

**The Highland Council
No. 12 2025/26**

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 11 December 2025 at 9.35am.

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

Present:

Mrs S Atkin	Ms L Johnston
Mr C Ballance	Mr R Jones
Mr A Baxter (Remote)	Mr S Kennedy (Remote)
Dr C Birt	Ms E Knox
Mr B Boyd (Remote)	Ms L Kraft
Mr R Bremner	Mr B Lobban
Mr I Brown	Mr P Logue
Mr J Bruce	Ms M MacCallum (Remote)
Mr M Cameron	Mr W MacKay (Remote)
Mr S Cameron	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (Remote)	Mr S Mackie
Mr A Christie	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr S Coghill	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs T Collier	Ms K MacLean (Remote)
Mrs H Crawford	Mr T MacLennan
Mr R Cross	Mr D Macpherson
Ms L Dundas	Mr D McDonald
Mr J Edmondson (Remote)	Mrs J McEwan
Mr J Finlayson	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Mr D Fraser	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr L Fraser	Ms L Niven
Mr R Gale	Mr P Oldham
Ms C Gillies	Mrs M Paterson
Mr K Gowans	Ms C Ramsay
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Reid
Mr A Graham	Mr M Reiss
Mr M Green	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Gregg	Mr K Rosie
Dr M Gregson	Mrs M Ross
Mr R Gunn (Remote)	Mrs L Saggars
Mrs J Hendry	Mr A Sinclair
Ms M Hutchison	Mr R Stewart
Mr A Jarvie	Ms K Willis
Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)	

In Attendance:

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive - People
Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Chief Officer - Housing and Communities
Chief Officer - Revenues & Commercialisation
Joint Democratic Services Manager

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr M Baird and Mr H Morrison.

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, Mr A Graham paid tribute to former Councillor Kenneth MacLeod who had recently sadly passed away. His hard work and dedication over decades was recognised as was his contribution. In this regard, the condolences of the Council were conveyed to his family and friends.

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

The Council **NOTED** the following Declaration of Interest:-

Item 16 – Mr McGillivray

And the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 3 – Ms S Atkin, Mr C Ballance, Mrs H Crawford and Mr K Gowans

Item 5 – Mr D Gregg

Item 7 – Mr K Gowans and Mr S Mackie

Item 8 - Mr K Gowans and Mr M Green

Item 18 (Motion 4) – Mrs A MacLean and Mrs J McEwan

Item 18 (Motion 6) – Mr M Gregg and Mr A Jarvie

**3. Notice of Amendment
Brath Athararachaidh**

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Ms S Atkin – as a member of the Commission on School Reform

Mr C Ballance – as a parent of a child in Secondary School in Highland

Mrs H Crawford - as a family member on a temporarily placement in a school in the Highland Council area

Mr K Gowans - as a parent of a child in Secondary School in Highland

There had been circulated, in the Volume of Minutes, Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee on 19 November 2025.

With reference to these Minutes, the following Notice of Amendment had been received in accordance with Standing Order 14:

“We the undersigned, being Elected Members of the Highland Council, hereby refer to Council Item 7, Education Improvement Plan and Raising Attainment and Achievement Update, of the Education Committee on 19 November 2025 to Council.”

Signed: Mr A Christie	Mr R Gale	Mr R Stewart	Mrs H Crawford
Mr A Baxter	Ms C Ramsay	Dr M Gregson	Mr R Cross

In this connection, there had been re-circulated Report No EDU/31/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair of the Education Committee expressed surprise that the Notice of Amendment had been lodged given that, during the in-depth discussions that had taken place at the Committee on 19 November, neither he nor officers had received any direct questions regarding the Education Improvement Plan, and Members had appeared to appreciate that education was about supporting schools and young people, seeking to improve attainment and achievement, preparing pupils for the world of work, and planning strategically for the future. Many Members of the Education Committee had asked for a plan that set out an improvement agenda, looked at data from schools to focus improvement on, took account of advice from Education Scotland and other local authorities, involved dialogue with schools and school leaders and had input from Members. All these asks, as well as the constructive ideas generated at the Members’ Seminar that had taken place, had been included in the Plan and, given the detail provided by officers beforehand, he had assumed final approval would take place at the Education Committee.

As discussed at the Committee, it was recognised it was necessary to continue the journey of improvement in terms of attainment. To do so, a clear plan was needed, and the Education Improvement Plan clearly articulated the themes that would support an improvement in attainment, achievement and other outcomes for young people, namely, Leadership; Learning and Teaching; Curriculum; Data Analysis for Improvement; Health and Wellbeing; Parental Involvement and Engagement; and Additional Support for Learning/Inclusive Practice. The Plan also supported other requests from Committee Members, including identifying improvement outcomes and outlining planned action to achieve them, evaluation of achievement of outcomes, and the relationship between the improvement outcomes and the National Improvement Framework. The Plan was a pathway to raising attainment that had been created in partnership with all stakeholders, and he asked Members to support and endorse the work of the Education Committee by agreeing the decision of the Committee on 19 November. Whilst further improvement in attainment was needed, many schools in Highland were attaining well above the national figures, and information in that regard would be reported to Area Committees in the new year, when Education officers and Head Teachers would be in attendance. In concluding, he referred to the attainment data for the current year and cited several areas where improvements had been made.

Mr A Christie then spoke to his proposed amendment, the aim of which was to support the Education Improvement Plan to succeed. Attainment progress was not where Members wanted it to be. Highland was not improving at a rate that was keeping up with the virtual comparator or national benchmark, and that was clearly evidenced in the report. In particular, attention was drawn to the tables on pages 35, 36, 39 and 40 of the report and the bullet points at section 6.2.3. Whilst Highland might have improved by 1%, for example, the virtual comparator and national

benchmark had often improved at a higher rate, meaning the attainment gap was worsening. The Chair of the Education Committee had repeatedly stated that all Members could attend the Education Committee to discuss attainment but, given the importance of children and their attainment to the future of the Highlands, and that other key matters such as the Highland Housing Challenge, adult social care and inward investment were discussed at Full Council, it was questioned why the Administration did not want to discuss attainment at Full Council. There were excellent teachers in Highland schools, and the amendment aimed to put infrastructure around them and allow specialist led subject teachers to take forward the curriculum and ensure the best tools and practice were available to teachers. It was highlighted that, since 2022, there had been 60 school inspections in Highland that had assessed leadership of change; learning, teaching and assessment; raising attainment and achievement; and ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion. Of the schools inspected, 39% had been rated “good” for raising attainment and achievement compared to 68% of schools in the rest of Scotland. The gap in respect of the other inspection indicators was similar. This showed that the investment set out in the amendment, which would be drawn from a reserve that had not been spent by the Administration, was needed. The proposed 17-month project would benefit teachers and pupils and improve attainment, and Members were urged to support it.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Education Improvement Plan set out a clear, data-driven approach to improving outcomes, with measurable targets, leadership development and a strong focus on supporting teachers and learners. The achievements in literacy and numeracy demonstrated that progress was being made under the current strategy, and schools now needed stability, not sudden policy shifts. The right place to design and costs interventions was the Education Committee, informed by officers and impact assessments, and to bring forward a budget proposal as set out in Mr Christie’s amendment risked undermining the purpose of the Council’s committee structure;
- it was necessary to take a holistic view of the report. Whilst there were challenges, there were a lot of positive trends in the early years and in the combined primary literacy and numeracy ACEL (A Curriculum for Excellence) data. In addition, the employability report which had been presented to the Education Committee showed that Highland was at the forefront nationally in terms of positive destinations;
- it was highlighted that eight Area Quality Improvement Managers were now in place and a Raising Attainment Headteacher Reference Group had been established;
- the proposed amendment by Mr Christie did not refer to the Education Improvement Plan, and it was questioned whether a short-term investment of £1.7m with no evidence framework was going to make a difference;
- Members were urged to read the Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy (RAAS) if they had not already done so, and to attend the Members’ workshops that took place;
- education was the engine of social mobility and when it failed the life chances of children and families were adversely affected. Despite assurances that improvement was coming, attainment in Highland had remained unacceptably poor for many years and, where progress had been made, the rate of improvement had not kept pace with the national position. Strong communities were built around strong schools, and families could not thrive if the education system charged with supporting their children continued to underperform.

Concern was expressed that the Education Committee was not delivering the improvement required, and that there was a lack of scrutiny, openness and accountability, with non-Members of the Committee being denied the right to contribute to the debate. It was therefore intended to move a second amendment proposing that the Education Committee be placed into special measures for no fewer than six months, and that all substantive education reports be brought directly to Full Council so every Member could share in the duty of restoring excellence to education in Highland;

- the Education Service continued to engage with employers through the Workforce North partnership, with the focus being to support co-investment in talent attraction, skill development and retention to create long-term opportunities for communities across the Highlands. As part of this work, the service had recently held an employer engagement event, attended by over 80 employers, to support closer working with schools to ensure the curriculum was developing in line with the needs of the local economy;
- Members questioned the significance of positive destination statistics. The figure of 96.5% that had been presented to the Education Committee, when broken down further, showed that in 2023/24 only 32% of Highland school leavers had gone on to university compared to a national average of 40% and 65% in East Dunbartonshire Council. However, other Members commented that to say all young people should go to university was not the right approach, and it was necessary to ensure the long-term vitality of communities in Highland by developing informed, well-rounded young people and supporting them, and their families, in whatever they wanted to do;
- the response to previous calls to be paired with a top-performing local authority had been that the Council already worked with other local authorities. However, the Council was not paired with the highest performing local authorities, currently East Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire Councils, and it was questioned why such an obvious and practical step to learn and improve had not been taken;
- concern was expressed that the proposed amendment by Mr Christie would move 10 full-time teachers of core subjects out of their teaching positions and into quasi-managerial positions, and that supply teachers would then have to plug the gap for pupils in their crucial exam years. This had already happened to an extent with the introduction of Area Quality Improvement Managers, and another layer of management was not needed;
- in education, as with healthcare, early intervention and prevention were the key to better outcomes. It was extremely difficult for a child to take advantage of secondary schooling if they were behind academically and ill-prepared in terms of resilience and confidence, and the early intervention aspects of the Education Improvement Plan were welcomed. In particular, reference was made to the intention to track and address literacy difficulties on a whole school basis from as early as P1. Similarly, if a child was disengaging in S1 it would be addressed at an early stage;
- what worked should prevail and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that evidenced interventions, such as the Caol Primary School case study set out in the Education Improvement Plan, would be replicated in other schools of similar types;
- the new service structure and the RAAS should enable greater collaboration to take place, and it was necessary to give them time to take effect;
- what happened in classrooms was what delivered results, and school leaders and teachers also needed to get behind the RAAS and the Education Improvement Plan;

- support was expressed for the amendment by Mr Christie, which it was suggested was complementary to the RAAS. There was a need for practical improvement on the ground and, contrary to earlier comments, the proposed 10 subject leads would not be managers but subject advisers/supporters. There was a lot of evidence, from S3 upwards, that attainment could be improved, and the proposed short-term project could be fruitful in terms of improving attainment at subject level;
- contrary to earlier comments, it was stated that there were productive discussions at the Education Committee and non-Members generally got the opportunity to contribute. However, there were some issues that merited regular discussion at Full Council;
- the complexity of the Education Service and the wider education landscape was highlighted;
- there were fundamental issues with the current curriculum, and it was suggested that a knowledge-based curriculum was the future;
- as indicated by the Chair of the Education Committee in his introduction, many schools in Highland were performing well above the national average, and they should be applauded for doing so, but that suggested others were performing well below the national average. It was necessary to look at what could be done to help those that were not performing well, and the proposed amendment by Mr Christie went some way towards that;
- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons one third of probationer teachers in Highland at both primary and secondary level had not stayed on, and the Assistant Chief Executive – People undertook to provide further information to Mr D Gregg on the number of probationers that came to Highland, the number that stayed on and the ways in which officers worked with them to develop them in their role;
- the Education Improvement Plan stated that all schools would have a Learning and Teaching Policy in place, consistently applied by staff; all primary schools would have an agreed curriculum rationale; and all schools would use literacy and numeracy frameworks. These were fundamental aspects of education, and it was questioned why it had taken so long to implement them. Similarly, the Plan included a measure that all schools would complete their annual Attainment Template, and it was questioned why this was not already happening. In response, it was clarified that the Plan was intended to set out clear baseline expectations for all schools. It did not mean these practices were not already in place;
- the Education Improvement Plan indicated that more than 60% of primary schools would report consistent use of the Emerging Literacy approach in Early Level, and information was sought, and provided, on the rationale behind the target and why it was not 90 to 100%. Similarly, the Plan indicated that children's views would be heard and recorded in 95% of Child's Plans. It having been queried why the figure was not 100%, it was explained that not all children had the capacity to feed into their Child's Plan, and 95% was as close to 100% as was considered reasonable;
- reference was made to a case study in respect of Millburn Academy, where specific interventions had been introduced to improve attendance, and information was sought as to whether these interventions had continued to be effective or whether progress had declined. The Assistant Chief Executive – People undertook to investigate and revert to Mr D Gregg;
- it was necessary to give all children in Highland the same opportunities to enhance their future education as those in the better performing schools and areas;

- education was a key factor influencing decisions to relocate to a particular area. If the standard did not improve, it would be difficult to attract people to live and work in Highland;
- all 74 Elected Members had schools in their wards, and they had a lot of different expertise. They could not all attend the Education Committee, and support was expressed for bringing key education reports to Full Council;
- concern was expressed regarding the deliverability of the Education Improvement Plan given the number of teaching staff on long-term absence, the high retirement rate, and that the remaining teachers were overloaded. It was suggested it was necessary to consult more with teachers and bring forward ideas from all Council wards;
- Parent Council meetings allowed Local Members to hear the views of teachers, parents and pupils, and provided an understanding of what was going well and what was not;
- information was sought, and provided, on the extent to which teaching staff had been involved in shaping the Education Improvement Plan;
- the Chief Executive responded to a request for his honest opinion on the Education Service in Highland, as someone who had had a long career in education throughout Scotland, commenting that there was a relatively good system in place in Highland and there were key signs that improvements were being made. There were therefore reasonable grounds for optimism. However, there was considerable room for further improvement. In relation to school inspections in particular, the aim was to move to a position where 90 to 100% of school inspection gradings were “good”. Reference was also made to the need to continue to improve teacher judgement, and confidence in their judgement, in terms of assessment of the Broad General Education. A structured team was now in place to line-manage schools and provide oversight and, subject to the Council’s decision today, the necessary improvement plan would also be in place; and
- on the point being raised, clarification was provided regarding the acronyms in section 4.6 of the Education Improvement Plan. It was explained that the need for more plain English in education documents had been raised at the Education Committee and this would be worked on going forward.

Following summing up, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr D Millar, **MOVED** the decision of the Education Committee, held on 19 November 2025, in relation to item 7, Education Improvement Plan and Raising Attainment and Achievement Update.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Dr M Gregson, moved the following:

Budget Heading	People Cluster OLG			Ref. AC2025/1
Savings Name	Improvement Model – Subject Lead Teachers			
Current Budget (£m)		Current Staffing (FTE)		

Financial Year	Investment £m	Staff Impact FTE
2025/26	0.180	10
2026/27	1.090	
2027/28	0.420	
Total	1.690	10

Detailed Description of Proposal

It is proposed to implement a new improvement model for education based on driving up standards of delivery across the curriculum, by establishing a more structured approach to subject networks in secondary to drive up attainment and close the gap that Highland presently has with the virtual comparator and National average.

Subject Lead Teachers

This proposition would see 10 Lead Teachers being established to work as a set of subject specialists who would do the following:

1. Model best practice in learning and teaching
2. Provide training and support for teachers
3. Develop resources to be distributed across schools
4. Support schools in preparing for inspection
5. Improve uptake and attainment in services
6. Make a contribution to digital school delivery and model best practice in digital pedagogy.

The subject specialisms would be Maths, English, Chemistry, Physics and Biology

Reporting to the Chief Officer secondary, this would be a proactive way to support learners across Highland by providing more specific and subject specialist support for teachers. This model is coherent with the existing management structure for secondary.

Anticipated Costs: £1.690m over the period of 17 months

How will this be funded?

To be funded by drawing down on the reserve created on 6th March 2025 of £2M "Invest in Teacher Capacity"

Actions, Resource Implications and Timescale for Delivery

Actions: The posts would need to be defined and job sized prior to being advertised, the expenditure is profiled over 17 months.

Corporate Risk

Does this savings proposal impact on any existing risk(s) within the corporate risk register? If so, which one(s)?

NO

Are there any other risks associated with this savings proposal?

At the end of the 17 month period, the posts would cease. It is presumed that postholders would be secondments into the role and return to substantive posts thereafter.

The use of the earmarked reserve would almost wholly utilise the earmarked reserve, with the result that any costs the Council may face in future regarding Reduction in Class Contact Time (RCCT) would need be funded by Scottish Government.

Staffing:

Positive

Creating opportunities for development for our most effective practitioners and a range of support for those who are less effective.

<p>Negative</p> <p>Recruiting 10 additional main grade teachers would be challenging, especially for certain key subjects given the national shortage for certain key subject specialisms (Maths, English, STEM, Languages). However, the attraction of a secondary lead teacher position @c£83k annual salary could be sufficient to attract high calibre recruits into Highland.</p>
<p><i>The Service:</i></p>
<p>Positive</p> <p>Once implemented, there would be a likely positive impact on the running of schools and an opportunity to strengthen Highland systems and improve leadership and management of schools.</p>
<p><i>Equality Groups:</i></p>
<p>Positive</p> <p>Improved pathways for pupils would have positive impacts on groups with protected characteristics, depending on how the supporting systems are developed. All post holders would be subject to legislation and national policy.</p>
<p><i>Rural:</i></p>
<p>Positive</p> <p>Improved digital offering would have positive impacts on rural areas, depending on how the supporting systems are developed. The model can be customised to incorporate rural challenges relating to delivering curricular breadth.</p>
<p><i>Socio-economic:</i></p>
<p>Positive</p> <p>Improved leadership and management of schools would have positive impacts on the socio-economic make up of areas of the Highlands, depending on how the supporting systems are developed. These inputs would make Highland a gold standard education system within two years and accelerate our improvement journey.</p>

Area for Assessment	Assessment Summary
Equality	<p>Potential Positive and Potential Negative Impact</p> <p><i>Summary of assessment:</i> <i>The proposal has the potential to have a positive impact both on young people and children with disabilities through a focus on driving up attainment and closing the attainment gap.</i></p> <p><i>There could be a potential negative impact as the subjects listed are for specialisms that are the hardest to recruit to. There is therefore a risk that this will take subject teachers out of the classroom and the service will not be able to backfill, which could have a detrimental impact on individual pupils.</i></p>
Poverty	<p>Potential Positive Impact</p> <p><i>Summary of assessment:</i> <i>The proposal has the potential to have a positive impact on those pupils from lower income families. There is an attainment gap between pupils in the highest and lowest income households and this proposal aims to close the attainment gap through a focus in raising attainment.</i></p>
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights	<p>Potential Positive and Potential Negative Impact</p> <p><i>Summary of assessment:</i> <i>With a focus on improving attainment and closing the attainment gap, the proposal has the potential to have a positive impact on a range of children's rights including Article 3 (you are working in the best interests of the child), Article 28 (children have a right to education) and Article 29</i></p>

	<p><i>(education that develops their personality, talents and abilities to the full (Article 29)</i></p> <p><i>There could be a potential negative impact as the subjects listed are for specialisms that are the hardest to recruit to. There is therefore a risk that this will take subject teachers out of the classroom and the service will not be able to backfill, which could have a detrimental impact on individual pupils.</i></p>
Data Rights	No impact
Rural/Island	<p>No impact</p> <p><i>Summary of assessment: The proposal has the aim of benefiting pupils from across Highland therefore it is not anticipated that there would be any specific rural/island impacts.</i></p>
Climate Change	No impact

As a **SECOND AMENDMENT**, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mrs H Crawford, moved the following:

Given the continuing decline in outcomes, the lack of demonstrable progress, and the need for full accountability in matters affecting the life chances of Highland children, in order to raise attainment, Council agrees:

- i. That the Education Committee be placed into special measures for a period of no fewer than six months; and
- ii. That during this period, all substantive education reports which would ordinarily come before the Education Committee shall instead be brought to the full Highland Council for consideration and decision.

On a vote being taken between the **FIRST AMENDMENT** and the **SECOND AMENDMENT**, the **FIRST AMENDMENT** received 27 votes and the **SECOND AMENDMENT** received 6 votes, with 36 abstentions. The **FIRST AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the First Amendment:

Mr C Ballance, Mr A Baxter, Mr S Cameron, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr R Jones, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Ms C Ramsay, Mrs T Robertson, Ms K Willis.

For the Second Amendment:

Mr J Bruce, Mrs H Crawford, Mrs B Jarvie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs L Saggars, Mr R Stewart.

Abstentions:

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr

M Reiss, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross.

On a further vote being taken between the **MOTION** and the **FIRST AMENDMENT**, the **MOTION** received 38 votes and the **FIRST AMENDMENT** received 24 votes, with 7 abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Ms S Atkin, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

For the First Amendment:

Mr A Baxter, Mr S Cameron, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms M MacCallum, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Ms J McEwan, Ms C Ramsay, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr A Sinclair.

Abstentions:

Mr C Ballance, Mr J Bruce, Mrs H Crawford, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs L Sagers, Mr R Stewart.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the decision of the Education Committee, held on 19 November 2025, in relation to item 7, Education Improvement Plan and Raising Attainment and Achievement Update.

The following item was taken at 2pm.

**4. Highland Poverty and Equality Commission - Interim Report
Aithisg Eadar-amail Coimisean Bochdainn is Co-ionannachd na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/38/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members thanked the Joint Chairs of the Commission, Ms Cunningham and Dr McCormick, for presenting the report and thereafter raised the following main points:-

- the work undertaken by the Commission to date was an excellent example of engaging with communities and listening to local views in local settings;
- tackling poverty and inequalities had to be embedded in the Council's planning to transform lives across Highland;
- the significant impact of social determinants on life expectancy and health, there being a striking difference between the least and most deprived areas in Highland; the contributory factors were embedded in the Commission's initial report such as income, housing, education, work and connectivity;

- the potential for health to be included in the Commission's thematic areas of focus and the potential for the Commission to meet with the Director of Public Health was supported;
- the implications for the Council associated with the Scottish Government's paper on Population Health Framework 2025-2035 were recognised;
- there was a need to consider how to reach out and engage with the hidden group of the working poor in terms of connecting into services, and sources of help and support;
- improving the experience for the user by building on the concept of a "no wrong door" approach to access public services would be welcomed; it was important the Council developed this approach going forward to ensure mechanisms were in place to trigger a series of actions when someone asked for help and also for there to be a focus on staff training;
- there was a need for as much publicity and feedback as possible on the Commission's work and the potential for the Council to set up a temporary portal that could gather views and comments;
- the Council had been aware of the issues raised in the interim report for many years and concern at the lack of decisive action on poverty and inequalities at all levels of government;
- it was questioned whether the Commission's work would deliver new and groundbreaking outcomes, given its allocation of public funding could alternatively be used to help alleviate the drivers of poverty in remote communities;
- poverty in the Highlands was not just about income, it was about access to services, support and opportunities and overcoming transport barriers to allow people to get to work and appointments;
- it was encouraging the interim report referred to expanding community transport, bringing services to the people and for a more person-centred approach;
- there were practical steps the Council could take over the next year to pilot or implement public service hubs or digital access points;
- the Commission was solution focused and there had been discussion on the potential for mobile hubs to take services to people in rural communities, particularly in areas with transport barriers;
- it was hoped the Administration was considering how aspects of the interim report could be reflected in commitments in the Council's budget for 2026/27, for example increasing funding for community transport projects, active travel, and energy efficiency to address fuel poverty;
- there was concern at issues of hidden poverty in the Black Isle despite the perceived affluence of the area and challenges that existed in accessing support and funding due to its Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation rating;
- the impact of the cost of the school day on families in poverty was highlighted and consideration needed to be given as to how to make this more equitable;
- the Commission was encouraged to consider the needs of neurodivergent persons;
- data was available in the public domain from a previous rural poverty project that might be helpful to the Commission;
- it was hoped the Commission had a specific focus on childcare for ages up to two years as this was a real issue in communities in terms of lack of provision and cost;
- it would be helpful for the Commission's final report to reflect on how the purchase power of people's income in Highland varied throughout the area, for example in relation to childcare;

- the consideration should be given to the issues around the historic lack of uptake of support and benefits in Highlands;
- there was a need to consider the environment in communities by protecting natural open green spaces rather than these being regarded as shovel ready building sites;
- the importance of meeting the wider needs of vulnerable tenants such as support with living on their own, managing their money, mental health and addiction issues to prevent the spiral which often resulted in anti-social behaviour was highlighted;
- the Chair and Vice Chair of the Housing and Property Committee and officials would be willing to be a sounding board for the Commission given that housing was at the core of many issues;
- concern about the burden of paying for the Council's new build house programme that was being placed on tenants through the level of increases proposed in the rent consultation for 2025/26 was expressed. The programme should instead form part of the Highland Investment Plan;
- the Commission could make a difference by prioritising a small number of areas that had the highest leverage and opportunities and ensuring interventions were sustainable so they had a lasting impact;
- the Commission was a crucial project for the Council and the process to date had been constructive with valuable conversations taking place to increase the understanding of the reasons for poverty in Highland including with third sector partners given the significant level of ongoing support they were delivering; and
- the calls for action in the Commission's final report to be presented to the full Council in June 2026 would require to be taken forward by the Council well into the future to deliver a legacy of there being no children in poverty in Highland.

In conclusion of this item, an assurance was provided that the Commission would reflect on the points and comments raised by Members in discussion.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the:-

- initial work of the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission; and
- interim report from the Commission which could be found at Appendix 1 to the report.

5. Medium Term Financial Plan Update Cunntas às Ùr mun Phlana Ionmhais Meadhan-ùine

Mr D Gregg made a Transparency Statement – as an employee of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/39/25 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

During discussion, reference was made to the fact that in preparing the budget for 2026/27, the Council had not been helped by the UK budget being presented on 26 November 2025, a month later than the previous year, and that in turn had pushed the Scottish Government's budget announcement back to 13 January 2026. In addition, the Council had not been helped by the uncertainties around Council Tax on

2nd Homes and Long-term Empty Properties. There were challenges ahead, however there was confidence the budget gap over the next three years could be filled. In relation to preparing the Council's budget for the next financial year, the public should be encouraged to take part in the public consultation exercise and opposition Members urged to raise any suggestions and ideas on how to make next year's budget better in early course with officers or members of the Senior Leadership Group.

Further comments included that the Administration had already received a number of budget proposals from the Opposition, and it would be helpful for these to be considered and feedback provided. The major concern was the budget gap and wider impact on Highland communities of closing that gap through local government spend being pulled out of the Highland economy. It was suggested the budget gap was understated and could grow rapidly given the potential impact of Reduced Class Contact Time and the final amount that would be required to be transferred to NHS Highland in respect of the overspend on the Adult Social Care budget. The Scottish Government's intention to consider a multi-year settlement was welcomed, however it was hoped there would not be a range of strings and conditions attached as to how this funding was spent. It would be helpful for the Administration to reach out positively to Opposition Members on the budget and have collaborative discussions.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the:-

- i. update provided regarding the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) as set out in the report;
- ii. update regarding the UK Government Budget of 26 November 2025;
- iii. update on Scottish Government budget and grant settlement, including an expectation intimated by Scottish Government that a multi-year grant settlement was being planned for;
- iv. update regarding budget engagement over the coming months; and
- v. actions being progressed regarding closing the budget gap.

6. Response to Scottish Government Consultation: The Future of Council Tax in Scotland

Co-chomhairleachadh Riaghaltas na h-Alba: Àm ri Teachd na Cìse Comhairle ann an Alba

There had been circulated Report No. HC/40/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Corporate. The report provided information about the Scottish Government's consultation which sought views on a range of options for how the council tax system in Scotland could be updated and improved. It was aimed at individuals, households, communities, and organisations with an interest in how local services are funded and how council tax affects them. The public consultation presented illustrative models and sought views on how to make council tax fairer, simpler, and better aligned with property values, while ensuring continued support for essential local services. Members were asked to consider the Council's draft response to the consultation.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was generally felt that a review of the Council Tax system was long overdue. Property valuations were now very dated and should be reviewed and the limited number of Council Tax bands meant moving up and down bands resulting in a significant financial change to property owners and therefore a suggested 14 band solution in the consultation response was welcomed;
- as part of the consultation, the Scottish Government were inviting members of the public to attend workshops including in Inverness on 24 January 2026 in Eden Court Theatre and it was hoped that there would be a good attendance from the public at this event;
- a view was expressed that the Council Tax system penalised home owners for improving their homes as if the value of the home went up, this could change the band the property was in. Further, there should be reference in the Council's response to the consultation that there had been no consideration of alternatives to the Council Tax. Alternatives suggested were a Local Income Tax; Carbon Emissions Lands Tax and Land Value Tax. Therefore, an amendment to question 16 in the Council's response was proposed as follows 'we regret there has been no consideration of the alternatives to Council Tax';
- any alternative system to the Council Tax should ensure the independence and control of local taxation by local authorities and not by Government. There had been freezes in Council Tax by Governments in past with no recompense to Councils for this. The flexibility to increase Council Tax should be left with local authorities;
- an increased number of Council Tax Bands could lead to more disputes and appeals about which bands properties should be in. This and property revaluations might have an impact on the budget of the Assessors department;
- the aim of the consultation was not to increase overall tax revenue, but to ensure a fairer and more equitable distribution of tax funding that reflected current property values and household circumstances. Currently, Council Tax was based on property values from 1991. In delivering a change to the system there was a need to ensure social equity, protect low income households and balance fairness with local service funding needs. The consultation was a unique opportunity to shape local taxation;
- an opinion was expressed that there should be consideration of the income of individual households. Where a household had multiple incomes coming in, the Council Tax should be increased by 25% for each income in the household as they could afford to pay more. There was a general recognition that the value of homes did not recognise the wealth of a household;
- there was a concern regarding the Council's response that homeowners moving into a higher Council Tax band should not receive transitional relief. This would have a sudden financial impact on households. Similarly, the proposed response to reduce the 25% single person occupancy discount to 20% would impact those on fixed incomes, particularly at a time when the cost of living was increasing. There was support by Members that the response be amended to reflect these views;
- at a time when more individuals were receiving care at home, the majority of them were single and they should not be penalised for this. Therefore, the single person occupancy discount of 25% should be retained;
- there was a need to highlight the urgency to bring this review of the Council Tax system to a conclusion as the review was long overdue. Also, there should be flexibility for Local Authorities to increase taxation on second homes and long term empty properties;
- the landscape of tax had changed greatly and the essentials today were such things as a good internet connection and bus services and these should be

- considered in any revaluation of properties; and
- in relation to how often property values should be reviewed and updated for Council Tax purposes, the proposed response of was that every 10 years seemed reasonable. This was based on experience through the non domestic rates revaluation system and that property values did not increase significantly year on year.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the draft response to the consultation as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, subject to it being amended to reflect comments raised at the meeting.

7. Invest Highland – Growing the Highlands Taisg sa Ghàidhealtachd

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

**Mr K Gowans - as a close family member is an employee of Highland Council
Mr S Mackie - as a Council appointee to Dounreay Stakeholders Group**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/41/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which presented Invest Highland, a resource designed to stimulate and promote investment opportunities and demonstrate the benefits of doing business in Highland. Invest Highland would be an evolving and iterative resource, to be updated as new priorities, projects and opportunities for investment arose. Members were asked to consider the resources developed to date but also contribute to its development over the coming months.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members in general welcomed the report which identified the vast opportunities in attracting investment and developments to Highland and the commercial benefits that could be achieved from this. There was a need to ensure that the Council stood out from other areas in the promotional material to potential developers/investors;
- a Highland wide investment prospectus was being developed and partnership working was key to providing investment opportunities and outcomes. Officers were also engaging with the Civil Service as to future plans as to what comes next in terms of City and Region growth deals. Growth opportunities in Highland were highlighted, such as, in civil nuclear and defence sectors;
- the report demonstrated that the Council was at the forefront in recognising the current and potential growth expansion taking place in the Highlands. Developers were being invited to invest in housebuilding, which would help the Council with its housing strategy. The Highland Investment Plan would transform many communities for the better;
- tourism continued to be an important area for investment and particular mention was made to all those involved in the Inverness Castle experience and refurbishment which was a fantastic project for the Highlands. Also given tourism's important to the economy and the view was expressed that there was a need for an economic impact assessment in Highland regarding major energy

- infrastructure on tourism
- areas near major energy infrastructure developments received no compensation for the loss of value on homes;
 - it was welcomed that there were many local projects that would fit in with Invest Highland portfolio. Invest Highland was ambitious and it was welcomed that local community organisations could input into it. The importance of investment in regions like the Highlands was highlighted;
 - there was significant emphasis on investment in the energy sector, in particular renewable energy and the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport. However, it was important to understand the wishes of local communities, as there was opposition to some renewable energy projects and therefore there was a need for diversified areas of investment;
 - the report did not have a definitive list of projects where investment would be welcomed and areas not mentioned such as the Caol links could bring substantial benefits to the area. Also, some of the barriers to development should be addressed, such as the lengthy planning process, to encourage investment;
 - Members welcomed that the Stromferry bypass, Lochcarron had been included on the list of projects in the Highland Prospectus. Also, the importance of good transport infrastructure was highlighted and works to upgrade sections of the A9 was welcomed. However, there needed to be much more investment in other roads such as the A96 trunk road and also the rail network;
 - the Highlands was on the verge of economic transformation and the Council, public sector partners and private investors were unlocking the region's full potential. There were commitments to investments worth several billions of pounds in the area through, for example, the Highland Investment Plan, alongside the Inverness City Region Deal and the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, Ardersier, Nigg and Kishorn ports. These investments would create vibrant communities and attract and retain a talented workforce and ensure all areas of the Highlands benefit from investment. Invest Highland set out the vision to attract private capital, deliver infrastructure and secure a future growth deal for the region;
 - it was queried how the investment proposals would contribute towards the Council's net zero strategy. Further, the report's impact assessment made no reference to an impact on the environment. It was contended that the net zero strategy was a critical part of the Highland Investment Plan and the Council would work with industry to ensure that investments brought forward met the net zero strategy;
 - as had been experienced in the Aberdeen area in the past with the expansion of the oil and gas industry, investment did not immediately end poverty and it was important to ensure that investment made a real difference where it was most needed to the most vulnerable and poorest families in Highland. Further, Workforce North were a group of employers who collaborated to resolve the regional workforce challenges. There was a structured plan to look at all of the regions needs including looked after children and others most at risk from being left out of the jobs market;
 - strategies like community wealth building and local place plans demonstrated to developers the community benefits required;
 - the online platform would give communities and investors a single accessible gateway to see what Highland can offer. The need for the Highlands to receive a fair share of the income from renewable energy was stressed;

- it was queried that, given the importance of culture to this area, if there could be a section on culture for arts and cultural organisations on the Beconnected online platform for local place priorities. It was advised that a strategic tourism infrastructure plan was being looked at again and the online platform had more information on tourism and culture. Local cultural initiatives could be added to the Beconnected online platform;
- it was requested that in future reports, there be timelines for the various projects/initiatives so it was clear the length of times involved and also for Area Committees to have updates so that they could consider projects in their own areas;
- depopulation was a significant concern for the Highlands and the various elements to Invest Highland should identify how they affect depopulation trends and this be monitored. Also, there was a need to ensure that any investment was sustainable and of value to the area into the future;
- transparency and clarity on proposals as they came forward was stressed as there was a need to know what the consequences were of what was being proposed as there were downsides as well as successes; and
- Invest Highland was a live initiative that would continue to be worked on. The prospectus could become the basis of a growth plan with potential funding that had yet to be matched to projects.

Decision

The Council:-

- AGREED** the aims and purpose of Invest Highland as set out and articulated on the Invest Highland online platform;
- AGREED** the Invest Highland Prospectus set out at Appendix 2 of the report for use at Scottish Cities Week (20-22 January 2026) and at other inward investment forums over 2026, noting that updates will be made periodically to reflect emerging opportunities;
- AGREED** and **NOTED** the use of the Beconnected online platform for local place priorities; and
- AGREED** a Member workshop on the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport's retained Non Domestic Rates Strategy would be held in January with a report on the Strategy to be considered at Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 12 February 2026.

8. Visitor Levy – Next Steps Cis Luchd-tadhail – Na h-Ath Cheumannan

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

**Mr K Gowans - as a close family member is an employee of Highland Council
Mr M Green - as an owner of self-catering accommodation**

There had been circulated Joint Report No. HC/42/25 by the Assistant Chief Executives – Place and Corporate.

The Convener highlighted to Members that the recommendations in the report did not at this stage include making a final decision on implementation of the Visitor Levy.

Following a summary of the report, the Council Leader summarised the considerable concern that had been expressed during the consultation process about the prospect of a percentage-based levy, and the Scottish Government's intention to take forward new primary legislation in early 2026 to give councils greater flexibility to set either a single fixed amount or a range of fixed amounts for different purposes or areas. Following this, a report would be submitted to the Council, and a new consultation undertaken on the amended proposals, with ongoing work being undertaken by the Visitor Levy Reference Group.

During discussion, issues were raised as follows:-

- attention was drawn to the earlier objections from the Scottish Conservative Group to the levy proposals. It was disappointing that considerable anxiety had been caused to the business community, particularly to small tourism businesses, at the prospect of the percentage-based levy;
- the unique features of tourism in the Highlands, compared to other areas of Scotland, especially larger cities, was highlighted, and the importance of tourism businesses to the Highland economy was emphasised;
- the Convener was thanked for sharing the letters he had exchanged with the Scottish Government;
- concern was expressed about the administrative burden of the levy, especially on small businesses, and it was urged that this be raised with the Scottish Government, with reference being made to other rising costs affecting businesses, such as increasing NI contributions and higher non-domestic valuation rates;
- issues such as seasonality, charging mechanisms, dispersed geography, VAT thresholds, exemptions, and plans for the income all required clarification, and the views of business associations and Chambers of Commerce should be sought. The levy model for a city like Edinburgh would not necessarily meet the needs of the Highlands;
- specific concerns for the collection of the levy by campsites were highlighted;
- commitment to continued region-wide engagement and sector-specific discussion was urged;
- it was suggested that the problem of the increasing numbers of motor caravans had been one of the triggers for the levy, but those choosing not to stay on campsites would not be captured by the levy, and other means of charging them should be considered. Particular reference was made to the need to collect income from motor caravans using the Isle of Skye out with campsites;
- small scale tourism businesses were often key to preventing the depopulation of rural areas of Highland and they should not be burdened as unpaid tax collectors;
- the pause to reconsider the legislation was welcomed and it was suggested that while the principle of the levy was accepted, it being calculated on a percentage basis was not;
- the need to ensure Highland residents travelling for medical treatment were not charged and a form of postcode exemption was suggested;
- it was hoped some of the income from the levy would be used to improve Invergordon given the large numbers of tourists passing through the town from cruise ships;

- the proposed use of funds from the levy to support sustainable tourism was welcomed, and a plea was made to invest in ongoing ranger services in popular areas of the Highlands;
- clarification was sought, and provided, that the next consultation period would commence after the matter had been considered by the Council again, early in 2026;
- investment in trains and expansion of the ability of trains to carry bikes was urged, although it was also pointed out that it was premature to consider what to spend the income raised on when implementation of the levy had not yet been agreed; and
- it was suggested that assurance should be sought that, should the legislation not be completed prior to the next Scottish Government elections, a commitment be given that the matter would be taken forward regardless of the outcome of the election.

Decision

The Council:-

- NOTED** the strength of concern from stakeholders and accommodation providers regarding the complexities inherent with a percentage-based levy;
- NOTED**, in response to the concerns received as set out in 2.1(i) of the report, the Convener's letter to the Minister for Public Finance dated 12 February 2025 seeking discretionary powers to enable local authorities to choose between a flat rate or percentage rate, and the Minister's response received 9 October 2025, as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report respectively;
- NOTED** the letter from the Minister for Public Finance to Chief Executives and Senior Officers dated 18 September 2025. Appendix 3 to the report refers;
- NOTED** the Convener's more recent letter dated 24 November 2025 to the Minister for Public Finance seeking clarity regarding the Scottish Government's intentions for proposed flat and tiered flat rates. Appendix 4 to the report refers;
- NOTED** the letter from the Minister for Public Finance to Council Leaders dated 2 December 2025 setting out the Scottish Government's to introduce legislation early in the new year to give councils greater flexibility over how they design and implement a visitor levy. Appendix 5 to the report refers;
- NOTED** the Chief Officer – Revenues & Commercialisation will participate in Visitor Levy Implementation Forum as detailed in the Minister for Public Finance's letter dated 2 December 2025 (Appendix 5);
- NOTED** The Diffley Partnership's cross-cutting themes from the consultation based on a percentage rate levy;
- AGREED** to await the intended new primary legislation for either a single fixed amount or a range of fixed amounts for different purposes or areas, and thereafter for a report to be brought forward to a future meeting of the Highland Council to decide the way forward for Highland;
- AGREED** that Highland Council undertake a 12-week statutory consultation based on new proposals. A report would then set out the findings from the statutory consultation and invite Members to decide whether to proceed with a Visitor Levy for Highland. Should Members decide to proceed, then an 18-month implementation period would be required before a visitor levy could be implemented in Highland; and

- x. **NOTED** the potential uses of funds should a Visitor Levy be decided for Highland, noting that approval for use of funds would be sought in a future report to Council should a Visitor Levy be agreed for implementation. Appendix 6 to the report refers.

