

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee** held **remotely** on Monday 26 January 2026, at 10.00 am.

Present:

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

Participating Officials:

Mr P Tomalin, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms C MacIver, Community Development Manager
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Ms A Jansson, AQIM (Dingwall Fortrose Invergordon)
Ms I Sinclair, AQIM (Dornoch Tain Ainess), Education Service
Mr I Moncrieff, Area Roads Operations Manager
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead - Housing & Cust Services
Mr L Marchi, Housing Investment Officer
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in Attendance:

Chief Inspector David McAlpine, Area Commander, Police Scotland (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

There were none.

3. Police – Area Performance Report Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadas Sgìreil

There was circulated Report No BIER/01/26 by the Area Commander (North Highland Area Command).

During discussion, the following issues were raised and responded to:

- the male to female ratio of the perpetrators of sexual offences, and the work being undertaken to tackle the increasing numbers of offences, noting that

some were historic or multiple cases involving the same people, and the reasons for the increases in cruel and unnatural treatment of children as well as the reasons for the choice of terminology. Reference was made to a charity that provided support for victims of historic abuse;

- the reducing number of care experienced children going missing was welcomed, noting that the numbers reported were incidents rather than the number of people;
- concern was expressed at the upsurge in telephone fraud, sometimes using AI, and a summary was provided of being undertaken to tackle this. Mrs Ross requested that Police attend a session to talk to elderly people and this could be further considered outwith the meeting;
- prevention and intervention work in relation to illegal drugs was summarised, including work with schools and with the assistance of third sector partners. Clarification was sought that the public were encouraged to report anti-social or suspected criminal behaviour, with particular reference to drug use, to the police, to provide a body of evidence to facilitate action;
- information was sought on the types of illegal drugs being abused, on the process between arrest and court appearances, and on work to tackle repeat shoplifting;
- in relation to knife crime and county lines issues, information was sought on preventative work, and further detail could be provided outwith the meeting in relation to work with youth clubs;
- the importance of providing support to people who were the victims of house burglaries was emphasised;
- clarity was sought and provided on the road traffic accident fatalities that had occurred;
- it was queried whether the issuing of a stop notice was counted in the reported statistics, with particular reference to wildlife issues. Further information on this could be provided outwith the meeting; and
- information was sought and provided on the minimum number of police officers on duty at each station at any time.

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 – 31 December 2025.

4. Common Good Funds Maoin Maith Choitchinn

a. Cromarty Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Chromba

There was circulated Report No BIER/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, it was confirmed that staff costs had risen in relation to work undertaken for the consultation. There was currently no rental income but discussions were underway with a community group.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the CCGF Statement of Accounts within Appendix 1 for 2024/25, subject to the approval of the 2024/25 Highland Council accounts;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the CCGF as shown in the 2025/26 Q3 monitoring statement at Appendix 2; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 3.

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

There was circulated Report No BIER/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, information was requested on the current status with regard to Rosemarkie Campsite.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the FRCGF Statement of Accounts within Appendix 1 for 2024/25, subject to the approval of the 2024/25 Highland Council accounts;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the FRCGF as shown in the 2025/26 Q3 monitoring statement at Appendix 2; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 3;
- iv. **AGREED** to delegate to the Community Support and Engagement Team power to approve expenditure up to £10,000 in relation to FRCGF within the annually set budget and following consultation with relevant Ward Members. This delegated power will be reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process; and
- v. **AGREED** information be provided to Members following the meeting on the current status with regard to Rosemarkie Campsite.

**c. Invergordon Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There was circulated Report No BIER/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, an update on the Bouchardon Bust was sought and provided. Although a press release had been issued about its sale, Members asked that any institutions that had expressed an interest in purchasing it be contacted to inform them of the 3-month timescale. Members also asked that information be provided outwith the meeting on whether staff costs were subject to a multiplier, and on the options should the Bust fail to find a purchaser.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the Invergordon Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts as set out in Appendix 1 and Q4 monitoring report for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 2;

- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Invergordon Common Good Fund as shown in the 2025/26 Q3 monitoring statement as set out in Appendix 3;
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 4;
- iv. **AGREED** that any institutions that had expressed an interest in purchasing the Bouchardon Bust be informed of the timescales for its purchase; and
- v. **AGREED** to provide information to Members outwith the meeting on whether the CGF staff costs were subject to a multiplier, and on other options for the Bouchardon Bust if an export licence was refused.

**d. Tain Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There was circulated Report No BIER/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In section 6 of the report, reference to Appendix 3 should be to Appendix 4.

During discussion, it was clarified that there was match funding for the £10k to support the Tain Initiative Group's establishment of a Development Officer resource to assist with the ongoing work to deliver a new leisure centre and swimming pool for the town. Reference was made to the development officer's intended focus on the track and to the importance of getting started with the project.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the Tain Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts as set out in Appendix 2 and Q4 monitoring report for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 3;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Tain Common Good Fund as shown in the 2025/26 Q3 monitoring statement as set out in Appendix 4; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 5.

**5. Education Attainment Reports
Aithisgean Buileachadh Foghlaim**

In relation to all four Education Attainment reports, the Committee **AGREED** that ward level briefings be held with Members and relevant Headteachers.

**a. Invergordon Academy Associated School Group Overview
Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Acadamaidh Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There was circulated Report No. BIER/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive, People Cluster.

During discussion, information was sought and provided on the following issues, and would be further considered at a ward-level briefing to which Head teachers would be invited:

- interventions that were having the most significant impact on pupils affected by poverty;
- how transition from primary to secondary was managed in light of the attainment gaps;
- what additional support was provided to ASN and care-experienced pupils;
- which inspections had taken place since April 2024;
- exclusion and attainment rate concerns;
- the theory behind the virtual comparator; and
- in relation to destinations, (section 9.6.2 of the report), the percentage of pupils unemployed and not seeking work.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

b. Fortrose Academy Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Acadamaidh na Cananaich

There was circulated Report No. BIER/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive People Cluster.

