

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, 4 February 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:

Dr C Birt

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

Mr A MacKintosh

Mrs K MacLean

Mrs M Paterson

Ms C Ramsay

Mrs M Reid

Ms T Robertson (substitute for Mr Gunn)

Ms M Ross

Non-Members present:

Ms S Atkin

Mr A Christie

Mr J Finlayson

Ms C Gillies

Mr K Gowans

Dr M Gregson

Ms M Hutchison

Mr B Lobban

Ms M MacCallum

Mrs A MacLean

Mr T MacLennan

Mr P Oldham

Mr R Stewart

NHS Highland representatives:

Ms J Davies, Director of Public Health

Ms L Bussell, Director of Nursing

Ms A Johnstone, 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

Mr E Williamson, Principal Mental Health Officer

Ms M Cano, Principal Officer, Justice Social Work Service

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

**1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr R Gunn.

**2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

**3. Service Achievements
Coileanaidhean Seirbheis**

An update was circulated on the following issues:

- Third Sector Service Achievement: Hubs United Group (HUG) (Unregistered Social Care Preventative Services) - the Health and Wellbeing Hubs in Sutherland and Dunbeath came together in 2023 to form the Hubs United Group with the aim of working together for both organisational and community benefit;
- Highland Well-Ness Collective had successfully delivered Phase One of the Highland Sober Collective;
- CareFirst Replacement - the service had carried out a procurement exercise to select a supplier to replace the current Health and Social Care Case Management System;
- Fiona Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer, Health and Social Care, had been elected as Convener of Social Work Scotland, the professional leadership body for the social work and social care professions;
- Ms Pamela Ann Clark (OBE), and Dr Timothy Allison (MBE) had been recognised in the New Year's Honours List: and
- Local nurse, Amy Prentice, had been nominated as Healthcare Hero of the Year in the Highland Heros 2026 awards.

The Committee **NOTED** the updates.

**4. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report Q3
Slàinte is Cùram Sòisealta**

There was circulated Report No HCW/01/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- information was sought and provided on the reporting of the baseline figures for implementation of the Mosaic Case Management system through revenue monitoring budget and corporate budgets;
- information was sought and provided on the possible scope for the consideration of historic decisions on kinship care, to allow people to access to kinship payments. Improving parity between the financial input for formal and informal kinship care arrangement was being reviewed;

- it was queried whether reference in the report at paragraph 5.4 to Self Directed Support (SDS) options which contributed to the budget challenge was for children or adults, and whether monthly scrutiny of smaller SDS payments should be undertaken quarterly instead;
- the progress in relation to the provision of short breaks, as detailed in paragraph 5.4 of the report, was welcomed;
- concern was expressed that six more out-of-area placements had been made and information about them was sought and provided, noting that the details of the placements were confidential. Work was underway to improve infrastructure and staffing to allow more children to stay within Highland, although medical and security needs could require specialist care that was not available in Highland. The importance of considering the needs of the child rather than the financial costs was reiterated, and information was provided on the average cost of out-of-area placements, which depended on the needs of the individual, and could vary considerably. Attention was drawn to the Council's role as corporate parents and it was queried whether the Scottish Government was informed of the situation and the need for additional budget for this, as well as for Adult Social Care across Highland. A brief summary of the data provided regularly to the Scottish Government was provided;
- further detail on the NHS Adult Social Care financial situation was sought and would be provided outwith the meeting;
- concern was expressed that the provision of Adult Social Care might deteriorate due to the saving requirements and the need for additional staffing. A simple table was suggested for future meetings summarising the current position with regard to issues such as workforce, delayed discharges, staffing requirements, waiting times for key services, care at home and care home challenges. It was necessary to properly understand the current situation to establish what measures required to be taken. Attention was drawn to the Adult Social Care assurance report that was presented to every second meeting;
- assurance was sought and provided that adult mental health services would not be targeted by budget pressures, and information was provided on external and internal scrutiny of those services;
- concerns were voiced at the overall financial position and cost of social care to Council and the tax payer, with particular reference to the high cost of out-of-area placements, which were not in the best interests of the child, and also to the NHS Highland overspend in relation to Adult Social Care. Attention was drawn to the overall budget situation which was considered elsewhere and at full Council, and it was re-iterated that finances should not be the main driver when allocating care services. Out-of-area placements were undertaken on a case by case basis, focused on the individual's needs;
- it was queried whether recruitment issues were a significant cause of many of the pressures in primary mental health, and what mechanisms could be employed to prevent future issues. This information could be provided outwith the meeting as some of the figures came from NHS Highland; and
- the challenges inherent in shifting the balance of care were summarised, with attention drawn to the plans that had been put in place to put the care of people first and foremost.