**9. Highland Investment Plan – Establishing the Dingwall POD and Statutory Consultation Final Report on Relocation of St Clement’s Special School
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Ath-shuidheachadh Sgoil Naoimh Cliamhainn
- Aithisg Dheireannach**

There had been circulated Report No HC/43/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members warmly welcomed the report, which was a momentous end to a long process for the huge number of people who cared about St Clement’s School. It had not been an easy process, and tribute was paid to the many iterations of St Clement’s Parent Council for their consistent hard work, resolution and resilience, and to Local Members for their steadfast support for the project. Thanks were also expressed to officers, particularly the Chief Officer – Property and Assets and the Service Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy, for their efforts in bringing matters to this stage;
- the great success of the consultation was that planning had continued while it was ongoing, and it was welcomed that there would be no delay in moving forward;
- the Highland Investment Plan was an exciting and ambitious programme that would benefit all of Highland, and Local Members welcomed Dingwall and Seaforth being at its forefront and the £50m investment allocated to the Dingwall Community Point of Delivery (POD);
- the Dingwall Community POD would affect the futures of generations of young people in the area and impact on residents of Dingwall and Seaforth and beyond, and Members stressed the importance of establishing a comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder group which would determine the success of the Council’s hopes and ambitions;
- it was essential to engage with parents about the benefits of co-location to address the concerns raised by them, and to consider the needs of young people, parents, staff and the community in the design of the new school accommodation. It was also important to keep the promises made to replicate the indoor and outdoor spaces that would have been available at an alternative site, and to consider the reintroduction of early learning and childcare provision at St Clement’s School;
- information was sought, and provided, on the Council’s delivery partner, Hub North Scotland, who it was explained had a base in Inverness and individual project directors who would be closely involved in dealing with Tier 1 and Tier 2 contractors as work progressed;
- it had been clear from the start of the consultation that the proposed location of the new St Clement’s School was not going to be the preferred option of the parents, and sympathy was expressed in that regard. However, Education Scotland had recognised the educational benefits of a co-located site;
- attention was drawn to section 1.3 of the report which referred to the place-based masterplan that was being prepared for Dingwall and the collaborative process that had identified opportunities and potential solutions to maximise the use of assets and improve service delivery in Dingwall. In addition, the Co-Chairs of the

Poverty and Equality Commission had talked about services being as close as possible to communities, and the new Community POD would support that aspiration;

- there was a need for further engagement regarding the Community POD, particularly with Third Sector organisations of which there were many in Dingwall and the surrounding area;
- the report mentioned the possibility of a Centre of Excellence for Disability Sports, and it was important that was part of the Dingwall Community POD project;
- it was imperative that all stakeholders had confidence in the process and were kept informed at every stage. The timeline and milestones for delivery of the project were also vital;
- it had been heartening to hear about the success of a campus in Stirling, designed by the architect that had been appointed to design the Dingwall Community POD, that had two primary schools and a special school on the same site; and
- reference was made to previous instances where new schools had been constructed that were smaller than the buildings they had replaced, and which had been over capacity from the date of opening. It was important to avoid a similar situation in this case, and the intended capacity of the new St Clement's School was queried as the report did not provide a definitive figure. In response, it was explained that the capacity was not known at this stage but would be based on school roll projections. In addition, the design included nine flexible teaching spaces that would allow for future expansion. The Assistant Chief Executive – People undertook to share with Members the current working assumption in terms of capacity whilst stressing that the figure would and should be able to flex.

Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress being made with the place-based review for the Dingwall Community Points of Delivery (POD) as part of the Highland Investment Plan;
- ii. **NOTED** the opportunities that would be provided for stakeholders and partners to engage in the design process;
- iii. **NOTED** the report from Education Scotland (Appendix 4 to the report) that recognised the Education benefits of locating St Clements School and Dingwall Primary School on the same site;
- iv. **AGREED** officers should fully discharge the recommendations from Education Scotland as set out in the Consultation Report at Appendix 2 to the report;
- v. **AGREED** to relocate St Clement's School to the site adjacent to Dingwall Primary School; and
- vi. **AGREED** that the working assumption in terms of the capacity of the new St Clements School be shared with all Members.

10. Decision of Standards Commission for Scotland – Hearing on 4 November 2025 Co-Cdhùnaidhean Coimisean Inbhean na h-Alba – Èisteachd

There had been circulated Report No. HC/44/25 by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance/Monitoring Officer.

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the decision of the Standards Commission of Scotland.

11. Membership of Committees, etc
Ballrachd air Comataidhean, msaa

The Council:-

- i. **AGREED** that Mrs L Kraft replace Mr P Oldham on Audit Committee; and
- ii. **NOTED** that Mr P Logue would replace Dr C Birt as substitute for North Planning Applications Committee.

12. Appointment to Outside Bodies
Cur an Dreuchd gu Buidhnean air an Taobh A-muigh

Following the resignation on 18 November 2025 of Mrs I Mackenzie, the Council **AGREED** that Mrs M Paterson be appointed as a new Director for Eden Court Highlands.

In this regard, there had been circulated a copy of the Job Description.

13. Timetable of Meetings
Clàr-ama Choinneamhan

The Council **NOTED** that a Special Meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee will be held on 7 January 2026.

14. Deeds Executed
Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

There had been circulated a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 30 October 2025 which were **NOTED**.

15. Confirmation of Minutes
Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 30 October 2025 and the Special meeting held on 6 November 2025 as contained in the Volume which were **APPROVED**.

16. Minutes of Meetings of Committees
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan Chomataidhean

Mr D McGillivray made a Declaration of Interest in respect of this item in regard to the Sutherland County Committee's starred item as a former Director of Dornoch and District Community Association and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting for that part of the meeting.

There had been submitted for confirmation as correct records, for information as regards delegated business and for approval as appropriate, the Minutes of Meetings of Committees contained in Volume circulated separately as undernoted:-

	Date
Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee	3 November 2025
Caithness Committee	3 November 2025
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh Committee	3 November 2025
Housing and Property Committee	5 November 2025
*Climate Change Committee	5 November 2025

Starred Item as follows:-

Item 4i Net Zero Programme Update – iii. AGREED the Council approve of the project brief templates in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

Item 5 Annual Report under the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties 2024/25 – AGREED that the current carbon reduction targets be maintained until the evaluation of the carbon budgeting and analysis tools was complete. This would ensure future targets were informed by robust, data-led evidence, accurately reflecting the full impact of operational activities and avoiding the risk of setting unrealistic targets that could undermine engagement and progress toward Net Zero.

Item 6 Climate Change Impact Assessment Update - AGREED the Council approve the project brief template in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

[Climate Change Committee | The Highland Council](#)

Communities and Place Committee	6 November 2025
*Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee	10 November 2025

Starred Item as follows:-

Item 7.b Rosemarkie Caravan Park - AGREED (see section 8 of the report) that the proposal should be approved subject to Sheriff Court consent.

[Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee | The Highland Council](#)

*Lochaber Area Committee	10 November 2025
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Starred Item as follows:-

Item 12 Notice of Motion

- The Leader of The Highland Council should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands urging that:
the Scottish Government bring forward its planned penalty regime for farmed fish escapes without delay; greater resources be provided for environmental inspection and regulation.

[Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#)

Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee	12 November 2025
Audit Committee	12 November 2025
*Economy and Infrastructure Committee	13 November 2025

Starred Item as follows:-**Item 7 Masterplan Consent Areas: Potential Sites**

- iii. **AGREED** the “long-list” of potential Masterplan Consent Areas as listed in section 8 and mapped at Appendix 1 of the report, with a firm preference to progress sites at Essich Road, Embo and Ardersier;
- iv. **AGREED** that urgent work was carried out to identify a fourth preferred site on the west coast, in relative proximity to the Kishorn Yard, to support the ongoing investment in that area; and
- v. **AGREED** that the Council’s Scheme of Delegation with particular reference to the role of both E&I Committee and PACs be amended as set out in Appendix 2 of the report to reflect the proposed governance of the MCA process.

Item 15 Appointment to Outside Bodies**HITRANS Tier 1 Ferry Users Consultation Groups**

AGREED the following Members be appointed to the following Tier 1 Ferry Users Consultation Groups established by HITRANS:

- i. Argyll Group – covering Oban, Colonsay, Iona, Lismore, Coll, Tiree, Barra, South Uist and Ardnamurchan – Mr T MacLennan;
- ii. Lochaber and Skye Group – covering the Small Isles, Mallaig, Armadale, Raasay, Kilchoan and Lochaline – Ms C Gillies ; and
- iii. Hebrides Group – covering Barra, North and South Uist, Harris, Lewis and links to Skye – Ms C Gillies.

Membership of the Harbours Management Board

AGREED Mr R Cross be appointed as a member of the Harbours Management Board.

[Economy and Infrastructure Committee | The Highland Council](#)

City of Inverness Area Committee	17 November 2025
Education Committee	19 November 2025
Corporate Resources Committee	20 November 2025
Nairnshire Committee	24 November 2025
Dingwall, Seaforth Committee	27 November 2025
Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee	1 December 2025
*Sutherland County Committee	1 December 2025

Starred Item as follows:-**Item 10 Dornoch Common Good: Dornoch and District Community Association (DADCA) Application**

The Committee **AGREED** to approve the £280,000 application from Dornoch and District Community Association (DADCA) for the new community centre project, subject to match funding and required permissions being in place.

[Sutherland County Committee | The Highland Council](#)

17. Question Time
Àm Ceiste

There had been circulated separately in Booklet A Public and Members Questions received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance.

Public Question**L Graham****To the Leader of the Council**

Please can the council tell me what community impact assessment has been undertaken is or planned to be undertaken with regards to surroundings and boundaries of the site's security, community security services, public health services and what public consultation has been or is planned on the Home Office's proposal to temporarily house 300 asylum seekers at Cameron Barracks?'

RESPONSE

The Council has written specifically to the Home Office and asked for copies of the appropriate impact and risk assessments for the site. The Council have also asked for assurances that there will be no detrimental impact on local services, especially health and housing. We have not yet received a response to these questions and the documentation has not been provided. We have been given no indication by the Home Office that there is an intention to undertake a public consultation on the proposal.

Member Questions**1. Mr A Christie****To the Leader of the Council**

In the Budget passed on the 29 February 2024 a reserve of £20m for Adult Social Care Redesign was established. The purpose of the reserve was "to support the Adult Social Care budget on a multi-year basis, and the process of change and transformation.

Please could you detail, with a descriptive analysis and value that would enable a good understanding of the aims of the project, the proposals that have been approved up to the 20 November 2025, together with any positive outcomes already seen as well as any projects that are in the pipeline that may receive funding by 31 March 2026?"

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, could the Leader explain the plans for the Adult Social care funds including whether any are being passed over to the NHS.

In response, the Leader advised this had not been finalised, however when it was it would be presented to Committee.

2. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

Will the Administration be holding any public meetings to consult on the Council Budget for 2026/27?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, would the Leader be providing notice of dates for the series of activities and meetings with key sectors/groups to enable members to attend future council budget meetings.

In response, the Leader advised any ongoing plans in terms of budget will be informed in a timely manner.

3. Ms K Willis

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

The frequency and intensity of storms is increasing due to climate change, with storms often causing widespread damage across Highland. What has the cost been to Highland Council of each named storm in the Highlands since 2015? Please can the chair provide a breakdown of costs for each named storm.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, would future recording of costing of named storms be available.

In response, the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure confirmed this information would be made available.

4. Mr A Graham

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

In the October 2025 Roads Factsheet, current financial year performance is reported as follows:

No. of work instructions raised (to 01/10/2025): 1,163

No. of work instructions completed (to 01/10/2025): 583

Please explain why only 50% of instructions have been completed, and your plans are to improve our roads.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, due to the level of public concern with pothole repairs, would a report be brought to an early Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

In response, it was confirmed this would happen.

5. Mr R Stewart

To the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

When does he anticipate the Council will be in a position to award contracts for Women's Refuge Services across the Highlands.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, can the Chair set out what assurance and services in relation to the Women's Refuge Services are not at risk.

In response, the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing advised refuge services were currently under review. However, an extension of 6 months had been made to the current contracts. A review would be undertaken and report on the outcome would be brought to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee for consideration.

6. Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

The Food Train's, 'Malnutrition Risk Prevalence in the Community Report (September 2025)', <https://thefoodtrain.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Malnutrition-Screening-Report-September-2025.pdf> highlights growing levels of malnutrition risk among older people living at home across Scotland, including the Highlands. Given the serious impact malnutrition has on healthy life expectancy, hospital admissions, social care demand, and the ability of older residents to live independently, will the Council confirm:

How it will work jointly with NHS Highland, community partners, and the wider social care sector to investigate the scale and underlying factors causing malnutrition risk in Highland?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, due to cost of living rise affecting older people, what action would Highland Council be taking regarding adequate diet and nutrition and will these be able to be reported back to ensure support for malnutrition.

In response, the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing reported attending a public health workshop which had taken place recently to address such issues and risks. Following the brief from the meeting around Poverty and Equality these would now need to be reviewed together to ensure a resolution to malnutrition.

7. Mrs H Crawford

To the Leader of the Council

Will you provide a table setting out which developers have signed up to the Social Values Charter, the value of contributions made to date, the value of contributions that have been committed but not yet delivered together with a detailed breakdown of the type of each contribution thus far committed.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, can the Leader advise on the Social Values Charter how many developers were approached, advise of their intention to sign and who refused.

In response, the Leader advised he was unaware of anyone who had refused to sign.

8. Mrs B Jarvie

To the Leader of the Council

Could I have statistics on staff assaults over the past 5 years, under the headings of verbal, physical, and sexual assault and workplace heading, with ages of the person committing the assault and month of year to see if there is a seasonal correlation with behaviour, please.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, can the Leader advise whether there would be a possibility of publishing the statistics of reports to RIDDOR (Report of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) over the last 5 years under Highland Council workplace headings.

In response, the Leader advised he would seek advice from the Legal Team as to whether this information could be published and would feedback their response.

9. Mrs A MacLean

To the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

The Highland Council has stated it is committed to supporting all victim-survivors of domestic abuse. This vision was outlined at an elected members' workshop earlier this year. Their aim is to establish a Highland-wide Domestic Abuse Service for all victim-survivors, irrespective of location, sex or gender.

What evidence base of need a decision has been reached to move in this direction, given that it seems to be a departure from a gendered approach to service provision for women and girls impacted by VAWG. As a departure from the nationally agreed political position under equally safe, when was the political decision taken and at what committee was it agreed?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, can the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing provide transparency and clarity to which councillors of which Committee agreed to change the SLA policy to a new Highland domestic abuse model.

In response, the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing advised of a recent review which identified gaps for improved governance and accountability. This was considered by Health, Social Care and Wellbeing in 2024 when it was approved. It was reinforced this was a Committee decision, not personal.

**18. Notices of Motion
Brathan Glusaid**

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Motion 4

**Mrs A MacLean - as a former director of Ross Shire Women's Aid
Mrs J McEwan - as a former director of Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid**

Motion 6

**Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland
Mr A Jarvie – as an employee of the Mental Welfare Commission**

1. The Council Parking Strategy (2021) requires revision to improve clarity around income generation and allocation, and investment in carparking infrastructure across Highland.

Currently, legacy carparks in Highland are not generating income for their local areas and are instead subsidising parking, enforcement, and other costs for carparks across Highland that do not charge for parking. Car parking revenue is also not currently used to maintain and repair carparks or invest in capital works.

Council requests a review of the Parking Strategy, with the review to consider the following:

- Local/strategic revenue allocation following tariff increases in legacy carparks,
- Local/strategic revenue allocation from new carparks,
- Local/strategic revenue allocation from on-street parking,
- A Highland wide strategy to implement parking tariffs,
- A repair and maintenance strategy for all carparks,
- A Highland-wide strategy to implement new Pay & Display carparks.

Council requests that a Member workshop is held to help develop the Strategy, and that the revised Parking Strategy is reported to the May 2026 meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

Signed: Ms K Willis

Mr C Ballance

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the need to review and modernise the car parking strategy, which was last reviewed in 2021, to ensure fair income distribution and investment across the Highlands was emphasised;
- concern was expressed that income generated in legacy car parks such as Skye and Lochaber was not being reinvested locally, particularly for car park maintenance, and was instead subsidising areas without parking charges;
- further concern was expressed that parking tariff increases had not followed the 50/50 local/strategic revenue split as agreed in the strategy, parking permit charges had been increased by 5% and mandatory parking charges for motorhomes and campervans, as agreed in the budget, had not yet been implemented;
- reference was made to the need for transparency in respect of the level of income that was being generated at a local level and how and where this was being reinvested back into the infrastructure, particularly in respect of car park maintenance, and the feasibility of increasing parking enforcement officers; and
- an appeal was made for the review to consider further powers being delegated to Area Committees to enable them to set policy for local car parks.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the motion as presented.

2. Fireworks

Fireworks are often used at different events during the year. While bringing much enjoyment to many people, they can also cause distress and anxiety to people, domestic pets, farm livestock, and wildlife. Animals may suffer injuries if they try to avoid the noise.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Urge organisers of all public firework displays within the Highland Council area to advertise them in advance, allowing residents to take precautions for themselves and their animals.
2. Promote public awareness of the impact of fireworks on vulnerable people and animal welfare and provide advice on precautions to reduce the impact.
3. Investigate the use of quieter or silent fireworks at displays organised directly by the Highland Council.
4. Write to the Scottish Government urging them to investigate reduction of the maximum noise level (120 dB) for consumer fireworks.
5. Encourage local suppliers of fireworks to stock quieter consumer fireworks.

Signed: Mr A Graham
Mr A Baxter

Mrs J McEwan
Mr R Gunn

Mrs T Robertson
Mrs A MacLean

It was explained that there had been a growing number of large fireworks displays and that fireworks were becoming louder so it was important to strike a balance between enjoying community events and minimising any discomfort and harm caused by fireworks to people, pets, livestock and wildlife, and that the five steps of the motion sought to do this.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the motion as presented.

3. STV

This council supports Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce's campaign to save STV North.

Plans to cut or centralise STV North will destroy local journalism, cost vital jobs, and strip away our ability to make decisions about how our stories are told.

Local news isn't just about headlines, it's about community, democracy, and identity. Without a strong regional newsroom, people across the Highlands and north east Scotland will lose representation, visibility, and trust in the media that serves them.

We therefore mandate our Council Leader to contact Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce to express our support and to write to STV and Ofcom to call on them to stop these cuts and protect STV North's independence and investment in regional journalism.

And we ask Corporate Comms to publicise this motion internally and encourage members and staff to sign the petition at [Petition · Save STV North - Aberdeen, United Kingdom · Change.org](https://www.change.org/p/save-stv-north-aberdeen-united-kingdom)

Signed: Mr C Ballance

Ms K Willis

Dr M Gregson

AMENDMENT

Replace paragraph 4 with the following:

“therefore, ask the Leader for the Council to note the points made by the Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce to express the concerns of The Highland Council in writing to, Ofcom and the First Minister of Scotland regarding STV's plan to downgrade their commitment to local news reporting in Highland”.

Signed: Mr K Gowans

Mr R Jones

Prior to consideration of the Motion, the Convener advised that contracts for domestic outreach services in North, Mid and West Highland had been awarded and would take effect from 1 April 2026. The contract for South Highland had not yet been awarded and the procurement process remained ongoing. Members were reminded that, because the procurement exercise was still active, financial details and the position of any provider could not be discussed, as these were subject to commercial confidentiality. It was further confirmed that refuge services would continue under a contract variation until September 2026.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- citing concerns over repeated reviews, there was concern surrounding the lack of clarity on funding, and the need for a full report to Council. In response, the procurement process was outlined and it was confirmed that outreach and refuge services were in place and a written update would be issued shortly. It was proposed that the scheduled meeting of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee on 4 February 2026 would include a detailed paper and that a briefing or seminar be held in mid-January 2026; and
- the importance of domestic abuse services as a lifeline, the need for transparency and the urgency of reassurance for service users and providers were highlighted. Concerns were raised about communication failures, the impact on Women's Aid organisations, and the absence of a publicly accessible strategy. Members emphasised the need for clarity before the Christmas period and requested that messaging confirm continuity of refuge services.

Thereafter Councillor McEwan confirmed acceptance of the amendment.

Decision

The Council:-

- i. **AGREED** the Amendment as set out; and
- ii. **NOTED** that a Members' briefing/seminar would be arranged in mid-January 2026 to provide an update on the current review of domestic abuse services and a written update would be issued to all Members as soon as possible.

5. The Council notes that:

- 0.025% of Scotland's population own 67% of Scotland's rural land. Just over 400 people;
- the Highland Council area has many of Scotland's largest estates and highly concentrated land ownership;
- such ownership patterns concentrate wealth, influence and power in very few hands and limit opportunities for communities to be more in control of their circumstances and natural resources;
- the Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar council area has in recent decades seen the ownership of most of its land area transfer into community ownership, bringing greater local democratisation of land decisions and allowing the resources the land can earn to be shared widely and retained locally –

contributing significantly to community wealth building and a more inclusive economy;

- the Highland Council area has seen only a fraction of the transfer of land the Western Isles has enjoyed but is home to a number of remarkable community owners, such as in Eigg and Knoydart, which stand as an example of what could be more widely achieved;
- a dysfunctional land market – as evidenced recently in the Scatwell Estate sale, in Strathconon, where 3525 hectares sold for £25,200,000 (£7149 per hectare) – makes community buyouts all but impossible;
- an increasing number of ‘Green Lairds’, often supported by external investor capital, have been buying up land in the Highlands to deliver private earnings from carbon credits and speculating on a future biodiversity credits market to extract wealth from the Highlands, or to allow them to continue the carbon emissions they create elsewhere;
- land ownership attracts many tax breaks and grants access to substantial public subsidy and many argue that reforming taxation will be an important part of future land reform; and
- the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands made clear during the recent debate passing the latest piece of land reform legislation that much more beyond the further steps the Bill enabled was needed to further the cause of diversifying Scotland’s land ownership patterns.

The Council resolves that:

- It shares the view of the Cabinet Secretary that further action on land reform to diversify land ownership is needed.
- It wishes to see a significantly and progressively greater number of Highland communities owning land and thus controlling and retaining locally the earnings from that land, to achieve their economic potential.
- Land ownership patterns need to be fairer and more accountable.
- Recognising the imbalances in power that can arise from accumulating landholdings which may be non-contiguous, enabling acquisitive landowners to avoid provisions of the existing law, will be an important issue to address further.
- It must become easier for entry into farming and crofting to take place, and more ‘Starter Farms’ should be established.
- The Scottish Land Fund is an essential part of the picture and the Council supports its maintenance by the Scottish Government and expansion when resources allow.
- The public interest should drive land policy and a public interest test should also be applied to the buyers of significant areas of land, under which their intentions for the land can be publicly examined.
- It should engage with the Scottish Land Commission and develop a comprehensive policy on how it can assist in bringing about land reform that empowers more communities across the Highland Council area to own and control land and build community wealth, seeing such policy development as a major contributor to future economic development policy. The Council further instructs Officers to report further on the issues with proposals upon which the Council can then engage with a range of interested parties prior to finally agreeing its policy.

Signed: Dr M Gregson

Mr C Ballance

During discussion, Dr M Gregson spoke in support of the motion, highlighting the recent passage of land reform legislation at Holyrood and the need to address profoundly unbalanced land ownership patterns. He emphasised that concentrated ownership limited community agency and economic development and observed the importance of applying a public interest test to significant land transactions.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- attention was drawn to the impact of renewable energy expansion in creating further financial advantage for large landowners and the need for officers to bring forward proposals for consultation and policy development if endorsed;
- points were raised on fairness and accountability, including consideration of large landholdings by organisations such as the National Trust for Scotland; and
- questions were also asked about the practical issues the Motion sought to address, with reference to challenges faced by community buyouts and the financial burden of land management. Examples were provided of rural areas where wealthy landowners had purchased housing stock, reducing availability for local residents and creating dependency on seasonal employment tied to accommodation.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Motion as set out.

6. Council commits to:

- Designating a named lead Highland Council contact for each care home in the area to act as a clear point of contact for residents and relatives to contact with concerns, issues or question.
- Creating a document which explains the rights of residents and relatives within a care home. This document should include clear information on how concerns can be raised to the council and external regulatory bodies (Care Inspectorate, professional regulators, Disclosure Scotland, police).
- All relatives/residents within the relevant care home, and all councillors, to be notified of the publication of Care Inspectorate reports within 7 working days of that report being received by the council.
- All relatives/residents within the relevant care home to be notified that a Large Scale Investigation has commenced within 7 working days, and all councillors to be notified at the next full council meeting.
- All Care Inspectorate reports to be formally presented to the Health & Social Care Committee, in public or private session at discretion of the committee chair, with councillors being given chance to ask questions on the report.
- When a care home ceases to be under an improvement notice from the Care Inspectorate, a 'Lessons Learned' report will be presented first to the Health & Social Care Committee and then before the full council to detail what improvements were made while under the Care Inspectorate improvement notice, and any recommendations which should be made to improve practice across Highland care homes.

Signed: Mr D Gregg

Mr A Christie

AMENDMENT

To replace the motion with the following amendment:

Under the Lead Agency Model it is NHS Highland that deliver Care Home services for adults by commissioning the private sector and providing inhouse care homes. They also commission the care at homes services. The regulator is the Care Inspectorate. Although adult social care is delegated to NHSH as part of the Lead Agency Model, the Chief Social Work Officer maintains statutory responsibility and accountability for the delivery of social work and social care services.

With regard adult protection, governance and assurance is through the Adult Protection Committee. This then reports into the Highland Public Protection Chief Officers Group for the overarching governance across Highland. Councillors receive twice annually assurance reports through the Health and Social Care Committee. The Chief Social Work Officer Annual report comes to Full Council and includes the care Inspectorate grades for all Care Home and Care at Home Services. Under the lead agency model the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) is key in terms of overseeing all partnership business and much of this material is provided there at the quarterly meetings.

In partnership with the NSH Highland as lead agents the Council undertakes to carry out a full review of the reporting structures related to the regulated services i.e. care homes and care at home. The review will articulate what and where governance currently lies and how this can be improved. One of the issues that will be looked at is how various committees and boards are given assurance when governance lies elsewhere and how the attendees then report back to other boards and committees. The review will also look at opportunities to share learning across Highland with a view to improving the overall standard of care. The report will include a section on access information about the Regulated Services and how the escalate concerns about a service.

The draft report will be discussed at the February 2026 meeting of the Health & Social Care Committee and a final draft report will then be taken to Full Council. The Final Report will be agreed at JMC.

Signed: Mr D Fraser

Mrs M Cockburn

Decision

The Council **NOTED** that Mr D Gregg had withdrawn his Notice of Motion.

The meeting was concluded at 5.50pm.

**The Highland Council
No. 13 2025/2026**

Minutes of Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 5 March 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)
Mr M Baird	Ms L Johnston
Mr C Ballance	Mr R Jones
Mr A Baxter	Ms E Knox
Dr C Birt	Ms L Kraft
Mr B Boyd	Mr B Lobban
Mr R Bremner	Mr P Logue
Mr I Brown	Ms M MacCallum
Mr J Bruce	Mr W MacKay (Remote)
Mr M Cameron	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr S Cameron	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs I Campbell	Mr S Mackie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr A Christie	Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs M Cockburn	Mrs A MacLean
Mr S Coghill (Remote)	Ms K MacLean (Remote)
Ms T Collier (Remote)	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr R Cross	Mr D Macpherson
Ms L Dundas	Mr D McDonald
Mr J Edmondson	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson	Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Mr D Fraser	Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mr L Fraser	Mr P Oldham
Mr R Gale	Mrs M Paterson
Ms C Gillies	Mr M Prosser (Remote)
Mr K Gowans	Ms C Ramsay
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Reid
Mr A Graham	Mr M Reiss
Mr M Green	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Gregg	Mr K Rosie (Remote)
Dr M Gregson	Ms M Ross
Mrs J Hendry (Remote)	Mr R Stewart
Ms M Hutchison	Ms K Willis
Mr A Jarvie	

In Attendance:

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive - People
Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Chief Officer - Finance
Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Joint Democratic Services Manager

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Gunn, Mr S Kennedy, Mrs J McEwan, Mr J McGillivray, Mrs L Saggars and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Council **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 4 – Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr D Gregg, Ms L Kraft, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Millar, Mrs M Ross and Mr R Stewart.

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, tributes were paid to former Councillor Charlie King, who had recently passed away. Mr King had represented Mallaig and the Small Isles between 1995 and 2007, and his contribution, both to his community and as a Strategic Chair, were recognised. Condolences were conveyed, on behalf of the Council, to his family and friends.

**3. Membership of the Council
Ballrachd na Comhairle**

The Council **NOTED** that, following a By-Election for Ward 21 (Fort William and Ardnamurchan) held on 11 December 2025, Mr Matthew Prosser had been elected as a Member of the Council, and that Mr Michael Baird had now joined the Highland Independent group.

The political make-up of the Council was now as follows:-

SNP – 19 / Highland Independent – 18 / Scottish Liberal Democrats – 16 / Highland Alliance – 9 / Scottish Conservative and Unionist – 6 / Scottish Green Party – 3 / Labour – 2 / Non-Aligned – 1.

The formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees was now 5/5/4/2/2.

**4. Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 to 2028/29, Revenue Budget and Council Tax 2026/27
Plana Ionmhasail Meadhan-ùine 2026/27 gu 2028/29 agus Buidseat Teachd-a-steach agus Cis Comhairle 2026/27**

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr A Christie as a Non-executive Director of Inverness Business Improvement District and as Chief Executive of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau.

Mr J Edmondson as a close family members was a part-time employee of High Life Highland.

Mr R Gale and **Ms L Kraft** as owners of second homes.

Mr D Gregg as an employee of NHS Highland and Board Member of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau

Mr A Jarvie as an Employee of the Mental Welfare Commission and as a Director of Scottish Autism.

Mr D Millar as a family member was employed by Highland Council.

Mrs M Ross as Director of the Seaboard Memorial Hall, which participated in the Highland Comfort Scheme

Mr R Stewart as a family member was employed by Highland Council

There had been circulated Report No. HC/01/26 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance (Section 95 Officer).

Prior to the debate, the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance, as Section 95 Officer, explained that the report followed a series of earlier reports on the Council's financial planning, as well as a number of briefings for Members, and he thanked all Members and officers involved in the budget process for their support and input. He gave an assurance that the proposals set out in the report and appendices would allow the Council to fulfil its legal obligations in terms of setting a balanced budget and Council Tax. He went on to provide a detailed overview of the report, highlighting a number of key points to support Members in their decision-making.

In moving the recommendations, the Leader of the Council expressed thanks to everyone who had contributed to the report and engaged in the budget process. The proposed budget was multi-faceted and built on the work and aims of the current Administration in recent years, including providing continued financial stability, providing for a sustainable future, continuing investment in communities, and continuing to focus on boosting economic growth in Highland. This was within the context of a challenging financial environment for the public sector and a grant funding settlement that fell short of the service demands and priorities the Council faced, which made budgetary decisions increasingly difficult.

This year, as in the previous year, the proposed budget had been set using a three-year financial outlook for local government, based on Scottish Government figures and analysis produced by COSLA. The outlook included a net cash uplift for 2026/27 of just over £8m. This was set against a backdrop of flat cash, which did not take inflation into account, in the following two years. Whilst the challenges governments faced were understood, local authorities continued to see a greater real-terms reduction in funding than other public organisations. Nevertheless, the approach taken had not been one of simple "salami-slicing" of budgets, and what was presented was another multi-year sustainable budget, aligned to the Council's strategic priorities, that would deliver for Highland communities for several years ahead.

The multi-year way of working allowed a more strategic, forward-thinking approach to shaping the Council's Future Operating Model, which would continue to focus on the decentralisation of services, investment in buildings and infrastructure, targeted support for those most in need, and measures that helped communities remain independent and resilient. It also meant it was possible to move away from the year-to-year savings approach that had been a feature of previous Administrations. The report included proposals for a £61m package of service and strategic savings, income generation proposals and financial flexibilities over the next three years, to close the budget gap and allow for new investments. This included £41.7m of new proposals, which had been worked through carefully by officers across services, and approximately £20m of proposals agreed over the last two years as part of the three-

year budget setting process. Some of the previously agreed proposals had been revised to reflect further due diligence or changes and influences in the external environment. £28m of savings were proposed for 2026/27, of which £15.3m were new. Whilst this was a major challenge, such challenges had been successfully met in recent years. The Council now had a strong record of prudent financial management and long-term planning, which had been recognised by Audit Scotland, and its strategic, progressive approach to achieving savings and generating income beyond grant funding and Council Tax was becoming established and recognised.

Turning to Council Tax, every effort had been made to keep this to a minimum whilst also protecting services. As had been set out previously, the proposed increase was 7%, 5% of which was to deliver a balanced budget and support delivery of vital Council services such as education, housing, day-to-day roads operations and social care. The remaining 2% would be ringfenced to deliver the Highland Investment Plan. This would represent one of the lowest increases in Council Tax in Scotland, and the Administration remained committed to not using an increase in Council Tax as a means of reducing the budget gap. In addition, there were now financial flexibilities in place that allowed the amount of Council Tax charged on second homes and long-term empty homes to be increased. It was therefore proposed to increase the charges for long-term empty homes and second homes to 250% and 300% respectively, to support the Highland Housing Challenge.

The Reserves Strategy introduced in December 2023 continued to be applied, and there was no intention to use non-earmarked reserves to balance the budget. This demonstrated the Administration's commitment to making the Council financially sustainable for the future and ensuring it had secure, robust, financial and effective management.

The proposed budget built on the comprehensive consultation that had taken place during the 2024/25 budget engagement period. As a result of feedback from Community Councils, some members of which had said that they were paying administration costs themselves, it was proposed to increase funding for Council Councils. Similarly, communities had indicated that they wanted support to provide investment in small, meaningful local projects, and it was therefore proposed to increase Ward Discretionary Budgets. Feedback from businesses and Community Councils had also indicated that they would welcome engagement throughout the year, not only during the budget process, and officers had been asked to draw up plans to put this in place. In addition, it was intended, in future years, to bring forward the budget engagement process to late summer/early autumn, which demonstrated the Administration's continued willingness to increase engagement and deliver on its commitment to invest in communities. During the engagement process, the budget position had been clearly set out, as had the work taking place both in terms of investment and to minimise or eliminate unnecessary costs by reducing, redesigning, reappropriating or otherwise increasing the efficiency of service delivery and the operation of the Council. The final details of that work had been set out in the appendices to the report.

In terms of employment, despite the continuing financial challenges, the Administration remained committed to avoiding redundancies wherever possible. Where targeted savings were proposed that affected posts, vacancies would be managed and positions and structures redesigned. The proposed investment plans would seek to create new jobs throughout Highland to deliver improved services and support to communities, including a focus on, but not restricted to, climate impact assessment, the Future Operating Model, bio-diversity, and My Highland Future.

The proposals continued to support the Highland Investment Plan, the Social Value Charter and the Highland Housing Challenge, as well as the work of the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission. In addition, a number of new programmes would be introduced. The overall approach to multi-year planning, strategic and service savings, income generation proposals and Council tax had allowed new investment totalling £12m - £3.5m recurring and £8.m non-recurring – to strengthen key services. This would add to the £4.5m of recurring revenue investment agreed as part of last year's budget setting process.

The proposed new recurring investments in 2026/27 included a £1m fund to support the Highland Housing Challenge; £500k of additional revenue investment for roads maintenance, complementing the previously agreed £21.5m of capital investment; £500k to enable immediate action on the recommendations of the Poverty and Equalities Commission once it published its findings; £406k of additional investment for schools to support children experiencing poverty and barriers to learning; and additional investment in Ward Discretionary Budgets (£105k), public toilets (£72k) and Community Councils (£55k). Non-recurring proposals included £7m of additional investment to support the Social Care Transformation Fund; £1.6m of investment to create a Workforce North Co-investment Fund in partnership with Skills Development Scotland; and a further £300k of investment in the Repair the Highlands Fund, which supported reuse and repair community projects.

While it was recognised that all available investment could be channelled into a limited number of areas such as roads, many people in Highland communities wanted to see investment in a broader range of services. It was acknowledged that the fact that the proposed Council Tax increase was one of the lowest in Scotland would be of little comfort to those who would face affordability challenges, and that some might question proposing such an increase whilst also investing in the Poverty and Equalities Commission and increasing fees and charges. However, it was not possible to maintain fees and charges at current levels when the cost of materials, labour and services provided to the Council continued to rise, and not increasing them risked service provision and creating budget pressures. A strategic yet measured approach had been taken, and increases for services such as bereavement and school meals had been limited to inflation only. The aim had been to achieve the best balance possible, and this was evidenced throughout the proposed budget.

In conclusion, he referred to the continued commitment to working with partners, including High Life Highland and NHS Highland, to invest in the health and wellbeing of communities in Highland.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to his intention to move an amendment, the details of which had been circulated to Members, and he thanked the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance and his team for their support in its development. It was pointed out that the Liberal Democrat Group proposals represented just 0.44% of the overall revenue budget, and the amendment was intended to improve the budget further and provide a more focused, targeted service.

Reference was made to the current conflict in the Middle East and the impact previous conflicts had had on inflation and the price of supplies, and it was highlighted that the budgetary assumptions set out in section 8 of the report could change very quickly.

The Leader, in his introduction, had referred to the fact that the Council had not been fully funded by the Scottish Government, but that was going to continue over the next few years, and attention was drawn to the graph at section 7 of the report which showed that, from 2025/26 to 2028/29, local government was projected to be £500m worse off in real terms. The Leader had also referred to the savings that had been made. However, the report showed that just under £7m of savings from previous budgets had had to be rebased, and it was questioned whether those savings had been too ambitious or unrealistic.

Section 9 of the report referred to a projected overspend of £26m in respect of Adult Social Care, yet in 2022/23 the overspend had been close to £3-4m. It was suggested that this showed a lack of monitoring and control which, if not addressed, would lead to severe difficulties.

The Liberal Democrat Group supported the Administration's proposals regarding Council Tax on second homes and long-term empty homes. It was imperative, for the future of Highland and to address depopulation, to try to bring as many properties as possible back into use and provide opportunities for young people to get on the housing ladder. It was also necessary to ensure there were good quality jobs for young people in Highland.

He disagreed with the statement that there had been no use of reserves in balancing the budget, referring to the repurposing of £21.9m of earmarked reserves to bring general reserves up to 3%. This included £5m in respect of community transport, £6m in respect of renewable energy and £1.7m in respect of teacher numbers, all of which had been flagship projects in last year's budget, and meant that, in future years, the ability to rebase earmarked reserves had gone.

Turning to the investment proposals in Appendix 4 of the report, he agreed with many of them, and the amendment was intended to improve things further by targeting specific areas. He went on to summarise the proposals within the amendment, which included:-

- Accelerating improvement in Highland roads – additional funding to look at new and innovative ways of improving the roads in Highland, in partnership with industry. It was emphasised that it was necessary to continually focus on roads, which the budget consultation clearly showed was constituents' main priority;
- Highland Education Conversation – funding to support a conversation on how to deliver services from the early years to around the age of 30. This linked into a separate proposal relating to parenting skills, as children were sometimes presenting to schools not fully able and ready to cope with the primary or nursery environment. It was necessary to have discussions regarding the secondary school structure and what that should look like in terms of management arrangements, and there was also a separate proposal to fund Business Managers to allow Head Teachers to focus on being leaders of learning. This was about empowering teachers and senior educationalists to close the attainment gap and drive up attainment in secondary schools. The conversation around education should be pan-Highland and holistic, including Parent Councils, third sector representatives, Highland Youth Voice, Skills Development Scotland, UHI, Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership and many others, and should be concluded in time to feed into the 2027/28 budget;

- Free online driving theory and driving safety lessons for S6 pupils – too many young people in Highland lost their lives in road traffic accidents, and the aim of the proposal was to raise awareness, at an earlier stage, of how dangerous Highland roads could be, especially in winter when conditions could change quickly;
- Learning Labs or Homework Clubs – it was proposed to trial, with a view to rolling out further, a homework club in a primary school on a couple of nights a week. This would provide mentors, such as retired teachers or Pupil Support Assistants, as well as wraparound care and a safe learning environment, and could be linked up with Pupil Equity Funding to provide other activities. It would provide the young people and volunteers involved with an evening meal, and would help to address both poverty and the attainment gap;
- Intergenerational activities fund – this would allow youth clubs, schools, community centres and third sector organisations to bid for funding for transport costs, food and activities to create links between young people and older people. It would raise awareness amongst young people of the issues experienced by older people, and could potentially foster an interest in a career in adult social care;
- Enforcement – funding to support a zero tolerance approach to the enforcement of fines and fixed penalties in respect of issues such as littering, dog fouling and abandoned vehicles. It was also intended to strengthen enforcement in relation to hygiene standards and planning breaches; and
- Financial Education – it was necessary to equip every parent and young person with financial literacy so that they could avoid debt or poor decision-making in the future, and the proposed funding would support the provision of advice on financial literacy in schools, early years settings and community centres.

In conclusion, it was hoped that the amendment could be accepted as it would create a better, more powerful budget for Highland, and he looked forward to the comments of the relevant Strategic Chairs on the proposals.

The Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Group also referred to his intention to move an amendment, and he thanked the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance and his team, as well as his Scottish Conservative and Unionist Group colleagues, for their assistance in its development. He acknowledged that there were many good proposals within both the Administration's budget and the Liberal Democrat Group's amendment, and there were clearly areas of agreement among Members regarding the scale and scope of the challenges the Council faced. However, he could not support a proposal that would result in taxing hardworking constituents more than they were already paying. Households continued to face sustained cost of living pressures, with mortgage rates, food prices, fuel costs and everyday bills all remaining high. In such circumstances, it was essential for local authorities to focus on protecting residents and strengthening frontline services, and he believed that the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Group's amendment made the right choices for working families, businesses and communities across Highland.

It was proposed to increase Council Tax by 3.5%, the minimum viable level, which was 1.5% above the 2% required to support the Highland Investment Plan. It was also intended to double the Administration's proposed additional investment in roads to £1m to kick-start the recovery of Highland roads and begin to address the more than 30,000 defects and the £233m maintenance backlog. Additionally, the amendment would introduce free Saturday parking in town centres to support High Street businesses; deliver fully funded universal primary school meals worth over £40

per child per month for working families; freeze bereavement fees to protect families at their most difficult times; and maintain Council Tax on second homes, many of which existed for practical reasons and were in use, at 200% for at least the next two years while focusing action on long-term empty properties. Under these proposals, families would be up to £1,386 per year better off which demonstrated the difference that responsible tax policy and pro-growth thinking could make to household finances, and that it was possible to support families, invest in infrastructure and protect frontline services. He went on to state that Highland was one of the most scenic places in the world, and tourism was a cornerstone of the Highland economy. However, it was essential it was managed properly, and the amendment would double the number of Countryside Rangers, strengthening the service and ensuring there was a visible presence across communities. Discretionary funds, Community Council grants and Comfort Scheme funding would also be increased.

In conclusion, he commended the amendment to Members, emphasising the importance of spending taxpayers' money wisely to deliver the essentials well, and leaving as much money as possible in the pockets of those who had earned it.