During discussion, information was sought and provided on the following issues, and would be further considered at a ward-level briefing to which Head teachers would be invited:

- the extent to which good practice in relation to attainment was shared with other schools, and the role of teacher development days in this;
- despite good results it was important not to be complacent, and falling school rolls, and ELC quality improvement issues, were highlighted as areas that would benefit from further consideration;
- in relation to the banding of percentages, actual figures would be more helpful;
- ASG figures, without identifying the smaller schools, would be useful;
- the latest secondary attainment figures would be helpful for the next committee;
- the virtual comparator was a useful tool; and
- assurance was sought in relation to the level of support provided to cluster Headteachers.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

c. Alness Academy Associated School Group Overview Aithisg Bhuileachaidh – Alanais

There was circulated Report No. BIER/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive People Cluster.

During discussion, the encouraging primary school attainment was welcomed and should be encouraged. The monitoring of smaller schools was queried, noting that, for example, one pupil being absent for a significant amount of time could have a big impact on the figures, which could not be reported for reasons of confidentiality. The functioning of the quality improvement team was summarised, as well as the standards and quality monitoring mechanisms.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

d. Tain Royal Academy Associated School Group Overview Aithisg Bhuileachaidh – Baile Dhubhthaich

There was circulated Report No. BIER/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive People Cluster.

During discussion, measures put in place to improve attendance were welcomed and the level of support offered to cluster Headteachers was queried and explained.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

6. Area Roads Capital Programme Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre

There was circulated Report No. BIER/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the Area budget approval process, through the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, and estimated amounts, was summarised, as were the project and road prioritisation process throughout the year;
- further information was sought outwith the meeting on where the ‘red line’ in the programme would be (the line dividing which projects that were likely to be undertaken and which were not), road prioritisation issues for wards 6, 7 and 9, and the need for a second Members’ demonstration of the new thermal repair system;
- Ms MacCallum asked for further information on Cocked Hat Wood, Culbokie and
- Mr Edmondson asked for further information on roads inspections; and
- it was queried whether the annual roads budget was sufficient to keep up with the maintenance and repairs required.

The Committee:

- APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2, which will be a multi-year programme;
- NOTED** that the Area budget will be available after the February 2026 Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee;
- NOTED** that the rolling programme may require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey have been received and considered;
- AGREED** the Roads Operations Manager provide Members with confirmation of where the ‘red line’ in the programme would be (the line dividing which projects that were likely to be undertaken and which were not), after the Council’s budget had been approved in February 2026;
- AGREED** to consider road prioritisation issues for wards 6, 7 and 9 at ward business meetings;

- vi. **AGREED** consideration be given to a second Members' demonstration of the new thermal repair system;
- vii. **AGREED** the Roads Operations Manager inform Ms MacCallum by email of the issues raised with regard to Cocked Hat Wood; and
- viii. **AGREED** the Roads Operations Manager discuss roads inspections with Mr Edmondson outwith the meeting.

7. Housing Repairs and Capital Report Càraidhean Thaighean

There was circulated Report No. BIER/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- information was sought and provided on why re-let times were increasing, which included internal and contractor availability and that one property could take a significantly longer period of time and affect the averages. It was asked that consideration be given to the loss of rental and council tax income from unoccupied properties being possibly greater than the cost of expediting repairs by using sub-contractors. This would be further considered at ward business meetings and Ms Atkin offered to raise the matter with senior Housing Service managers;
- assurance was sought and provided on the correct installation of appropriate cladding. Any specific concerns could be informed outwith the meeting; and
- concerns was expressed at the perceived inequality when some houses on an estate were upgraded and others were not. This was generally due to funding restrictions and programme prioritisation. Funding application information could be provided outwith the meeting, and it was hoped there were shovel-ready projects for any funding applications that were successful.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 31 December 2025.

8. Housing Revenue Account – Garage Rents Màil Gharaidsean Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais

There was circulated Report No. BIER/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

It was highlighted that reference in the report to ward 11 should be to ward 9.

During discussion, concern was raised at the high number of voids and the relatively small sizes of the garages compared to modern vehicles. It was suggested that it might be more beneficial to remove the void garages and use the land for parking or for housing. 10% was considered too high a rise, with some Members speaking in favour of 8%, or 9% rise. Others pointed out that this was significantly higher than inflation and suggested 5%. Housing officers confirmed that while a 5% rise was competent, it would reduce the garage

repairs and maintenance budget and any significant emergency repair might require funds from other budgets.

Mr J Edmondson, seconded by Mrs M Ross, **moved** to defer consideration of the item to the next meeting of the committee and to hold a briefing for Members on the issues raised during discussion in the meantime.

Ms L Johnston, seconded by Ms M MacCallum, moved as an amendment, not to the defer the decision.

On a vote being taken, the motion received 5 votes and the amendment received 4 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Ms C Ramsay, Mrs M Ross,

For the amendment: Ms T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Ms L Johnston, Ms M MacCallum

The Committee **AGREED** to:

- i. **DEFER** a decision on a level of rent increase to apply to Black Isle and Easter Ross Garages to the next meeting of the Committee; and
- ii. to provide a briefing to a ward business meeting on the garage rent issues raised during discussion.

9. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

There was circulated and **NOTED**, details of the Discretionary Budget applications that have been approved from 1st April 2025 – 31st December 2025.

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** minutes of the meeting of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee held on 10 November 2025, which were approved by the Council on 11 December 2025.

The meeting ended at 2pm.