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; and
- iv. **NOTED** the numbers of children accommodated by the Council and the nature of those placements in terms of the delivery of the recovery plan.

5. Highland Domestic Abuse Update (HDAS) Cunntas Droch-dhiol san Dachaigh na Gàidhealtachd

There was circulated Report No HCW/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the importance of the professional review to ensure the right services were delivered for all victims was emphasised;
- Mrs T Robertson proposed additional recommendations which, following a brief adjournment to consider their competency, were unanimously accepted, and were detailed in the decision below (points v. to ix.);
- key concerns highlighted included the importance of HDAS working with the providers of support, and that future services were shaped by the needs of survivors and not by procurement requirements, with equal levels of support in urban and rural areas, and with a model which provided continuity, specialist expertise, and stability of care home provision;
- the reassurance that refuge services would be protected was welcomed, as was the issue being brought back to committee later in the year. Gratitude was expressed to those providing services which protected women and children;
- it was concerning that some police reports suggested an increase in the figures for sexual violence and that provision of support was not a statutory duty of the Council, albeit one that was taken seriously. Assurance was sought that the procurement process was not being undertaken to reduce funding or support for victims, and reference was made to the Council's trauma-informed approach;
- the excellent work undertaken by third sector partners in this area was acknowledged and praised;
- the importance of a clear audit trail of support for victims of domestic abuse was emphasised, and attention was drawn to the need to manage risks associated with new contracts and monitor early warning signs to ensure there were no gaps in planning and support;
- attention was drawn to the need to support male and same sex victims of domestic abuse, and it was clarified that services for men did not impact the budget for women's services. The process for support services for men was summarised;
- attention was drawn to the value of the services provided by Women's Aid and the essential nature of core funding provision. It was highlighted that Ross-shire Women's Aid had received a significant funding cut in 2024, and

the need for the additional recommendations, as detailed below, was reiterated;

- an explanation was sought and provided for the delay to the last remaining contract award for the South area, which would be verbally updated to Committee; and
- Members were reminded there would be a Members' workshop on 6 March 2026 and questions in advance of the workshop would be welcomed.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** progress on HDAS procurement, including awarded outreach contracts in North, Mid and West Highland commencing 1 April 2026, and the planned further procurement for South Highland;
- ii. **NOTED** a verbal update on the last remaining contract award for the Inverness area would be provided to Committee;
- iii. **AGREED** the approach and timeline for the Council's review of commissioned contracts, noting continuity arrangements in place throughout the review period;
- iv. **AGREED** to support the continuation of Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference funding arrangements while the review of the most effective delivery model was completed;
- v. **AGREED** to receive a further report prior to September 2026 setting out the outcomes of the refuge review, the proposed future funding model, and assurance on continuity of women-only refuge provision;
- vi. **NOTED** the current procurement position for South Highland and requests that officers bring forward contingency arrangements for Member assurance should procurement not conclude within the anticipated timescale;
- vii. subject to the agreement of providers, **AGREED** future performance reports on HDAS including outcome measures on survivor safety, access for rural communities, and support for children affected by domestic abuse be brought to Committee;
- viii. **AGREED** MARAC funding would continue until a successor delivery model was agreed by the Multi Agency Partners; and
- ix. **AGREED** to request a summary of provider and survivor engagement undertaken as part of the commissioning review be included in the final report to Committee.

6. **Highland Mental Health Officer (MHO) Service - Future Planning Report** **Seirbheis Oifigeair Slàinte Inntinn na Gàidhealtachd – Aithisg Planaidh Teachdail**

There was circulated Report No HCW/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- it was queried whether there were opportunities to assist the support workers through their training programmes, similar to a Scottish Government funded pilot being run in Edinburgh, and this information could be provided outwith the meeting;