Thereafter, the following points were raised:-

- Mr A Jarvie moved an amendment where he highlighted that the current waiting list for neurodevelopmental assessment services (NDAS) for autism and ADHD in NHS Highland and Highland Council's area now exceeded 1900 children. There was a significant risk that many of these children would not be assessed during their time in school. An amendment was proposed to transform NDAS with an immediate phase to clear the backlog, and a long term partnership phase to redesign the NDAS assessment model to meet the future levels of need. This would involve commissioning a qualified provider to assess those on the waiting list and clear the existing backlog whilst partnering with Glasgow University Clinical Researchers to develop a new future model. It was estimated that the resources required to implement this proposal would be £1.2m over 2 years funded by the transformation reserve. It was requested that the proposal be approved with a report on the next steps to be submitted as soon as possible to a future Council meeting;
- in terms of the NDAS amendment, this was welcomed as there were long waiting lists for neurodevelopmental assessments and the proposal sought to develop a sustainable solution to prevent waiting lists from building up again. However, the proposal required further development by officers, working with the NHS and allied professionals, as well as procurement and commissioning advice. It was hoped that Officers could develop a detailed proposal that could be considered at an early meeting of full Council;
- in relation to the budget for Social Care, COSLA had lobbied for £750m of additional funding for social care pressures and that had not been forthcoming. There were planned real term increases in the Scottish Government spend on health and social care and social justice. However, that was for services largely delivered by NHS and Scottish Prison Service and excluded the core services provided by the Council, therefore the Council was facing real term cuts in its grant funding over the coming years;
- the challenges in social care were highlighted, for instance the number of people aged 75+ in the Highlands had increased by 78% since 2001 and was set to rise a further 34% by 2028. Therefore, the Council's budget provision for Adult Social Care had been rising faster than its overall budget;

- the NHS and the Council had developed recovery models that were designed to deliver long term savings and improved outcomes. However, bringing about these changes required investment. The proposed budget would introduce £19m additional funding in Adult Social Care, which included a £7m increase in funding for cost recovery, change and transformation;
- it was encouraging to see the way the Council, NHS Highland and all its partners were working together to improve outcomes and deliver improved value for money. Progress was being made in several areas and these budget proposals allowed that work to continue. The oversight of the adult social care budget was by the Joint Monitoring Committee and the joint chair of that committee had already written to the Chief Executives of NHS Highland and Highland Council regarding the need for improved financial control;
- proposed investment contained in the budget would address key areas of poverty and equality, roads maintenance, community investment and support for pupils and their families. There would also be increased funding for ward discretionary funding, community councils and comfort schemes as these were areas of importance for communities. All of this enhanced the recurring funding for care and respite, additional support needs, countryside rangers and many other key areas. Partnership working was very important given the pressures being faced in many areas and this was reflected in the budget;
- savings and efficiencies required to be made in order that the Council could continue to meet its statutory obligations and deliver core services and these were reflected in the budget;
- proposed savings in the education budget were limited and those identified accounted for 0.5% of the total budget, whereas the total of new Council funding for such areas as My Highland Future, Curriculum development, employability, support for additional support needs totalled nearly £3m;
- reference was made to the proposed budget safeguarding frontline services and protected funding for schools. It recognised the unique geography and challenges of the Highlands, delivering services across one of the largest local authority areas in the UK. There was investment in roads and transport connectivity. There was investment in schools, funding to strengthen communities and deliver housing, the importance of which was detailed at the meeting. The Highland Investment Plan would ensure sustainability, resilience and opportunity for the Highland area;
- there was a need to support people to remain active and live in their own homes for as long as possible; to focus on community support and accessible housing with adaptations, early interventions and local care services and reduce long term demand on hospitals and high cost care. The importance of fairness to people was highlighted for people on fixed incomes, particularly at difficult times in life and for this reason it was proposed that bereavement fees should be frozen;
- in order to meet budget pressures the Communities and Place budget proposed increases in line with inflation to lair and interment fees following a freeze in those fees last year; after the refurbishment of the Inverness crematorium fees would increase in line with CPI; there would be an increase in fees for commercial waste but no increase in the fees for brown bin garden collections. With the new waste collection fleet there would be significant savings arising from this and there was scope to reduce the number of vehicles in the fleet by two. There would be savings following the roads and amenities redesign and further income generation proposals as highlighted at the meeting;

- the areas in the budget relating to the continuation of seasonal access rangers, maintenance of long distance paths, repair cafes for community groups was welcomed as was the £500k set aside for initial measures to address the Poverty and Equality Commission's findings. There were numerous planning conditions for biodiversity net gain and the additional resource for Planning was welcomed so that biodiversity net gain areas could be mapped and protected. More investment in active travel and home insulation had been sought in the budget;
- the proposed 7% Council Tax increase in the budget was in the bottom third of increases by local authorities across Scotland. The Council's medium term financial plan put the Council in a good position going forward. Further, the Council's new accounting software meant that all budget holders could monitor their budgets in real time which was important in order to control budgets;
- it was welcomed that the budget would increase the Council Tax on long term empty properties and second homes to help improve housing availability in local communities and there was evidence to show that these increases were working;
- some of the practical and forward looking steps being taken were highlighted to strengthen the economy and infrastructure in Highland that supported communities, businesses and households. These measures included the continued 2% of Council Tax earmarked for improvements would deliver £120m over a two year period; modernising how major projects were delivered to increase capacity and efficiency. Increased investment in roads was highlighted;
- in terms of savings proposed in School Crossing Patrollers, more detail was requested on which schools would be affected;
- in terms of the independent Scottish road maintenance condition survey results, this survey highlighted the major gap in funding to maintain roads to a suitable standard in Highland which was approximately £1m each month. It was felt that the funding formula at COSLA needed to be looked at and the Council should lobby the Scottish Government for more funding for its roads;
- there was concern that repair costs for Chromebooks were to come from school budgets and this should be reviewed;
- an amendment was proposed Dr M Gregson that £0.8m of earmarked reserves be re-purposed to carry out a scoping and feasibility exercise in respect of improvements to Upper Bridge Street, Inverness to complement the refurbishment of Inverness Castle and deliver a better gateway to the Highlands;
- the Highland Housing Challenge was a strategic initiative that sought to address the critical shortage of affordable and market rate housing of all types and tenures through a multi-faceted approach;
- as part of the above approach, the Highland Housing Challenge Fund would provide grants and loans to incentivise bringing empty homes back into use as affordable homes for rent or sale; it was also important that the Council led by example with its own stock;
- the proposed increase in Council Tax for second homes and long-term empty properties be supported on the basis that everyone in the Highlands should have the opportunity to own a suitable first home or to rent affordably;
- querying whether the Council tax premiums on long-term empty properties and second homes would increase housing availability and the need to gather better data in this regard;
- expressing support for the community investment proposals set out in the proposed budget and the level of public consultation and engagement undertaken and also the expansion of the Repair the Highlands Fund;

- concern at the proposal to increase the cost of school meals when the Council was seeking to encourage uptake; it was recognised food inflation had increased, and it was proposed that Poverty & Equality Commission funding be used to mitigate against any increase;
- it was important to note that under the Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Group's amendment families would be better off and the proposal to introduce free school meals for all primary pupils would ensure equity and fairness for all children;
- it should be noted that school meals continued to represent good value with many families receiving free school meals and that officers were working to identify ways of increasing uptake which would help keep costs down in the longer term;
- in relation to the flexible childcare income uplift, the Council would continue to offer lower rates than the average private, voluntary and independent sector childcare rates across Highland;
- concern at any proposal to reduce the workforce as part of the roads and amenities redesign project given challenges in delivering works due to recruitment difficulties and staff vacancies in many areas in Highland;
- the purchase of a roller and paver to reduce hire charges and the need to bring in contractors be supported, however this equipment should be used for roads repairs in Highland and not in other areas as an income generation measure;
- the proposal to have free online driving theory and driving safety lessons for S6 pupils be supported on the basis that any action to reduce the number of fatalities on roads and keep youngsters safe was to be welcomed;
- concern at the impact on local businesses and residents associated with the proposed savings in respect of the Corran Ferry. The reason for the amendment to remove this saving was to allow the Council the time and opportunity to review the whole fare structure and engage with the local community; it was also queried why fares were being increased in the context of repeated loss of service, previous budget proposals not being achieved, and smart ticketing still not being in place;
- the significant backlog of unfunded roads repairs across the Highland and the importance of supporting that part of the Leader of the Opposition's amendment to accelerate improvements in the road network by focusing on innovation and the potential to work with all Members on this proposal going forward;
- concern that additional funding to NHS Highland in respect of Adult Social Care would not be a one-off and that it would be helpful if Members were provided with regular updates or a summit held on future funding requirements;
- support for the proposal to redesign the NDAS model and potential for this to be considered at the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee as it would affect young people going into adulthood; the potential to roll out a similar model in respect of dementia also be considered, noting this could potentially deliver a high level of savings for health and care services;
- concern that multi-year flat cash settlements from the Scottish Government to the Council were not acceptable and that the loss of European funding following Brexit had not been replaced; the onus should be on increased central government funding rather than on Highland tax-payers;
- the Administration, Senior Management Team, High Life Highland and Eden Court be commended on the cost efficiencies delivered and the importance of the Council working with all its partner agencies to help deliver efficiencies was referenced;

- the proposed increase in Council tax was reasonable and necessary, however further increases above the rate of inflation in future years was not fair, affordable or sustainable unless specifically for investment that enjoyed public support; the Council had to continue to live within its means and that of the public it served;
- the Council's inhouse bus team be commended on its success and increasing contribution it made to the Council's financial strength and sustainability as a result of excellent management, smart investment and a willingness to innovate;
- the Leader of the Opposition's amendment in relation to education and learning would enhance the Council's ability to take up the opportunities associated with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, help with preparation for reskilling and uptake of these new skills and the move to an able workforce required to support the growth of the Highland economy;
- the proposal in the above amendment to develop homework clubs be supported on the basis it was a way of improving attainment and the life chances of the most vulnerable pupils; if not approved as part of the budget setting, then it would be helpful for this to be considered going forward;
- the significant work being undertaken on cost control, financial management and monitoring and tracking and confidence that financial recovery and transformation could be delivered at greater pace; a real focus was required on how the Council could achieve more service delivery with better outcomes for the same spend going forward;
- in relation to sickness absence, the proposal to invest in attendance support officers to support managers and teams to help staff to remain at or return to work be supported;
- the majority of schools in Highland did not have school crossing patrollers and over half of the saving would be achieved through existing vacancies; the proposal was to consider whether a patroller was required by identifying and where appropriate implementing alternative safer routes to schools measures;
- it was important not to understate income and overstate expense when budgets were tight; the current global instability meant that there was considerable uncertainty over the budget for 2026/27;
- the proposed council tax increase for second homes was too inflexible as it could increase costs if a renovation project was delayed;
- clarity was sought on whether the figure of 9,000 on the housing waiting list was the number of individual people on the list or the number of properties being applied for. This would be provided to Mr R Cross outwith the meeting; and
- Mr Jarvie's amendment in respect of NDAS could impact significantly on Looked After Children, offending behaviour and employability, all of which could impact the cost savings in the budget.

Thereafter, Dr M Gregson withdrew his amendment that referred to Upper Bridge Street, noting that further discussion on the matter was to be held outwith the meeting.

Mr A Jarvie summarised his amendment, referring to the need to detect and remove barriers to neurodiversity referrals, comparing the policies for diagnosing cancer versus neurodiversity, and summarising the need for a wider range of tools for schools to tackle neurodiversity.

Mr R Stewart summarised his amendment, including the need to support working families and highlighting the need to keep the Council Tax increase to 3.5%, being the lowest sustainable increase, and to the funding proposals detailed in his amendment.

Mr A Christie indicted his acceptance of Mr Jarvie's amendment into his amendment, but indicated that while aspects of Mr Stewart's amendment were palatable, certain issues were not, including the 3% efficiency and its impact on staffing, and the removal of some non-statutory services, which Mr Christie considered to be essential. Mr Christie expressed disappointment that the Administration Members did not support his proposals and he drew attention to the poor state of the road network being the public's most pressing concern, and that faster action and innovation were required. The importance of the Highland Education Conversation was also referenced.

The Leader summarised his motion, and confirmed that Mr Jarvie's amendment was acceptable and would be incorporated. While not accepting Mr Christie's amendment into the motion, he indicated his support for much of the content of Mr Christie's amendment and his desire to include aspects of it in the Administration's budget going forward, in the terms offered by the Chair of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee. However, he made reference to the time required to develop ideas, including the opportunity costs and funding implications of any actions or proposals. The Leader stated that he did not support the inclusion of the amendment offered by the Scottish Conservatives in his motion as he did not feel able to support the proposed 25% additional increase in Council Tax on long-term empty properties and second homes over and above what had already been tabled, and this impacted on the ability to fund some of the further proposals put forward by Mr Stewart. Similarly, with regard to the repurposing of ear marked reserves as proposed by the Labour Group, this could not be accepted into the motion but the Administration would be willing to work with the Group to look at the proposals going forward.

The Leader made reference to the poor state of the road network as a result of many years of insufficient investment, highlighting that a £7.2m capital base budget had been in place in January 2023, with no sustainable investment plan. In comparison, the current capital road budget commitment was £21.5m for the next 22 years, with a sustainable plan and built-in annual increases. Further detail on the specific improvements to the road were summarised, including the focus on the road surface programme and the Area allocation process. The Roads Redesign Process that was underway was summarised. The impact of lack of investment in the Corran Ferry was also highlighted.

Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report, with the addition of the amendment proposed by Mr A Jarvie. Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mrs I MacKenzie, moved an **AMENDMENT** as circulated.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 54 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 3 votes, with 8 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr A Baxter, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mr M Prosser, Ms C Ramsay, Mrs M Reid, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis

For the Amendment:

Mrs B Jarvie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr R Stewart

Abstentions:

Mr S Cameron, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr M Reiss

Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report, with the addition of the amendment proposed by Mr A Jarvie. Mr A Christie, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, moved an **AMENDMENT** as circulated with the addition of the amendment proposed by Mr A Jarvie.

On a vote being taken the **MOTION** received 41 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 22 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs B Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr W MacKay, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis

For the Amendment:

Mr A Baxter, Mr S Cameron, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr A Jarvie, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr S Mackie, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr M Prosser, Ms C Ramsay, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson

Abstentions:

Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr R Stewart

Decision

The Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the budget context, information, assumptions and risks, as set out within the report and provided by the Section 95 Officer;
- ii. **NOTED** reports over the past year from Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission, as referenced in the report, providing positive commentary on the Council's financial management and other financial arrangements;
- iii. **NOTED** the additional processes, actions and controls being introduced to further enhance and improve the Council's financial management and budgetary control arrangements;
- iv. **AGREED** the three-year package of new, additional and revised budget saving, income generation and other saving proposals put forward by the Council Administration as set out at Annex 5a and 5b to the report;
- v. **AGREED** the growth and investment funding proposed by the Council Administration as set out on Annex 4 to the report;
- vi. **AGREED** the package of budget pressures and new burdens as set out on Annex 2 to the report;
- vii. **AGREED** to the Partner Funding arrangements relating to NHS Highland and High Life Highland as set out in section 9 of the report;
- viii. **AGREED** that in relation to Adult Social Care for the 2025/26 financial year, that an additional up to £5.0m of additional one-off funding, in recognition of cost pressures and overspend, be provided to NHS Highland, to be funded from reserves;
- ix. **NOTED** the updated position relating to reserves and taking account of the budget proposals and recommended earmarking and re-purposing as set out within the report (Annex 6);
- x. **AGREED** in relation to Council Tax, a 7% increase for 2026/27, represented by a 5% core increase to balance the budget for the year plus 2% earmarked for capital investment through the Highland Investment Plan, with details of the resulting Council Tax as shown in Annex 7a to the report;
- xi. **AGREED** that in relation to Council Tax on Second Homes and Long-term Empty Properties, the Council would utilise the flexibility to be introduced via legislation and increase premium charges on Second Homes and Long-term Empty Properties as set out in paragraph 18.5 and Annex 7b to the report;
- xii. **NOTED** the indicative assumptions on Council Tax for 2027/28 and 2028/29 as per Annex 7a to the report, with these subject to future review and formal decision as part of annual budget setting;
- xiii. **AGREED** the proposed Revenue Budget for 2026/27 as set out within the report and on Annex 3 to the report; and
- xiv. **APPROVED** the amendment in respect of NDAS and **AGREED** that further work be undertaken to develop a detailed proposal to be considered at a future meeting of the Council.

The meeting ended at 2.10pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday, 12 December 2025 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr I Brown
Mr S Cameron
Mrs I Campbell
Ms C Gillies
Mr J Grafton

Dr M Gregson
Mr P Logue
Mr W MacKay
Ms K MacLean
Mr D Millar
Mrs M Paterson

Non-Member also present:

Ms L Johnston

In attendance:

Mr D Brown, Chief Executive
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager
Ms E Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer
Mr R MacKay, Development Officer, Education and Learning
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr C Ferguson, Gaelic Development Officer, Alba Football Alliance
Mr A Campbell, Alba Football Alliance
Mr D Reid, Head of Sports Development, High Life Highland

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 D Millar in the Chair

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr A MacKintosh.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Good News

The Royal National Mod had been a huge success and a full report, including its economic impact to the Lochaber area, would be taken to the next Gaelic Committee.

Bun Sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh had been awarded a gold award by the Music Education Partnership, for their commitment to musical education and development.

Gaelic and Scots were now formally recognised as official languages of Scotland. This landmark change, introduced through the Scottish Languages Act 2025 and effective from St Andrew's Day, represented a major step forward in language policy.

Members congratulated the pupils from Thurso High School and Dingwall Academy who took part in the National Gaelic Schools Debate.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as presented.

4. Celtic Nations Cup Report – Gaelic Community Event

There had circulated Report No. G/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People and there was a presentation by Calum Ferguson, Gaelic Development Officer, Alba Football Alliance.

Mr Ferguson provided an insight into the origin of Alba Football Alliance (FA) and how it had developed since. The initiative began in March 2020 at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. A sudden shift towards online platforms provided an opportunity to produce a series of Gaelic videos for households. Support followed from the Council's Gaelic team and the process revealed the potential of blending Gaelic and football together. Alba FA became the representative organisation using football to connect, inspire and grow the Gaelic language, and had since evolved to deliver a series of curricular and extra-curricular activities, including holiday camps, across Highland and beyond.

The Celtic Nations Cup launched in Germany in 2024. After returning from Germany, Mr Ferguson saw players taking the lead in their communities. Harry Nicolson, a former Gaelic Medium pupil from Inverness, was now using Gaelic actively within his career as captain of Alba FA men's team and Clachnacuddin Football Club. This year's event in Highland saw a cultural gathering of over 300 people and included a community youth session which was attended by 83 players, the highest ever attendance at a youth event.

The programme was made possible through collaboration with Highland Council and High Life Highland. Partnership discussions were underway with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other local authorities in order to meet the demand across communities.

Members felt this was an excellent example of ensuring that Gaelic was for life, not just the classroom.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the report; and
- ii. the development of the Celtic Nations Cup and its role in promoting Gaelic and bringing communities together.

5. Gaelic Education Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/18/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Highland Council remained the largest local authority provider in the delivery of Gaelic Education;
- teacher recruitment remained a challenge, particularly the retention of probationary teachers; and
- information was sought, and provided, regarding how the Scottish Government planned to support the Council in meeting the commitments to the Gaelic Language Plan, and if there was enough funding within the Gaelic Specific Grant to do so.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress towards securing Gaelic Medium provision in Lochaline Primary school;
- ii. the development of the Gaelic education in-service programme as a strategic response to the *Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education*, which placed a duty on education authorities to support high-quality Gaelic provision; and
- iii. the contribution of events such as the In-service and Oideas podcast series in marking the 40-year milestone of Gaelic Medium Education (GME), and continued engagement with reflective and practitioner-led initiatives that strengthened the visibility and impact of Gaelic education in Highland.

6. PRMS Report

There had been circulated Report No. G/19/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Information was sought, and provided, in terms of Gaelic provision at Raasay Primary School, which was said to be unique.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to accelerate the Gaelic Language Plan action to create an online Gaelic business resource.

7. Cross-service Gaelic Language Plan Implementation

There had been circulated Report No. G/20/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

8. High Life Highland Progress Report

There had been circulated Report No. G/21/25 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

Darren Reid, Head of High Life Highland's Sports Development, provided an introduction to the report, which presented how High Life Highland supported and promoted Gaelic language and culture, and how this supported the Gaelic Language Plan. This included the provision of day-to-day services in addition to supporting the

Royal National Mod in Lochaber and the keenly awaited opening of the Inverness Castle Experience.

Members who had already visited the Inverness Castle Experience spoke very highly of the exhibition, with one Member calling it emotive. A visit was highly recommended by all.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

9. Gaelic 1 Plus 2 Progress Report

There had been circulated Report No. G/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Members welcomed the availability of opportunities for smaller communities in Caithness, particularly where recruiting Gaelic teachers continued to be challenging. Clarification was sought, and provided, in terms of sustainability and measuring the outcome of live lessons. Support was in place, and it was hoped that teachers would make use of it. The live lessons were 40 minutes in length, and would be best after lunch. Teachers would download PowerPoint games and they would become an accessible and valuable self contained unit of learning.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the continued development of Gaelic 1+2 support across the Authority;
- ii. the progress made with Mòd Academy towards supporting pupils and schools in Lochaber with their Gaelic learning and to increase the uptake of Gaelic Learner competitions at the Royal National Mòd 2025; and
- iii. the progress made with Blasad class lessons to develop Gaelic in Sutherland and Caithness schools and to assist achieving the target of 70% of primary schools delivering Gaelic as an L2 or an L3 language.

The meeting ended at 12.10pm.

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Geàrr-chunntas coinneamh **Comataidh na Gàidhlig** a chumadh ann an Seòmar na Comhairle, Prìomh Oifis na Comhairle, Rathad Ghlinn Urchadain, Inbhir Nis, air Dihaoine, 12 Dùbhlachd 2025 aig 10.00m.

An làthair:

Mgr R Bremner

Mgr I MacIlleDhuinn

Mgr S Camshron

A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul

A' Bh-uas C NicIlllòsa

Mgr I Grafton

Dr M Gregson

Mgr P Logue

Mgr U MacAoidh

A' Bh-uas C NicIlleathain

Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir

A' Bh-uas M NicPheadrais

Neo-Bhall cuideachd an làthair:

A' Bh-uas L Sheonstanach

A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr D MacIlleDhuinn, Àrd-Oifigear

A' Bh-uas L Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig

A' Bh-uas E Rodgers, Oifigear Poileasaidh Gàidhlig

Mgr R MacAoidh, Oifigear Leasachaidh, Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh

A' Bh-uas S NicIllinnein, Manaidsear Cho-Sheirbheisean Deamocratach

A' Bh-uas G Nic a' Phearsain, Oifigear Comataidh

Cuideachd a' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr C MacFhearghais, Oifigear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig, Caidreachas Ball-coise Alba

Mgr A Caimbeul, Caidreachas Ball-coise Alba

Mgr D Reid, Ceannard Leasachadh Spòrs, High Life na Gàidhealtachd

Tha rionnag air iomall na duilleige a' comharrachadh moladh a thèid chun na Comhairle. Tha co-dhùnaidhean gun chomharra fo ùghdarras na Comataidh.

Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir anns a' Chathair

Gnothach

1. Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Thugadh leisgeul seachad às leth Mhgr A Mhic an Tòisich.

2. Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd

Cha tugadh seachad Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt no Aithrisean Follaiseachd.

3. Naidheachdan Matha

Bha am Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail air a bhith soirbheachail dha-rìribh agus dheigheadh aithisg iomlan, a' gabhail a-steach buaidh eaconamach a' Mhòid ann an sgìre Loch Abar, a thoirt chun na h-ath choinneimh de Chomataidh na Gàidhlig.

Bha Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh air duais òir fhaighinn bho Chom-pàirteachas Foghlam a' Chiùil, airson a bhith cho dealasach a thaobh foghlam is leasachadh ciùil.

Bha a' Ghàidhlig agus Albais a-nis air an aithneachadh gu foirmeil mar chànanan oifigeil na h-Alba. Chaidh an t-atharrachadh cudromach seo, a chaidh a thoirt a-steach tro Achd nan Cànan Albannach 2025 agus èifeachdach bho Latha an Naoimh Anndra, a' riochdachadh ceum mòr air adhart ann am poileasaidh cànan.

Chuir Buill meal-an-naidheachd air na sgoilearan bho Àrd-Sgoil Inbhir Theòrsa agus Acadamaidh Inbhir Pheofharain a ghabh pàirt ann an Deasbad Nàiseanta nan Àrd-sgoiltean.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na Naidheachdan Matha a chaidh a thaisbeanadh.

4. **Aithisg Cupa nan Dùthchannan Ceilteach – Tachartas Coimhearsnachd Gàidhlig**

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/17/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine agus chaidh taisbeanadh a thoirt seachad le Calum MacFhearghais, Oifigear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig, Caidreachas Ball-coise Alba.

Thug Mgr MacFhearghais seachad cunntas air mar a thòisich Caidreachas Ball-coise Alba agus mar a bha e air leasachadh on uair sin. Thòisich an iomairt sa Mhàrt 2020 aig àirde galar Covid-19. Ri linn gluasad grad gu ùrlaran air-loidhne, bha cothrom ann sreath de bhidiothan Gàidhlig a chruthachadh do dhachaighean. Thàinig taic às dèidh sin bho Sgioba Gàidhlig na Comhairle agus bha e follaiseach gun robh cothrom an lùib a bhith a' toirt Gàidhlig agus ball-coise còmhla. Thàinig Alba FA gu bhith na bhuidheann riochdachaidh a bha a' cleachdadh ball-coise gus ceangal, brosnachadh is fàs a thoirt gu buil a thaobh na Gàidhlig, agus bhon uair sin thathar air sreath de chleasan curraicealach is neo-churraicealach a libhrigeadh air feadh na Gàidhealtachd agus nas fharsainge.

Chaidh Cupa nan Dùthchannan Ceilteach a chur air bhog anns a' Ghearmailt ann an 2024. Às dèidh tilleadh às a' Ghearmailt, chunnaic Mgr MacFhearghais na bha cluicheadairean a' dèanamh sna coimhearsnachdan aca fhèin. Bha Harry MacNeacail, seann sgoilear FtG à Inbhir Nis, a-nis a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig gu gnìomhach na dhreuchd mar sgiobair air sgioba fhear Alba FA agus Club Ball-coise Clach na Cùdainn. Am-bliadhna, chruinnich còrr is 300 neach airson an tachartais sa Ghàidhealtachd agus bha seo a' gabhail a-steach seisean coimhearsnachd do dh'òigridh far an robh 83 cluicheadair an làthair, an àireamh a bu mhotha a bha riamh aca aig tachartas òigridh.

B' ann tro cho-obrachadh le Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus High Life na Gàidhealtachd a bha e comasach am prògram a chur air adhart. Bha còmhraidhean com-pàirteachaidh a' dol air adhart le Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus ùghdarrasan ionadail eile gus coinneachadh ris an iarrtas a bh' ann thar choimhearsnachdan.

Bha Buill dhen bheachd gur e sàr eisimpleir a bha seo airson sealltainn gum buineadh a' Ghàidhlig dhan bheatha san fharsaingeachd, agus nach b' e dìreach cànan a bhuidheadh dhan t-seòmar-theagaisg a bh' innte.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

i. dhan aithisg; agus

- ii. do leasachadh Cupa nan Dùthchannan Ceilteach agus dhan àite aige ann a bhith ag adhartachadh na Gàidhlig agus a' toirt choimhearsnachdan còmhla.

5. Cunntas às Ùr mu Fhoghlam Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/18/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingeann a leanas a thogail:-

- b' i Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd fhathast an solaraiche a bu mhotha a thaobh Foghlam Gàidhlig am measg nan ùghdarrasan ionadail;
- bha a bhith a' fastadh thidsearan fhathast dùbhlannach, gu h-àraid a bhith a' gleidheadh thidsearan probhaidh; agus
- chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh, is a thoirt seachad, a thaobh nam planaichean a bh' aig Riaghaltas na h-Alba gus taic a thoirt dhan Chomhairle ann a bhith a' coinneachadh ri gealltanasan Plana na Gàidhlig, agus co-dhiù a bha maoinachadh gu leòr taobh a-staigh Tabhartas Sònraichte na Gàidhlig gus seo a dhèanamh.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

- i. dhan adhartas gu ruige a bhith a' cur solar Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig air dòigh ann am Bun-Sgoil Loch Àlainn;
- ii. do leasachadh a' phrògram in-sheirbheis airson foghlam Gàidhlig mar fhreagairt ro-innleachdail dhan *Stiùireadh Reachdail airson Foghlam Gàidhlig*, a bha ga chur mar dhleastanas air ùghdarrasan foghlaim taic a chur ri foghlam Gàidhlig de chàileachd àrd; agus
- iii. do na tha tachartasan a leithid an In-sheirbheis agus an t-sreath phod-chraolaidh Oideas a' cur ri bhith a' comharrachadh 40 bliadhna de dh'Fhoghlam tron Ghàidhlig (FtG), agus ri bhith a' cur taic ri conaltradh leantainneach le iomairtean cnuasachail is iomairtean a tha air an stiùireadh le luchd-cleachdaidh a tha a' neartachadh follaiseachd is buaidh foghlaim Ghàidhlig sa Ghàidhealtachd.

6. Aithisg PRMS

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/19/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh, is fhaotainn, a thaobh solar Gàidhlig ann am Bun-Sgoil Ratharsair, agus chaidh a ràdh gun robh suidheachadh na sgoile àraid.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg; agus
- ii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gun deigheadh an gnìomh sa Phlana Ghàidhlig a luathachadh gus goireas gnothachais Gàidhlig air-loidhne a chruthachadh.

7. Buileachadh Tar-Seirbheis Plana na Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/20/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg.

8. Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/21/25 leis an Àrd-Oifigear, High Life na Gàidhealtachd.

Thug Darren Reid, Ceannard Leasachadh Spòrs aig High Life na Gàidhealtachd, seachad ro-ràdh dhan aithisg, a bha a' sealltainn mar a bha High Life na Gàidhealtachd a' toirt taic is brosnachadh do chànan is chultar na Gàidhlig, agus mar a bha seo a' cur taic ri Plana na Gàidhlig. Bha seo a' gabhail a-steach solar sheirbheisean latha gu latha a bharrachd air a bhith a' toirt taic dhan Mhòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail ann an Loch Abar agus fosgladh Turas tro Chaisteal Inbhir Nis.

Thuir Buill a bha mar-thà air tadhal air Turas tro Chaisteal Inbhir Nis gun robh an taisbeanadh air còrdadh riutha gu mòr, agus thuir aon gun robh e air a bhith faireachail. Bha gach neach a' moladh turas chun a' Chaisteil.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg.

9. Aithisg Adhartais Gàidhlig 1+2

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/22/25 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Chuir Buill fàilte air na cothroman a bha rim faotainn do choimhearsnachdan beaga ann an Gallaibh, gu h-àraid seach gun robh e fhathast dùbhlach tidsearan Gàidhlig fhadastad an seo. Chaidh soilleireachadh a shireadh, is fhaotainn, a thaobh seasmhachd agus a thaobh a bhith a' tomhas buaidh leasan beò. Bha taic ri fhaotainn, agus bhathar an dòchas gun dèanadh tidsearan feum dhen chothrom seo. Bha na leasan beò a' mairsinn 40 mionaid, agus bhiodh iad na b' fheàrr às dèidh àm lòn. Bhiodh tidsearan a' luchdachadh a-nuas geamaichean PowerPoint agus bhiodh iad nan aonad ionnsachaidh ruigsinneach is luachmhor a sheasadh leotha fhèin.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

- i. dhan leasachadh leantainneach a thaobh taic do Ghàidhlig 1+2 air feadh an ùghdarras;
- ii. dhan adhartas a rinneadh le Acadamaidh a' Mhòid gu ruige a bhith a' toirt taic do sgoilearan agus sgoiltean ann an Loch Abar len cuid ionnsachaidh Gàidhlig agus gun robhar air meudachadh a thoirt air na bha a' gabhail pàirt ann am farpaisean luchd-ionnsachaidh Gàidhlig aig Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail 2025; agus
- iii. dhan adhartas a bhathar a' dèanamh le leasan clasa Blasad gus a' Ghàidhlig a leasachadh ann an sgoiltean Chataibh is Ghallaibh agus gun robh seo a' cuideachadh le bhith a' coileanadh na targaid de 70% de bhun-sgoiltean a bha a' lìbhrigeadh na Gàidhlig mar chànan C2 no C3.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 12.10f.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 7 January 2026 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance (Remote)	Dr M Gregson
Mr B Boyd (Remote)	Mrs J Hendry
Mr I Brown	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr M Cameron (Remote)	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (Remote)	Mr R MacKintosh (Remote)
Mr A Christie	Ms K MacLean (Remote)
Ms H Crawford (Remote)	Mr D Macpherson
Mr D Fraser (Remote)	Mr D McDonald
Mr K Gowans	Mrs M Reid
Mr A Graham (Remote)	Mrs T Robertson

In attendance:

Mr D Mudie, Strategic Lead (Planning and Building Standards)
Mr M Greig, Community Development Manager
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager (Remote)
Ms L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms K Arnott, Committee Administrator

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 I Brown in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair on behalf of the City Committee extended his gratitude to the winter maintenance teams for their strenuous efforts in response to the current period of severe winter weather.

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Gregg, Ms E Knox and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 3 – Mr C Ballance and Mr M Cameron

3. Short Term Let Control Area Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr C Ballance - as a close family member was likely to be applying for a Short Term Let Licence

Mr M Cameron - as he had a current Short Term Let Licence

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/01/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive, Place which invited the Committee to decide on whether to progress with the introduction of a Short Term Let Control Area (STLCA) covering all or part of their area.

There was commentary on the report by the Principal Planner. In discussion, reference was made to Ward 19 Inverness South and a request for this to be included as an area to be considered for a STLCA. Areas not included in a STLCA would likely become more in demand for Short Term Lets (STL) and Inverness South already had issues with STLs, for example, STL owners not paying factoring fees and factors withdrawing their services as a result. There was a significant demand for housing in Inverness South and it also covered a large rural area which also had a housing shortage. It was confirmed that Inverness South would be included in the consultation.

It was explained that when consulting on a STLCA, the proposal could be amended after the consultation feedback. Therefore, if a community decided they did not want to be included in a STLCA, then there was the possibility to make the STLCA smaller. However, the Regulations did not allow for making a STLCA larger following the consultation without going back and consulting with the community affected. There was a risk of displacement of STLs to other areas by introducing a STLCA and this would be considered in the consultation. The proposals were evidence led and where there was seen as justification for introducing a STLCA.

It was noted that having an STLCA did not prevent individuals from having a STL, it just meant they had to go through a different process. Introducing a STLCA would align planning and licensing processes for STLs. It was also felt that there were far more complaints aimed at STLs than was suggested in the report, as many complaints were not formally raised. It was also felt that consideration should be given to designating the whole Inverness area as a STLCA, as selecting specific areas would move STL owners to consider other areas not designated as STLCA.

A view was expressed indicating a preference that the Culloden and Ardersier area was not included as a STLCA as there was no evidence of many new builds becoming STLs, however this would be discussed further between Ward Members. Further, it was felt that the Aird and Loch Ness area was perhaps too large an area for a STLCA.

An explanation was provided on how information was known regarding house sales to individuals from outwith the area. Areas that did have higher rates of external sales had higher proportions of second homes and licensed STLs.

Also, the issue of empty homes was felt to be a bigger problem. It was advised that there was an Empty Homes Strategy to tackle the issue of empty homes.

In terms of the housing market in Inverness, rents had increased substantially as had house prices and the availability of property for sale/rent had reduced considerably. It was of great concern that local people could not get homes. External sales, STLs, empty homes and land banking by developers contributed to the housing shortage.

There was an opinion that the Council should resist the urge to introduce STLCA without evidence of clear benefits in doing this. The number of rental properties had reduced as Landlords were less keen to rent properties due to changes in legislation. The restrictions in the Scottish Short Term Assured Lease agreement had detrimentally impacted the number of rental properties available. There was also frustration that conditions could not be applied to new developments that could restrict new builds from becoming second homes and STLs.

It was queried if there was clear evidence of benefits of STLCA from the one STLCA within Highland, established in Ward 20 Badenoch and Strathspey. It was advised that this information was not available yet as the control area for Ward 20 only came into force in March 2024 and sales transactions for this Ward had not yet been received for the financial year 2024/25. However, the evidence presented had responded directly to what the Council had been instructed to do by the Short Term Let Planning Circular and the Regulations. This made no mention of the need to demonstrate that existing STLCA were working. However, there was anecdotal evidence from estate agents that house sales in the Aviemore area had slowed and there had not been significant increase in STLs in that area since the introduction of an STLCA.

The reasons for the housing shortage were complex and it was not claimed that properties lost to STLs was the sole reason for the challenges being faced. A STLCA was a tool available to try and slow the number of new STLs and increase the number of new build homes for people to live in.

It was advised that Members would have received correspondence from the Scottish Letting Association reflecting on the experiences of STLCA in Lisbon. It had not had the desired effects of increasing homes for residential purposes in that city. Also, given that the evidence of STLCA in Badenoch & Strathspey was not available as yet, there was a view that it might be better to wait until this was available before proceeding to consultation. Also, evidence of the effect of STLCA on the rental market and on the tourism industry should be gathered. It was acknowledged that the tourism industry was a vital part of the economy, but there were tourist operators including operators of STLs and self-catering operators who provided an economic contribution without having to incur a loss of housing supply.

It was suggested that investors should be encouraged to buy homes and enter into an agreement with the Council, so the Council could rent the homes.

It was felt that to address the housing shortage there was a need to continue building homes in order to address the 9000 people on the Council house waiting list. Also, waiting for further evidence on the success or otherwise of STLCA was not helpful to those seeking accommodation and therefore this matter should be progressed to consultation.

Officers undertook to provide a briefing to Members on feedback from the consultation specific to Inverness.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the evidence presented demonstrating that the housing market within parts of the Inverness Area was subject to significant pressure, exacerbated by high rates of potential dwellings being converted to Short Term Lets;
- ii. **NOTED** that the designation of any new STLCA would have no retrospective impact on existing Short Term Lets where no material change of use had occurred at the time of their establishment, and would therefore only require planning permission from new Short Term Lets established after a STLCA comes into force;
- iii. **NOTED** that in Inverness City Centre, Short Term Lets display different characteristics and present different issues relative to those in rural areas, which warranted further analysis of evidence on matters such as parking, anti-social behaviour, waste services and Environmental Health;
- iv. **AGREED** that the City of Inverness Area Committee therefore seek to progress with the process of considering the introduction of two distinct STLCA's corresponding to the City of Inverness and wider rural areas, and in so doing;
- v. **AGREED** that progressing with consideration of a STLCA enabled communities within the area to participate in that consultation at the appropriate stage,
- vi. **AGREED** that progressing with the consideration of a STLCA enabled further analysis of evidence on matters defined in recommendation iii. to be undertaken and made available to the public within that consultation exercise; and
- vii. **AGREED** that Ward 19, Inverness South be included in the consultation.

The meeting concluded at 11.25am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in **The Glass Room, Kingussie Courthouse, Kingussie/Remotely** on 19 January 2026 at 10.30 am

Present:

Mr J Bruce
Ms M Cockburn

Mr R Jones
Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Mr L Hannah , Community Development Manager
Mr S Hunter, Road Safety Officer
Mr S Grant, Roads Operations Manager
Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer
Ms A Tanner, Community Heritage Officer
Ms A Morrison, Project Manager (Whole Family Wellbeing)
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Inspector C Johnstone – Area Inspector (Badenoch, Strathspey and Nairn)

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were not declarations of interest or transparency statements.

**3. Police - Area Performance Report
Poileas - Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgireil**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/01/26 by the Area Commander (South Highland Area Command), Police Scotland.

The Area Inspector (Badenoch, Strathspey and Nairn) provided an introduction to the report highlighting road safety, drink and drug driving offenses, assaults, domestic offenses, drug possession and acquisitive crime.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- concerns were expressed over the issue of drug driving, and it was queried if a multi-agency approach was being taken to deal with this,

- in response to a question, the Area Inspector undertook to provide Mrs Cockburn with a breakdown of the demographic of drug driving offenders;
- it was queried how much time school liaison officers spent with secondary school pupils as it was important to educate young people about drug misuse and Police Officers were best placed to do this; and
- information was sought, and provided, about the process of roadside drug testing.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 in Annex A to the report, for the period covering 01 April 2025 – 31 December 2025.

4. Glentrium 40mph Speed Limit Order Òrdugh Casg Astair 40msu Ghlinn Truim

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Speed Limit Order was welcomed and would be of benefit to the majority of road users.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the background to the proposed 40mph Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) and the representations received;
- ii. **NOTED** the objections made to “The Highland Council (C1137, Glentrium) 40mph Speed Limit Order 2025”; and
- iii. subject to i) and ii) above **APPROVED** the making of the 40mph Speed Limit TRO (Appendix 3).

5. Prime Markings A939 Grantown to Nairn Route Prìomh Chomharran A939 Slighe Bhaile nan Grandach gu Inbhir Narann

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

- confirmation was sought, and provided, that this scheme would be monitored and could make the case for a wider roll out if it was successful;
- it was suggested that the Prime Markings scheme needed to be considered as a strategy going forward and that it would be useful to have other projects ready to go in the event that a wider roll out was approved;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that the road markings were relatively new and were accepted within Scotland; and
- it was suggested that the B9007 should be considered for future inclusion within the Prime Markings scheme.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the background to the proposed Perceptual Rider Information for Maximisation of Enjoyment and Expertise (PRIME) sign and road marking’s introduction; and

- ii. **APPROVED** the installation of PRIME signage and road markings at six locations on the A939 Grantown to Nairn Road.

