kingussie High School was currently trialing reusable food containers for the provision of school meals, which has been well received.

The Board **NOTED**:

- i. the progress to date;
- ii. the survey reports; and
- iii. the 10 point action plan.

5. My Council Programme Prògram na Comhairle Agam

There was circulated Report No RDB/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- it was queried whether information was gathered on calls to the Council that were abandoned, noting that these callers often tried to contact Members as a second option. It was highlighted that the introduction of improved online service provision should result in freeing up resources to deal with calls. It was also noted that the new telephony infrastructure in the Council's Service Centre, provided through the My Council Programme, now provided a lot of data which should enable better utilisation of resources to meet demands;
- support was voiced for the new website launch date in February 2026, noting the various staffing challenges if the launch date had remained just prior to the festive season;
- it was welcomed that the whole programme had stayed within budget, even when delivering multiple projects over a period spanning several years; and
- UHI students were suggested as possible testers of the new website.

The Board **NOTED** the progress update, including confirmation of the launch date for the new website on 17 February 2025.

6. Amenities Review and Roads Improvement Project 2 Pròiseact Ath-sgrùdadh Ghoireasan agus Leasachadh Rathaidean 2

There was circulated Report No RDB/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- it was disappointing that the Working Groups were not meeting as frequently as would be preferred, with particular reference made to a Trades Framework Agreement Working Group, which had not met for two years;
- the following recommendation was welcomed: 'to seek to maximise the number of local arrangements with clubs and voluntary groups to devolve maintenance of these areas to participants and residents';
- information was sought and provided on temporary road traffic order legislation, and it was queried whether there were more up to date laws in this regard. Attention was drawn to supplementary guidance that was provided;
- clarity was sought and provided on rural road verges and tree management responsibilities. It was pointed out that in the report verge control in rural areas was not mentioned, and reference was made to accident hot spots, verges near junctions, signage that required cleaning, and trees overhanging verges and signs. Landowner versus roads authority responsibility for verges was queried, and attention was drawn to the need to maintain verges for safety, including fire hazards, the latter point requiring coordination with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Attention was drawn to concerns about

verge maintenance in Badenoch and Strathspey. It was explained that the verge maintenance budget was prioritised by safety issues;

- the feasibility of obtaining a tree asset itinerary was queried, and attention was drawn to a recently purchased 'Ezytreev' app, which would be populated with tree data;
- the implications of the possible 6-day working week for seasonal employees was queried and would require further discussion, and the importance of employing people on a permanent basis whenever possible was emphasised; and
- it was hoped that in relation to job card digitisation, information would be sought not only from other local authorities, but from other public organisations such as Bear Scotland;

The Board **NOTED**:

- i. the report received from the Association of Public Service Excellence consultant on proposed future operating model for Amenities grounds maintenance service as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. the updates on the Roads Redesign project.

Closing remarks

Before closing the meeting, the Chair made the following requests, which were **NOTED** by the Board:

- i. a Gantt chart, or similar, be produced to include the timelines for each of Redesign Board projects and subgroups, and that this be discussed offline. The work of the Redesign Board was of interest to many Members, not only Members of the Board, and it would be helpful for them to see what progress was being made;
- ii. many of the Redesign Board projects had local elements that might be of interest to Area Committees, and local considerations might require to be taken into account as part of the Redesign process; and
- iii. it would be helpful if all the subgroups could have held their first meeting before Christmas 2025. It was important that they met regularly.

The meeting ended at 3.15pm.