- the improved understanding of the role of the MHOs was welcomed, with particular reference to their role dealing with legislation;
- information was sought and provided on the number of current MHOs in Highland, which was around 24 Full-Time Equivalents;
- with reference to 70% of guardianship orders being private, and 1% indefinite, the process for an indefinite guardianship order was queried and explained, noting that 50% were 4-5 years in length;
- in relation to place of safety orders, the relatively large number in Highland compared to Glasgow was queried, and it was thought this related to differences in recording processes;
- the increase in emergency detention orders was queried and explained, which included cost of living crisis and reduced mental health funding and hospital beds. It was also queried whether the increase was the result of neurodiversity being mistaken for other mental health conditions;
- the mix of social workers and psychiatric nursing staff was queried, and the benefits of co-location highlighted, as well as differing practices in England versus Scotland;
- the impact of increasing numbers of people suffering from dementia as a result of the ageing population was queried, and the importance of the support provided by the third sector was summarised. It was suggested that Age Scotland or Alzheimer Scotland be invited to attend a meeting and the Chair suggested they could have a display / table in the foyer at a future meeting;
- the importance of funding early intervention and prevention measures, and reducing waiting lists to avoid people experiencing a mental health crisis, were highlighted;
- concern was expressed at the increasing numbers of younger people, including those under 18, experiencing mental health issues;
- attention was drawn to projects in the Seaboard area for older people to receive advice from a solicitor on power of attorney. The high costs of implementing power of attorney was often a barrier to uptake, and it was queried whether funding should be put in place to assist with this, noting the number of people being delayed in hospital due to power of attorney not being in place; and
- the timescales for the implementation of a guardianship order was queried and explained.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report and the analysis of local and national workforce planning indicators in relation to the capacity and performance of the service.

7. Justice Service Highland Council Update Cunntas mu Sheirbheis Ceartais Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

There was circulated Report No HCW/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the success of the work was welcomed, with particular mention of the value of the open days and the work of the community payback team. A summary was provided of forthcoming open days around the Highlands;

- it was hoped the Scottish Government would increase funding to the service;
- the geographical challenges for the community payback team were highlighted, and their work praised. The use of community transport schemes for the community payback teams was suggested;
- restorative justice and the fire skills programme were highlighted as especially beneficial;
- the increasing numbers of registered sex offenders was concerning, and could in part be due to increasing detection and disclosure rates due to changing culture. Attention was drawn to the reported demographic of offenders; and
- attention was drawn to the Scottish Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission report on justice that was due to be published on 6 February 2026, and which would be studied for issues relevant to Highland.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

**8. Delivery Plan – Person Centred Solutions Q3 2025-2026
Plana Lìbhrigidh – Fuasglaidhean Stèidhichte air an Neach R3 2025–2026**

There was circulated Report No HCW/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- it was requested that future reports contain a key to all acronyms and abbreviations;
- information was sought and provided on the digital project, Vocala, which aimed to support home living and reduce the number of home visits required. A pilot was underway and an update would be provided to a future committee;
- clarification was sought and provided on the new contracts that had been issued Highland-wide for the Handyperson scheme;
- with reference to the need for, and cost of, additional infrastructure and staff in Highland to assist the Home in Highland project, attention was drawn to the role of the Highland Investment Plan and to issues covered earlier on the agenda;
- the improved provision of short term respite at the Orchard was welcomed and the compassionate care provided there was praised; and
- the provision of respite care for older people was queried, as was the length of the waiting list for assessment for people with additional needs. This would be included in the regular Adult Social Care update at the next meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Delivery Plan Project updates provided in the report.

**9. Performance Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report Q3 2025-2026
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Ràitheil R3 2025–2026**

There was circulated Report No HCW/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- an explanation was sought and provided on the drop in foster carer approvals, and the work that was ongoing on foster carer recruitment, as well as work that was ongoing to improve the level of support provided to kinship carers, especially those on an informal basis. It was hoped that recent improvements in England would be replicated in Scotland; and
- information on the length of the waiting lists for the assessment of people with disabilities was queried and would be provided to the Committee outwith the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. performance information for the Health & Social Care Service;
- ii. change to absence reporting to align with Chief Officer structure,
- iii. changes to presentation of the Health & Social Care Service data in sections 6-8 of the report in order to more clearly show alignment between Performance Indicators and Performance Plan commitments, and
- iv. inclusion of SPI's out with the Performance Plan to further support transparency and scrutiny of performance reporting.

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes were circulated and **NOTED**:-

- i. Highland Council / NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee held on 25 September 2025; and
- ii. Child Protection Committee held on 21 August 2025.

The meeting ended at 12.30pm.