6. Area Roads Capital Programme 2026/27 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/04/26 by Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

- an update was sought, and provided, on the situation at Church Terrace in Newtonmore and the Roads Operations Manager undertook to provide Members with a further update once more information became available;
- it was queried whether there was sufficient resource to deal with the additional inspections and repairs needed due to the effects of severe weather;
- it was highlighted that the Re-design Board would be discussing changes to the formula for funding for roads repairs and it was suggested that Members pay close attention to this as there was pressure from certain areas to have the formula revised to their benefit which could be to the detriment of the Badenoch and Strathspey area;
- information was sought, and provided, on how the quality of road surfacing work done by contractors was checked and what guarantees were in place if this failed;
- it was requested that information about the condition of bridges be included alongside information about roads in order to provide a clearer picture of the total amount being spent by the Council on roads and associated infrastructure; and
- Mr R Jones, seconded by Mr B Lobban proposed the following amendment which was accepted by the Committee:-

Jonathan's Brae in Kingussie is the only safe pedestrian route from the majority of the East End of Kingussie to the High Street shops, transport links, Doctors surgery and schools.

It has come to light that Highland Council does not own Jonathan's Brae and therefore will not maintain it.

This amendment asks that Highland Council will approach Jonathan's Brae owners, Dochfour Estate, to begin negotiations to take control of the Brae and report back to Ward 20 Councillors with a view to bringing the surface of the Brae up to an acceptable standard for continued public use.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2, which would be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Area budget would be available after the February 2026 Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee;
- iii. **NOTED** that the rolling programme may require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey have been received and considered; and
- iv. **AGREED** that Highland Council would approach Jonathan's Brae owners, Dochfour Estate, to begin negotiations to take control of the Brae and report

back to Ward 20 Councillors with a view to bringing the surface of the Brae up to an acceptable standard for continued public use.

7. Housing Repairs Performance and Capital Report Aithisg Coileanaidh is Calpa Càradh Rathaidean

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/05/26 by Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- it was queried whether the times for emergency and non-emergency repairs were skewed by Inverness figure, and was suggested that it would be useful to see how the Badenoch and Strathspey figures compare with other rural areas;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that detailed records were kept of repairs needed on voided properties and that costs for these were recouped where appropriate; and
- information was sought, and provided, on how the success of the Energy Performance Certificate Scheme was monitored, and whether the housing team worked with the Handy Person Scheme on the provision of aides and adaptations in properties.

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

8. Community Regeneration Funding Application Iarrtas Maoinachaidh Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Community Regeneration Funds (CRF) currently available in Badenoch and Strathspey; and
- ii. **AGREED** the approved CRF grant award of £5,316.26 to Newtonmore Village Hall.

9. Whole Family Wellbeing Programme – Local Partnership Network Overview Prògram Sunnd Teaghlaich Bhàideanach is Shrath Spè

There is circulated Report No BSAC/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People

During Discussion the following points were raised:-

- the work of the of the Whole Family Wellbeing Team was welcomed and the importance of working collaboratively with partners, including the Cairngorm National Park Authority, was emphasised;
- there were concerns about families struggling with food and energy insecurity that needed to be addressed;
- the Aviemore and Glenmore Trust Café was an important resource, however it was a significant distance outside Aviemore and was difficult to access by

public transport in the evenings, and many of the most vulnerable people did not have access to their own transport;

- there was a perception that Badenoch and Strathspey was an affluent area but the report identified it as the area with the third highest level of deprivation in the Highlands and it was important that this was recognised;
- the difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers and staff for Youth Spaces such as the one in the Badenoch Centre, was highlighted; and
- it was suggested that the Project Manager (Whole Family Wellbeing) be invited to a future Ward Business Meeting.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the strategic alignment of the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme (WFWP) with national and local policy priorities, including The Promise, GIRFEC and the Integrated Children’s Services Plan;
- NOTED** the identified needs in Badenoch and Strathspey and the role of the Local Partnership Network Group in addressing these; and
- AGREED** to support the development of collaborative proposals under Element 2 of the WFWP funding framework.

10. Ward Discretionary Fund Update
Cunntas air Maoin fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Ward Discretionary Fund applications had been approved since the last Committee:

Applicant	Project Title	Amount
Newtonmore Tennis Club	Junior Club Night	£500
Kincraig and Vicinity Community Council	Drumguish Defibrillator	£900

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 3 November 2025, which were approved by the Council on 11 December 2025 which were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 11.30am

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held **remotely** on Monday 19 January 2026 at 10.00 am

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr R Gunn
Mr A Jarvie
Mr S Mackie

Ms J McEwan
Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie
Mr W Mackay

In attendance:

Ms C MacIver, Community Development Manager
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer, Operations & Maintenance
Mr J Gunn, Senior Engineer, Roads Operations
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration
Mr L MacDonald, Housing Repairs Manager
Ms K Van Voorneld, AQIM (Farr KLB Thurso Wick Golspie)
Mr N Young, Project Manager (Active Travel)
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Traffic Officer
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr J Thrower, 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 A Jarvie in the Chair

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

There were none.

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

Item 6 – Mr M Reiss and Mr W Mackay.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No CC/01/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, information on the following issues was sought and provided:

- the availability of specialist wildfire resources for deployment to Caithness, these being currently located in Invergordon and Ullapool, with further resources due to go live in Dornoch;

- mitigation measures for severe weather, for example high snowfall and its impact on fire appliances, with attention being drawn to the Highland Resilience Partnership, to maintenance and inspection regimes, and to driver training;
- the main causes of modern domestic fires, with smoking being a significant issue;
- procedures relating to Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) fire hazard issues, including a visit to a facility that had been helpful and might be useful to do again for both Members and the public, to provide assurance. It was clarified the visit had been a Planning Committee site visit; and
- consideration was given to the perceived reduction in road traffic issues on the NC500 and efforts that had been taken to improve driver behavior.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. Area Roads Capital Programme Update - 2025-26 Cunntas mu Phrògram Calpa nan Rathaidean Sgìreil – 2025-26

There was circulated Report No CC/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members thanked staff for their work on the road network during the recent severe weather;
- concern was expressed at the overall roads budget shortage across Highland, it being insufficient to even maintain the current state of the roads. The additional funding that had been allocation to Caithness was welcomed, and attention drawn to the Redesign Board Road's Review which aimed to improve the efficiency and fair distribution of the roads funding;
- information was sought and would be provided outwith the meeting on the availability and use of the jetpatcher and potholer pro machines;
- information on a possible active travel scheme around Janetstown would be looked into outwith the meeting;
- it was emphasised that some works, for example improvements being undertaken in Wick, were being funded from sources external to the Council and with money that was not transferable to the Roads budget;
- the importance of long term planning in relation to road maintenance and repair was vital, with reference to the expenses of repeated temporary repairs;
- contractor capacity was a challenge at times, noting the significant number of other projects being undertaken across Highland. Roads staffing levels were based on the approved winter maintenance policy. Tar shortages also provided a challenge at times and, in response to a suggestion that the Council should consider producing its own tar, this was being considered as part of the Redesign Board's Roads Review;
- concern was expressed at the number of small issues that required attention, for example unpainted white lines and missing signage;
- assurance was provided that unspent capital budget could be carried forward;
- it was pointed out that the list of road defects was increasing, and attention was drawn to the policy agreed in 2018 to add all issues to the overall roads structural maintenance report, and that some minor issues that would not have been included in the past, were now reported, including issues that did not require immediate attention. The advantages of a planned maintenance

regime to protect the road asset were emphasised and this was being considered by the Road Redesign project. The significantly lower cost of surface dressing compared to full resurfacing was highlighted;

- the huge extent of the road network in Caithness (around 500 miles with only ten gritters) was highlighted;
- the advantages of the Highland Investment Plan were highlighted and information was sought on the pace and progress of the Roads Redesign Review, with further Members workshop planned and an intention to report to the Redesign Board in May 2026. The mechanism for the Highland Investment Plan to consider roads issues was queried; and
- an example was provided of a road surface that had failed after two years and the impact of HGV vehicles on the road surface was referenced.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the works completed on the approved prioritised list to date;
- ii. **NOTED** the additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the works still proposed for the 2025/26 financial year;
- iv. **AGREED** to provide information to the Committee on the availability and location of the jetpatcher and potholer pro machines; and
- v. **AGREED** to provide information to the Committee on a possible active travel scheme around Janetstown

5. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2026-27** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2026-27**

There is circulated Report No CC/03/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members asked that they be involved with varying the priority ranking of the programme through the year if required.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2 to the report, which will be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **AGREED** to delegate to officers in consultation with local Members to allow variations of priority ranking to be made if the need arises through the year;
- iii. **NOTED** that the Area budget will be available after the Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee on 12 February 2026; and
- iv. **NOTED** that the rolling programme might require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey had been received and considered.

6. **Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications** **Iarrtas Maoineachaidh Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd**

Declarations of Interest: The following Members declared interests in this item for the reasons provided, and they left the meeting for this item:

Mr M Reiss as a friend of a CVG post-holder

Mr W Mackay as a Director of CVG

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

During discussion, Members summarised the benefits of the projects and agreed the applications as follows:

John O'Groats Development Trust

Development of Playpark at John O'Groats – £150,000

Caithness Voluntary Group

Caithness Rural Transport – Minibus - £43,500

Caithness Voluntary Group

CVG Third Sector Support Officer - £30,758

Lyth Arts Centre

Caithness Artists in Residence (CAIR) 2026 - £34,640

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the CRF applications presented and that an approval of funding should detail the amount approved and outline any conditions of funding that Members wish to attach to the approval over and above the required technical conditions. A deferral would allow an applicant to resubmit the current application at a future date with updated information or for the project to be approved subject to further funding becoming available. A rejection would mean that the application will not proceed and any future application to the fund should be brought forward initially as a new expression of interest or application; and
- ii. **AGREED** the approved CRF grant award for each application up to the value of the available area allocation, as detailed above.

7. **Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2026/2027**

There was circulated report CC/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, it was queried and explained that the garage rental income was used towards the revenue budget for garage repairs and maintenance, and Members expressed concern that no information or evidence was available on the maintenance programme and budget required for it. Some Members spoke in favour of a 10% rise, while others considered the matter be deferred until more information was provided on the extent of the repairs that were needed, either to the next meeting of the Committee, or to a special meeting.

AGREED to DEFER a decision on level of rent increase to apply to Caithness Garages and Garage Sites, to either the next meeting of the Committee, or to a special meeting of the Committee if a decision was required before the end of the financial year, pending the provision of further information on the repairs budget required. *[post-meeting note: the matter is deferred to the meeting of the Committee on 27 April 2026]*

8. **Housing Repairs and Capital Report** **Aithisg Coileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais**

There was circulated Report No CC/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

At paragraph 6.3 of the report, a table containing emergency repairs data, was missing, and should have been as follows:

Table.7 Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs (hours)

Target 12 hours
8680-8 SHN Benchmark (Group) - 9 hours.

EME	No of Houses	2024/25		2025/26		
		Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
Thurso and Northwest Caithness	840	2.4	1.7	3.2	2.7	2.2
Wick and East Caithness	1205	2.2	0.2	3.2	2.9	2.7
Highland	15351	4.8	3.5	4.9	3.9	3.1

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

9. Wick Street Design – A99 High Street & Bridge Street, Traffic Calming Raised Tables

There was circulated Report No CC/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the history of the street design project was summarised, as were the concerns raised by the community. Information was provided on liaison that had taken place with contractors and provisions being put in place for ongoing communication with the community and local businesses;
- unsafe and inappropriate parking practices, and loading issues were highlighted. The benefits of the advance stop lane for cyclists were explained and Members asked that it be kept as small as possible; and
- it was intended the wider improvements in Wick would be helpful in attracting people and investment to the town centre.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the background to the proposed installation of two Raised Table Traffic Calming/Pedestrian Crossing features on the A99 High Street and Bridge Street, Wick and the representations received;
- considered and **NOTED** the objection made to the proposed installation of two Raised Table Traffic Calming/Pedestrian Crossing features on the A99 High Street and Bridge Street, Wick"; and
- subject to i) and ii) above **APPROVED** the installation of the two Raised Table Traffic Calming/Pedestrian Crossing features on the A99 High Street and Bridge Street, Wick, subject to the advanced stop lane being as small as possible.

10. Education Associated School Group Report

Aithisg Foghlaim Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

There was circulated Report No CC/08/26 and CC/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

It was clarified that formatting inconsistencies in the report would be rectified for future reports, and that the report was based on 2023-24 data, as 2024-25 data was not yet available.

Members welcomed the positive report, with many local schools performing well against the national average.

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

**11. Wick Common Good Fund – 2024/25 Annual Accounts and Final Monitoring, 2025/26 Quarter Three Monitoring Report and 2026/27 Proposed Budget
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige –Ràithe 2 2025/26**

There is circulated Report No CC/10/26 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, Members sought information on the 2026-27 budget surplus figures and on a possible donation of a communion table to the Common Good Fund.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Wick Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2024/25 (Appendix 2);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Wick Common Good Fund, as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement (Appendix 3) against budget for 2025/26;
- iii. **APPROVED** the Wick Common Good Fund Annual Budget for 2026/27 (Appendix 4); and
- iv. **AGREED** the Community Development Manager would provide the Committee with information on the 2026-27 budget surplus figures outwith the meeting and would liaise with the Common Good Fund Officer on a possible donation of a communion table to the Common Good Fund.

**12. Thurso Common Good Fund – 2024/25 Annual Accounts, 2025/26 Quarter Three Monitoring Report and 2026/27 Budget
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Theòrsa – Ràithe 2 2025/26**

There was circulated Report No CC/11/26 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, Members queried the timescale for the conclusion of the identification of assets, and information on the latest position with regard to rental income from Thurso Caravan Park, both of which would be provided outwith the meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Thurso Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts for 2024/25 (Appendix 1);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Thurso Common Good Fund, as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement (Appendix 2) against budget for 2025/26; and
- iii. **AGREED** Thurso Common Good Fund Annual Budget for 2026/27 (Appendix 3); and
- iv. **AGREED** information on the timescale for conclusion of the identification of assets and the latest position with regard to rental payments for Thurso Caravan Park would be provided to the Committee outwith the meeting.

13. **Ward Discretionary Awards** **Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

There was circulated and **NOTED** details of the Ward Discretionary Budget Applications approved for Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward and Wick and East Caithness Ward from 1 April 2025 to 5 January 2026.

14. **Minutes** **Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 3 November 2025 which were approved by the Council on 11 December 2025.

The meeting ended at 12.55pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely on 19 January 2026 at 11am.

Present:

Dr C Birt	Ms L Kraft
Mrs I Campbell	Mr P Logue

In attendance:

Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer - Operations & Maintenance
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Mr E Marsh, Repairs Manager
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Acting Chief Inspector Mr D McAlpine, 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 the Committee.

Ms L Kraft in the chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following declaration of interest:-

Item 8 (Application 1) – Ms L Kraft

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

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/01/26 by the Chief Inspector - Area Commander.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- clarification was sought on the road fatalities recorded during the period, including whether any had occurred at the same locations and whether those involved were local residents or visitors. It was confirmed that the incidents

had taken place at different sites across the North Area, each relating to a separate collision, and that further information on the individuals involved would be obtained and provided;

- Members queried whether figures for Lochalsh were included within the report, and it was confirmed that Lochalsh statistics formed part of the committee data although the area was policed by the South Area Command;
- concern was expressed about the rise in fraud, and Members asked whether improved identification and reporting contributed to the increase. Officers advised that enhanced banking protocols, greater public confidence and improved recording practices had contributed, although offending itself was also rising;
- the small population of the Ward was highlighted and Members asked whether low numbers risked identifying individuals. Data protection was always taken into account and that detailed personal information could not be disclosed;
- an update was sought on policing attendance at Community Councils. It was observed that quarterly combined meetings had replaced routine attendance due to staffing levels and call demand;
- clarification was requested on the appointment of a new officer in Lochcarron, and it was confirmed that the information would be provided after the meeting; and
- further information was requested regarding drug-related activity in the Ward. In this regard, it was reported that possession detections had increased due to proactive work, while no supply offences had been recorded for the period, and emphasised that intelligence from the community remained essential for targeting supply.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2025 – 31 December 2025

4. Area Roads Capital Programme 2026/27 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed regarding the condition of the A890 between Tower and Stromeferry following recent snow, with Members highlighting that drivers were forced to avoid deep potholes and that road safety was being compromised. It was recognised that the route was in poor condition and required attention;
- clarification was sought on the use of contractors, and it was confirmed that a mix of external contractors and Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) squads would be deployed, depending on scheme type and available resources;
- reference was made to the Gairloch Co-op area, whether the previously agreed works by the Co-op had been completed. It was confirmed that the Co-op had agreed to undertake a substantial portion of the works and that the Council's remaining section was included in the programme, subject to confirmation with the Roads Officer; and

- Members referred to the condition of the junction at Scatwell and asked whether it could be included while works were being undertaken nearby. In this regard, it was confirmed that Scatwell was on the future list for discussion at the next Ward Business Meeting and could potentially be added, subject to available budget and higher priority scheme costs.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2, which will be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Area budget will be available after the February 2026 Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the rolling programme may require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey had been received and considered.

5. **Community Asset Transfer Request – Torrison Playpark Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd – Raon-cluiche Thoirbheartan**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** to the sale of the land of the former Torrison Playpark, Torrison, to Torrison District Community Association for £1, based upon the terms of transfer as set out in the report at 6.1.

6. **Housing Revenue Account - Garage Rents 2026-2027 Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais – Mài Gharaidsean 2026–2027**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Consideration was given to the proposed rent increase options for garages and garage sites. Concern was raised that some garages, particularly in Strathpeffer, were too small to accommodate modern vehicles, with reference to earlier discussion about possible demolition and replacement although no progress had been made. It was also observed that many tenants used the spaces for storage rather than parking. There was broad support for an 8 percent increase as the most appropriate option in the current cost-of-living context, acknowledged that the difference in income between the available options was minimal.

The Committee **AGREED** an 8 percent rent increase to apply to Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Garages and Garage Sites.

7. **Housing Repairs Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- clarification was sought on the void period target of 35 days, specifically whether delays caused by prospective tenants taking longer to accept a property could extend the total period and whether there was a point at which an offer lapsed. In this regard, it was explained that housing management continued engagement throughout the process and managed refusals as required;
- concern was raised regarding the energy efficient band D to C Programme, with reference to cases where external contractors had been unable to deliver works despite initial indications that properties would be eligible. It was observed that strict grant criteria and property conditions could limit the level of upgrades, and specific constituent cases would be followed up directly; and
- Members acknowledged the positive contribution of energy efficiency works but recognised that inconsistent delivery could lead to tenant frustration, and they welcomed the offer to investigate individual cases further.

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

8. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications Measadh Iarntasan Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd

Ms L Kraft made a Declaration of Interest in respect of this item, relating to the first application, as a Member of the Board of Wester Ross Biosphere Ltd. In accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, she withdrew from consideration of that application and left the meeting for its duration, returning for the remainder of the item.

The Vice Chair assumed the Chair for consideration of Application 1. Following conclusion of that application, Ms L Kraft returned to the meeting and resumed the Chair for Application 2 onwards.

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members expressed strong support for all four projects. They highlighted the importance of securing continued designation for the Wester Ross Biosphere, acknowledged the significant community benefit of the Lochalsh and Skye Swimming Pool, and welcomed progress on the community hub project in Dornoch and District. The value of the Imaginarium initiative in addressing isolation in remote rural areas was also recognised.

The Committee **AGREED** that funding be awarded from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

- Wester Ross Biosphere Ltd – £38,093.00
- Lochalsh & Skye Swimming Pool Association – £ 16,380.00
- Dorie & District Community Trust – £ 11,130.00
- Create Inspire Projects CIC (CIP) – £ 14,122.20

9. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Budget

Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Fund applications had been approved from 1 October – 31 December 2025:-

- Contin Community Trust - Senior/Kids Christmas Party - £500
- Aultbea Community Hub - Purchase a new dishwasher for the Community Café - £1,500

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 3 November 2025 which were approved by the Council on 11 December 2025.

The meeting ended at 12:35pm

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:

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2, which will be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Area budget will be available after the February 2026 Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee;
- iii. **NOTED** that the rolling programme may require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey have been received and considered;
- iv. **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;
- v. **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.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, and remotely on **Monday, 26 January, 2026 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr M Prosser
Mr S Cameron	Ms L Saggars
Mr J C Grafton	Ms K Willis
Mr T MacLennan	

Officials in attendance:

Ms K MacLeod, Roads Operations Manager (Lochaber), Place Service
Ms K Clark, Area Quality Improvement Manager, People Service
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Officer Traffic & Parking (Acting), Place Service
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry, Place Service
Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry), Place Service
Mr A Maciver, Principal Engineer, Place Service
Mr M Culbertson, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager, Place Service
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager (West & Mid Highland)
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager, Place Service
Mr D Wilby, High Life Highland, Director of Corporate Performance
Ms A Martin, FW2040 Project Manager, Place Service
Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer, Place Service
Ms E Garden, Road Safety Officer, Place Service
Mr S Hunter, Road Safety Officer, Place Service
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Also in attendance:

Station Commander Che Scott, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service (item 3 only)

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Ms K Willis in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declaration of Interest/Transparency Statement:-

Item 8 – Mr S Cameron (Declaration of Interest)
Item 12ii – Mr A Baxter (Transparency Statement)

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus
Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No LA/1/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Following commentary on the report by the Station Commander, Members expressed their appreciation to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for all the hard work they did to keep communities safe and particularly the retained crews across Lochaber who were vital in ensuring that there was a robust fire service available.

Reference was made to the challenges with station availability and recruitment which was made more difficult with changing work patterns. In some rural stations the long term trend for availability was becoming more precarious, for example the 2nd fire appliance in Kinlochleven had zero availability. It was hoped that the current service delivery review would consider new options such as transferring the 2nd fire appliance in Kinlochleven to the Glencoe and Ballachulish area where many of the call outs to road traffic accidents occur. Cross service sharing of facilities should also be considered, such as with the Police and Mountain Rescue services.

It was noted that on occasions in rural communities in Highland including Lochaber there was no crew available for extended periods of time and it was queried what contingencies were in place for this. It was advised that the joint mobilisation partnership scheme was a pilot scheme designed to ensure there were crews to attend all incidents. While this innovation was welcomed there was still a concern that lack of station availability could leave rural areas vulnerable to delays in fire service responding to incidents due to bad weather for example.

There were a high number of recruits going through training at the moment in Lochaber, but it would take some time before this was reflected in the data for station availability.

In terms of deliberate fires in the area, these were subject to ongoing investigations and targeted prevention and further details on this would be provided in the next area performance report to the Committee. Discussions with Members would also take place in relation to road traffic accident prevention. Also, efforts were being made to prevent wildfires which included educating the public.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

**4. High Life Highland Service Delivery
Lìbhrigeadh Seirbheis High Life na Gàidhealtachd**

There was circulated Report No. LA/2/26 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland which provided the Committee with information on High Life Highland (HLH) service delivery in the Lochaber Committee area.

Following a summary of the report by the High Life Highland, Director of Corporate Performance a view was expressed that services provided by HLH were very valuable across Highland communities and should not be taken for granted. In terms of the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre, there had been plans in the past to bid for

funding for a complete refurbishment of the centre, but this was not progressed. In this respect, there was new tourism infrastructure and facilities being created on the Isle of Skye and it was queried what discussions Officers in HLH have had with Highland Council to invest in the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre. It was advised that HLH would welcome discussions with the Council to see if there was potential to develop a new tourism facility in Glen Nevis which would bring significant opportunities and benefits to the area and visitors and the Director of Corporate Performance undertook to follow this up with Highland Council Officers.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the report; and
- ii. HLH would discuss with Highland Council Officers the potential to develop a new tourism facility in Glen Nevis.

5. Area Roads Capital Programme 2026/27 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2026/27

There was circulated Report No. LA/3/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which detailed the proposed prioritised 2026/2027 Area Roads Capital Programme for Lochaber.

Following commentary on the report by the Roads Operations Manager (Lochaber), a view was expressed that the expectations of Members and communities in terms of the roads maintenance programme could never be met due to the limited resources available. It was noted that this was a multi year programme and last year there were £7.9m of road repairs required in Lochaber. The current total of road repairs was now £12.9m and this highlighted that the Council would never catch up with the work required on its roads. It would take 7 years to get to the bottom of the list of road repairs and in the meantime the capital costs would increase above inflation. Therefore, without significant Scottish Government funding, the Council would never catch up on the roads maintenance programme.

Continuing, at last years meeting when considering the roads maintenance budget, the Committee had agreed to invite the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee to a meeting of the Committee to discuss Member concerns about the lack of resources provided, but the Chair had not attended. It was requested that the Chair be invited to attend again to explain the Administration's approach to providing capital funding to local area Committees.

In terms of the £1.5m overspend in the Councils roads maintenance budget and that this would be brought back into balance, it was queried what impact this would have on the road maintenance budget for Lochaber. It was advised that Officers locally had not been instructed to change revenue budget spending as yet.

In terms of projects not carried out last year, these would be carried forward into the 2026/27 financial year. The roads maintenance list was an evolving list as schemes were completed and others were added.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2 of the report, which will be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Area budget will be available after the February 2026 Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- iii. **NOTED** that the rolling programme may require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey have been received and considered;
- iv. **NOTED** with concern that the total amount of capital expenditure required to fix the Lochaber road network is increasing year-on-year, having increased from £7.9 million in 2025/26 to £12.9 million in 2026/27 and the Council is failing to address this backlog of repairs; and
- v. **NOTED** that the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee and appropriate officers have not accepted the Committee's previous invitations to attend the Lochaber Committee to explain how the Council addresses the Committee's concerns. Consequently, request their attendance at the Lochaber Committee on Monday 11th May 2026.

6. **Glen Etive 18t Weight Limit Crìoch Cuideim 18t Ghleann Èite**

There was circulated Report No. LA/4/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which invited Members to approve the introduction of a 18t Weight Limit Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) "The Highland Council (C1094 Glen Etive Road, Glencoe) (Weight Limit) Order 2025".

In discussion, reference was made to tourist traffic on this road. While a weight limit could be introduced, the volume of tourist traffic on the Glen Etive road could not be controlled. That cumulative weight would also have a deteriorating effect on the road. It was advised that there was an issue with tourist traffic on this road and there were signs on the road advising users that the road was unsuitable for campervans and there was a 30 foot vehicle length restriction in place. However, while the cumulative weight of tourist traffic was a concern, this would not structurally fail the road.

An undertaking was given to check if a usage survey had been conducted on this road and information on this be shared with Members. It was felt that a weight restriction would not solve the long term condition of the road unless there was more investment in maintenance on it.

Given that the road was out of the way people could get away with not adhering to restrictions and if a weight restriction was approved, it was queried how this would be monitored. It was advised that the weight restriction would be enforced by Police Scotland.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the background to the proposed 18t Weight Limit Traffic Regulation Order and the representations received;
- ii. **NOTED** the objections made to "The Highland Council (C1094 Glen Etive Road, Glencoe) (Weight Limit) Order 2025"; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the making of the 18t Weight Limit Traffic Regulation Order.

**7. Cuil Bay 40mph Speed Limit
Crioich Astair 40msu Bàgh na Cùile**

There was circulated Report No. LA/5/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which invited Members to approve the introduction of a 40mph Speed Limit Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) "The Highland Council (Cuil Bay, Duror) (40mph Speed Limit) Order 2025".

In discussion, given the road's location to a School it might be more appropriate to consider in future a 30mph speed limit on this section of road for safety purposes. It was advised that this section of road was outwith the settlement and did not meet the criteria for a speed limit any lower than 40mph. Any consultation from Transport Scotland regarding setting speed limits would give the opportunity to review this. In terms of the number of users and types of users on the road, this was not in the remit of the TRO, but speed data was available. Also, the temporary 20mph speed limit in front of the School could be looked at again.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the background to the proposed 40mph Traffic Regulation Order and the representations received;
- ii. **NOTED** the objections made to "The Highland Council (Cuil Bay, Duror) (40mph Speed Limit) Order 2025"; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the making of the 40mph Speed Limit Traffic Regulation Order.

At this point the Committee adjourned for a comfort break and the meeting resumed at 12.10 p.m.

**8. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2026/2027
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2026/2027**

Declaration of Interest: Mr S Cameron declared an interest in this item as he rented a Council garage. Mr Cameron left the meeting for this item

There was circulated Report No. LA/6/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided information on garage rents for Lochaber and invited the Committee to set rent levels for garage and garage sites held on the Housing Revenue Account for 2026/2027.

In discussion, it was queried if all the rent income raised from garage rents in Lochaber was spent on garages in the area. Also, was there any underspend in last years maintenance budget for garages. In response, it was not guaranteed that all the increase in rents would come back to the Lochaber area. Income from the rent increase would go to a central budget and was distributed accordingly. Annual income generated from garage rents and garage sites was around £95k and £23k was spent on maintenance this financial year. Last year the garage budget was fully spent. Local budgets could be controlled to ensure any budget increase was spent on garages.

In terms of the garages and garage sites, it was queried if the current stock was up to a certain standard and was more money for maintenance required. It was advised that the garages needed significant investment to bring them up to a

suitable standard. There was a garage action plan which highlighted garages most in need of improvement. There were some garages earmarked for disposal in the medium term given their poor condition. There were no significant plans for works on garage sites, but this would be included in the garage action plan review.

The Committee **AGREED** an 8% rent increase be applied to Lochaber Garages and Garage Sites.

9. Housing Repairs and Capital Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais

There was circulated Report No. LA/7/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided information on how the Housing Service performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 December 2025.

In discussion, reference was made to the Swedish houses in Caol and it welcomed to see the improvements in energy efficiency made to these properties. Also, it was queried if there was a reason why the emergency repair times had increased from the same quarter last year. It was advised that this would have been due to the bad weather in that quarter. Work could only be carried out when it was safe to do so and this would affect repair times.

It was queried what component accounting was undertaking regarding plans to replace components in houses e.g. replacement kitchens/bathrooms. It was advised that there was an asset management strategy which detailed the investment required to properties and would identify timeframes for component replacement.

The hard work of the housing repairs team was acknowledged in dealing with significant workloads.

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

10. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-bheòthachadh Coimhearsnachd

There was circulated Report No. LA/8/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place. Members were asked to consider the applications presented and agree whether to approve, defer or reject the application.

The report detailed eight community regeneration fund applications received for consideration with a total grant request value of £270,120.28. If Members were to approve all of these applications, there would be £281,108.53 remaining in the Lochaber Community Regeneration Fund budget for 2025-26. All eight applications were eligible for support.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** all the applications for Community Regeneration Fund grant award and the grants requested.

**11. Fort William Common Good Fund – Parking Costs
Maoin Math Coitcheann a’ Ghearasdain – Cosgaisean Parcaidh**

There was circulated Report No. LA/9/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place. The operational management costs to deliver the car parking at the West End carpark must be considered and approved by this Committee before being recharged against the Fort William Common Good Fund.

In discussion, it was noted that the common good fund did not own the entrance to the West End Car Park, but previous maps showed it did. There was also concern about the potential for significant costs to fall on the common good fund with any repairs required to the sea wall. It was felt the Council should pay for any such repairs and this burden should not fall on the common good fund.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** that £4249.55 costs incurred by the Council’s Parking Enforcement Team to operate the paid parking scheme at the Fort William Common Good site is charged against the Fort William Common Good Fund;
- ii. **NOTED** how the 55% Common Good split was calculated; and
- iii. **NOTED** the maintenance update and the intention for this to be brought to Committee again once surveys have been completed.

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

Transparency Statement - Mr A Baxter declared a transparency statement in relation to the Kinlochleven High Associated School Group Overview item as he had children that attended Kinlochleven High School. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

The Area Quality Improvement Manager provided commentary on all the reports detailed below. In discussion, it was noted that to protect pupil confidentiality, the smaller schools attainment scores were not published, but it was requested that these scores be aggregated for all the primary schools in an associated school group (ASG) and for the whole of Lochaber. It was advised that the attainment reports were being revised and this request would be put forward for consideration in the review. This would make it clear in what was going well in the schools and areas for improvement.

Further, it was queried if all primary schools across all the ASGs had permanent contracts for all teaching staff. An undertaking was given to provide this information for Members. It was advised that consistency for learners was important and where possible permanent teaching contracts were in place. However, every year the Council required to place probationer teachers in schools and there were teacher redeployments. In terms of workforce planning this could impact staffing in schools.

In relation to Kinlochleven High School, this school had an inspection within the last five years. This inspection raised some concerns which were being addressed. There had been a recent follow up inspection and it was queried what progress there had been since the previous inspection had been completed. It

was advised that the follow up inspection had concluded two weeks ago and Officers were still waiting on the first draft report from Education Scotland. As soon as this was received it would be shared with Members. However, there had been positive progress in identifying the areas of improvement outlined in the original inspection and good progress had been made in relation to each of the areas of improvement identified.

Some of the attainment data provided related to 2023/24 and it was queried if more up to date information could be provided. It was advised that the Primary School data was for the last school session. Secondary School data was published in February and this would be shared with Members when available. In terms of how far forward leaver destination information was tracked, this would be checked and a response provided to Members.

Following consideration, the Committee **NOTED** the reports detailed below and that the following information would be provided to Members:-

- i. that the attainment reports were being revised and that the request that the smaller schools attainment scores be aggregated for all the primary schools in an ASG and for the whole of Lochaber, would be put forward for consideration in the review;
- ii. that information would be provided to Members on whether all primary schools across all the ASGs had permanent contracts for all teaching staff.
- iii. that the Education Scotland inspection report on Kinlochleven High School would be shared with Members when available;
- iv. that the most recent Secondary School attainment data would be shared with Members when available; and
- v. that it would be checked how far forward leaver destination information was tracked and this information would be shared with Members.

i. Ardnamurchan High Associated School Group Overview

There was circulated Report No. LA/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People Cluster.

ii. Kinlochleven High Associated School Group Overview

There was circulated Report No. LA/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People Cluster.

iii. Lochaber High Associated School Group Overview

There was circulated Report No. LA/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People Cluster.

iv. Mallaig High Associated School Group Overview

There was circulated Report No. LA/13/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People Cluster.

**13. Lochaber Area Place Plan Update
Cunntas air Plana Àite Sgìre Loch Abar**

There was circulated Report No. LA/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which invited Members to scrutinise progress on the Lochaber Area Place Plan.

Following a summary of the report by the Senior Community Development Manager specific reference was made to the Lochaber “Partnering for Progress” event held in November 2025, co-hosted by Highland Community Planning Partnership, Lochaber Area Place Plan, Voluntary Action Lochaber, and Fort William 2040. The aim of this event was to bring forward a coordinated approach to engagement, better sharing of updates on ongoing projects, and improved access to support and funding opportunities for community groups. The event provided a platform for residents, partners, and agencies to collaborate on key topics aligned with the Lochaber Area Place Plan priorities. Members acknowledged the work undertaken by Officers to organise this event.

It was queried if community action groups were involved in the Lochaber Area Place Plan. It was advised that the Place Plan did recognise all the different groups and various community action groups, different local place plans and development groups. The plan also reflected statutory plans, such as the Highland Development Plan.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress against the Lochaber Area Place Plan; and
- ii. **AGREED** continued support and to promote the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other Plans, Strategies, development, and funding opportunities across or impacting the Lochaber area.

**14. Fort William 2040 Bi-Annual Update
Cunntas Leth-bhliadhna a’ Ghearasdain 2040**

There was circulated Report No. LA/15/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the progress of the Fort William 2040 (FW2040) Masterplan and Delivery Programme.

In discussion, an update was sought in relation to the proposed bus link in the Blar Mor development. It was advised that this would be taken account of in the integrated transport plan and there was bus infrastructure work being carried out. The Upper Achintore and the Blar Mor Bus gate projects had been submitted for planning permission.

Reference was made to the abandoning of skiing and cycle provision at Nevis Range. This was disappointing given that Fort William was meant to be the outdoor capital of the UK and the Mountain Bike World Championships held in the past had made the area world famous. It was advised that the Nevis Range was a private enterprise and they would have business reasons for changes there. Also the Mountain Bike World Championships organisers had decided to hold the event elsewhere.

The lack of access to Loch Linnhe was also highlighted and this was a key theme in FW2040 and consultants had been asked to look at this in terms on the integrated transport plan.

In terms of the culture and leisure options appraisal and bus station improvements/relocation, Members wished to meet with the Consultant at an area business meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress that has been made with the individual projects within the FW2040 Masterplan as summarised at Appendix 1: FW2040 Annual Masterplan Project Update December 2025;
- ii. **NOTED** the successful delivery of the Partnering for Progress event in November 2025. This was organised in collaboration with the Lochaber Community Partnership, the Highland Council Area Place Planning team, and Voluntary Action Lochaber continuing the FW2040 commitment to ongoing community engagement. Further detail was provided in section 5 of the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** to support identified priority FW2040 work areas for the coming year as summarised in section 6 of the report.

15. Corran Ferry Update Cunntas air Aiseag a' Chorrain

There was circulated Report No. LA/16/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme, the Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel and Corran Ferry Service operations.

Following commentary on the report from Officers, it was queried what the timescale was for the Corran Ferry Ticketing project. In response, there was no fixed target implementation date for the ticketing project. The tasks to be undertaken would be finalised following engagement with stakeholders and Members.

Further, it was queried if the Council would admit there was a problem with the vehicle ramps on the Maid of Glencoul and that it was the fault of the ramps not drivers for damage to vehicles. Also, what guidance was being given to drivers who may wish to make a claim for damages and how many claims for vehicle damage there had been. In response, there were more than ten claims for damage and the exact number of claims would be shared with Members. A Naval Architect conducted an on-site assessment on the Maid of Glencoul's ramps and a written report on this had been shared with stakeholders. In preparation for her annual refit scheduled for March 2026 the Naval Architect is also examining any opportunities for improving the ramp design. The ramp was of an old design and speed of vehicles going onto the ferry was a contributing factor to damage to vehicles. Claims for vehicle damage sustained on embarking/disembarking the Maid of Glencoul should be e-mailed to:- CorranFerry.Office@highland.gov.uk

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme & Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel updates; and
- ii. Corran Ferry Service update.

**16. Appointments
Cur an Dreuchd**

- i. **Appointment to the West Highland Way Trust, Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) Board of Trustees
Cur an Dreuchd gu Bòrd Urrasairean Buidheann Corpaichte
Carthannach na h-Alba, Slighe Taobh Siar na Gàidhealtachd**

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Councillor M Prosser as a Trustee of the West Highland Way SCIO for the first term after the AGM on 14th January 2026.

- ii. **Appointment to Knoydart Foundation
Cur an Dreuchd gu Urras Chnòideirt**

The Committee **AGREED** that Councillor S Cameron be appointed to the Knoydart Foundation.

At this point the Committee adjourned for a comfort break and the meeting resumed at 1.50 p.m.

**17. Fort William Common Good Monitoring Report
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Maoin Math Coitcheann a' Ghearasdain**

There was circulated Report No. LA/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place, which presented the 2024/25 Annual Accounts, 2025/26 Quarter Three Monitoring Report and 2026/27 Proposed Budget for Fort William Common Good Fund (FWCGF).

In discussion, it was queried why the costs and income relating to the West End Car Park were different in this report as compared to the report at Item 11 of this minute relating to FWCGF Parking costs. This point would be clarified and information shared with Members. Also, it was queried how the parking costs in appendix 2 of the report were arrived at. It was advised that this was the cost of parking services for the West End Car park. Also clarification was sought on property costs. It was advised that as this was a new common good fund, costs were not fully understood, therefore a guide had been taken from other common good funds. Therefore, this was a proposed budget until costs were understood.

A view was expressed that there was a substantial risk to the fund due to the potential for the fund to bear costs associated with repairing the West End Car Park. Acting on behalf of the fund it would be better to spend all the money in the fund rather than funding the cost of repairing the car park and this liability should be removed from the fund and the Council should take on this liability. While a formal response to this would be sought and shared with Members, it was understood that Members as custodians of the FWCGF first responsibility was to look after the assets of the common good fund.

Given that there some points of clarification still required on this report as discussed, an amendment to the recommendations was proposed that the proposed budget for 2026-27 be not approved until the liabilities are understood and a sustainable surplus has been established. This amendment was supported by the Committee.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to defer to the next meeting the FWCGF Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) for 2024/25 for clarification on costs and income relating to the West End Car Park;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the FWCGF as shown in the 2025/26 Quarter Three monitoring statement at Appendix 2;
- iii. **NOTED** that the FWCGF needs to build reserves to cover liabilities; and
- iv. **AGREED** not to approve the proposed budget for 2026-27 and proposed property costs until the liabilities are fully understood; more detail is available on the property costs; and a sustainable surplus has established sufficient reserves to cover those liabilities and costs.

18. **Fort William Common Good Putting Green Shed Options Seada Pairèid Maoin Math Coitcheann a' Ghearasdain**

There was circulated Report No. LA/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place, which presented two options regarding the potential future use of the Putting Green Shed ("the Shed") which is a Common Good Fund (CGF) asset located on the Parade in Fort William.

In discussion, a third option was suggested to offer the Putting Green Shed and solar panels for sale and removal from the site on the Parade, with the proceeds of the sale to go to the common good fund.

In response to a query, it was advised that a community consultation would only be required when a change in use of a common good asset was in scope. There would be a cost of circa £3k for a community consultation. In terms of option 1 detailed in report, there would be no requirement for a statutory consultation presuming no change of use from storage to another purpose.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED**:

- i. option 1, as detailed in the report, for the potential future use of the Fort William Common Good Fund Putting Green Shed; and
- ii. the next steps for the potential future use of the Fort William Common Good Fund Putting Green Shed.

19. **Ward Discretionary Fund 2025/26 Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund awards from 1st November to 31st December 2025:

Ward 11

Young Enterprise Highland and Moray - Strengthening Career Opportunities for Young People - £300

Ward 21
no awards approved

Trusts and Bequests awards:

Ben Nevis Peace Cairn Trust Fund – John Muir Trust - £1849.17

HCT Caol and Mallaig Poor Fund – Lochaber Citizens' Advice Bureau - £2999.97

20. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 10 November 2025 which were approved by the Council on 11 December 2025.

The meeting ended at 2.23p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Wednesday 28 January 2026 at 9.30am.**

Present:

Ms S Atkin (Vice Chair)	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr R Bremner	Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (Chair)	Ms A MacLean
Mr L Fraser	Ms K MacLean (substitute) (remote)
Mr A Graham	Mr D McDonald
Mr R Jones	Ms J McEwan (remote)
Ms M MacCallum	Ms M Ross

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter (remote)	Mr M Hutchison (remote)
Mr M Cameron (remote)	Mr S Kennedy
Mr J Finlayson (remote)	Ms E Knox (remote)
Mr R Gale (remote)	Mr S Mackie (remote)
Ms C Gillies (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr J Grafton (remote)	Mr M Prosser (remote)
Dr M Gregson	Mrs T Robertson (remote)

Tenant Representatives in Attendance:

Ms L Richardson

Officials in Attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr F MacDonald, Chief Officer – Property and Assets
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing & Customer Services
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead Finance (Place)
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates Management)
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager (West & Mid)
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, 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.**

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mr I Brown, Mr S Cameron, Mr D Macpherson and Mr R Stewart.

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

The Committee **NOTED** that there were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

**4. Housing Revenue Account Financial Strategy and Estimates for 2026/27
Tuairmsean Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2026/27**

There had been circulated Report No HP/01/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the Tenant Representative welcomed the format of the collaborative report but expressed concern about the design of the tenant consultation, the affordability of the proposed increase, and the use to which rental income was put. She spoke against the recommended 8% rise across the HRA estate for 2026/27, with particular reference to working tenants who did not qualify for benefits, and unpaid carers, and quoted a report from April 2025 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which indicted that wages in Scotland had only increased by 4.6%, the lowest in the UK, with one in five Scots, and one in four children living in poverty. The welfare system was failing to protect people from harm and it should not be an aspiration to have more people claiming benefits. Increased use of foodbanks, the rise of cost of living related shoplifting, and the increasing cost of second hand goods were highlighted, as were other planned and unexpected costs facing people, the role of poverty as a driver of ill health and the limiting of life-enriching activities, and the rise of malnutrition as a result of food poverty. In relation to the use of the rental income, not enough was being spent on improving the properties, too few met accessibility standards, the void rate was too high, and tenants should not be effectively funding new build properties. The benefits of a housing mitigation fund to help deliver new homes was highlighted. In relation to the high loan charge ratio, it was suggested the Council should not continue to borrow money and, in summary, a rise of 5% to 5.5% was suggested.

Some Members raised the following issues in favour of the recommended 8% rise:

- if the Council had taken appropriate action to increase rents several years earlier, the current situation would be less severe, and it was vital that the same flawed decision-making did not recur, given the implications for the future. The Council's responsibility to maintain and invest in the housing stock was emphasised;
- discussions were ongoing with the Scottish Government on how to fund new housing and reduce the debt and, until government policy was changed, the Council had to take appropriate action to tackle the current situation;
- the Council's responsibility to provide safe, warm and sustainable homes, which required adequate investment, was highlighted;

- while acknowledging the difficulties the 8% rise could cause some tenants, reference was made to the challenging position facing the HRA budget, as detailed in section 5 of the report, and that an 8% rise now would prevent the situation further deteriorating and requiring an even steeper rise in years to come;
- reducing the rent increase by less than 8% would impact the maintenance and repairs budget, resulting in an increase in more costly emergency repairs, and reducing the value of the properties. Investment in maintenance and improvements, such as new windows, improved insulation, and upgraded heating systems could significantly reduce household energy bills;
- the need to reduce the loan charge ratio was emphasised; and
- the welfare system was designed to assist families who were living in poverty, and support was provided to tenants with financial struggles. However, working tenants that did not receive benefits were also likely to face additional financial pressures and need support. It was therefore proposed that a fund should be created to assist with this. Confirmation was provided that officers would examine the feasibility of developing such a scheme and how this could be financed, the details of which would be reported to Members for consideration.

Some Members raised the following issues against the recommended 8% rise:

- the Impact Assessment Area in paragraph 4.6 of the report referred to the need for further analysis on the potential impact on household budgeting and the need for this along with further information such as the risk of increased rent arrears to allow a decision to be made was emphasised;
- support was voiced for many of the points made by the tenant representative;
- although Highland had the lowest rent levels in Scotland, it also had lower average wages as well as higher heating, fuel and grocery costs. In some rural areas, the cost of living was even higher than in urban cities;
- concerns were expressed that the consultation did not include an alternative lower rent increase option. In addition, further concerns were raised regarding the low response rate to the consultation and the importance of identifying new ways of engaging tenants was emphasised;
- with reference to the reported underspends in the budget, it was suggested the 8% rise was not required to fund maintenance, but an explanation for the underspends was provided, namely that they had resulted from unexpected additional capital funding for specific projects which could be carried forward;
- the relatively small number of tenant responses should be investigated and other means found to reach more people, and an explanation was provided of the informal ongoing feedback that was received from tenants via in person and other communications;
- the increasing number of people using foodbanks, community fridges and similar initiatives was evidence that an 8% rent rise was too high for many to afford;
- reference was made to the cumulative impact the decisions of several Council committees could have on an individual or family, and issues should be looked at more holistically. For example, specific reference was made to housing rent increases, council tax increases and Scottish water rate increases;
- concern was expressed that Council tenants were paying twice towards new build houses, through their rent and through the Highland Investment Plan;
- while the proposals to reduce the loan charge ratio were welcomed, the 8% rise would place too high a burden on tenants, and would be contrary to the Council's efforts to tackle poverty;

- the plight of older adults living in poverty was highlighted and it was urged that if the 8% was agreed, effort be put into mitigation for those struggling with the increases;
- the financial challenges facing tenants who had recently moved into employment were highlighted and it was unfair to charge them an 8% rise with no guarantee any of the income would be spent on their property;
- there were around 15,000 Council tenants in Highland, and around 40% received no assistance with rent payments, despite the challenging financial economic situation at present; and
- with inflation being around 3%, and salary increases in Highland around 4%, it was considered that an 8% rent rise was unfair.

Following reference to neighbouring local authorities who had set rent increases for the next 3-5 years, the Chair clarified that the Committee was being asked to agree to the increase for 2026-27. It was noted that the principles and approach detailed within the paper – Financial Strategy – would inform future rent increases on an annual basis.

Ms G Campbell-Sinclair, seconded by Ms S Atkins, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr A Graham, seconded by Ms M MacCallum, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that recommendation (v) be amended to a 6% rent increase funded by a reduction of £1.692m in Capital Funded from Current Revenue and £67k in Repairs in Maintenance.

The Committee adjourned briefly for officers to verify the competency of the amendment. Once the meeting was reconvened, the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance provided clarification in respect of the financial implications of the amendment and the impact on budgets to accommodate a lower level rent increase of 6%. He provided confirmation that there would be a balanced HRA revenue budget for 2026/27 but there would be no change to the debt ratio. In terms of Service delivery, the Chief Officer – Housing and Communities explained that the £67k reduction on the Repairs and Maintenance budget would most likely impact on the cyclical repairs and provided examples of the type of additional improvement works that would not be undertaken as a result of the £1.692m reduction in capital funding.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 10 votes, the **AMENDMENT** received 4 votes, with no abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mrs S Atkin, Mr R Bremner, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Jones, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr R Mackintosh, Mrs K MacLean, Mr D McDonald and Mrs M Ross.

For the Amendment:

Mr A Graham, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs A MacLean and Mrs J McEwan.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the requirements to set a balanced budget for the HRA and the current financial position and associated challenges faced by the HRA;

- ii. **NOTED** the statement by the Section 95 Officer, in compliance with his responsibilities, of the need to address the financial challenges facing the HRA;
- iii. **AGREED** the Financial Strategy for the HRA as set out in section 7 of the report, noting the principals to guide the strategy that had already been agreed;
- iv. **NOTED** the feedback from tenants to the rent consultation, which was summarised in section 8 and the detailed feedback which could be found in Appendix 3 to the report;
- v. **AGREED** an 8% increase in rents across the HRA estate for 2026/27 and how this would be allocated in the 2026/27 budget as detailed in Appendix 5 to the report;
- vi. **NOTED** the above rent increase would be applied to all residential HRA rents and service charges, to Gypsy/Traveller site pitches and to non-HRA rents for leased properties (subject to lease agreements);
- vii. **NOTED** that in future years, the agreed Financial Strategy would be used to guide HRA Budget setting and multi-year financial planning; and
- viii. **NOTED** that officers would develop proposals in respect of establishing a scheme/fund to provide assistance to working tenants, details of which would be reported to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration.

5. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Non-HRA Budget Monitoring Statement to 30 November 2025

Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais agus Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Neo-thaigheadais gu 30 An Samhain 2025

There had been circulated Report No HP/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, concern was expressed at the lack of investment in Council garages and the fact many were in poor condition and not fit for purpose despite rent increases for garages and garage sites having been agreed. In response, it was confirmed that a report on Council garages and garage sites was to be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that Members would be provided with further information on the overspend on ‘Central Support’ and the difference in the variance from the previous report in respect of ‘Bad Debt Provision’.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2025/26 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; and
- iii. **NOTED** that further information on the overspend on ‘Central Support’ and the difference in the variance from the previous report in respect of ‘Bad Debt Provision’ would be circulated to Members.

6. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report Monitoring Report to 30 November 2025
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais gu 30 An Samhain 2025

There had been circulated Report No HP/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, an assurance was sought and provided that the relevant Teams were sufficiently staffed to deliver, manage and monitor projects in relation to the energy funding that had been achieved through ECO4 funding for projects across Highland in 2025/26.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the monitoring figures and projected outturn for the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2025/26.

7. Property & Facilities Management Services Revenue Monitoring Statement to 30 November 2025
Aithris Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Sheirbheisean Rianachd Cuid-seilbh & Ghoireasan gu 30 An Samhain 2025

There had been circulated Report No HP/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, further clarification was sought and provided on those underspends on the budget that were due to staff vacancies and an update provided on the ongoing work being undertaken within the Catering, Cleaning and Facilities Management Team to both advertise posts and reduce the number of vacancies.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the budget position to the end of November 2025/26 (Period 8), and the estimated year-end position, as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** the update provided regarding budget savings delivery as set out at Appendix 3 to the report.

8. Property Capital Monitoring Statement and Progress Update
Aithris Sgrùdaidh Calpa Seilbhe agus Cunntas às Ùr air Adhartas

There had been circulated Report No HP/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, it was confirmed that officers would consider the formatting of the appendices to the report to make them more readable.

The Committee **APPROVED** the capital budget position at the end of November 2025, including project progress, the estimated year-end position, and the main financial variances outlined in the report.

9. Strategic Asset Management Report Aithisg Stiùireadh So-mhaoin Ro-innleachdail

There had been circulated Report No HP/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- further clarification was sought and provided on the membership and configuration of the Strategic Asset Management Board and Highland Property Partnership, and how they linked in with the Highland Investment Plan;
- in response to a query, an assurance that the strategic asset management tool would provide cross cutting information on the impacts of potential options including on children, older people and others;
- concern at the estimated projected backlog of essential maintenance work due to the Council's lack of investment in its assets over decades and it was hoped the Plan would allow detailed consideration of effective maintenance plans in local areas and across the Council going forward;
- in regard to the above, an assurance was provided that there was significant investment in maintenance of the estate in the current and future years and over the next decade on new infrastructure, working with partners to reduce the size of the public estate and deliver efficiencies in service delivery for the benefit of all;
- the importance of working with communities and ensure there was regular consideration of groups and organisations in communities who might have new ideas and wish to be involved in the process;
- a bottom-up approach be progressed in local areas to accelerate the process with local Members ragging all the assets in communities and feeding this back to the Asset Management Team;
- the attendance of the Team at ward business meetings was welcomed and it was hoped progress with the Plan would be well reported to and followed up at Area Committees; and
- the core principle set out in the report of maintaining community connections was essential on the basis that people wished to have an accessible Council and public sector presence within their communities.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the:

- i. Strategic Asset Management Plan be adopted as the guiding framework for future property-related decisions, noting the background, purpose, and partnership approach to its development; and
- ii. Action Plan be progressed, with updates provided on implementation and outcomes.

10. Community Asset Transfer Glusad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd

a) Withdrawal of Offer – Black Isle Education Centre

There had been circulated Report No HP/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members paid tribute to Raddery House Ltd (RHL) and officers for their significant work on and dedication to the project.

Thereafter, it was queried whether the process for Community Asset Transfers was sufficiently robust, given the maintenance costs to the Council to date and going forward pending disposal of the asset, and whether there was a follow up process to ensure the funds raised by the RHL were spent appropriately.

It was suggested that key issue for the project had been the need for more innovative dementia care in the area, and it was considered there was no reason why the work undertaken on this aspect could not be taken forward within the community by RHL with the support of local Members, in partnership and with other groups.

Following on from the above, it was explained that a Members workshop was being arranged to consider and review the CAT process within the terms of the legislation.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **AGREED** to the withdrawal of offer for the land and property comprising the Raddery Wood and the Former Black Isle Education Centre, Raddery, the Black Isle, to Raddery House Ltd. based upon the terms of transfer as set out in the report to this Committee on the 29 January 2025;
- ii. **AGREED** to the process for disposal of the asset as set out in the report at paragraph 6.1; and
- iii. **NOTED** the consideration given to an alternative use of the asset by the Housing service as set out in the report at paragraph 6.5.

b) Fort Augustus Janitors House

There had been circulated Report No HP/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the sale of the land and property comprising the former Fort Augustus Janitors House to Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company for the sum of £70,000 based upon the terms of transfer as set out in section 6 of the report.

11. Delivery Plan Monitoring and Progress Update Q3 2025-26 – Reconfiguring our Asset Base; Net Zero, Energy, Investment and Innovation Plana Libhrigidh agus Aithisg Adhartais

There had been circulated Report No HP/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- an assurance was sought and provided that both the overall costs and external funding opportunities were considered in terms of the decision to retrofit properties;

- the work of the Terra Tracker Team be commended and an assurance was sought and provided that options for the Team were being considered following the end of the pilot project;
- the need to take into consideration the whole of Ward 8: Dingwall and Seaforth in terms of the Single Public Estate project in Dingwall;
- an update was sought and provided on progress with the new Trades Framework and the slight delay in the procurement process, the intention being to have this in place for the Inner Moray Firth from Quarter 2, 2026, moving to a procurement process for the wider Highland area thereafter;
- the opportunities to improve the timelines for procurement for Housing and other Council services; and
- the challenges in achieving a balance in terms of the higher maintenance costs associated with the Council's substantial legacy of older buildings against the fact they tended to be heritage and listed buildings that communities wished to retain. Discussions on these buildings would be held with local Members as part of the area reviews.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** progress to date and forward plans as outlined in the report.

12. Service Performance Report Cunntas às Ùr mun Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh

There had been circulated Report No HP/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the performance information for the Housing and Property Service;
- ii. **NOTED** the changes to presentation of the Housing and Property Service data in section 6 of the report in order to more clearly show alignment with Performance Plan commitments; and
- iii. **NOTED** the inclusion of SPI's out with the Performance Plan to further support transparency and scrutiny of performance reporting.

13. Housing Performance Report 1 April 2025 – 31 December 2025 Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2025 – 31 An Dubhlachd 2025

There had been circulated Report No HP/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members commended the Housing Team on the level of performance achieved.

The Committee **AGREED** the information provided on Housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 to 31 December 2025.

14. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

15. Property Transactions Monitoring
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting was closed at 12.50pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 28 January 2026 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr A Graham
Dr C Birt	Dr M Gregson
Mr J Bruce (remote)	Mr P Logue
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Ms M Ross (Vice Chair)
Mr S Coghill (remote)	Ms K Willis (Chair)
Mr J Grafton	

Non-Members also present:

Mr R Cross (remote)	Mrs A MacLean
Mr R MacKintosh	

In attendance:

Mr P Reid, Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Programme Manager
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead – Environment, Development and Active Travel
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead – Transport and Logistics (remote)
Mr A Henderson, Programme Manager (Property)
Mr N Young, Project Manager (Active Travel)
Ms T Ratnam, Programme Manager
Ms A Anthoney, Senior Youth Development Officer
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Leah McBain, Highland Youth Convener
Jake McCulloch, Chair, Highland Youth Parliament
Gemma Bell, Vice Chair, Highland Youth Parliament
Archie Brindle, Highland Youth Parliament
Hannah Maher, Highland Youth Parliament
Hamish Nott, Highland Youth Parliament
Rosie Stewart, Highland Youth Parliament

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Ms K Willis in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd and Ms L Niven.

2. **Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement** **Foilseachaidhean 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. **Highland Youth Parliament Presentation** **Taisbeanadh Pàrlamaid Òigridh na Gàidhealtachd**

Representatives of the Highland Youth Parliament gave a presentation outlining their climate change priorities and providing youth perspectives on areas for urgent action and opportunities for meaningful engagement in shaping Highland's journey to Net Zero and climate resilience.

There were four asks of the Committee, which it was believed were achievable, as follows:-

- **Improvement in Secondary Education** – make climate change education a part of the core curriculum
- **Walking and Cycling Routes** – have more and safer ways to get to school and around local communities that were not cars or buses
- **Community Actions** – promote green initiatives, like litter picking or upcycling, in local communities
- **Create more recycling options in schools** – improve the recycling infrastructure in schools to support everyday climate action

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the impressive and powerful presentation was commended, and the Chair confirmed it would be circulated to all Members;
- the importance of recycling in schools was emphasised, and Members raised the possibility of undertaking a waste audit in every secondary school and implementing a ranking system or minimum recycling standard. In that regard, it was confirmed that waste audits had been carried out in a number of schools, and pilot projects trialling recycling infrastructure and reusable food packaging were underway to establish benchmarks, assess how the recycling bins operated in practice and identify the likely costs associated with the installation of recycling infrastructure across the school estate. It was added that it would be helpful to receive feedback from pupils to determine what worked best for them, as the aim was to encourage as much recycling as possible;
- with reference to the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and the Scottish Government's commercial-first approach, information was sought, and provided, as to how the Highland Youth Parliament ratified the difference between commercial interests and the need to maintain the natural environment and biodiversity; how the Highland Youth Parliament acted as a lobbying group; and whether it was felt that Scottish politicians were listening to the youth voice;

- Members emphasised the value of the work of the Scottish Youth Parliament and commended the Scottish Youth Parliament Manifesto, which it was confirmed had been constructed based on consultation with almost 5000 young people from across Scotland;
- the importance of walking and cycling routes was a recurring issue, particularly in Inverness and the surrounding area, and youth representatives had a significant contribution to make in revisiting that topic, which was a key factor in the quality of life of citizens;
- support was expressed for making climate change education part of the core curriculum;
- reference was made to the issue of parking outside Hilton of Cadboll Primary School, which was located less than a quarter of a mile from the village, and it was suggested it was necessary to find a way to encourage parents and guardians to avoid using the car for such short journeys. In that regard, it was suggested the “walking bus” initiative already operating in some schools, whereby children walked to school in a group chaperoned by adults, could potentially be rolled out more widely. Attention was also drawn to the system used at Avoch Primary School, whereby a tally was kept of how pupils travelled to school and efforts were made each year to increase levels of sustainable travel; and
- young people would be inheriting and living with the impacts of the climate and nature crises, and it was important that Members and officers had had the opportunity to hear their concerns and priorities. It was clear that the Highland Youth Parliament wanted to be part of the conversation going forward and to work with the Council, helping to develop solutions and strengthen the Council’s journey to Net Zero, and building long-term climate resilience that worked for everyone. The Chair therefore proposed that it be recommended to the Council that officers work with Members and representatives of the Highland Youth Parliament to progress the four asks of the Climate Change Committee as set out in the presentation, and this was unanimously supported.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the presentation; and
- * ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that officers work with Members and representatives of the Highland Youth Parliament to progress the four asks of the Climate Change Committee as set out in the presentation.

5. Net Zero Programme Prògram Neoni Luim

i. Net Zero Programme Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Neoni Luim

There had been circulated Report No CCC/1/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- officers were commended for the positive report and the progress that had been made;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including the hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) fuel trial and the timeline for wider rollout;

whether the Net Zero Programme approved investment of £630,000 was considered sufficient to cover months 1-36 of the Delivery Plan; how it was intended to accurately measure the impact of the Highland Reuse and Repair Fund; and whether any progress had been made in terms of embedding Net Zero across the three Council service clusters;

- the financial savings aspect of the Net Zero Programme was likely to resonate with the public;
- in response to questions regarding Solar PV, information was provided on the current installed capacity across the Council's non-domestic estate, the associated financial savings and the work underway to increase capacity. The Energy Manager undertook to revert to Mr S Coghill regarding the associated Carbon Dioxide (CO2) savings;
- reference was made to potential greening opportunities that had been identified on Council land in Invergordon, and it was queried how to go about progressing matters and applying for Nature Restoration Fund funding. In that regard, the Net Zero Programme Manager explained that a joint post, between the Environment and Amenities teams, had recently been appointed to, and she undertook to send an introductory email or set up a meeting with Mr S Coghill;
- Members had noticed coastal changes that would soon impact on public infrastructure but did not feature in current planned works, and it was requested they be added to the list even if they were not addressed immediately. The Net Zero Programme Manager undertook to liaise with colleagues in the Flood Risk Management Team and set up a meeting with Mr S Coghill;
- the intention to ensure properties with the greatest need were prioritised for energy efficiency works was welcomed, and information was sought, and provided, on the extent to which retrofit energy efficiency works had been carried out across the Council's housing stock, and when tenants might expect to see reductions in their energy bills. Balintore being cited as an example, it was added that fully retrofitted houses, where energy bills had been reduced by around half, were situated alongside properties that had not been retrofitted, which was creating a conflict;
- in response to concerns regarding grey fleet usage and that there was no way of capturing the type of vehicle being used, the Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Manager acknowledged it was challenging to measure and monitor CO2 emissions associated with grey fleet mileage claims. However, reassurance was provided that this was being looked at through the Car Club as part of the fleet recovery and efficiency plan;
- it having been queried whether consideration had been given to a car leasing scheme which could be used to incentivise staff to use lower emission vehicles, thereby lowering the Council's overall emissions while also giving employees the ability to have a newer, more efficient car, it was confirmed that early discussions had taken place with some suppliers regarding ultra-low emission leasing opportunities. Information was also provided on the forthcoming implementation of a Car Club share scheme in partnership with NHS Highland and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that charging infrastructure would also be shared;
- on the point being raised, the Net Zero Programme Manager undertook to investigate why, in the Audit Scotland report on Scottish Councils' approach to climate change, the Council was not listed amongst the local authorities that had Net Zero targets. Members having commended the infographics in the report, she also undertook to explore what infographics could be produced to show how the Council was progressing towards its Net Zero targets;
- concern was expressed that the national flood risk assessment report indicated that 400,000 homes in Scotland were now at risk, and the number was increasing

due to rising sea levels and water courses. A request was made for a dedicated agenda item on flood risk in the coming months, and the Net Zero Programme Manager undertook to liaise with the Chair and relevant officers in that regard;

- with reference to Appendix 2 of the report, the projects being brought forward were welcomed, particularly Integrating Net Zero into Highland Investment Plan projects; and
- it was understood Round 1 of the Highland Reuse and Repair Fund had been oversubscribed and it was hoped further funding would be made available in next year's budget, which would complement one of the asks of the Highland Youth Parliament in terms of supporting community initiatives.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** progress to date as outlined in the report and Appendix 1 of the report; and
- * ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval of the project brief templates in Appendix 2 of the report for inclusion in the Council's Net Zero Programme.

**ii. Net Zero Thematic Group Interim Update – Sustainable Business Travel
Cunntas Eadar-amail Buidheann Cuspaireil Neoni Luim – Siubhal
Gnothachais Seasmhach**

The Service Lead – Transport and Logistics provided a verbal update on Sustainable Business Travel, following the report which had been presented to the Communities and Place Committee in November 2025, during which it was explained that fleet reduction work continued on a depot-by-depot basis, looking at how multi-service depots could share vehicles more effectively to increase utilisation and reduce the overall size of the fleet. Work had commenced at the Diriebught Depot with Carr's Corner (Lochybridge Depot) in Fort William to follow. The fleet continued to reduce year on year, and there had been a reduction of 34 vehicles since the November 2025 report.

In relation to the EV Pathfinder Project, the migration of charge points continued to progress well, and the programme remained on track for completion by the end of March 2026. Pathfinder 1 sites were moving forward in parallel, and further updates would be provided as work progressed.

As previously discussed, a Members workshop on sustainable business travel would be arranged in the coming months, as well as an EV education/familiarisation session for Highland Council fleet drivers. The dates would be agreed and confirmed to Members and staff shortly. Other workstreams, including the HVO fuel trial and the review of grey fleet mileage, continued to progress.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members commended the reduction in the number of fleet vehicles since November 2025;
- it was welcomed that a Members workshop was planned alongside an EV education session;
- in relation to the EV Pathfinder Project, reference was made to issues around the ability to obtain RFID cards and downloading the app onto mobile phones, and

information was sought, and provided, on whether there had been any feedback in that regard and how many charge points had been migrated to date. It was also highlighted that the telephone number on the app was incorrect, and the Programme Manager undertook to ensure it was updated as soon as possible;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that, currently, DC electric vehicle chargers would accept credit and debit cards but not all AC charge points would;
- reference was made to the report to the Communities and Place Committee on 6 November 2025, which provided statistics on the various modes of staff travel. It was highlighted that walking and cycling had been omitted from these figures, and it was suggested they should be included in future to provide a fuller picture;
- in relation to the plans to streamline depots, reducing the number of depots might increase staff travel distance/time and, in response to a question, it was confirmed this had been taken into account. It was also confirmed that officers had been working in coordination with the Strategic Asset Management Board; and
- further to the earlier contribution regarding modes of staff travel, reference was made to the growth of the Council's in-house bus fleet, and it was suggested staff members should potentially be able to show their ID badge to allow them to travel free of charge for business purposes. It was highlighted that Stagecoach companions and drivers benefited from free travel, and it was requested that this point be raised at the forthcoming workshop.

The Committee **NOTED** the position.

iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Built Estate & Energy Cunntas Buidheann Cuspaireil Neoni Luim – Oighreachd Thogte & Lùth

There had been circulated Report No CCC/2/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In introducing the report, the Programme Manager (Property) advised Members of a correction at section 6.11 which stated the Council would be adopting full Passivhaus certification on all Highland Investment Plan (HIP) projects. However, the Net Zero design standards had not yet been completed. Once they had been completed, they would be brought to Committee for approval.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- officers were commended for the 200 Net Zero and Energy surveys which had taken place;
- in terms of the Council's Flexible Working Policy, it was feasible for people living outwith Highland to work for the Council, and information was sought, and provided, on how it was intended to measure the carbon footprint of staff, including High Life Highland staff, when working at home or travelling a considerable distance to attend meetings;
- it was suggested that, going forward, the carbon costs of commuting might feature in the Council's recruitment strategy as a means of reducing the overall carbon footprint; and
- further information was sought, and provided, regarding hydrotreated vegetable oil, particularly where it could be sourced and whether this would create a high carbon transport footprint.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the contents of the report, subject to the correction provided in respect of section 6.11.

**6. Scotland's Draft Climate Change Plan 2026-2040: Consultation
Dreachd Phlana Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde na h-Alba 2026–2040: Co-
chomhairleachadh**

There had been circulated Report No CCC/3/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In introducing the report, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager explained that the final response was currently being worked on further to input from Members at the drop-in sessions that had taken place earlier in the week. He summarised a number of areas, as follows, that were not fully represented in the draft response that had been circulated:-

- in relation to a Just Transition and fair work, additional narrative in terms of understanding the renewable energy opportunities that existed in Highland and ensuring they did not result in the creation of a second-class workforce from Highland residents; the idea that workforce protection was essential in terms of delivering a credible Just Transition; severe skills and work shortages in certain areas, particularly within the insulation and retrofit market, and how to address them to meet the needs of the Highland population; and, in relation to heat pump installations, how to bring that skillset into Highland and support it on an ongoing basis;
- in relation to community wealth building and land reform, the Net Zero benefits must not be concentrated on a small number of landowners. It was necessary to understand how community wealth building was looked at from a Highland region perspective, and that needed to be addressed as part of this piece of work;
- in relation to the long-term benefits from energy infrastructure, there was already a huge amount of energy infrastructure in Highland and it was likely to increase further in the coming years. It was important development was seen as an asset to communities and to work with developers to ensure tangible local benefits were brought into Highland;
- in relation to the community voice and lived experience, it was necessary to ensure communities had a meaningful say in nearby developments, and that the national lived experience was embedded into national climate policy;
- in relation to coastal erosion risk and resilience, it had been recognised, as part of the work around the Highland risk assessment, that there was a heightened risk of coastal flooding and erosion, and it was necessary to address that from a regional perspective as a significant part of Highland was impacted;
- in relation to agriculture and crofting, the crofting community was a vital community within Highland, and it was necessary to understand how to support them through the expected transition around food resilience; and
- in relation to funding, a clearer understanding was needed of the long-term funding strategy associated with the Climate Change Plan and how that was likely to impact on Highland.

The intention was that these points would be embedded into the response and an updated draft would be shared with Committee Members tomorrow, 29 January, prior to submission that afternoon.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to all officers who had contributed to the excellent consultation response, and for the drop-in sessions that had been arranged to allow Members to contribute. It was also commented that the response was a good example of cross-service working and could be used as a template for future collaborative processes;
- various national and international bodies had attributed around a third of global warming gas emissions to food production, second only to energy production, and it was suggested it would be useful to have an estimate of the CO₂ equivalent of the food purchased by the Council, and that the response ought to take more account of food production in general. It was also commented that reducing meat consumption was a significant contributor to individual CO₂ savings, although other Members stated that meat consumption was a matter of personal choice. The Climate Change and Energy Team Manager confirmed that these points, which had been raised at the drop-in sessions, had been embedded into the draft response. It was further explained that a significant piece of work was underway in terms of developing the Highland Good Food Nation Plan, which it was intended would be brought to the Committee for discussion in due course. In addition, it was hoped the carbon budgeting work that was taking place would allow more detail to be provided, going forward, on the carbon emissions associated with the Council's food purchasing. Members added that the Council's Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee was concerned about improving the nutritional content of food provided in Council settings, and that there was scope for cross-service working as food health and food sustainability had a lot in common;
- due to the differing herbivore density requirements, sporting land use was often a barrier to land use change towards more woodland, and was expensive in that deer fencing was often required. It was confirmed that a member of the Climate Change and Energy Team would liaise with Mr S Coghill to ensure this point was covered in the consultation response;
- with reference to the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, the importance of the Fair Work First Policy was emphasised;
- further to earlier comments regarding food production, it was highlighted that food in schools was currently being considered by the Council's Redesign Board, and the importance of buying local produce was emphasised. In addition, many Members represented agricultural wards, and food security was a significant issue;
- concern was expressed regarding the often-overlooked environmental impacts associated with Artificial Intelligence technology, and it was suggested further thought should be given to the issue;
- reference was made to the Scottish Government's goal of increasing forestry to 21% of total land use by 2032, and it was questioned whether it might be possible to be more ambitious. It was also commented that many major infrastructure projects were resulting in loss of woodland, and achieving the 21% target would be more challenging if it was not replaced. Particular reference was made to Ardersier Port, where a unique habitat was home to protected species including the Scottish Wildcat, and concern was expressed that destroying this habitat, even if it was subsequently replaced, could lead to loss of species; and
- Highland would play a critical role in delivering the national climate ambitions, and it was hoped the Scottish Government would fully digest the Council's response to the consultation and incorporate many of the valid points and suggestions in the Climate Change Plan. The transition to Net Zero would have a profound and varied impact on daily life across Highland, especially in remote areas, as had been highlighted in the response, and it was important there was a well-planned and just transition for all.

The Committee **AGREED** the Council's response to the consultation on Scotland's Draft Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report, subject to the additions summarised by the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager, the points raised during discussion and any further feedback received prior to submission on 29 January 2026.

7. Performance Monitoring Report – Q3 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh – R3 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No CCC/4/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

The meeting concluded at 4.00 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 29 January 2026 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance

Mr S Coghill (remote)

Mr R Cross (remote)

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 D Millar

Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)

Mr M Reiss

Non-Members also present:

Ms L Dundas (remote)

Mr J Finlayson (remote)

Mr D Fraser (remote)

Ms C Gillies (remote)

Mr J Grafton

Dr M Gregson (remote)

Ms M Hutchison (remote)

Mr R Jones (remote)

Mr T MacLennan (remote)

Mr P Oldham (remote)

Mrs T Robertson (remote)

Ms K Willis

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 B Cumming, Senior Environmental Health Officer

Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager

Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer

Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Superintendent R Shepherd, Divisional Commander, Police Scotland

Superintendent D Ross, Police Scotland

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

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management informed Members that, further to the report to the Committee on 6 November 2025, the Council had been called to a Pre-Public Enquiry Meeting with the

Traffic Commissioner for Scotland on Friday 30 January. An update on the outcome of this meeting would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

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 J Bruce.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 4: Mr D Millar

Mr D Millar also made a general Transparency Statement on the basis that a family member was employed by the Council. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

3. **Good News**

The Chair extended thanks to all operatives, supervisors and managers in the Amenities, Waste Management and Bereavement teams for their hard work during the recent challenging winter weather.

In relation to the new industrial waste shredders that would be operated at Seater and Longman Waste Transfer Stations, the Chair confirmed that, as previously agreed, Members' visits would be arranged in the near future.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

4. **Police Performance Report** **Aithisg Coileanaidh Poileis**

Transparency Statement: Mr D Millar declared a connection to this item on the basis that a family member was a serving Police Officer outwith Highland. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CP/01/26 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

The Divisional Commander, Chief Superintendent Shepherd, provided an overview of recent months, including the positive effects of the rollout of body-worn video and good examples of partnership working in response to adverse weather and during the Bella 1 incident. The forthcoming implementation of the Chief Constable's new policing model, which was more community-focussed, was also highlighted.

He also introduced Superintendent David Ross, who would take on the role of Temporary Chief Superintendent for four months while Chief Superintendent Shepherd participated in the Executive Leadership Programme in Coventry.

Members' attention was drawn to several key elements of the report including that violent sexual offences, anti-social behaviour and criminal damage had remained at a consistent level, and there had been an increase in drug and traffic offences due to increased policing in those areas.

A detailed discussion took place, during which the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on assaults on emergency workers and what steps were being taken to mitigate this; the increase in Concern for Persons incidents, which caused a drain on Police resources; how County Lines drug dealers were being dealt with in the Highlands; what was being done to address the increase in cases of cruel and unusual treatment of children; the reasons behind the reduction in the number of missing persons cases; the Victim Support Service and how information was shared securely with other agencies; and how prepared Police Scotland was to deal with the possible influx of asylum seekers into Inverness, and whether there would be additional funding to support this;
- Police Scotland's involvement in the Inverness Community Planning Partnership's "No Place for Hate" campaign was welcomed, and more information was sought, and provided, on what was being done in relation to the campaign;
- it was good to see that the number of rapes and sexual assaults had fallen. However, the number of attempted rapes had increased and, it having been queried whether there was a pattern to these offences and whether there was cause for concern, the Chief Superintendent undertook to liaise with the Public Protection Chief Inspector in that regard;
- there was a lot of good news in the report including the additional work that had gone into tackling shoplifting, the positive effects of the use of body-worn cameras and the increased detection of road traffic offences. Support was also expressed for the Highland Cops television series which provided a thoughtful perspective on policing in Highland;
- the partnership work that had taken place during the recent adverse winter weather was highly commended, although the delayed communications from Transport Scotland about road closures in Caithness had caused worry and confusion in communities;
- concern was expressed that an automated message on Traffic Scotland's website encouraged drivers to seek an alternative route when roads were closed which, in adverse weather, could lead to drivers unfamiliar with the area taking more dangerous roads, such as the A897 in Sutherland when the A9 was closed north of Helmsdale, thereby causing a risk to public safety. It was suggested that representation be made to Traffic Scotland on this point, and the Chief Superintendent indicated he would be happy to co-sign a letter by the Chair, on behalf of the Committee;
- as the number of named storms had increased and appeared likely to increase further in future, it was queried whether Police Scotland had the appropriate type of vehicles to deal with severe weather conditions without relying on mutual aid from partners such as the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Ministry of Defence and Red Cross, as had been required during the most recent storm, and, if not, whether this would be considered as part of procurement. In response, it was clarified that Police Scotland had an excellent fleet of vehicles, including a number of 4x4s, that

was appropriate in the vast majority of circumstances, and it was more efficient and cost-effective to use mutual aid in extreme conditions than to procure an increased fleet for circumstances which only occurred rarely;

- on the point being raised, it was explained that a state of emergency had not been declared in Highland during the recent period of adverse weather because there had been no need to reallocate resources to deal with it;
- a large number of road traffic fatalities, as well as less serious incidents that were not always reported, involved foreign nationals in hire cars and campervans, particularly in Skye and on the North Coast 500. It was queried what more could be done to prevent this and whether hire car companies had a duty to ensure drivers were prepared for rural Highland roads. It was highlighted that, in some areas, hire cars had prominent stickers to alert other road users that the driver might be unfamiliar with local roads, and the Chief Superintendent confirmed he was happy to explore that as an option, as well as the possibility of providing a guide to rural driving in all hire cars. Concern was also expressed regarding the number of fatalities involving motorcyclists, and information was sought, and provided, on what was being done to tackle this;
- it having been queried whether Police Scotland would support a campaign to prevent newly qualified drivers from carrying passengers, or the introduction of a graduated driving licence, it was explained that the potential impacts of such proposals required careful consideration. In particular, reference was made to the implications for the environment, for young people who were responsible for providing transport for family members, and for those with limited access to public transport; and
- in response to concerns that shoplifting offenders were not being dealt with effectively by the Criminal Justice system, it was explained that, while Police Scotland worked closely with the Criminal Justice system, concerns regarding court outcomes were a matter for the Crown and court service.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **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 1 April 2025 to 31 December 2025; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a letter be sent to Traffic Scotland from the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, regarding the public safety concerns raised during discussion relating to Traffic Scotland’s automated message encouraging drivers to seek an alternative route during road closures.

5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report to 30 November 2025 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach gu 30 Samhain 2025

There had been circulated Report No CP/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- given the number of complaints relating to environmental health, the need for a strong Environmental Health team was emphasised and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that, due to workforce planning, there had been a slight delay in recruitment to vacant Environmental Health posts, but this was now progressing;

- in relation to the Waste Service overspend, it was queried whether increasing the budget for the Reuse and Repair Fund, the first round of which had been hugely oversubscribed, might reduce the amount of residual waste going to incineration;
- the detailed monitoring statement at Appendix 2 of the report was helpful;
- disappointment was expressed regarding the reduction in Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility funding, and an update was sought, and provided, on the likelihood of further reductions and the expected level of funding for the following year. The Chair confirmed that representations regarding the reduction in predicted income had been made to COSLA and the UK Government; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the budget saving relating to mobile mechanics; and the impact of vandalism of public conveniences on the budget overspend, and what plans were being considered to reduce incidences of vandalism.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the current financial position for Quarter 3 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 of the 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 Budget Monitoring Report for the period Q3 2025/26 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Calpa airson na h-ùine R3 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No CP/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, information was sought, and provided, on what impact the suspension of the landfill ban would have on Seater Landfill Site, and it was confirmed there were no plans to continue to use the private sector Duiskey Landfill Site in Fort William. Thanks were expressed to the Waste team for their efforts in delivering Fort William Waste Transfer Station.

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; and
- ii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed.

7. Environmental Health – Contaminated Land Strategy Review Slàinte Àrainneachdail – Ath-sgrùdadh Ro-innleachd Talaimh Thruaillte

There had been circulated Report No CP/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the clean-up of beaches surrounding the former nuclear reactor site at Dounreay and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that Dounreay and Vulcan were classed as one site; and
- it having been queried when the Strategy would next be reported to the Committee, the Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Service suggested that a 5-yearly reporting interval was appropriate, and that this be added to the Strategy document.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the work being carried out by the Council to meet its statutory obligations under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the revised Strategy for the Inspection of Contaminated Land, including the suggested addition regarding 5-yearly reporting going forward.

8. Performance Reporting for Q3 October 2025 to December 2025 Aithris Coileanaidh airson R3 Dàmhair 2025 gu Dùbhlachd 2025

There had been circulated Report No CP/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was explained that information on the reasons for staff absence was limited as the Quarter 3 data was not available due to the timing of the Committee, and a more detailed breakdown would be provided for the next meeting. Further information was sought, and provided, on whether muscular-skeletal injuries were mostly acute or due to overuse; whether injuries were mapped in terms of task, time and location with any patterns being identified; and the steps being taken to manage and prevent these issues, such as warming up before work and the provision of physiotherapy; and
- concern was expressed regarding the fragility of some Community Councils, and that some Inverness Community Councils had failed to re-form after the last election. Information was sought, and provided, on the steps being taking to support Community Councils in the period before the next election and to ensure there was greater stability going forward. In addition, the review that had been carried out of the Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils was commended.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance information;
- ii. **NOTED** the changes to presentation of the Communities and Place Service data in sections 6 of the report in order to more clearly show alignment with Performance Plan commitments; and
- iii. **NOTED** the inclusion of Statutory Performance Indicators outwith the Performance Plan to further support transparency and scrutiny of performance reporting.

9. Bereavement Services Report Aithisg Seirbheisean Bàis

There had been circulated Report No CP/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- surprise was expressed that the Dores Cemetery project had been RAG rated Green when the original completion date had been approximately 18 months ago, and an update was sought, and provided, on the project's progress and the reasons for the delay. The Bereavement Services Project Manager undertook to provide Local Members with a further update following the forthcoming site visit;
- concern was expressed regarding the outstanding works at Portree Cemetery and, in response to a request, it was confirmed that the Bereavement Services Project Manager would attend the forthcoming Ward Business Meeting in Ward 10 to provide an update;
- concern had been expressed by the Skeabost and District Community Council about the slow progress in identifying a new burial ground as the burial ground in Skeabost was full, meaning that local people who had not previously purchased lairs were unable to be buried in the area. The Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to revert to Local Members and the Community Council with an update on the situation;
- concern was expressed, on behalf of Broadford and Strath Community Council, about the condition of paths in Ashaig and Broadford cemeteries. The Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to liaise with local teams in that regard and update Local Members;
- the planned extension for Dunvegan Cemetery was welcomed, and it was suggested the contractor and design team be encouraged to seek advice from the local Bereavement Services Officer to help avoid problems such as those that had arisen at Portree Cemetery;
- the importance of maintaining cemeteries in a sensitive and careful manner was emphasised and, in response to a question, it was confirmed there was a dedicated grass-cutting team for Tomnahurich and Kilvean cemeteries. On the point being raised, the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to meet with the Amenities teams prior to the start of the grass-cutting season to discuss the maintenance of the area between Tomnahurich Cemetery and the A82, and whether there were any particular issues surrounding grass-cutting and maintenance at Tomnahurich and Kilvean cemeteries;
- concern was expressed that the burial ground extension in Alness was due to be completed only two months before the existing site was expected to reach full capacity, and it was queried whether the timeline for completion of the extension could be accelerated to allow sufficient time for the site to settle after works;
- thanks were expressed for the work to repair the damage caused by rabbits at Roskeen Cemetery, and the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to ensure this was passed on to the Amenities team;
- the works on burial grounds in Caithness had been completed to a high standard and had been well received locally;
- reassurance was sought that the extension works at Mount Vernon burial ground would be completed before the current site reached capacity, and it was confirmed

preparations were being made to ensure work could commence as soon as the outstanding land issues were resolved;

- attention was drawn to ongoing flooding issues at Oligig Cemetery in Castletown, and the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to discuss the matter with local officers with a view to finding possible solutions;
- information was sought, and provided, on why it had taken so long to identify an appropriate site for a new burial ground in Fort William, and the plans in the event the drainage tests and trial digs at the proposed site were not successful; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that a detailed report had been commissioned on the feasibility of a crematorium in Lochaber and a further update would be provided to Local Members.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress of current projects on the burial ground extension programme; and
- ii. the progress of the Inverness Crematorium refurbishment project.

The meeting concluded at 11.45 am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Monday 2 February 2026 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance	Dr M Gregson
Mr B Boyd (Remote)	Ms E Knox (Remote)
Mr I Brown	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr M Cameron (Remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr A Christie (am only)	Ms K MacLean (Remote)
Mr D Fraser	Mr D Macpherson (Remote am)
Mr K Gowans	Mr D McDonald
Mr A Graham	Mrs M Reid
Mr D Gregg	Mrs T Robertson

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager Inverness & South
Mr S Fraser, Chief officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Mr D Mudie, Strategic Lead (Planning and Building Standards)
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead-Environment Development, Active Travel
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Traffic Officer
Mr K Forbes, Property Manager (Estates Management)
Mr S Grant, Roads Operations Manager
Mr M Greig, Community Development Manager
Ms E Linn, Legal Manager
Mr L MacDonald, Repairs Manager
Ms S Lamb, Project Officer, Community Regeneration
Mr H McHale, Senior Maintenance Officer
Mr A Brown, Senior Technician
Ms J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs K Arnott, Committee Officer
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector C Still, Police Scotland
Inspector, P Sutherland, Police Scotland
Mr F Roach, Partnership Manager, HITRANS
Mrs C Cameron, Inverness Town Twinning Committee
Ms C Barclay, Network Rail
Mr G Ross, Consultant

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 I Brown in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie (pm), Ms H Crawford, Mrs J Hendry and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declaration of Interest:-

Mr A Graham – Item 16

And also, the following Transparency Statements:-

Mr M Cameron – Item 12

Mr A Christie – Items 7, 8, 10, 13 (a, b, c and d) and 14i

3. **New Years Honours** **Urraman na Bliadhn' Ùire**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following individuals had been recognised in the New Years Honors List:-

- Pamela Ann Clark (OBE)
- Professor Angus Watson (OBE)
- Dr Timothy Allison (MBE)

4. **Police Scotland – Area Performance Report** **Poileas Alba – Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/01/26 by the Area Commander (Inverness Area Command).

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the reassurance the report and the Chief Inspector's accompanying introduction provided to Members was welcomed;
- more detailed information was sought, and provided, on the support being provided to older and vulnerable people and wider public in relation to the complex issue of digital fraud in terms of interventions and prevention. The potential for more work to be undertaken to reduce the number of cases and the need for joint messaging with partners was also highlighted;
- a specific strategy on fraud should be brought forward within the Council to help tackle this issue through measures such as targeting older people in receipt of services with anti-fraud advice and including a leaflet in Council Tax bills issued to every household in Highland on this issue;
- concern was expressed at the increase in the number of drink/drug driving and drug (supply) offences and impact on the victims of those crimes;

- there was potential for the Council to promote the interventions that had contributed to the reduction in housebreaking offences such as ring/video doorbells;
- in relation to violent crimes, it should be borne in mind that the City of Inverness continued to be a safe environment in which to live compared to many other areas across the UK;
- Members commended the hard work of officers in the Community Beats Team in the area and, in conjunction with Council officers, significant improvements had been achieved in anti-social behaviour in the Raigmore Estate;
- the potential to include the year-to-date change in detection rates in future reports would be considered, noting that the North Division retained one of the highest crime detection rates of any Police Scotland divisions;
- more detailed information was sought, and provided, on the rise in reported cooking oil thefts and the prevention and intervention work being undertaken;
- in response to a query, confirmation that details of 'other miscellaneous offences' would be provided outwith the meeting;
- further information was sought, and provided, on the challenges in tackling driver behaviour around speeding and the focused strategies in response to this issue in terms of education, messaging and enforcement. The introduction of a graduated drivers licence however was a legislative matter for the Scottish Government;
- significant road safety concerns were expressed in relation to speeding on the B9006, being used by many drivers to avoid roadworks and delays on the A96, and a request for increased Police visibility on this route was requested. The Chief Inspector undertook to follow up on this matter in early course in conjunction with Roads policing colleagues, the Safety Camera Partnership and within available resources and to report back to the appropriate local community forums;
- in response to a spate of housebreakings in Ward 12: Aird and Loch Ness and surrounding area, an update was provided on the Police investigations in progress and the community were commended for their support in this regard. The Police would also seek to be as proactive as possible in terms of messaging around security and safety in rural areas;
- further information was sought, and provided, on food shoplifting and the potential to signpost those involved in lower-level crimes to sources of advice and support. The feedback from Police teams operating in the City Centre was that there was no reluctance by businesses to report crimes;
- in terms of attendance at community council meetings, it was confirmed the Police had attended the Inverness Area Community Council Forum and that this had proven to be an effective use of Police resources. If there was a specific issue a community council wished to raise then they be encouraged to advise the Police directly;
- further clarification was sought, and provided, on the host of ways in which the public could report concerns about drug and other offences to the Police and to statutory and third sector partners via the partners intelligence portal. The concerns around the national centralised 101 system were recognised but it was difficult to address this from a local policing perspective;
- clarification was sought, and provided, that the Police considered there was a strong CCTV network in the City. There would always be spots where there was no coverage, however officers were effective in scrutinising CCTV systems, both public and private, to track individuals who might be responsible for crimes such as graffiti; and
- Member briefings with the Police would continue and Members were encouraged to attend.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the 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 1 April 2025 – 31 December 2025; and
- ii. the change in format necessitated by a reduction in back-office capacity to prepare additional area committee reports.

5. Visit Inverness Loch Ness Annual Report Tadhail air Inbhir Nis – Loch Nis

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the annual report of Visit Inverness Loch Ness (VILN).

6. Inverness Town Twinning Committee Comataidh Càraideachadh Baile Inbhir Nis

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Officer – Place.

Mrs Christina Cameron, Secretary of the Inverness Town Twinning Committee, gave a presentation on this item during which she outlined her memories and experiences of the town twinning arrangements.

Members thanked Ms Cameron for her presentation and the Inverness Town Twinning Committee for its excellent work over many years and raised the following main points:-

- there were opportunities to expand town twinning to involve more individuals and groups in Inverness to maximise the benefits of visits in terms of experiences of other cities and cultures;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that an annual report would be brought to the Committee providing an update on town twinning activities and as a way of providing support to the Town Twinning Committee;
- there was a focus on expanding involvement in the town twinning, for example through the reciprocal plan involving Inverness sports clubs as detailed in the report;
- the potential, in conjunction with Visit Inverness Loch Ness, to appoint tourism ambassadors was highlighted with a view to building relationships and promoting Inverness as a tourist destination;
- there was also potential to strengthen links with Augsburg as the place where the diesel engine was invented through the involvement of mechanics, apprentices, Inverness College, University of the Highlands & Islands and Highlands and Islands Enterprise;
- consideration was being given to inviting FC Augsburg to play Inverness Caledonian Thistle FC, Ross County FC and others in a pre-season tournament;
- it was important to further develop connections between young people and schools as part of the twinning arrangements and also the commercial opportunities;

- there was a need to better promote town twinning and to encourage new members with appropriate expertise to join the Committee to maximise the benefits of the twinning arrangements. In response, it was confirmed the Committee had organised for an open day to be held in Spring for this purpose; and
- the importance of town twinning in terms of its contribution to building friendships, having good relationships with other countries, travel and expanding people's horizons was emphasised. Members were therefore urged to support town twinning and the work of the Committee, including through the Common Good Fund.

The Committee **NOTED** the varied and dedicated work of the Town Twinning Committee supported by the civic leadership and thanked the City of Inverness Town Twinning Committee (ITTC) for all their hard work over many years in support of the well-founded principles of the City and Area's Twinning arrangements.

7. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications Measadh Iartrasan Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Chair recorded thanks to the Chair of the Community Regeneration Fund Sub Committee and its Members for the considerable time and effort undertaken in reviewing the applications;
- disappointment was expressed that support had not been awarded for the application relating to Active Travel Regeneration in the Inverness area (CRF4185), which included the South Loch Ness Trail. It was highlighted that the route provided an important active travel corridor and that sections were currently in poor and unsafe condition. Assurance was sought that alternative means of supporting the route might be explored;
- it was emphasised that the Sub Committee had undertaken over two hours of detailed review of the applications and had previously examined expressions of interest in December 2025. The constraints of the budget were acknowledged, and it was observed that supporting an additional application would have required withdrawing funding from another. Approval of the recommendations as a complete package was therefore encouraged;
- clarification was sought on the position whereby two projects with lower scores on the scoring matrix received partial or full support, while another project with a higher score received no funding. In this regard, it was explained that concerns had been raised about the absence of firm cost estimates within the application in question. The figures provided were indicative only and it was felt that the proposal was not sufficiently developed to proceed at this stage;

- it was further indicated that scoring matrix acted as an indicator rather than a strict ranking mechanism. Each application had been assessed on its individual merits and issues relating to deliverability and completeness of information had guided the Sub Committee's conclusions;
- support was expressed for ensuring that the organisation concerned was assisted in strengthening its proposal. Reference was made to the wider network of long distance routes in the Loch Ness area and to the importance of signage and continuity along the trail; and
- attention was drawn to the possibility that other areas undertaking the same assessment process might have underspends. It was suggested that officers investigate the treatment of such underspends, including any year end restrictions, to ensure that no funding was lost.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the position in respect of applications that had not been progressed or had been withdrawn; and
- ii. **AGREED** the formal recommendation from the Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee contained in paragraphs 5.8 & 5.9 of the report on final funding awards.

8. **Inverness Interchange Feasibility Study** **Sgrùdadh So-dhèantachd Ceann-rathaid Inbhir Nis**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- appreciation was expressed for the opportunity created by the consolidation of land in public ownership, which enabled consideration of a comprehensive integrated transport hub and was regarded as a significant opportunity for the Station Quarter area;
- reference was made to the recent Members' briefing, which had been well attended and considered informative. The importance of progressing the work in collaboration with transport partners and in alignment with wider city aspirations was emphasised;
- support was expressed for the creation of an improved civic space and for enhancing the setting of existing buildings, while also addressing long-standing operational and accessibility issues in the area;
- Members highlighted that developing an integrated arrangement for transport services would bring benefits comparable to those seen in other UK and European cities;
- concern was raised regarding the proposed approach to consultation. It was suggested that, in light of previous experiences, early engagement with

- stakeholder organisations would help agree clear consultation protocols, timelines and expectations before wider engagement commenced;
- it was considered important that consultation be structured in stages, ensuring sufficient opportunities for public input and avoiding confusion over what each phase sought to achieve;
 - the inclusion of key user groups in the engagement process was encouraged, such as access panels, older people's groups, regular public transport users, groups supporting parents with prams and others with specific accessibility needs;
 - reference was made to the former Spectrum Centre as a valued community facility, recognising that the previous venue had been highly valued for its central location and accessibility and that the re-provision of comparable accessible public space should be considered as part of future development;
 - the need for urgency was stressed, highlighting the long history of proposals for Farraline Park and calling for clarity on timescales and financial requirements to ensure meaningful progress. In this regard, concerns were also voiced that earlier proposals for the area had not progressed beyond initial concept stages;
 - the process through which properties in the area had been brought into public ownership was acknowledged and it was emphasised that broad engagement should now take place with business organisations, accommodation providers, community groups, students, older people and regular bus users;
 - comments were made regarding the future treatment of the existing library building, including the view that retaining the façade could offer flexibility while accommodating modern requirements;
 - concerns were raised about the suitability of the current multi storey car park structure to accommodate heavier modern vehicles, including electric vehicles, and the need for any future provision to be designed accordingly. Reference was also made to the increased weight and width of modern vehicles, including EVs, which older structures were not designed to accommodate;
 - the importance of ensuring a clear and transparent consultation process was reiterated, with lessons from previous projects taken into account;
 - representatives of partner organisations advised that the forthcoming engagement would focus on initial options only, with further detailed consultation to follow in later phases;
 - Members suggested that potential funders should be engaged early in the process to avoid progressing proposals that might not secure financial support;
 - comments were also made on operational considerations for future design, including bus station layout, taxi and car drop-off arrangements, routing to the A82 and the need for improved cycle parking, which was confirmed as part of future planning; and
 - the initial period of engagement was expected to conclude at the end of the financial year, after which findings and next steps would be reported back.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the findings of the Inverness Interchange Feasibility Study;
- ii. **NOTED** and **AGREED** the proposed engagement plan and associated timelines; and
- iii. **NOTED** next steps as detailed in section 9 of the report.

**9. Area Roads Capital Programme 2026/27
Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2026/27**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following general concerns, with many giving specific local examples, which the Chair advised should be raised at ward level:-

- drainage issues were causing water to repeatedly run across certain Council and Transport Scotland roads, damaging the longevity of the road surface and creating hazardous ice during cold weather;
- the footpath resurfacing programme was welcomed and it was requested that officers seek advice from local Members in relation to the prioritisation of projects for the footpaths, as well as for the overall Capital Programme;
- clarification was sought, and provided, that some works on the programme had already been started and, if completed early, might allow other projects to be undertaken from the prioritisation list;
- in response to a request from Mr Cameron for more information on the decision making process in relation to prioritisation of projects, a summary of the complex process was provided, and Mr Cameron invited to visit the Area Roads office for a demonstration;
- it was acknowledged that Ward 16's footpath budget allocation had been mistakenly missed off the report;
- various specific examples of roads with potholes, missing or obscured signage, faded or missing road marking, blocked gullies, overgrown vegetation, or drainage issues were raised and all specific locations could be further considered outwith the meeting;
- the distinction between projects that were funded through revenue versus those funded by the capital budget was explained;
- it was queried whether Members, in addition to officers, were able to issue template letters to residents whose foliage were overhanging public footpaths, and this would have to be checked with the Council's legal services;
- the Council's policy in relation to investing additional funds into resurfacing damaged roads rather than repairing and surface dressing them, which was cheaper but more temporary, was summarised in response to a query;
- it was disappointing that damage had been caused to roads by heavy construction vehicles, without contribution from the construction company;
- assurance was sought that the second gully-emptying machine that was ordered was due to be delivered by May 2026, and the benefits of its purchase were summarised. Procedures for gully-emptying including ensuring vehicles were not parked in the area, were queried and summarised;
- attention was drawn to the need to review road signage in the city centre and in rural areas;
- concern was expressed that heavy delivery vehicles for the Eastgate Centre were using the small roundabout in Crown to turn, risking damage to the road, and this should be raised with the shops in question;
- assurance was sought, and provided, that joined up working with utility and other organisations to undertake work on roads simultaneously was being coordinated;
- it was requested that repeated flooding on Ardersier High Street, and the use of a minor road between Daviot and Croy by heavy vehicles, be investigated; and

- the increase in the roads capital budget to £20m across Highland was highlighted, and officers in the roads team were thanked for their work, particularly during the winter months. Attention was drawn to innovative work practices being developed and the encouragement of community resilience.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2 of the report, which was to be a multi-year programme;
- NOTED** that the Area budget would be available after the February 2026 Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- NOTED** that the rolling programme might require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey had been received and considered; and
- AGREED** in future officers should attend ward business meetings to seek input from local Members prior to presentation of the Capital Programme to the Committee.

**10. Housing Repairs and Capital Report – 1 April 2025 to 31 December 2025
Aithisg Chàraidhean is Calpa Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2025 gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2025**

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as the General Manager of Inverness Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, and in terms of section 8.3 of the report, it was asked how many houses in the Inverness area were considered energy efficient. A response would be provided to Committee Members through their respective Ward Business Meetings. It was hoped that there would be an increase in the number of better energy rated properties.

In terms of section 8.5 of the report, it was highlighted that Rowan Road was located within Ward 14 rather than Ward 13.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on Housing Performance for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 December 2025.

**11. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2026/27
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2026/27**

There had been circulated Report No CIA/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- a garage was considered an asset to a property and it was emphasised that when building new houses, garage provision should also be considered;
- it was asked if garage rent revenue was put towards repairing garages;

- there were no garages in Ward 19. Residents often travelled throughout Inverness to benefit from a garage and it was thought that sharing a list of available garages on the Council website might be helpful;
- the use of container units had increased in the area and it was felt that this was due to a lack of garages for rent; and
- in response to questions, it was confirmed that a review of garages in the Inverness area was being undertaken, which included their condition, and a report would be presented to this Committee in due course.

The Committee **AGREED** an increase of 10% to apply to Inverness garages.

12. Associated School Group Attainment Overview Foir-shealladh air Buileachadh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a close family relative was employed as a teacher in one of the schools referred to. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/09/26, No CIA/10/26, No CIA/11/26, CIA/12/26, CIA/13/26 and CIA/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **AGREED** that the reports relating to Millburn Academy, Glenurquhart High School, Charleston Academy, Kilchuimen Academy, Inverness Royal Academy and Inverness High School be deferred to allow the relative Service Supported Ward Business Meetings to consider them, for a Members' Seminar to be held and for them then to be resubmitted to the May City of Inverness Area Committee.

13. Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF) Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

a) Inverness Common Good Fund - 2024/25 Annual Accounts and Final Monitoring Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis – 2024/25 Cunntasan Bliadhnail agus Sgrùdadh Deireannach

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/15/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- in response to concern about the significant overspend of £747k against the Victorian Market in 2025/26, and the forecast overspend in 2026/27 of £184k, it was explained that the 2025/26 budget had been set against the 2023 footfall, which had increased significantly in 2024 and had led to higher costs. These had been partly offset by increased service charge income, as

detailed. Other factors included void units, which were soon to be let, the provision of public toilets, as agreed earlier by the Committee;

- information was sought, and provided, on the reported changes to the heritable estate and the changes to the asset valuation. This was the result of periodic review and related to changes in the formal valuation of the Town House during the period of renovation;
- information was sought by Mrs Reid on the £15k overspend in relation to Victorian Market marketing, with specific reference to the external contractors, Spey Design, who had been appointed through a procurement process. She also asked for information on how the services were evaluated. It was explained that the additional costs had been agreed by tenants of the Market and further detail would be provided to the Committee outwith the meeting, along with detail on the evaluation process for the marketing services. It was clarified that £65k was the total figure, of which the Council (ICGF) paid half;
- it was queried, and explained, why ringfenced carried-forward budget was being reported in the following year's figures;
- it was requested that any Common Good Fund budget overspend be presented to the Committee prior to being agreed by officers;
- it would be preferable if the accounts for significant properties like the Town House or Victorian Market were reported individually, and assurance was provided that this was being worked on;
- information was sought, and provided, on progress with improving rental income for the Town House, noting the significant reduction following the withdrawal of the Council from the office space. Clarification was provided on the location of the 'town clerk's office'; and
- the reported £340k of debt was queried and while it was likely to be transient creditors or service charges in progress, this would be checked and confirmed to Dr Gregson outwith the meeting.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the final monitoring report (Appendix 1) and Statement of Accounts (Appendix 2) for the Inverness Common Good Fund for the year ended 31 March 2025;
- ii. **AGREED** that in future the Committee be informed of any Common Good Fund budget overspends prior to the money being spent; and
- iii. **AGREED** that in relation to Victorian Market marketing costs, further detail would be provided to Members on the additional costs which had been agreed by tenants of the Market and on the evaluation process for the marketing services.

b) **Financial Monitoring** **Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/16/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- clarification was sought, and provided, that staff costs for community events and revenue monitoring were recorded under events office; and
- with reference to the likelihood of ending the year with a surplus, it was hoped there might be capacity to run a further winter festival event. Attention was drawn to the ongoing work of the Events and Festivals Working Group.

The Committee **NOTED** the financial monitoring report to 31 December 2025 and that overall expenditure was within agreed budgets excepting estimated outturns detailed in Appendices 1 and 2.

c) Inverness Common Good Fund Budget Setting for 2026/2027
Suidheachadh Buidseit Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis airson
2026/27

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- it was queried whether a reserves policy should be developed, and a summary was provided of the role of the Pensions Committee Investment Sub-Committee which oversaw Common Good Fund investments, which were reviewed periodically. It was urged that Members should be consulted early in the development of any strategies for the Fund; and
- it was proposed to increase the Poverty and Inequality budget by £30,000 to £190,000 and to reduce the “Other” budget by £30,000 to £50,000, for one year only, with this to be reviewed in due course.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Common Good Fund budget for 2026/2027 as detailed within the report and appendices, subject to moving £30k from the ‘Other’ budget to the Poverty and Inequality budget.

d) Grants Applications over £10,000
Iarrtasan Tabhartais thar £10,000

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Inverness City Centre Gift Card project (paragraph 5.2 d of the report), was deferred, as requested by the applicant;
- concern was expressed that, for several projects, the Council contribution had increased, and the Inverness BID contribution had reduced. While the increase in non-domestic rates had caused financial issues for BID, it was also an issue for Common Good Fund properties. It was suggested that a strategy for allocation of funds was required, to ensure that projects being funded with the Common Good Fund goals. Encouragement of third-party funding bids was suggested;

- in response to queries about the Gull project, attention was drawn to the gull management plan that was being worked on in partnership with other agencies including NatureScot. A briefing was planned for Members at which all gull-related queries could be discussed. The budget for gull management was queried, with a suggestion that it should not be funded by the conference support budget. Assurance was sought, and provided, that gull-proof bins were being used in the city; and
- the wide-ranging benefits of the Inverness in Bloom project were highlighted, however it was thought the £69,428 detailed in the report was inaccurate and should read £67,000, as detailed in the budget. This would be checked out with the meeting.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the four applications for funding detailed in Appendix 2 relating to the 2026/27 budget
 - a. Operation Respect Easter/Summer/Autumn 2026 – **£24,328** –from the Operation Respect Campaigns Budget;
 - b. Safe Inverness Project 2026/27 - **£12,995** –from the Operation Respect Community Safety Budget;
 - c. Coach and Visitor Ambassador Project 2026 - **£28,500** –from City Destination Projects Budget; and
 - d. Inverness in Bloom – Community Grow Project – **£67,000** - from the City Flowering Budget
- ii. **APPROVED** the application for funding in support of the Inverness Gull Project 2025/26 Q4 - £9,763 – with £5,000 drawn from the Other Grants - 1k and Conference support – 4k,; and £4,763 being drawn from reserves; and
- iii. **NOTED** that Inverness City Centre Gift Card - **£9,500** - had been deferred at the request of the applicant in order for additional information to be provided in relation to wider benefits to the City. .

14. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of item 14i in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

The following Minutes had been circulated for noting or approval as appropriate:-

- i. City of Inverness Area Committee held on 17 November 2025 - **NOTED**;
- ii. Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 12 January 2026 - **APPROVED**; and
- iii. Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 4 December 2025 and 15 January 2026 - **APPROVED**.

15. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

URGENT ITEM

16. Inverness Common Good Fund – Longman Site
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis - Làrach an Longmain

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Graham declared an interest in this item due to his long-standing affinity with Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting for the duration of the item.

In terms of Standing Order 8.2, the Chair has agreed to take an additional item of Urgent Business in relation to the Longman Site on the grounds of the potential financial and legal implications.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. CIA/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations.

The meeting concluded at 3.15pm.

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 I Mackenzie
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr R Cross	Mrs K MacLean
Mr D Fraser	Mrs M Paterson
Mr R Gale	Ms C Ramsay
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Reid
Mrs B Jarvie	Ms T Robertson (substitute for Mr Gunn)
Ms L Johnston	Ms M Ross
Ms L Kraft	

Non-Members present:

Ms S Atkin	Mr B Lobban
Mr A Christie	Ms M MacCallum
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs A MacLean
Ms C Gillies	Mr T MacLennan
Mr K Gowans	Mr P Oldham
Dr M Gregson	Mr R Stewart
Ms M Hutchison	

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 Oifigear 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.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 4 February 2026 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr D McDonald
Mr C Ballance	Mr P Oldham (Substitute)
Mr B Boyd (Remote)	Mrs M Reid (Substitute)
Mr A Christie (Substitute)	Mrs T Robertson
Mr L Fraser (Remote)	Ms M Ross
Ms L Kraft	Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Ms T Collier (Remote)	Mr M Green (Remote)
Mr R Gale (Remote)	Mr B Lobban
Ms C Gillies (Remote)	Mr P Logue
Mr K Gowans	

Officials in Attendance:

Mr D Brown, Chief Executive
Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Mr F MacDonald, Chief Officer – Property and Assets
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Ms E Barrie, Head of HR
Mr M Watters, Corporate Information Governance Manager
Miss D Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk)
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager
Mr A Forsyth, Learning and Development Manager
Mr J Mackay, Marine Superintendent
Ms F Daschofsky, Programme Manager, Climate Change and Energy
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms E Scoburgh, Audit Scotland
Ms C Gardiner, Audit Scotland
Ms J McBride, Audit Scotland

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council.
All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.**

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Jarvie, Mr R Jones, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs A MacLean and Mr A Sinclair.

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

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

**3. Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report
Ath-sgrùdaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/1/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

People – Human Resources, Learning and Development (Reasonable Assurance)

Prior to discussion, it was highlighted that in Reference M2B of the Action Plan within the Internal Audit Final Report, 'Medium-Term Improvement Programme' should read 'Mandatory Training Improvement Plan'.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- in response to a query regarding the conclusion of reasonable assurance, the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk) provided an insight into the review process, which included significant scrutiny, and explained that the audit opinion was stated on the front cover of the Final Report;
- in response to a question, the Committee was informed that a report on the Investors in People Programme would be presented to the next Corporate Resources Committee;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that automatic alerts for impending completion dates within the online learning system were in the process of being activated;
- assurance was sought, and provided, in terms of the importance of succession planning; and
- information was sought, and provided, in terms of the auditing of Common Good Funds.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Final Reports referred to in Section 5.1 of the report; and
- ii. the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at Sections 6 and 7, and the status of work in progress detailed at Appendix 1 of the report.

**4. Internal Audit Action Tracking
Tracadh Ghniomhan In-sgrùdaidh**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/2/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

It was emphasised that realistic target dates for actions would be preferred over significant dates in the financial year.

The Committee **NOTED** the action tracking information provided including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions.

5. **Review of Corporate Risks** **Ath-Sgrùdadh air Cunnartan Corporra**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/3/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought and provided on what plans were in place to mitigate the potential loss of communication to homes and offices during a major power outage due to the telephony in many buildings having been converted to run via Broadband and not all mobile masts having generators, especially since the instances of power outage in Highland were quite high. It was highlighted that this problem had become more evident during the recent storms where some communities had been cut off completely without communication; and
- it was queried whether further mitigations were needed for Sustainable and Adaptable Workforce, Civil Contingencies – Pandemic Diseases and Net Zero Programme as none of these risks were close to meeting their target risk rating.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Corporate Risk Register provided at Appendix 1; and
- ii. the risk profile at Appendix 2.

6. **Audit Scotland Report - 2025/26 Annual Audit Plan** **Aithisg Sgrùdadh na h-Alba - Plana Sgrùdadh Bliadhna 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No. AC/4/26 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance and the Council's External Auditors (Audit Scotland).

During discussion the following points were raised;

- the Annual Audit Report would be presented to this Committee on 11 November 2026, however, steps were being taken, with support from the Finance Team, to present next year's Annual Audit Report in September, which was preferred; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that all Common Good Funds were considered collectively as part of the audit. However, only certain Common Good Funds met the materiality level for being specifically listed. It was requested that this be clarified in the report. An updated report to this effect would be circulated to Audit Committee Members after the meeting.

The Committee **APPROVED** the 2025/26 Annual Audit Plan.

7. **Exclusion of the Public**
Às-dùnadh a'Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

8. **Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report**
Ath-sgrùdaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais

There had been circulated to Members only Confidential Report No. AC/5/26 (Investigation into harbour's operations – control weaknesses) by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

The meeting ended at 2.45pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held in the Chamber, The Court House, High Street, Nairn on Monday 9 February 2026 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr L Fraser
Mrs B Jarvie

Mr M Green
Mr P Oldham

In attendance:

Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Mr T Masterton, Senior Technician, Road Operations
Mr S Hunter, Road Safety Officer, In House Bus Service
Mr M Gemmell, Principal Repairs Officer, Housing and Customer Services
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Officer, Traffic and Parking (Acting)
Ms S Lamb, Project Officer
Mr H McHale, Senior Maintenance Officer, Housing and Customer Service
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer, Democratic Services
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer, Democratic Services

Also in attendance:

Inspector C Johnstone, Police Scotland

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 M Green in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 3 - Mrs B Jarvie

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

Transparency Statement: Mrs B Jarvie declared a connection to this item as a member of the Nairn Books and Arts Festival Committee. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

Attention was drawn to the following items of good news:-

- collaborative work was ongoing between the Council and NICE (Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise) on feasibility studies in respect of the Links public toilets and the Nairn Riverside Development Plan. By working together, the Council and NICE were combining legal insights and strategic expertise to develop community-led proposals that supported growth, enhanced Nairn's natural environment and would ensure future investment was well-informed, deliverable and focussed on achieving real benefits for the people of Nairn; and
- according to the annual social and economic impact report, the benefit to the local economy of Nairn Book and Arts Festival 2025 had been £221,438. 90% of those surveyed had agreed that the festival increased community spirit, and it gave people a new interest, included free events, was age-inclusive and was a major asset to the Nairnshire area.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. Police Performance Report – Annual Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Poileis – Aithisg Bhliadhnaidh

There had been circulated Report No NC/01/26 by the Area Commander (South Highland Area Command).

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern had been expressed by Housing officers that the weekly meetings with Police officers, previously held to discuss incidents involving Council tenants and properties, had ceased several months ago. It was hoped these meetings could be reinstated due to the increasing number of incidents taking place, examples of which were provided. Inspector Johnstone undertook to look into the matter, and the Community Development Manager confirmed he would provide contact details for the Principal Housing Officer;
- there was concern locally regarding the increasing levels of aggression and drug use in the area, and information was sought, and provided, on these issues, including whether early release of offenders was a contributing factor. Questions were also raised regarding the Community Payback Scheme and whether it required more support. However, it was explained that the Community Payback Scheme was a matter for the Criminal Justice Service, and Inspector Johnstone undertook to revert to Members with a contact;
- concern was expressed regarding the rise in domestic crime, and information was sought, and provided, on whether the increase was due to new crime or historic offences now being reported. It was also queried whether there was sufficient support available for victims of domestic crime;
- reference having been made to incidences of graffiti in Nairn which appeared to be similar to graffiti at Balloch Bridge, Inspector Johnstone undertook to assign a local officer to look into the matter and establish whether there was any commonality;
- it was important that the detailed and comprehensive report received widespread coverage to raise awareness of the challenges faced by Police officers and the effectiveness with which they dealt with them;
- it was alarming that drug-related driving offences now outnumbered drink driving offences, and clarification was sought, and provided, on the process for testing and prosecuting individuals for drug driving; and

- online crime was increasing, and the importance of education was emphasised, particularly for elderly and vulnerable people who were more likely to be caught out by scams. The importance of reporting online crime was also highlighted, as the majority of such incidents went unreported.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. 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; and
- ii. the change in format necessitated by a reduction in back-office capacity to prepare additional area committee reports.

5. Area Roads Capital Programme 2026/27 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No NC/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair highlighted that roads capital allocations would be considered by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 12 February 2026, and there would be an increase in capital funding next financial year; and
- it was pointed out that there were significant potholes in Cawdor on the road from the Cawdor Tavern and at the Back Street junction. The Senior Technician undertook to investigate. However, it was explained that some sections of road in Cawdor were not adopted as they belonged to Cawdor Estate;

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2 to the report, which would be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Area budget would be available after the February 2026 Economy and Infrastructure Committee; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the rolling programme might require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey had been received and considered.

6. PRIME Markings A939 Grantown to Nairn Route Comharran PRIME A939 Slighe Bhaile nan Grandach gu Inbhir Narann

There had been circulated Report No NC/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in response to questions regarding Site B, which had not been recommended for PRIME as it was the last bend in a series of three and the road markings would extend into bend two, the Road Safety Officer explained that there were strict criteria in the toolkit provided by Transport Scotland and the sites had been

- assessed accordingly. He undertook to check what road markings and warning signs were already in place at Site B following recent bend improvement works; and
- the high number of motorcycle-related fatalities reinforced the importance of the PRIME initiative. In response to a question, it was confirmed that PRIME had been trialled by Transport Scotland on the trunk road network, and Highland was among the first local authorities to implement it.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the background to the proposed PRIME sign and road markings introduction; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the installation of PRIME signage and road markings at six locations on the A939 Grantown to Nairn Road.

7. Housing Revenue Account – Garage Rents 2026/27 Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais – Màil Gharaidsean 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No NC/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the Chair proposed a 10% increase, which was unanimously supported. It was commented that the garages were effectively being used for storage yet even with a 10% increase the rent would be less than half the average weekly cost of hiring a storage container. It was further highlighted that the majority of those renting a garage were not Council tenants. On the point being raised, it was confirmed that garage rents in Nairn continued to be below the Highland average.

The Committee **AGREED** a 10% rent increase be applied to Nairnshire Garages.

8. Housing Repairs and Capital Report – 1 April 2025 – 31 December 2025 Aithisg Chàraidhean is Calpa Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2025 – 31 Dùbhlachd 2025

There had been circulated Report No NC/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- effective void management had a role in addressing the housing shortage and, as performance in Nairnshire was above the Highland average, information was sought, and provided, on the approaches being taken locally that other areas could benefit from;
- in relation to Appendix 1 of the report - 2025 Delivery Output, it was queried what was meant by “Date Kitchen Installation” and “Date Heating Installation”. The Principal Repairs Officer undertook to check and feed back to Members;
- mould was an ongoing issue, and tenants had approached Members as they were unhappy with the responses they had received from officers. Discussion ensued, during which it was explained it was a legal requirement that reports of mould be addressed within a set timescale. Cases were dealt with as fairly and consistently as possible within the resources available and prioritised according to extent and severity. In response to a question, it was explained that a new policy was currently being developed that would set out the Service’s approach to addressing mould.

The Chair requested that, when the policy was available, officers attend a Ward Business Meeting to update Members. Information was also sought, and provided, on the timescale between receiving an independent mould report and action being taken, and whether the findings of an independent report were advisory or mandatory;

- reference was made to an instance of a tenant being promised a new kitchen in 2023, but it had not yet been installed. Whilst the pressures on the team were acknowledged, concern was expressed that promises were being made that could not be kept. The Principal Repairs Officer explained that strict criteria were in place to determine whether or not a kitchen would be replaced, and he undertook to look into the specific case referred to; and
- questions were raised regarding how the funding for housing repairs was apportioned between wards, and whether the age of properties/estates was taken into account. The Principal Repairs Officers undertook to clarify the position with the Repairs Manager and report back to Members;
- solar panels would reduce tenants' energy bills and help meet energy efficiency targets, and it was queried how such measures were assessed; and
- concern was expressed regarding instances of void properties being signed off with faults outstanding, and the Chair requested that the details be forwarded to the Principal Repairs Officer to investigate.

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

9. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications Measadh Iartasan Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No NC/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

It was highlighted that the regeneration of old buildings was a central element of the Local Place Plan, and support was expressed for the single application in respect of the renovation and redevelopment of Viewfield Stables, which was considered to be a worthwhile project.

The Committee **APPROVED** the following Community Regeneration Fund application:-

Ref: 4221

Applicant: The Highland Council

Project: Nairn Viewfield Stables Renovation and Redevelopment

Grant requested: £57,601.05

10. Nairn Common Good Fund – Invitation to Pay Parking Scheme Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Sgeama Parcaidh Cuireadh gus Pàigheadh

There had been circulated Report No NC/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members questioned the total transactions figure in the report as it represented a significant increase on the previous year. In response, it was clarified it was a typographical error and the correct figure was 17,246, not 71,246 as stated;
- a number of questions were raised regarding the figures in the report, particularly the gross income and the card transaction and processing fees, the latter of which had increased significantly on the previous year despite there being approximately 2000 fewer transactions. The Chair suggested the information in the report was not sufficiently clear for the Committee to agree the recommendation, and he proposed that the matter be deferred to the next meeting so a more detailed breakdown could be provided;
- an update having been sought on the recent consultation on parking in Nairn, it was proposed that the outcome be reported to the Ward Business Meeting, followed by a full report to the Committee;
- it was requested that information on the number of £10 parking payments being made for campervans be included in future reports; and
- the need to publicise the Maggot car park was highlighted.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to defer the Invitation to Pay Parking Scheme report for the provision of more detailed information on gross income and card transaction and processing fees; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the outcome of the consultation on parking in Nairn be reported to the Ward Business Meeting, followed by a full report to the Committee.

11. Nairn Common Good Fund – 2024/25 Audited Accounts, 2025/26 Q3 Monitoring and General Update, Proposed Budget 2026/27 Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Cunntasan Sgrùdaichte 2024/25, Sgrùdadh agus Cunntas Coitcheann R3 2025/26, Buidseat ga Mholadh airson 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No NC/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place and the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members were advised of an error within the report in that section 6 referred to the Quarter 3 Monitoring Statement for 2025/26, not 2024/25 as stated;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that, as set out in section 5.4.1 of the report, the revaluation loss in respect of the Sandown Lands was attributable to a revaluation by the Property and Estates team in light of the recent sale of adjoining private land. It was commented that the loss was unfortunate. However, it was welcomed that the Property and Estates team had taken a current view;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that full audited accounts would be brought to the Committee later in the year;
- in relation to the Quarter 3 2025/26 Monitoring Statement, the projected surplus of £56,000 was welcomed. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the corporate review by the Chief Officer for Corporate Finance was ongoing and further details would be available later in the year;
- the Community Development Manager provided an update on the Nairn Highland Games, during which it was explained that, as set out in the report, the 2026 Games would be delivered by the Council, as a Common Good Fund event, with

the Nairn Games Committee continuing to operate the Games arena as an attraction within the event. The Chair added that it was important to recognise the contribution the Nairn Common Good Fund was making to the Games, and emphasised that the new arrangements were very much in collaboration with the Nairn Games Committee. He commended all those involved in the success of the 2025 Games, and it was hoped to build on that success in 2026; and

- in relation to the Nairn Common Good Fund Engagement Group, engagement had improved in that it was now more focused on future developments than historic issues. However, it was considered that a review was required at the end of the current period.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** the Nairn Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts for 2024/25 (Appendix 1a) and the final 2024/25 Monitoring Statement (Appendix 1b);
- NOTED** the position of the Nairn Common Good Fund and 2025/26 outturn as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement against the budget presented at Appendices 2a and 2b to the report;
- AGREED** the Nairn Common Good Fund budget for 2026/27 detailed at Appendix 3 to the report; and
- NOTED** the summary of discussion from the Nairn Common Good Fund Engagement Group (NCGFEG) held on 16 October 2025 and **AGREED** the revised NCGFEG Terms of Reference at Appendix 4 of the report.

12. Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund (WDF) payment that had been approved since the previous meeting of this Committee:-

Applicant	Project	WDF Award
Nairn Community & Arts Centre	Automatic Door	£4748.40

In response to a request, the Community Development Manager undertook to circulate details of the remaining balance to Members. The Chair highlighted that the deadline for applications in 2025/26 was 31 March 2026.

13. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 24 November 2025 which had been approved by the Council on 11 December 2025.

The meeting concluded at 11.30 am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on Monday, 9 February 2026 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr S Kennedy
Mrs A MacLean

Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Ms A Jansson, Area Quality Improvement Manager
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Ms C Murray, Project Officer, Community Regeneration
Mr G Ralph, Repairs Manager, Housing
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr D McAlpine, Police Scotland

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mrs M Paterson in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr G MacKenzie.

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

There were no Declarations of Interests/Transparency Statements.

**3. Police – Area Performance Summary
Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/1/26 by the North Area Commander.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- in response to concerns regarding county lines, violence, and anti-social behaviour, it was explained that intelligence from the public played a crucial role and that each piece of information helped to build a clearer picture. Gathering intelligence took time and not every single report could be acted on immediately. However, there was concern for

vulnerable residents who were asked to report incidents of anti-social behaviour despite being afraid to leave their homes;

- an explanation was sought, and provided, regarding reports that some incidents had not received a response;
- it was suggested that some members of the public had stopped reporting crimes because they felt they would not be investigated, and that the connection they once had with the Police had been lost;
- proactive community policing would be welcomed and it was asked what resources were available; and
- there were still concerns regarding the B9163 and B9169 junctions with the A835 road between Tore and Maryburgh, and it was asked what impact the Police had in this regard. In response, and in terms of accident hotspots, it was said that road traffic patrol plans were based on previous years' statistics.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 1 April 2025 – 31 December 2025.

4. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2026/27** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2026/27**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/2/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Frustration was expressed due to the lack of funding available and it was felt that the Ward deserved more. There were a number of roads in need of resurfacing works, particularly those listed in Appendix 2 of the report. Prioritising between economic and community benefit was becoming increasingly more difficult to balance.

The Committee sought further information which included the amount of capital budget available for pavement improvements and whether the Housing Service were in a position to carry out improvements to car parking in Millbank Road and Chestnut Road in Dingwall. An update would be provided outside of the meeting.

It was commented that the recent works carried out by Openreach, which had resulted in lights and internet being cut off throughout a number of homes and streets, had caused chaos and upheaval.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2 of the report, which would be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Area budget would be available after the February 2026 Economy and Infrastructure Committee; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the rolling programme might require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey had been received and considered.

**5. Housing Repairs Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/3/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- in terms of the completion of repairs, it had been reported that staff who had attended tenants' homes had been professional and helpful;
- information was sought, and provided, as to why some void properties were empty for so long, and what impact this had on in-house repairs in terms of workload and cost;
- further information was sought, and provided, in terms of the ECO4 funding review. Where energy efficiency measures such as cavity wall insulation had been fitted, residents had reported a reduction in their energy bills; and
- in terms of section 8.5 of the report, Members had not yet been approached regarding local environmental projects and they looked forward to walking around the Ward. Clarification was sought, and provided, in terms of the budget available for these projects, some of which had already been ringfenced for vital upgrades.

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

**6. Housing Revenue Account Garage Rents 2026/27
Gharaidsean Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2026/27**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/4/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members expressed concerns about increasing garage rents when there continued to be a number of garages that were unused, lying empty or in poor condition, and it appeared that little or no maintenance had been carried out for many years. While the recommended rent increase was intended to allow investment into garage improvements, housing repairs were prioritised and this could limit resources. It was felt that a walk around with local maintenance officers might be helpful.

Clarification was sought on the following:-

- how much of the Ward's garage rent income was reinvested into maintenance;
- what works had been carried out on garages in the Ward to date;
- how many garages were currently used for storage versus car parking;
- how many required repair and whether there was a maintenance programme; and
- details of the void garages, including how long they had been empty.

The Committee felt that the proposed 8-10% increase in garage rents was too high and sought an action plan in terms of garage repairs be submitted to a future Ward Business Meeting in order for the recommended increase to be considered in future.

The Committee **AGREED** a 5% rent increase to apply to Dingwall and Seaforth Garages and Garage Sites.

7. **Community Regeneration Funding (CRF) Award** **Duais Maoineachaidh Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/5/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following a brief discussion on the specific projects, the Committee:-

- i. considered and **AGREED** to approve the applications;
- ii. **AGREED** that funding be awarded from the CRF as follows:
 - Dingwall Mountain Bike Trail Group - £6,715.50
 - Muir of Ord Development Trust - £13,325.79; and
- iii. **AGREED** to ringfence the remaining £34,140.60 Place Based Investment Programme funding for The Maryburgh Community Woodlands Group and The Peffery Way Association.

8. **Dingwall Common Good Fund** **Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Pheofharain**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/6/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Dingwall Common Good Fund (DCGF) Statement of Accounts for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the DCGF as shown in the 2025/26 Q3 monitoring statement as set out in Appendix 2;
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 3; and
- iv. **AGREED** to delegate to the Community Support and Engagement Team power to approve expenditure up to £10,000 in relation to DCGF within the annually set budget and following consultation with relevant Ward Members. This delegated power would be reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.

9. **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan – Progress Update** **Plana Àite Sgìre Inbhir Pheofharain agus Shìophort – Cunntas air Adhartas**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/7/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Assurance was sought, and provided, as it was highlighted that some

communities, particularly those outside Dingwall, might feel overlooked though they had equal opportunity to contribute to the Delivery Group. Any additional groups that wished to participate in the Delivery Group were invited to contact the Community Development Manager.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the annual report which recognised the progress made by the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan Delivery Group and the opportunity the group afforded to review and refresh priorities on an ongoing basis; and
- ii. **AGREED** to support the targeting of service programmes and external funding to meet the Area Place Plan priorities when appropriate.

10. **Dingwall Academy Associated School Group Overview** **Foir-shealladh Buileachaidh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Inbhir Pheofharain**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/8/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the report showed that Ward 8 schools were doing well and this came down to the dedication of staff and leadership;
- information relating to St Clements School could be provided at a future Ward Business Meeting;
- it was asked what impact there had been on smaller schools where Head Teachers had to cover long term sickness. It was confirmed that the Head Teachers were supported and capacity was backfilled;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the reasons for non-attendance and what was being done to encourage attendance;
- the number of home-schooled children was sought and would be provided outside of the meeting; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, in terms of the virtual comparator, which was said to be a guide.

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

11. **Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary budget applications approved since last meeting** **Iarrtasan buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàrd Inbhir Pheofharain agus Shìophort air an aontachadh bho choinneamh mu dheireadh**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved between 15 November 2025 and 16 January 2026.

- i. Lady Haig's Poppy Factory - 5 poppy wreaths for Armistice Day - £151
- ii. Conon Bridge Lunch Club - Christmas Lunch 2025 - £300
- iii. Maryburgh Amenities Company - Senior Citizens Christmas Lunch 2025 - £400

- iv. Conon Bridge Community Council - Christmas Lunch 2025 - £500
- v. Muir of Ord Community Council - Senior Christmas Party - £500

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 27 November 2025 which were approved by the Council on 11 December 2025.

The meeting ended at 12.55pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 12 February 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr B Lobban (Substitute)
Mr I Brown	Mr P Logue
Mr J Bruce (Remote)	Mr D Macpherson
Mr M Cameron	Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mr S Coghill (Remote)	Mrs T Robertson
Mr J Edmondson	Mrs M Ross (Substitute)
Ms C Gillies (Substitute)	Mr R Stewart
Mr M Green	Ms K Willis

Non-Members also present:

Mr R Bremner (Remote)	Ms L Kraft (Remote)
Ms L Dundas (Remote)	Mr R MacKintosh (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Ms K MacLean (Remote)
Mr D Fraser (Remote)	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Dr M Gregson	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr M Hutchison (Remote)	Mr P Oldham (Remote)
Ms E Knox (Remote)	Mr M Reiss

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer - Operations & Maintenance
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer - Facilities & Fleet Management
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead - Environment Dev Active Travel
Mr D Mudie, Strategic Lead - Planning and Building Standards
Mr T Stott, Development Plans Manager
Ms J Bromham, Flow Country Partnership Manager
Mr P Tomalin, Senior Community Development Manager
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager – Corran Ferry
Mr P Waite, Outdoor Access & Long Distance Route Manager
Mr D Cowie, Principal Planner
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Ms S Lashley, World Heritage Project Co-ordinator
Ms J Cromarty, Team Leader (Sustainable Transport)
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs O Bayon, 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 M Green in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr K Gowans, Mr R Jones, Mr W MacKay Mr H Morrison and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following declaration of interest:-

Item 13 – Mr J Edmondson

And also **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 4 – Mr M Cameron and Mr M Green

Item 10 – Mr J Edmondson

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

The Committee **NOTED** the following items of Good News:-

Indicative Capital Budget Allocations for Roads Maintenance 2026/27

There had been an increase in the Area allocations for the Roads Capital Budget for 2026/27 and a proposed contingency allocation of up to £1 million was also brought forward to address in-year issues.

Roads Team Response to Snow Event in Highland 1-12 January 2026

The Roads Team responded to challenging winter weather conditions between 1-12 January 2026. The severe conditions required a coordinated approach across the Service, with teams providing support to Roads colleagues throughout this period. Alongside many notes of thanks and praise received from members of the public, sincere appreciation was expressed to all operatives, supervisors and managers for their commitment and hard work.

Catch the Bus Month 2025 Campaign

The Highland Council received the 2025 Catch the Bus Month Local Authority Engagement Award from Bus Users UK. The Council had been one of 376 official partners taking part in this year's Catch the Bus Month, promoting the benefits of bus travel and encouraging increased public use.

During the campaign, the Council invited school pupils to visit the in-house bus depot. A month-long social media campaign was also delivered and supported by a discounted 10-journey ticket for the in-house bus service, which proved popular

with the public. In addition, a public awareness event was held in Inverness with representatives from Bus Users UK, D&E Coaches, Stagecoach and CityLink. The focus of the day was to highlight the benefits of using buses, including boosting the economy, reducing congestion and pollution, and improving health and wellbeing.

Highland Council Bus Service – Growth

The Highland Council Bus Service continued to grow. The Council expanded its in-house bus service to cover several routes in Inverness and the Black Isle, ensuring service continuity after significant low-passenger-driven cuts by Stagecoach. New Council-operated services, including routes in Dalneigh, Milton of Leys and Culduthel, filled gaps to maintain city connectivity. This provided communities with transport links across the city and beyond.

Improvement Service Innovation Award 2025

Ben Forrester, Systems Administrator within the Systems and Change Team, was the recipient of the 2025 Gazetteer Innovation Award. He had utilised the Python coding language to create scripts designed to update records in the Corporate Address Gazetteer, information supplied daily to the One Scotland Gazetteer and relied upon by public sector systems including those within Scottish Government, National Records of Scotland, NHS and the emergency services.

Naver Bridge

The deck of the new bridge was completed and was scheduled to receive its waterproofing layer in the week ending 30 January. This would allow the abutments to be backfilled and utilities to be finalised before surfacing the bridge. This represented a significant step forward in progressing the transfer of traffic to the new bridge to enable demolition of the old structure.

30 Years of Screen Highland 1996-2026

Screen Highland marked its 30th anniversary. It was one of Scotland's oldest film offices, having been established in 1996 to support the development of the screen industry, drive economic development and promote the region to visitors. Over the past three decades it had been highly successful in attracting some of the world's most iconic productions to the Highlands, supporting local talent and helping to grow a vibrant screen sector year on year. Working closely with partners, plans were being developed to celebrate the achievements and growth of the industry. The milestone year also looked ahead to attracting new productions, investment and opportunities across the Highlands.

4. Short Term Let Control Area Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine

**Transparency Statements: Mr M Cameron and Mr M Green made
Transparency Statements in respect of this item as a short term let licence**

holder and an owner of a holiday property in Nairn respectively. However, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/01/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- appreciation was expressed for the quality of the evidence, with emphasis that decisions had been taken locally at Area Committees and that any final approach should continue to respect local decision making;
- concern was expressed about the proposal to consult on two aggregated areas, Inverness City and a single Highland Rural area, rather than on an Area Committee basis. Members queried governance, the risk that local recommendations could be overruled at Committee, and sought assurance that post consultation reports would return to relevant Area Committees before any final decision;
- Members reiterated concern that consolidating areas into a single Highland Rural control area reduced the influence of Area Committees and emphasised the need to maintain meaningful local decision making throughout the process;
- observations were made that designating a single large rural control area could create risk of legal challenge if statements of reasons were not sufficiently specific to each locality;
- Members sought information on resource implications and it was indicated that significant officer capacity would be required to manage an anticipated rise in applications seeking to regularise existing use;
- it was confirmed that the control area mechanism did not operate retrospectively. However, some existing short term let properties already required planning permission and would need to regularise their position, including by application for certificates of lawfulness where appropriate. A significant volume of such applications was anticipated and would be addressed in the next report;
- clarification was provided that consultation would be local in focus within the proposed areas, with statutory public notice, direct notification to Community Councils and a preferred six-week consultation period. Following consultation, proposed boundaries could be reduced to exclude areas that opposed inclusion, but could not be expanded to include new areas that had not been consulted;
- reference was made to impacts on housing availability, workforce recruitment and community sustainability, including the position in Gaelic speaking areas where displacement from home communities affected language use and service resilience;
- observations were made that short term let control areas formed only one part of a wider response to the housing challenge, and requests were made for updates on action to address long-term empty homes; and

- it was confirmed that work on rural housing within any future growth deal was being taken forward as part of the Council's Housing Challenge programme with both Governments, with further detail to follow in due course.

Following a short adjournment, the Committee **AGREED** to suspend Standing Order 35.1 as the decision on the process had previously been taken by the Highland Council on 18 September 2025, falling within the six-month period during which decisions could not normally be revisited,

The Committee then accepted the amendment by Mr A Baxter, which required post-consultation reports to return to the relevant Area Committees before a final decision by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, with corresponding amendments to the Scheme of Delegation.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the Area Committees of Lochaber, Sutherland, City of Inverness Area, Skye and Raasay and Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh had agreed to continue the process of considering designating Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of their area;
- ii. **NOTED** that the process of designating further Short Term Let Control Areas requires consultation on the Planning Authority's statement of reasons, and that in Inverness City, Short Term Lets display different characteristics and present different issues relative to those in rural areas, which warrants consultation on a different statement of reasons;
- * iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to Council that the final decision to designate a Short Term Let Control Area was for Economy and Infrastructure Committee, following a post-consultation report to the relevant Area Committees, amending the Scheme of Delegation, accordingly, allowing them to comment, and if necessary, amend the Short Term Let Control Area within their area committee boundary; and
- iv. **AGREED** that following consultation officers bring back a further report to Committee, summarising the feedback so that Members could decide whether to continue with submission to Scottish Government Ministers.

5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the period Q3 2025/26 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach airson na h-ùine R3 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- a brief introduction confirmed that the Q3 revenue position continued to show challenges across several service areas, with active management measures underway, including work on roads maintenance budgets, climate change and energy budgets and the Corran Ferry overspend;
- clarification was sought on whether mandatory charges for motorhomes and campervans had been implemented across all Council car parks, observing

that this had been highlighted as a £50k income line but had not been in place when queried at the October 2025 Council meeting;

- reference was made to section 7.1 of the report, and Members requested further detail on the Corran Ferry budget recovery plan, including proposals relating to refit costs and staffing. It was highlighted that Lochaber Members received regular operational updates but had not yet discussed the budget recovery plan. Assurance was sought that any consideration of fare increases beyond the annual uplift would involve engagement with Lochaber Members and community stakeholders as previously committed;
- additional income reported from increased cruise ship numbers brought significant revenue in areas such as Fort William and Portree, yet this income was centralised within the wider harbours budget. Members expressed interest in future work to explore options for linking harbour income to local reinvestment, similar to the approach used for car parking;
- concern was expressed regarding delays in implementing previous budget decisions, with comment that failure to implement agreed measures undermined the role of Members in setting the annual budget. Reference was made to a projected £2m overspend in the climate change and energy budget and the view was expressed that such variances risked necessitating service reductions, use of reserves or increases in charges in future years; and
- Members emphasised the importance of realistic budgeting, noting that businesses in financial difficulty often overestimated income and underestimated expenditure. Further clarification was sought regarding seasonal reductions in marine gas oil sales and progress with battery-storage or solar PV-related income streams, including whether these had begun to generate revenue or whether significant income was not expected until the following financial year.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the forecast financial position for the year as set out in the report and Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
- ii. the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
- iii. the update provided regarding savings delivery as detailed within Appendix 3 of the report.

6. Capital Monitoring Report Q3 2025/26 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Calpa R3 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- concern was expressed regarding the condition of rural bridges, with specific reference to closures in the Carrbridge and Dulnain Bridge area. It was highlighted that the impact on local businesses, including farms operating on both sides of the river, had been severe and questions were raised about

whether current approaches risked leaving rural communities without viable transport connections;

- clarification was requested on an apparent underspend identified in the report. Members asked why temporary bridges continued to incur ongoing costs when capital budget remained unspent and sought further information on progress with permanent repair works. Questions were also raised regarding the status of the Tomich Junction planning application and the cause of significant cost increases at Naver Bridge;
- observations were made that underspends were not reflective of reduced need, but instead highlighted delays in delivering critical infrastructure works. Members stressed that rural bridges were essential links for residents and businesses and that asset failure had wide ranging social and economic impacts;
- comment was made that chronic under funding of roads and bridges by national government had left Highland with structural disadvantages, as current funding formulas prioritised traffic volumes over geographic scale. Members emphasised that Highland's extensive network required a more equitable national approach and expressed support for renewed representation to both Governments;
- additional questions were raised regarding active travel, with Members querying whether the full allocation would be spent in year and whether increased funding would be pursued in the next financial year. Further clarification was sought on progress toward upgrades at Glencoe car park;
- Members referred to the scale of the Highland bridge estate, highlighting the large number of structures nearing or exceeding their lifespan. Examples were given of bridges requiring full replacement, including those long overdue for renewal and those carrying heavy local usage, with Members requesting clarity on how priorities were determined and what leverage the Council had to influence national investment decisions;
- comment was made that the condition of key assets, including the Waterloo Bridge, demonstrated a significant backlog. Members emphasised that delays in inspection and replacement were affecting communities daily and urged renewed escalation to national level;
- Members expressed broader concern that the condition of Highland's roads network had deteriorated to a level affecting mobility across the region, with the view expressed that the challenge was now comparable in scale to the housing crisis;
- officers advised that temporary bridge allocations were being utilised as quickly as procurement timescales allowed, with an expectation that budgets would be fully spent by year end. It was confirmed that outline planning had been submitted for Tomich Junction, that detailed design was ongoing, and that Glencoe car park updates would be provided following the meeting; and
- it was recognised that the concerns raised across Members reflected the significant importance of rural and urban bridges to communities throughout the Highlands.

The Committee **APPROVED** the financial position to 31 December 2025 and note the estimated year end forecast.

7. Roads Capital Allocations Riarachaidhean Calpa Rathaidean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members were advised of a minor correction in Table 4 of the report, with the 2025/26 allocation for Sutherland stated incorrectly and now confirmed as £2.316 million;
- concern was expressed that the level of capital allocation continued to fall significantly short of the investment required to address the condition of the Highland roads network. Reference was made to long standing backlogs and the widening gap between budget availability and actual need;
- area level allocations did not reflect the scale of deterioration across the network and examples were given highlighting substantial local backlogs, including in Lochaber and Dingwall and Seaforth. It was observed that many Councillors lacked clear visibility of the true backlog in their areas and that previously agreed reporting standards had not yet delivered full transparency;
- questions were raised regarding the structures allocation for Lochaber, including whether the annual uplift of approximately £50k was additional to the structures allocation approved at the 13 November 2025 Economy and Infrastructure Committee meeting, and how priority projects for that area would be funded;
- wider concerns were raised that funding formulas based on usage rather than network length disadvantaged Highland disproportionately, given the size and rurality of the network. This contributed to sustained under investment and placed communities, businesses and services at increasing risk;
- the view was expressed that the condition of Highland roads was deteriorating faster than investment could offset, with several Members describing the situation as unsustainable. Highland required a significantly improved national funding settlement to safeguard connectivity, public safety and economic activity;
- questions were raised on the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey results, including whether the most recent findings differed materially from the previous year and how these would impact area allocations once confirmed;
- Members also queried disparities in annual percentage increases for areas such as Skye and Caithness, asking whether their relative positions in previous condition assessments explained the lower uplift for 2026/27;
- concerns were raised that delays in addressing critical bridges across Highland, including lifeline structures and those already categorised as poor, risked escalating further. Examples included Waterloo Bridge and other bridges where inspection backlogs and funding gaps continued to affect communities and businesses;
- reference was made to the cumulative impact of inflation on road materials and construction costs, with Members observing that the reported 2.15% average increase for 2026/27 represented a real term reduction against inflation rates for road materials; and

- it was recognised that while the Council had continued to allocate the maximum resources available within its own budget, the scale of the problem required additional funding from national government, with calls for stronger collective representation to secure a fairer settlement.

Thereafter, Mr M Green seconded by Mr I Brown, **MOVED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Baxter seconded by Mr D Macpherson **MOVED** that the Council notes the estimated £233 million backlog of capital road repairs across the Highland Council area and that without Scottish Government commitment and additional financial assistance the council's road network would continue to deteriorate with a direct impact on communities and the Highland economy. Consequently, the Chairman of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee write to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport requesting a cross-party and cross-agency roads summit for the Highlands to discuss future funding options to improve Highland roads.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 8 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 8 votes, with no abstentions.

In accordance with Standing Order 30, the Chair used his casting vote in favour of the motion, and the **MOTION** was **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the Motion:

Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Ms C Gillies, Mr M Green, Mr B Lobban, Ms L Niven, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis.

For the Amendment:

Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Edmondson, Mr P Logue, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs T Robertson, Mr R Stewart.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the funding allocations in Table 2 of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** the specific projects from the road's contingency allocation, as detailed in Table 3 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** that agreement on additional schemes proposed for funding from the contingency allocation would be delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive - Place, in consultation with the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair; and
- iv. **NOTED** the indicative allocations in Table 4 of the report and agree they would be updated with any adjusted for any carry forwards and using the same methodology as last year, once the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey results were available.

8. Highland Local Development Plan - Progress Update (Part 2) Plana Leasachadh Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd – Cunntas Adhartais (Pàirt 2)

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the initial estimates from work undertaken for the Housing Need and Demand Assessment indicated a potential net increase of 17,000 to 18,000 jobs in Highland over the next 20 years and that related household projections suggested around 17,000 additional homes might be required, reflecting updated Scottish Government demographic projections;
- Highland remained one of the few local authorities in Scotland projected to experience household growth and therefore required to plan for the associated impact on services, infrastructure and land supply;
- clarification was sought on how the jobs forecasts might be influenced by recent developments affecting the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport area. Members queried whether temporary reductions in staffing levels at the Ardesier port site could affect long term projections; and
- it was confirmed that current estimates for job creation were based on best available information, including figures submitted with pending planning applications, but that adjustments could be made in due course as evidence evolved.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress on gathering, analysing, and reporting sufficient evidence to produce the new Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP), including ongoing engagement with the public, Scottish Government and other stakeholders;
- ii. **NOTED** the next steps, including requirements for completion of the Evidence Report documentation for approval by Full Council and subsequent submission to Scottish Ministers for independent Gate Check; and
- iii. **AGREED** the content of the remaining chapters of the Evidence Report as summarised in Section 7 of this report.

9. The Flow Country World Heritage Site – Progress Report Làrach Dualchas na Cruinne anns na Flobhachan – Aithisg Adhartais

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

A presentation from the Flow Country Partnership Manager was provided who outlined the governance, management and planning work underway following inscription of the Flow Country as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2024. The partnership, established as a charity in 2024, employed two Highland-Council-funded staff and managed the World Heritage budget on behalf of Highland Council and NatureScot.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members were advised of a minor correction within paragraph 1.2 of the report, where the reference should read “planning position statement” rather than “planning permission statement”;
- appreciation was expressed for the significance of the Flow Country landscape, with Members emphasising its unique ecological value and encouraging Members who had not visited the site to do so;
- clarification was sought on the meaning of “inappropriate development” referenced in paragraph 3.3 of the report. It was explained that such development would be any that adversely affected the Outstanding Universal Value of the site, particularly activities impacting peat-forming processes and blanket bog integrity;
- Members asked for further explanation of the term “climate reliance” in paragraph 5.9. of the report and officers advised that the wording should had read “climate resilience”; and
- concern was raised regarding the increasing spread of non-native coniferous species, including Sitka Spruce and Lodgepole Pine, which were regenerating across areas cleared for forestry or wind farm development. Members highlighted the difficulty landowners faced in determining responsibility for removal of these invasive species, observing that re-seeding was occurring beyond original planting boundaries.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress made and future proposals in relation to The Flow Country World Heritage Site; and
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed timeline for future reports in relation to planning and development within and close to the Site.

10. Local Transport Strategy Delivery Plan

Plana Lìbhrigidh Ro-innleachd Còmhdhalach Ionadail

Transparency Statement: Mr J Edmondson made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Director of Ardross Online CIC. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, on how the programme would be funded and whether progress depended on external bids;
- questions were raised on how future amendments to the Delivery Plan would be communicated to Committee, given its status as a live document;
- Members suggested that local transport forums, already operating in several areas, could form a useful part of ongoing engagement;

- reference was made to abnormal loads and the need for clearer coordination given their potential disruption. Members highlighted previous difficulties during planning processes and sought greater focus on managing such movements;
- Members welcomed efforts to support new station proposals and were advised that rail station requests were resource intensive and competitive at national level, with 77 applications currently across Scotland;
- queries were raised regarding the inclusion of smart-meter infrastructure within the Plan, with Members recognising its relevance to supporting cost effective EV charging. Officers accepted to relay this point to colleagues in the Climate Change and Energy team;
- Members asked whether car sharing was included in the priority actions. Officers advised that active workstreams existed but would confirm whether it appeared explicitly within the Delivery Plan;
- concern was expressed about the vulnerability of mobile phone masts during power outages, with Members highlighting the severe impact on communities during recent storms. Officers undertook to seek further advice and report back;
- Members sought clarification on timescales for the Fort William integrated transport work and were advised that results from the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) appraisal were expected in early 2027; and
- comment was made regarding modal shift, with the view expressed that public transport in many rural areas could not realistically match the convenience, affordability or reliability of private car use. It was argued that future work should acknowledge rural dependency on private transport and avoid approaches that were perceived to penalise car users, while continuing to support active travel and public transport where viable.

The Committee **APPROVED**:-

- i. the Local Transport Strategy 2025 – 2035 Delivery Plan; and
- ii. the Local Transport Strategy 2025 – 2035 Progress Update Template, which includes the Monitoring and Evaluation programme from the LTS.

11. Highland Council – In-house Bus Service

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd – Seirbheis Bhusaichean an Ùghdarrais

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the in-house bus service had transformed a financially unsustainable position into a strong operational and financial success, with substantial savings achieved and significant growth in passenger numbers. A report on the future operating model would be brought to the 14 May 2026 Council meeting;
- Members queried whether establishing an Arm's Length External Organisation (ALEO) with D&E Coaches would restrict flexibility to deploy buses in areas beyond Inverness, highlighting recent reductions in

commercial services in Lochaber and the need for improved connections to new housing areas;

- questions were raised on the upcoming £2 bus fare cap pilot, specifically when it would be implemented in Highland and what impact it might have on passenger numbers;
- Members emphasised that in many parts of Highland, services had been withdrawn by commercial operators and community expectations for improved provision were growing. Members sought assurances that the in-house model would be used as a platform for further expansion across the region;
- concern was expressed that, while the in-house service was welcomed, many communities viewed it as Inverness-centric, with limited visibility elsewhere in Highland. Members asked for clarity on timescales for expansion and how gaps left by commercial operators would be addressed;
- questions were raised regarding Section 22 permit limitations and whether establishing an ALEO or obtaining an operator's licence would improve the ability to run a wider range of services and generate income;
- it was asked whether the Council was recovering the full value of reimbursement from the Scottish Government for under-22 free travel;
- questions were raised regarding progress toward a zero-emission fleet and concern expressed that earlier lack of access to funding had resulted in older, high-emission vehicles being used in Inverness;
- the importance of reliable provision in areas such as Milton of Leys, Hilton, Culloden and Inverness South was highlighted, with suggestions for improved links to visitor destinations including Culloden Battlefield;
- the need for a robust vehicle replacement programme was stressed, and assurances were welcomed that D&E Coaches operated on a strict renewal cycle and that older vehicles would continue to be phased out as electric fleet capacity increased; and
- appreciation was expressed across the Chamber for the work of the in-house bus team, with Members highlighting the reliability of services, the responsiveness shown in filling gaps left by commercial operators and the positive contribution made to local communities.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress of the in-house bus service; and
- ii. **AGREED** the work to develop a new operating model for Highland Council Bus and Coach services with a report to be brought to the Council meeting May 2026.

12. Seasonal Access Rangers Annual Report 2025 Aithisg Bhliadhnail Maoir-dhùthcha Inntigidh Ràitheil 2025

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members welcomed confirmation of recurring funding of £655,000 per annum from 2025/26 onwards to support the re-establishment and continuation of the Seasonal Access Ranger service, recognising its importance for visitor management and community reassurance;
- strong appreciation was expressed for the work carried out by the Ranger Team, with Members highlighting the scale of activity undertaken across Highland during the previous season. Examples included over 3,000 public engagements, more than 370 patrols in Lochaber alone, significant volumes of litter removal, and the identification of large numbers of abandoned tents and informal campsites;
- concern was expressed about the volume of waste, inappropriate camping, parking pressure and anti-social behaviour in hotspot areas. Members stressed that Rangers played a vital role in supporting local communities who were frequently overwhelmed during peak visitor periods;
- Members commented that the role was challenging and often undertaken in difficult conditions, involving direct engagement with visitors whose behaviour was not always responsible. It was suggested that the scale of visitor pressures, particularly in Lochaber, Skye and along the NC500, now exceeded the capacity of the current team;
- the view was expressed that educational engagement remained valuable but, in some cases, insufficient. Members suggested exploring whether Rangers could be supported by stronger enforcement mechanisms, including fixed-penalty powers for inappropriate parking, littering or irresponsible camping, as a means of addressing persistent issues;
- Members welcomed the positive impact reported in Skye, where coordination between Rangers, Police Scotland and Community Councils had been effective, but emphasised that coverage remained limited by geography and time. The importance of resourcing that would allow for increased staffing and consideration of more permanent roles was raised;
- in Easter Ross, it was highlighted that only one recognised seasonal hotspot, Portmahomack, appeared in the report and clarification was sought on whether additional sites such as Shandwick, Nigg and Balintore could receive more consistent ranger presence, given that previous locally funded provision was no longer available;
- reassurance was sought that recruitment for the 2026 season was progressing and that sufficient capacity would be in place by spring. The value of Rangers' data collection was emphasised, as it provided important evidence on visitor behaviour trends, pressures and infrastructure gaps across the region;
- growing concerns were expressed regarding blackwater waste dumping, outdoor toileting and fire risks, all of which had increased significantly in 2025. Broader infrastructure planning, including additional waste points and public toilets, should be considered in future discussions;
- reference was made to the need for improved long-term investment in visitor infrastructure, with questions raised about how observations on parking capacity, waste disposal, toilet provision and roadside camping could be translated into capital planning and budget decisions; and
- officers advised that while enforcement powers were limited and challenging to implement in practice, emerging legislative changes, including the new

Natural Environment Bill might enable local authorities to issue fixed-penalty notices for wildfire related offences. It was confirmed that this would be explored further and, if appropriate, brought back to Committee for consideration.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided by the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Access Ranger Annual Report 2025 for distribution to stakeholders and interested parties.

**13. Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited Annual Accounts 2024/25
Cunntasan Bliadhnail Coimhearsnachd Tuathanas-gaoithe na Beinne
Tarsainn Earranta 2024/25**

Declaration of Interest – Mr J Edmondson made a Declaration of Interest as he was a Director of Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Limited for part of the period the Accounts covered and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for this item.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- following the last Committee meeting, a letter had been sent to Scottish Power seeking an uplift in the community benefit contribution in line with the Council's Social Value Charter. Members were informed that the response received was disappointing, confirming no increase to the current £2,000 per megawatt base payment, significantly below the £12,500 per megawatt level sought under the Charter;
- a further letter from the Chair would be sent to Scottish Power requesting a face-to-face meeting to continue pressing for adherence to the Charter for future years, observing that the Council was not seeking retrospective application but a fairer forward looking settlement;
- questions were raised regarding interest earned on funds held by the company. Members sought a breakdown of backdated interest referred to in the report, including the years covered and the annualised rate of interest achieved, observing that balances in earlier years had yielded minimal return;
- comment was made that, compared with previous discussions, interest payments for 2024/25 appeared to show improvement, but Members asked for clarity to ensure that communities were not disadvantaged in earlier financial years; and
- officers confirmed that the requested information could be provided to Members.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the activities of Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited;
- ii. **AGREED**, on behalf of Highland Council, the Financial Statement of Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Limited for year ending 31 March 2025;
- iii. **AGREED** to write once again to Scottish Power seeking an uplift in community benefit contribution from this scheme, and for the Chair to request a face-to-face meeting to press for a fairer forward-looking agreement in line with the Social Value Charter; and
- iv. **AGREED** that officers would provide Members with a breakdown of the backdated interest referenced in the report, including the years covered and the annualised rate of interest for the previous three financial years

14. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update Q3 2025/26 Sgrùdadh Buidseit is Cunntas Adhartais a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh R3 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- questions were asked in relation to the closure report for the Solar PV Commercial Estate project, as set out in the appendix of the report. Reference was made to the earlier work comparing potential delivery models to the Edinburgh Solar Co-operative and Members queried whether similar partnership based models could now be reconsidered;
- the UK Government's newly released Local Power Plan might provide future funding opportunities for Local Authorities to work with communities to develop renewable energy schemes. This could open the door to partnerships that delivered community benefit, reduce energy costs and lower emissions, in line with the Council's Community Wealth Building and Social Value Charter commitments;
- Members sought assurance that, although the project had been formally closed, officers would continue to explore alternative approaches for deploying Solar PV within the commercial estate, including community-led or co-operative models where viable;
- officers confirmed that although the specific Delivery Plan project had been closed, work remained ongoing to identify opportunities across both leased and Council-occupied properties. They advised that further dialogue with Highland People's Power could be considered and accepted to take this forward for discussion;
- further questions were raised on the monitoring and reliability of the Council's existing solar PV installations, with Members asking how downtime was identified and reported. Officers undertook to investigate monitoring arrangements and provide clarification; and
- Members also asked whether the Council itself contributed to communities under the Social Value Charter when delivering its own renewable projects.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress provided in the Utility Scale Solar PV Programme and Project for updates in the report;
- ii. **APPROVED** the closure of the Solar PV Commercial Estate project as recommended by the Net Zero Portfolio Board; a
- iii. **NOTED** the progress on delivering an Investment Pipeline in compliance with the Council Delivery Plan 2024-2027;
- iv. **AGREED** that officers would explore options for renewed engagement with Highland People's Power regarding potential partnership models and report back on any viable opportunities; and
- v. **AGREED** that officers would review the monitoring arrangements for the Council's existing solar PV installations and provide clarification to Members on how system performance and downtime were recorded and addressed.

15. Performance Monitoring Report Q3 2025-26 Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R3 2025–26

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, a query was raised regarding the continued absence data, which had not been reported in the previous cycle and remained unavailable in the Q3 report. Officers confirmed that they would investigate the reason for the missing information and circulate the figures to Members by email once available.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Service's performance information;
- ii. **NOTED** the changes to presentation of the Economy and Infrastructure Service data in section 6 of the report in order to more clearly show alignment with Performance Plan commitments;
- iii. **NOTED** the inclusion of SPI's out with the Performance Plan to further support transparency and scrutiny of performance reporting; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Assistant Chief Executive – Place would investigate the absence of absence data and circulate the information to Members by email once confirmed.

16. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Planning Applications Committees (PAC) for:-

- i. North PAC – 12 September 2025;
- ii. South PAC – 8 October 2025;
- iii. North PAC– 26 November 2025;
- iv. North PAC– 17 December2025;

and, **APPROVED** :-

- v. City Region Deal Monitoring Group held on 4 November 2025;
- vi. Harbours Management Board held on 28 November 2025;
- vii. Community Regeneration Fund Strategic Sub Group held on 20 January 2026; and
- viii. Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group held on the 23 January 2026.

The meeting ended at 1 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drumbuie, Golspie on Monday 16 February 2026 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr M Baird

Mr R Gale

Ms M Hutchison

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison

In attendance:

Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager

Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager

Mr C Sutherland, Principal Repairs Officer

Ms C Murray, Project Officer (Community Regeneration)

Ms A Jansson, Area Quality Improvement Manager

Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector David McAlpine, Police Scotland

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 R Gale in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There was an apology for absence from Ms LA Niven.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

3. Police Scotland - Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No SCC/01/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- further information was sought and provided on the increase in the number of cases of cruel and unnatural treatment of children;
- concern that speed limits in Bonar Bridge were not being observed by many drivers and confirmation the potential to increase Police visibility in the village would be raised with the local Inspector; in addition, it was clarified that the Council was

the responsible authority for the installation of smiley traffic signs in the village;

- concern at issues of speeding through Golspie, particularly by HGVs in the early mornings and late evenings and confirmation the potential to increase Police visibility in the village would be raised with the local Inspector;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that an appointment had been made to the vacant Police officer post at Tongue Police Station, and it was hoped the officer would be in post within the next few months; and
- concern at the statistics in relation to domestic abuse and further clarity was sought and provided on how these were reflected in the specific crime statistics detailed in the report. It was confirmed a more detailed breakdown of the figures would be provided outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2025 – 31 December 2025.

4. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/02/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- noting there had been an increase in the number of schemes completed in 2025/26 in comparison to previous years;
- in response to a query, it was explained the intention was to complete further works before the end of the financial year, weather permitting and where operationally feasible;
- further clarity was sought and provided that the priority list at Appendix 1 was constantly reviewed and updated in terms of works having to be added, accelerated or otherwise, and third parties carrying out their works in the same locations; a balance had to be achieved between the available budget, in-house and contractor capacity and programming considerations; and
- in response to a query, it was explained that no direct funding was received from the timber industry towards the cost of repairs to roads damaged by timber vehicles.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the works completed on the approved prioritised list to date;
- ii. **NOTED** the additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the works still proposed for the 2025/26 financial year.

**5. Area Roads Capital Programme 2026/27
Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2026/27**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/03/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a query, Members were advised that it was anticipated fewer schemes may be completed in 2026/27 compared to the previous year due to there being less surface dressing works and the other types of priority works taking longer to complete;
- the need to consider the works required to the road either side of the new Naver Bridge following its completion;
- the challenges around the provision and delivery of materials for roads repairs due to the lack of quarries in the area and private quarry capacity. Members undertook to liaise with Caithness Members who had raised similar concerns on this issue; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that there was no provision in the capital allocation for car parks in the area, however officers were having discussions on this matter.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2 of the report, which will be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **NOTED** that the Area budget will be available after the February 2026 Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the rolling programme may require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey have been received and considered.

**6. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2026/27
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2026/27**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, reference was made to the lack of investment and maintenance in garages in Sutherland and at their overall condition. In addition, tenants were facing rent and potentially Council tax rises and therefore it was reasonable that a 5% increase be applied.

The Committee **AGREED** that a 5% rent increase be applied to Sutherland County garages and garage sites in 2026/27.

7. Housing Repairs and Capital Report 1 April 2025 to 31 December 2025
Aithisg Chàraidhean is Calpa Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2025 gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2025

There had been circulated Report No SCC/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

It was noted that Table 1 had been omitted from the report and Members were provided with a verbal update on the figures for the average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs.

In discussion, concern was expressed at the standard of contractor workmanship in relation to replacement windows in Council houses in north and west Sutherland and the need to be mindful of this going forward to prevent follow-up works being required.

Following on from the above, further clarification was provided on the works carried out under the Capital Programme detailed at paragraph 8.3 and the number of properties involved as set out in Appendix 1 of the report. In addition, further information was provided on the rolling programme for the installation of solar panels and other energy efficiency measures in Sutherland.

Thereafter, it was confirmed that as a saving to new tenants, floor coverings on vacated Council houses could be retained on request from the incoming tenant/s and subject to an agreement being signed to that effect.

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

8. Community Regeneration Fund Application
Measadh Iartasan Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No SCC/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **APPROVED** the following Community Regeneration Fund applications:

Ref: CRF4198

Applicant: Create Inspire Projects CIC

Project: Travelling Imaginarium

Grant Requested: £9,415.00

Ref: CRF 4207

Applicant: Durness & Kinlochbervie Angling Club

Project: Oldshoremore Beach Steps Replacement

Grant Request: £8,250.00

Ref: CRF 4208

Applicant: Lochview Rural Training

Project: Multi-use teaching/support building

Grant Request: £29,378.65

9. **Attainment Reports – Golspie, Farr, Kinlochbervie and Dornoch Aithisg Coileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the fact the attainment reports were generally positive, including in relation to positive destinations, be welcomed;
- officers be thanked for confirming that Members would be provided with attainment information in respect of Ullapool High School on the basis that some primary schools in Sutherland formed part of its Associated School Group (ASG); and
- it was important for the context to be borne in mind when considering the figures in the reports given that some schools had small pupil numbers.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the reports related to Golspie, Farr, Kinlochbervie and Dornoch schools.

10. **Dornoch Common Good Fund – 2024/25 Annual Accounts and Final Monitoring, 2025/26 Q3 Monitoring Report and 2026/27 Proposed Budget**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members were thanked for their support for a new community centre for Dornoch and it was suggested the project demonstrated how well the Common Good Fund had been managed and the benefits it generated for the Dornoch community.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the Dornoch Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts as set out in Appendix 2 of the report and Q4 monitoring report for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 3;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Dornoch Common Good Fund as shown in the 2025/26 Q3 monitoring statement as set out in Appendix 4 of the report;
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 5 of the report; and
- iv. **DELEGATED** authority to the Community Development Manager to approve Dornoch Common Good grants up to £10,000, within the annually set budget and following consultation with Ward 4 Members.

11. Ward 1 & 4 Discretionary Fund Approvals 2025-2026

The Committee **NOTED** the awards:

North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Fund applications approved 1 April 2025 – 1 February 2026

Durness Community Council – Multimedia & TV Equipment	£1,400.00
Kyle of Sutherland Hub – Community Cycling Project	£500.00
Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust – Kyle Feeds	£1,000.00
Scourie Community Development Company – Repopulating Scourie	£5,384.71
CFINE – Fareshare in Highland	£3,585.00
Lochinver Weed Whackers – Lamp Post Planters	£750.00
Lady Haig Poppies – 3 x Poppy Wreaths	£99.00
Bonar Bridge Community Hall – Running Costs	£1,250.00
The Flow Country Partnership – Flowing Forward	£412.29

East Sutherland & Edderton Ward Discretionary Fund applications approved 1 April 2025 – 1 February 2026

Golspie Youth Action Project – Youth Club Core Costs	£1,500.00
Go Golspie Development Trust – Go Golspie Community Car Service	£2,000.00
Sutherland Sports Council	£1,000.00
Feis Chataibh – Feis an t-Samhraid	£2,000.00
Embo Football Club – Football Pitch Development/Update	£975.00
CFINE – Fareshare in Highland	£975.00
Golspie Sutherland FC – Season’s Transport	£1,000.00
Golspie High School – Higher Geography Field Trip	£1,598.00
Lady Haig - 3 x Poppy Weaths	£99.00
The Flow Country Partnership – Flowing Forward	££412.29
Golspie High School – Small Schools Football Competition	£1,220.00
Engaging with Activity CIC – Christmas Hamper Project 2025	£1,000.00

12. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 1 December 2025, which were approved by the Council on 11 December 2025.

The meeting concluded at 11.15am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held remotely on **Monday, 16 February 2026 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr J Finlayson
Ms C Gillies

Mr D Millar
Mr R Stewart

Officials in attendance:

Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer Operations & Maintenance, Place Service
Ms S Armstrong, Chief Officer Revenues & Commercialisation
Mr M Bailey, Strategic Lead Commercialisation
Mr A MacBain, Business Management Analyst (Income Generation)
Ms M MacDonald, Area Quality Improvement Manager, People Service
Ms D Henderson, Strategic Lead Care & Support, Health & Social Care
Mr J Mackay, Amenity Services Manager (North), Communities and Place
Mr L MacDonald, Repairs Manager, Housing & Communities
Mr D Swanson, Active Travel Project Manager
Ms M A Gray, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund, Place Service
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Officer (West & Mid Highland)
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Also in attendance:

Station Commander, S Fraser, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (item 3 only)
Mr S MacPherson; Mr P Higginbotham; Ms J Rodgers, SSEN (item 4 only)
Ms M MacLennan, Ms B Anderson, Dunvegan Community Trust (item 5 only)

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 J Finlayson in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were none.

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

Item 14 - Ms C Gillies (Transparency Statement)

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus
Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No SR/1/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Following commentary on the report by the Station Commander, reference was made to the recruitment and retention challenges facing the Scottish Fire and

Rescue Service in this area and the Service continued its efforts to fill vacancies to ensure station availability. In the last six months recruitment had been positive and in particular, Broadford station had seen a 33% increase in staff since last year.

In terms of the development of new stations in Uig and Portree, it was advised that a pre start meeting with the contractors would be held in late February regarding the new Uig station. In terms of the new Portree station, funding would be made available with a view to construction commencing in the next financial year.

In relation to muirburns, the Service worked closely with landowners/estates to ensure that the Service could provide advice and support to them. Further, the joint mobilisation system was a pilot project and had been used successfully so far on Skye.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. **SSEN Transmission Skye Re-inforcement Project – Community Benefit Fund Presentation**

Pròiseact Ath-neartachaidh Tar-chur SSEN an Eilein Sgitheanaich – Taisbeanadh Maoin Buannachd na Coimhearsnachd

Representatives from SSEN were in attendance to give a presentation on their community benefit fund which was currently being developed. The presentation covered SSEN approach to community benefit funding; plans for developing the fund in accordance with UK Government guidance; community engagement and timeline for development of the fund.

In discussion, it was queried why half of the money available would be through the Regional fund as opposed to more money being available to the community fund where the impact of the re-inforcement project would be greatest. It was advised that this was SSEN's approach to community funding and was used for other funds, such as renewable funding. This was based on evidence that setting money aside for regional transformational projects was an effective way of spending this money, such as for cross area priorities to be addressed.

It was queried if the amount of funding was enough to make up for the effects of the project in local communities. It was advised that from experience of community funding, around £5m for a local community benefit fund was good progress. With the addition of Regional funding, there would be a total of over £10m available for projects.

There would be a Panel who would decide on applications for community benefit funds. There would be a comprehensive recruitment process to appoint members to this Panel and efforts would be made to ensure as wide a range as possible of community members could apply to be on the Panel.

An online survey regarding the fund would be advertised and would also be available at community consultation events. The community consultation would firm up what the communities priorities were.

The SSEN representatives were thanked for their attendance at the Committee, and otherwise the Committee **NOTED** the presentation and that Members would be kept updated with progress on the community benefit fund.

**5. Dunvegan Community Trust Presentation
Taisbeanadh Urras Coimhearsnachd Dhùn Bheagain**

Representatives from Dunvegan Community Trust were in attendance and gave a presentation in relation to information about the Trust; work the Trust undertook in the community; key projects that the Trust were delivering and some of the challenges faced by the Trust i.e. funding, staff capacity and access to land.

Following the presentation, reference was made to the Trust's long term aims and ambitions which showed they were covering the real issues highlighted by the community, such as housing, a community pitch, community transport. The Trust working in partnership with other communities/groups was very proactive and welcomed. In terms of developing a local place plan, the Trust intended to do this themselves without seeking external help given the substantial costs this would incur.

In terms of marine tourism in the area, Dunvegan pier was a unique asset for the whole of the North West and there was a need for a new Group comprising people with experience in economic development to get involved to progress marine tourism.

In relation to the Gaeltac community hub, the building had substantial repair needs with around £1.5m needed for this project. It was intended to undertake this project in two phases as this would help with funding the project and would enable other projects to be delivered from the Hub more speedily.

Members were supportive of the work of the Trust as community regeneration and tackling depopulation were key issues to address in the area.

The representatives from Dunvegan Community Trust were thanked for their attendance and the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

**6. Area Roads Capital Programme 2026/27
Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2026/27**

There was circulated Report No. SR/2/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place. The report detailed the proposed prioritised 2026/27 Area Roads Capital Programme for Skye and Raasay, for Members agreement.

It was highlighted that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee had now agreed road maintenance budgets, but final figures were still not known as results from the Scottish road maintenance condition survey were still not known. An indicative figure for the capital allocations for Skye and Raasay area was £3,187, 975.00 for 2026/27.

In discussion, a view was expressed that given this was a remote and rural area, the Committee should made representations to the Scottish Government to try and obtain more funding for roads maintenance, particularly given the number of visitors to the area which had an impact on our roads. This proposal would be discussed at an Area Business meeting.

In regards to the revenue budget for roads maintenance in this area, this would be decided at the full Council budget meeting in March. A document provided at a previous Roads Redesign project workshop would be provided to Members. This document informed on how the revenue budget for roads maintenance was allocated and the road conditions across Highland. Good progress was being made on roads maintenance across the area with additional investment making a real difference over the last two years.

It was advised that there was a separate budget proposal for Sconser quarry for investment in the quarry and to undertake work to understand capacity at the quarry to deliver more.

Further, recruitment was underway to fill vacancies in the roads team. Discussions were also being held with SSEN regarding potential funding from them for staff to take forward their projects. The Council aimed to undertake as much work inhouse as it could on roads maintenance. The Council did encourage young people to see opportunities of working with the Council. The Service worked with the Council's Employability team on recruitment and workforce planning.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2 of the report, which will be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **NOTED** the Area budget as agreed at the February, 2026 Economy and Infrastructure Committee; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the rolling programme may require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey have been received and considered.

7. **Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) Assessment of Applications** **Measadh Iartasan Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd**

There was circulated Report No. SR/3/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which presented three funding applications to the Isle of Skye and Raasay Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) allocation for discussion and decision by Members.

Members were supportive of all the applications and therefore, the Committee **AGREED:-**

- i. the applications and grant requests for the South Skye Mens' shed and Counselling Care Skye & Lochalsh; and
- ii. to approve £100,000 of CRF towards a road infrastructure improvement project as per the detail in 6.2 of the report.

With the approval of the Committee, the following item was taken after item 6 of this minute.

8. **Allocation of Local Car Parking Income**

There was circulated Report No SR/4/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

It was highlighted that Members had made a commitment that any parking income available for spending in the local area should be invested in the infrastructure in the area and in particular roads.

The Committee **AGREED** £100,000 of the Area share of car parking income as match funding for a future Community Regeneration Fund application towards a road infrastructure improvement project as per the detail in 6.2 of the report.

9. **The Old Man of Storr Site Management – Parking Charge Review** **Stiùireadh Làrach Bodach an Stòir – Ath-sgrùdadh air Cìsean Parcaidh**

There was circulated Report No. SR/5/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Corporate which updated Members on a proposal to increase parking charges at The Old Man of Storr site, effective from 1 April 2026, to maintain service standards, fund ongoing maintenance, and support future developments.

Following commentary on the report by the Chief Officer Revenues & Commercialisation an opinion was expressed that the increase in parking charges should be more than proposed given Isle of Skye was the second most visited tourist destination outside Edinburgh in Scotland. In Edinburgh some of the car parking charges were up to £9 per hour. It was felt the increase should be at least £2 for both tariffs (up to 6 hours and up to 12 hours) which would be reinvested to improve facilities at this site. Also the number of people that opted for the 'up to 12 hours' tariff was significantly less than the lower tariff. Therefore, it may be worth removing the higher tariff to ensure there is more turnover of people at the site.

It was advised that there were proposals to increase the retail space and car parking capacity at the site and therefore there would be a review of car parking tariffs on an ongoing basis.

It was also felt that people visiting the site went firstly to walk in the area and the facilities were there to enhance tourists experience of the area and they should not be overcharged for this.

It was confirmed that £7,500 from on Street parking income would be reinvested to road improvements at the site. There was also a review of the Council's parking policy which would be considered at the Council meeting in May.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the proposal to increase the daily parking charges at The Old Man of Storr site by £1 for both tariffs (up to 6 hours and up to 12 hours), effective from 1 April 2026; and
- ii. that the Local Parking Season ticket arrangement for Skye car parks remain unchanged.

10. **Scottish Government Play Park Funding** **Maoineachadh Phàircean Cluiche Riaghaltas na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No. SR/6/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which proposed Members agree the allocation of funding for Uig play park to receive a full refurbishment.

This funding was welcomed and refurbishment of this play park would be welcomed by Uig and the wider area and those waiting for the Ferry at Uig.

Concern was expressed regarding the little amount of money left for maintenance of play parks in the area from an annual budget of £8500. There was a need for more investment in play parks rather than relying on communities to take on responsibility and find funding for play parks. Partnership working between the Council and Community Groups to support play parks was highlighted.

The Committee **AGREED** £39,868.16 to be allocated to the agreed project as outlined in section 6.4.1. of the report.

11. Portree High Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-Sgoil Phort Rìgh

There was circulated Report No. SR/7/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive People Cluster which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Portree High Associated School Group (ASG) and provided useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

In discussion, reference was made to the standards and quality reports for schools and the self evaluation taken place in individual schools. It was queried what the experience was of the inhouse self evaluation compared to HMIE inspections. It was advised that a grading of satisfactory was not where schools wanted to be and the area education team continued to work very closely with them. Portree High School had given themselves a grading of satisfactory but given their good attainment it was felt this school should be graded good.

School rolls across Highland were decreasing ever year and there was a need to understand how this could be managed better. It was advised that this was a concern and had an impact on staffing in the ASG. The reasons for this were smaller families and housing issues. Broadford Primary school was forecast to have an increase in its school roll from 2026/27.

It was reassuring that there was not the fixation of education that young people had to do higher, advanced higher education and go to university. This could be seen in the destination information of pupils that things had changed in the last few years. It was advised that schools did look at the wider achievement on young people. Schools could improve on the recording of skills being taught to children when looking at wider achievement.

Pupil destinations information was only available for 2023/24 and not information for 2024/25 and it was advised that this was a concern each year. There was a much higher rate of young people leaving school and into employment, with some of them moving into further education thereafter.

Teacher recruitment in Portree ASG had overall been positive this year. In terms of subject choice in gaelic medium and english medium staff recruitment was becoming an issue and perhaps the Council could advertise for bilingual teachers. It was advised that with more young people coming back to Skye who were gaelic medium trained in Education, there could be opportunities for employing them in general education before going onto the senior phase education. The service was working hard to support gaelic medium in the school.

In terms of support for neurodivergent children there was a need to focus on class Teachers having the skills in the classroom to ensure they were aware of the needs of children.

In terms of pupils who refused to go to school, it was queried what support was given to encourage them to go back to school. It was advised that attendance was monitored and when necessary interventions could be put in place before attendance became to the point of school refuser.

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

**12. Children's Disability Service Update
Cunntas mun t-Seirbheis do Chloinn le Ciorraman**

There was circulated Report No. SR/8/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive People which provided the Committee with information in relation to the delivery of Childrens Disability Services within the Highland Council and specifically within the Skye & Raasay area. A timeline of the progress of the short break service within Skye & Raasay was also provided.

In discussion, recruitment challenges in the Social Care staffing for the short break service was highlighted and efforts continued to encourage interest in the local area to apply for vacant posts. It was noted that staff in childrens services were paid a lower rate compared to staff in adult services and a levelling up of salaries might help with recruitment. There was a review of how the social care sector was delivered and this might provide an option to improve matters.

The Committee **NOTED** the issues raised in the report and the implications for the future provision of service within Skye & Raasay.

**13. Housing Repairs and Capital Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais**

There was circulated Report No. SR/9/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided information on how the Housing Service performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 December 2025.

In discussion, it was highlighted that the Housing Service were currently undertaking a restructure and details were provided. It was requested that a report on the new structure, particularly in relation to line management in the Skye/Raasay area be submitted to the next meeting.

It was clarified that the average length of time to complete emergency repairs was measured from the first point of contact to the Council.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 31 December 2025; and
- ii. that an update on the Housing Service restructure would be provided to the next meeting.

14. Active Travel Update
Cunntas mu Shiubhal Gnìomhach

Transparency Statement - Ms C Gillies declared a transparency statement in relation to this item as she was the Chair of Raasay Development Trust. Having applied the objective test she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No. SR/10/26 by the Active Travel Team Leader with an update on the 2-year fixed term Active Travel post, funded through income available to the Committee.

In discussion, it was requested that for future reports a map of the locations for the various projects be produced. It was confirmed that the repairs to the Moll Road would only allow access for walking/cycling and not for vehicles. The Portree mobility hubs were to be delivered by end of March and it was requested that an update report on this project be submitted to the next meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update on works undertaken / upcoming;
- ii. **NOTED** the budget which has been allocated to support Active Travel projects on Skye and Raasay;
- iii. **AGREED** to support efforts to secure additional funding for delivery of Active Travel projects on Skye and Raasay; and
- iv. **AGREED** that an update report on the Portree mobility hubs project be submitted to the next meeting.

15. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward 10 Discretionary Budget applications approved since the last meeting of the Committee.

Brae's Village Hall - External Wall Repairs - £3,000

Portree & Braes Community Trust - Speak up for Gaelic Project - £1,000

16. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 1 December 2025, the terms of which were approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 11 December 2025.

The meeting ended at 1.24 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 25 February 2026 at 9.35 am.

Present:

Mrs I Campbell (remote)

Mr A Christie

Mrs T Collier (substitute) (remote)

Mr R Cross

Ms L Dundas

Mr J Finlayson (Chair)

Mr R Gale

Mr D Gregg

Ms M Hutchison

Ms E Knox

Ms L Kraft

Mr D Macpherson

Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)

Ms C Ramsay

Mr K Rosie (substitute) (remote)

Mr R Stewart

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Rev Dr C Caley

Ms S Lamont

Mr J Maxwell

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms L McBain

Non-Members also present:

Mr D Fraser (remote)

Ms C Gillies

Mr K Gowans

Dr M Gregson

Mrs M Paterson (remote)

Mr M Prosser (remote)

Ms M Ross

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People

Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education

Ms B Martin-Scott, Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years

Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services

Ms C Macklin, Head of Education, Lifelong Learning and Gaelic Services

Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead – Resources

Mr D Martin, Strategic Lead – Operations

Mr R Campbell, Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy

Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years

Ms M MacDonald, Area Quality Improvement Manager

Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer

Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist

Ms L Harper, Headteacher, Newton Park Primary School

Ms S MacDonald, Depute Headteacher, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh

Ms G Rodger, Chief Officer, Inspiring Young Voices (Third Sector) (remote)

Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer

Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

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 J Finlayson in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs S Atkin, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs H Crawford and Mr J McGillivray.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 6: Mr D Gregg

Mr D Macpherson made a general transparency statement on the basis that a close family member was a Primary School Teacher. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

**3. Good News/Outstanding Achievements
Naidheachdan Matha/Coileanaidhean Air Leth**

A presentation on outstanding achievements by pupils and schools had been circulated.

Congratulations having been extended to all the schools involved for the wide variety of work and achievements that had been showcased, the Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

**4. Highland Qualifications Scotland Presentation Policy
Poileasaidh Buileachaidh Teisteanasan Alba na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/1/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- young people should be challenged to achieve as much as their ambition and ability allowed, and the aspiration of the Policy was commended. However, some Members expressed concern that it was too prescriptive, while others welcomed the clear framework and consistency the Policy provided;
- it was questioned how a large urban secondary school could operate under the same conditions as a small rural school, and concern was expressed that, unless the digital offering was expanded at pace to ensure a broad curriculum for all learners, the Policy risked entrenching inequality. Other Members argued that the Policy could benefit rural schools as it would place responsibility on the Education Authority to ensure there was sufficient provision to meet the Policy requirements;

- it was necessary to consider what outcome reflected excellence, and concern was expressed that the Policy removed the ability for pupils to withdraw from courses as, in some instances, dropping a subject could enable a young person to achieve a higher grade in their remaining subjects;
- on the point being raised, Members were reassured that the Policy allowed for local flexibility at school level, and included Foundation Apprenticeships as they were a Qualifications Scotland offering;
- with reference to the proposed minimum requirements in S6, some courses were more intensive than others in terms of the amount of work required, and it was suggested there was a need for flexibility. For example, it was argued that two Highers and two Advanced Highers represented a greater workload than three Advanced Highers. In response, it was explained that each qualification had a set number of study hours, and the example of two Highers and two Advanced Highers was possible within the allocated weekly hours. However, this would be the subject of a discussion with a Guidance Teacher. It was emphasised that the Policy was aspirational, and it was necessary to trust teaching professionals to know their pupils and what was right for them;
- it was suggested the Policy be reviewed in a year's time to assess how it was working in practice, and the Chair concurred that this was a sensible approach;
- reference was made to an instance of a pupil with Additional Support Needs (ASN) being encouraged to aim low in terms of attainment. It was emphasised that this must not happen going forward, and that children should be supported and encouraged to achieve as highly as possible. Information was also sought, and provided, on the impact of the Policy on children with ASN who required additional support for exams;
- the Policy set out the minimum number of courses a pupil should take unless there were "exceptional circumstances". Information was sought, and provided, on what would be considered exceptional circumstances, and what would happen in the event of a disagreement between a pupil and/or parent and the school in that regard. Similarly, the Policy stated that there was no option to "drop" or withdraw from any subject and that courses selected at the start of an academic session would be completed by the pupil for the whole session. Further information was sought, and provided, in that regard, during which it was explained that if a pupil had spent a significant amount of the year studying a course there were other, lower-level awards, such as unit awards, that they could be presented for rather than dropping the subject completely. However, it was acknowledged there would be times when young people would need to be supported to leave a subject if it was causing them significant distress; and
- the report emphasised the Broad General Education as the vital foundation from which the Senior Phase should build. It was queried whether this breadth was being achieved in the smallest, most rural secondary schools, and the extent to which the provision of digital courses was contributing to this. In response, it was explained that, while the Council was keen to expand digital provision, there was an ongoing dispute with the teaching unions in that regard. However, there was already a significant digital offering, both from the Council and through the University of the Highlands and Islands and Edinburgh College, that was available not only to rural schools but to those in more populated areas.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Highland Qualifications Scotland Presentation Policy; and

- ii. **AGREED** that it be reviewed in a year's time to assess how it was working in practice.

5. Learning Estate Strategy Update Cunntas air Ro-innleachd na h-Oighreachd Ionnsachaidh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/2/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there was a significant problem with school catchment areas in Inverness in that, in some areas, children did not attend their geographically closest school and, in some instances, walked past the nearest school on their way to their catchment school. Placing requests might not be an option as some school rolls were capped. This was causing dissatisfaction in the community, and it was requested that a report be brought to the next meeting of the Committee on the issues around Inverness catchment areas with a view to taking action to address the situation. It was acknowledged that a review of catchment areas would be a significant undertaking as changing a school catchment area required a statutory consultation to be carried out. However, it was considered necessary and urgent, particularly in light of the ongoing housing development taking place in parts of Inverness. The Chair recognised the concerns raised and confirmed that a report would be brought to the June meeting of the Committee articulating what action needed to be taken, adding that a phased approach might be necessary. He suggested that Members with particular issues in their wards liaise with officers so that officers fully understood what the problems were;
- Members welcomed the report and the progress that had been made, especially on the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) schools. In relation to Broadford Primary School in particular, the investment had been badly needed, and Local Members had been pleased to see the turf cut and work progressing. However, the Council's budget papers indicated that the funding position was still to be confirmed, and an assurance was sought that the full funding package offered by the Scottish Government in 2020 had been secured and would not be affected by delays in the project. The Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy confirmed that officers were in regular dialogue with the Scottish Futures Trust, the funding agency for the Scottish Government, so they were aware of the situation. In terms of funding, an inflationary uplift had been received for both the Tain Campus and Nairn Academy projects, and it was hoped there would be a similar uplift for Broadford Primary School. He undertook to notify Members as soon as the final figure was available;
- there were still 91 schools, almost half of the school estate, rated C for condition or suitability, and the scale of the challenge could not be understated. Disappointment was expressed that LEIP phase 3 had not delivered for Highland schools, and it was necessary to take that up with the Scottish Government and press for more funding;
- it was welcomed that annual reviews were underway for currently mothballed (temporarily closed) schools. However, concern was expressed regarding reports from parents who wished to enrol their children in Edderton Primary School that they were being steered towards other schools. It was emphasised that schools were the heart of a community, and if families were directed to schools outwith their local area, mothballed schools would never reopen. A request was therefore made to actively consider how parents could be encouraged to enrol their children in their local school to get mothballed schools back into operation. In response, the

Assistant Chief Executive – People highlighted that a report on the Council’s approach to temporarily closed schools would be brought to the next meeting of Committee, which would address the points raised regarding engaging with communities about future demand for mothballed schools. It was explained that it was necessary to emphasise the temporary nature of mothballing and ensure that the Council’s website indicated that mothballed schools were available for registration, and that Members were kept up-to-date on progress. Ultimately it was a matter of parental choice. However, it was highlighted that there were challenges in terms of staffing and education provision when bringing a mothballed school back into operation;

- it was welcomed that the Beauly Primary School and Charleston Academy projects were still on track. However, recent Beauly Primary School stakeholder meetings had been cancelled or postponed, and a guarantee was sought that stakeholders, particularly parents and school staff, would receive regular updates. The Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy confirmed that it was intended to hold a stakeholder meeting before the Easter holidays, and the date would be confirmed in the next week or so;
- appreciation was expressed regarding the expansion of nursery provision across the school estate, with particular reference to the new nurseries at Duncan Forbes Primary School and Kinmylies;
- Culloden Academy had the most demountable units of all schools in Highland, and parents and teachers were disappointed at the lack of progress with plans for a new school;
- on the point being raised, the Chair confirmed that it was not the case that there would be no provision for an ASN department in the new Nairn Academy; and
- concern was expressed regarding the condition of the toilets at Invergordon Academy, particularly that there were opportunities for bullying due to the cubicle doors not reaching the floor or ceiling. It was further commented that, whilst neighbouring schools had been rebuilt, there were no imminent plans to rebuild Invergordon Academy. Reference was made to the economic growth associated with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, and it was suggested that families seeking to move to the area for work, when looking at schools, would be unlikely to choose Invergordon and would instead go to Tain, Alness or further afield. Concern was also expressed that Park Primary School remained in temporary accommodation yet the school roll, based on the former fire-damaged buildings, still indicated that there was adequate capacity for incoming pupils. The need for an infrastructure-first approach and serious discussions about the way forward for Invergordon was emphasised. The Chair acknowledged the concerns raised and suggested that Local Members liaise with the Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy and the Estates team in that regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress on statutory and informal consultations as outlined in sections 5 to 7 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the current position and next steps for Learning Estate Investment Programme projects as outlined in section 8 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed timeline and scope for the June Learning Estate Strategy update report as outlined in section 9 of the report; and
- iv. **AGREED** that a report on the issues around Inverness school catchment areas, articulating what action needed to be taken, be brought to the June meeting of the Committee.

6. Highland Sports Strategy Update Cunntas air Ro-innleachd Spòrs na Gàidhealtachd

Transparency Statement: Mr D Gregg declared a connection to this item as an employee of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/3/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- support was expressed for the Highland Sports Strategy, the alignment of which with the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) was considered essential for improving outcomes for children, families, and communities across the Highlands. Embedding sports and community facilities within the long-term framework provided by the HIP would ensure continuity of provision across generations. The Strategy would enable the Council to set out long-term plans for delivering high-quality, affordable, accessible sport and leisure opportunities across Highland, in both rural and urban communities, with aims that would create vibrant community hubs by integrating sports, leisure, library and community services within school settings; ensure services were sustainable and planned in line with community needs and population patterns; and improve health and wellbeing and equality of access, particularly in rural areas, by co-locating services where people already had to go. Having the Strategy integrated within the HIP would bring advantages such as coordinated investment in schools and community hubs and better use of capital funding by ensuring sports and community facilities were built into HIP projects rather than added later at a higher cost. The result would be better school and community facilities, healthier children and communities, cost-effective service delivery, stronger place-based community-centred planning, and long-term sustainability for sports and leisure across the Highlands. The Strategy was an opportunity to shape a modern, integrated, community-driven model for sport and wellbeing, and to ensure every Highland community benefited. In conclusion, reference was made to work taking place in the Tain and Easter Ross ward to establish a new community sports complex. There was community backing and a recognised gap in provision, and it was suggested that the project was exactly the kind a regional strategy should prioritise. A request was made that consideration be given to embedding Tain Royal Academy Community Complex (TRACC) within the HIP, as this would give the project strategic weight, which was often essential for unlocking major capital funding. The Chair acknowledged the points raised. However, it was explained that such a decision was not a matter for the Education Committee;
- the key themes outlined in section 6 of the report were welcomed;
- an appeal was made for an increased focus on sporting provision in the more remote and rural areas of Highland;
- the sporting provision delivered by High Life Highland (HLH), and the staff who provided it, was commended. However, it was felt that more was needed;
- the strong focus on grassroots sports was welcomed. However, there was a gap in terms of support for talented young athletes and future elite players. The report briefly mentioned progression pathways, and clarification was sought as to what pathways currently existed in Highland and how the Strategy would strengthen them so young athletes did not fall through the gaps. It was also queried how the Strategy

would ensure that young people in Highland had the same access to performance development opportunities as those in more central areas of Scotland; how the review would address the barriers faced by talented athletes in rural areas, particularly around travel costs and access to performance coaching; and whether facilities would be considered in terms of supporting early performance development so that young athletes could progress without having to leave Highland. It was emphasised that sport changed lives at all levels, ages and abilities, and it was necessary to make sure that every young person had the chance to reach their full potential. The Chair concurred with the points raised, and confirmed that he was aware, through his involvement in the COSLA Sport and Physical Activity Special Interest Group and through **sportscotland**, that elite athletes were included within any programmes being developed and the funding packages provided to local authorities;

- an example having been provided of one school charging another, via HLH, to use its facilities for sporting activities, the Assistant Chief Executive – People confirmed that it was intended to review the school letting policy. Other Members added their support for such a review, commenting that, strategically, there was a need for stronger complementary work between the Council and HLH;
- the importance of disability sport, and Scotland's track record in terms of performance at the Paralympics, was emphasised, and it was requested that disability sport be specifically included in the Strategy. Other Members added that limited access to disability sport was an issue in the more remote and rural areas of Highland. The Assistant Chief Executive – People suggested that disability sport, along with the points raised regarding pathways for elite athletes, be added to the bullet points in section 8.1 of the report;
- the Rural Athletes Support Network, operating in the Ullapool area, offered travel grants and support to aspiring young athletes for whom location and transport was an issue, and it was hoped this could be emulated in other areas;
- dance was as physical, and required as much agility, balance, coordination and teamwork as many sporting activities, and it was suggested that the Strategy be broadened to include dance and other forms of movement that constituted physical exercise. This would potentially open other funding avenues and partnerships and help to address the sport dropout rate amongst teenage girls. The Chair concurred with the point raised and confirmed it could be included in the Strategy;
- sport benefited mental health as well as physical health;
- the Strategy was hugely important, but it would be challenging to achieve all the Council's aims and aspirations;
- disappointment was expressed that Culloden Academy and Leisure Centre had not been included in the report given that it was awaiting an upgrade. It was suggested that HLH Members in the Culloden area were being let down as equipment was out of operation and it was a 40-minute drive to the HLH facilities in Inverness, and it was questioned why a proper maintenance programme was not in place. In response, the Chair explained that the report was focused on strategy rather than individual facilities, and it was suggested that Local Members liaise with officers regarding the points raised;
- the Chair highlighted that young people could apply to the Council's Educational Trusts for funding to support sporting activities;
- the importance of TRACC to the Easter Ross community was emphasised. Local Members had been involved in discussions with potential stakeholders that could assist with funding, and a meeting with officers was requested as soon as possible so that matters could be progressed; and

- the valuable role of volunteers in facilitating sports provision throughout Highland was recognised.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress to date;
- ii. **NOTED** emerging strategic themes;
- iii. **AGREED** to progress the preparation of the Sports Strategy with the overall objectives as set out in section 8 of the report, working closely with **sportscotland** and partners through a Community, Leisure, and Sports Board, subject to the points raised regarding the inclusion of disability sport, pathways for elite athletes, and dance and other forms of movement/physical activity; and
- iv. **AGREED** that regular updates on progress be reported to the Committee, including a draft strategy for wider consultation and engagement.

7. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Q3 2025/26 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach – R3 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No EDU/4/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for Quarter 3 2025/26 as set out in the report and appendices;
- ii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
- iii. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery.

8. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – Q3 2025/26 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanadh Ràitheil – R3 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No EDU/5/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- with reference to the table at section 6.2 of the report, much of the data was incomplete due to annual updates being due at a later date, and it was queried whether target values could be added for all data points. In response, the Assistant Chief Executive – People undertook to liaise with senior officers and the performance business partner with a view to identifying more meaningful performance measures; and
- the best tool for assessing progress was school inspection reports, and it was requested that an analysis of inspection reports be brought to the next meeting of the Committee as not all Members had been receiving copies of local inspection reports and the reports gave an independent view of how the Council was delivering leadership and change; learning, teaching and assessment; equality; and wellbeing and raising attainment, which was vital information that should be analysed and discussed by the Committee. In response, it was confirmed that a report setting out the approach being taken to improving inspection outcomes would be taken to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the performance information for the Education Service;
- ii. **NOTED** the change to Freedom of Information reporting to align with Chief Officer structure;
- iii. **NOTED** the changes to presentation of the Education Service data in sections 6-8 of the report in order to more clearly show alignment between Performance Indicators and Performance Plan commitments;
- iv. **NOTED** the inclusion of Statutory Performance Indicators outwith the Performance Plan to further support transparency and scrutiny of performance reporting; and
- v. **AGREED** that a report setting out the approach being taken to improving school inspection outcomes be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

9. Early Years Strategy Ro-innleachd nan Tràth-bhliadhnaichean

There had been circulated Report No EDU/6/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the importance of early years education, especially for the acquisition of language, was highlighted. The evidence-based approach and emphasis on the role of meaningful play, inclusive practise, emotional intelligence and sustaining and expanding key programmes, including the Words Up speech and language programme, were commended;
- information was sought, and provided, on the challenges around staff recruitment in rural areas; and on what data was being tracked and how it was collected;
- the Strategy's emphasis on strong partnership working with Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) partners was commended, and it was highlighted that collaborative working was essential to high-quality, sustainable and flexible early years provision across Highland;
- the challenges faced by PVI partners in relation to pay levels, terms and conditions and annual leave entitlement were recognised;
- some pupils were starting primary school without all the skills they would be expected to have by that stage, such as brushing their teeth and cutting their own food, and it was confirmed that these, and other developmental milestones, were being tracked in Early Learning and Childcare settings;
- there were recruitment challenges across Highland and one school in Inverness had had to reduce its wrap-around care provision due to being unable to recruit sufficient staff. When schools could not provide wrap-around care it impacted on parents' ability to work which could ultimately lead to higher levels of poverty. It was suggested that staffing levels within the Council and PVI partners be tracked to allow future challenges to be predicted, and that the provision of supply staff be supported;
- the importance of early intervention was emphasised, as better results could be achieved by targeting potential issues in the early years rather than waiting until later in school when these issues were more difficult to address;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that pupils from the ASN Nursery at Cauldean Primary School were continuing on to primary education at Drummond School, and it was clarified that, due to the legal presumption of mainstreaming, local authorities were expected to support children with ASN to attend their local school, especially if that is what their parents would prefer; and
- it was queried why the suggestions and views of parents and teachers were not afforded the same weight as the recommendations of HM Inspectors of Education.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the Early Years Strategy (Appendix 2 of the report);
- ii. **NOTED** the three high-level strategic priorities for the period of the Strategy; and
- iii. **NOTED** the next steps.

10. **ACEL (Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels) Attainment Update** **Cunntas Buileachaidh a thaobh Coileanadh Ìrean a' Churraicealaim airson Sàr-** **mhathais**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/7/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In addition to the report, Laura Harper, Headteacher, Newton Park Primary School, and Shona MacDonald, Depute Headteacher, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh, gave a presentation on how school ethos, community involvement and prioritising well-being helped to drive attainment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the success of targeted support for small groups of pupils to improve attainment was recognised, as well as the importance of support for self-evaluation, a pupil-centred approach, community within and outwith school, play and additional activities such as music;
- the astute use of data to help improve attainment was commended;
- concern was expressed that improvements in attainment in earlier stages were not continuing past S3. It was suggested that recruitment challenges, staffing instability, staff absences, a shortage of robust school improvement plans and lack of consistency in tracking and monitoring systems could be contributing to this, and that wider strategic action needed to be taken;
- the introduction of the Family Link Worker in Newton Park Primary School was welcomed, and it was suggested that a lot could be learned from the success of this approach;
- the steady increase in attainment over the past five years was very encouraging but results were still not in line with national levels and it was important to remain aware of this and continue working towards targets;
- the methods of assessment and observation used to track the progress of early years pupils were commended, and it was suggested that it would be useful to include early years data, similar to that which had been included in the Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh presentation, in future Early Years Strategy reports;
- an explanation of stretch aims, and whether some needed to be revised in light of the results in 2024/25, was sought, and provided;

- it was requested that a report showing data on how pupils' achievement progressed through primary and secondary school be brought to a future meeting of the Committee;
- it was queried whether the statistics highlighted any areas of concern or any areas where more resources were needed, especially around the transition period between P4 and P6/7;
- while improvement was welcome, it was not progressing quickly enough and it was suggested that the data showed a lack of strength and ambition within education which was troubling as, for many, education was a route out of poverty. Although there had been some recovery since 2021, this did not equate to excellence, transformation or equity, and primary attainment had stalled, with the Council failing to meet its own standards in terms of tackling inequality and closing the attainment gap between the most deprived and least deprived pupils, which was even larger by the time pupils reached S3;
- the growth of Gaelic Medium Education was welcomed, and information was sought, and provided, on the recruitment challenges within Gaelic Medium Education, and the reporting of Gaelic Medium attainment figures;
- the presentations provided a valuable insight into the steps being taken within schools to raise attainment. The different approaches taken by each school emphasised the importance of not being overly prescriptive and allowing teachers and headteachers to decide what worked best for their school;
- it was queried why 2021 had been chosen as a benchmark as some attainment figures were lower or unavailable due to the Covid 19 pandemic; and
- the breakdown of literacy figures into the three areas of listening and talking, reading, and writing was welcomed. It was suggested that, in future, it would be useful to see a breakdown of the rates of change in each of those areas, and it was queried whether children who were not meeting the literacy requirements were not meeting all or only one or two of the three areas. In response, it was clarified that the data reflected pupils who had achieved all three of the requirements and that writing was the most difficult element to achieve which was why a high number of schools were engaging with the National Improving Writing Programme.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Council's commitment to improving attainment and achievement at all stages through strategic initiatives developed in collaboration with school staff detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. the content of the report, the positive outcomes for young people and the focus on improving further.

11. Gaelic Education Foghlam Gàidhlig

There had been circulated Report No EDU/8/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in some areas the number of pupils in Gaelic Medium Education was higher than those in English Medium Education;

- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons why Gaelic Medium Education was most popular in the early years and declined as pupils move through school; and challenges in teacher recruitment;
- it was important that reports on Gaelic education came to the Education Committee as the Education Service covered the education of all children in Highland. Members were encouraged to stay for further discussion of Gaelic education in the Gaelic Committee;
- it was emphasised that there was more to education than academics, as had been shown in the previous presentation from the Head Teacher of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh, and the increasing number of opportunities for young Gaelic speakers was highlighted; and
- on the point being raised; it was explained that Gaelic speaking pupils could be targeted in High School and encouraged to work in Gaelic Medium Early Learning and Childcare Settings where they could work while earning a Scottish Vocational Qualification.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the commitment to Gaelic specific Career Long Professional Learning focused workstreams alongside partnership working with Education Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other national bodies to strengthen professional learning pathways, develop high-quality learning resources, and align work with national Gaelic education priorities;
- ii. the positive impact of recent school improvement, attainment and achievement focused actions to encourage continued monitoring and evaluation of Gaelic initiatives in schools and their impact and effectiveness; and
- iii. the Scottish Government Gaelic Capital awards and their contribution to improving Gaelic curriculum outcomes for pupils.

12. Delivery Plan Update: Person Centred Solutions Board - Early Learning and Childcare Project

Cunntas air a' Phlana Libhrigidh: Bòrd Fuasglaidhean Stèidhichte air an Neach – Pròiseact Tràth-ionnsachaidh is Cùrainm-chloinne

There had been circulated Report No EDU/9/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a query as to how the anticipated savings of £0.5m would be achieved, it was explained that some savings had been identified through the Education Service restructuring process and these and other savings would be reported in the next quarterly update;
- on the point being raised, reassurance was provided that, since the report had been written, significant progress had been made in respect of the two delayed milestones, and it was anticipated they would be completed by the end of the project;
- in response to questions as to how many rural settings were at risk, it was clarified that alternative delivery models were being proposed for rural and island communities where the current provision was not sustainable or was not meeting the needs of the community; and
- there were many challenges around the provision of Early Learning and Childcare in rural areas and, because lack of childcare was a key driver of depopulation,

overcoming these challenges was extremely important. The development of a Single Care Model was welcomed, and the importance of supporting childminding was emphasised as increasing the availability of childminders would make a significant difference, particularly in rural areas.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report, including progress to date and next steps.

13. Promoting and Realising Children's Rights A' Brosnachadh is a' Buileachadh Chòraichean Chloinne

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10/27 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- although the intentions stated in the report were admirable, attention was drawn to the data which showed that significant numbers of pupils did not feel safe, respected or that they were achieving. The report did not expand on the possible reasons for this, such as bullying, behaviour and exclusion policies, staffing pressures, and trauma support capacity. It was queried whether targets were being set to tackle these issues as, to properly support children's rights, more focused strategies would be needed. In response, it was clarified that the data provided from the Lifestyle Survey concerning whether children felt safe included community safety and safety at home as well as at school, and that, although data about the causes and effects of bullying had been tracked for a number of years, the purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the Council's reporting requirements under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Implementation Act, so this had not been included; and
- it was highlighted that Ullapool High School had received the silver Rights Aware Award, and it was always encouraging to see what schools were doing to promote children's rights.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the requirements of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act (2024) and how it impacted on the work of Elected Members;
- ii. **AGREED** to continue to consider children's rights in all decisions made by the Education Committee; and
- iii. **NOTED** some of the work ongoing to ensure children's rights were recognised and realised across Highland.

14. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the following draft Minutes:-

- i. Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (Annual General Meeting) – 2 December 2025; and
- ii. Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (Ordinary Meeting) – 2 December 2025.

**15. Membership of Sub-Committees
Ballrachd air Fo-Chomataidhean**

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr R Cross be appointed to the Highland Alliance Group vacancies on the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee and the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers.

**16. Appointment to Highland Football Academy Trust
Cur an Dreuchd gu Urras Acadamaidh Ball-coise na Gàidhealtachd**

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that Ms K MacLean be appointed to replace Ms H Hutchison on the Highland Football Academy Trust.

The meeting concluded at 12.40 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 25 February 2026 at 2pm.

Present:

Mr R Bremner (Remote)	Dr M Gregson
Mr I Brown	Mr P Logue
Mr S Cameron (Remote)	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs I Campbell (Remote)	Ms K MacLean (Remote)
Ms C Gillies	Mr D Millar
Mr J Grafton (Remote)	Mrs M Paterson (Remote)

Non-Member also present:

Mr D Macpherson

In attendance:

Mr D Brown, Chief Executive
Ms B Scott, Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years
Ms C Macklin, Head of Service, Integrated People Services
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager
Ms M A MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer
Ms E Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer
Mr R MacKay, Development Officer, Education and Learning
Ms A MacLeod, Gaelic Literacy Development Officer
Ms S Paterson, Community Learning and Development Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr C Macmillan, Chief Executive, Fèisean nan Gàidheal
Ms E Mackenzie, Fèisgoil Manager, Fèisean nan Gàidheal
Mr J Adam, Director, Tourism Resources Company
Ms M Cunningham, President, An Comunn Gàidhealach
Ms P MacLennan, Chief Executive, An Comunn Gàidhealach
Mr I Robertson, Board Member, An Comunn Gàidhealach and Chair, Lochaber Mòd 2025

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 D Millar in the Chair

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr W Mackay.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Good News

A wide range of activities and events were taking place across Highland during World Gaelic Week.

A successful Gaelic day had taken place in Lairg recently, showcasing local talent, following concerns about the visibility of Gaelic in the area.

The Siuthad 2026 careers fair, this year focusing on Gaelic learners and the career opportunities available to them, had attracted 110 pupils from 6 secondary schools.

The Highland Council Gaelic Team, in partnership with the Gaelic Digital Archive Centre at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, had developed an engaging and interactive workshop for S4 to S6 pupils.

Thanks were extended to Fèisgoil and Fèisean nan Gàidheal for their involvement in a recently completed pilot project that delivered Gaelic through games and song across Sutherland.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as presented.

4. BLAS 2025 Events and Economic, Linguistical and Cultural Impact

There had been circulated Report No. G/1/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People and there was a presentation by Mr Calum Alex Macmillan, Chief Executive, Fèisean nan Gàidheal and Ms Eilidh Mackenzie, Fèisgoil Manager, Fèisean nan Gàidheal.

The presentation outlined the long-term impact of the Blas Festival, and highlighted key events and achievements from the 2025 programme, which included concerts, ceilidhs, events, musical and song sessions, and several school performances throughout Highland. Community and visitor feedback had been positive. Planning for Blas 2026 was in the early stages.

Blas had grown from strength to strength over the years. The arts, particularly traditional music, were hugely important in the development and promotion of the Gaelic language. The festival allowed children to perform with their musical heroes and connect to the Gaelic culture. Opportunities to use Gaelic and steps taken to increase confidence in the use of Gaelic were incredibly important. It was hoped that the Council continued to support Blas in the future.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the continuation of annual funding for the BLAS festival, noting that all future allocations remained subject to the Council's annual budget review and external funding constraints;
- ii. **NOTED** that the festival's ability to secure external funding was dependent on The Highland Council providing ongoing annual support. Any reduction or withdrawal of this funding would place the wider funding package at risk;
- iii. **AGREED** to support work on community ownership of Blas with the local promoters and revenue sharing to boost local engagement;
- iv. **AGREED** to encourage that Fèisean nan Gàidheal (FnanG) undertook research with their network of promoters to ensure that the promoters had a voice in the programming;

- v. **AGREED** to continue to enhance the metrics for economic impact and Gaelic-language indicators in line with the outcomes of the Gaelic Language Plan;
- vi. **AGREED** to continue to strengthen the links between The Highland Council and the Blas Festival organisers for 2026 event;
- vii. **NOTED** the work undertaken by FnanG and An Comunn Gàidhealach with support from Highland Council and Bòrd na Gàidhlig regarding Mòd Academy which took place in Schools across the Lochaber Area in the lead up to the Lochaber Mòd. (Appendix 1); and
- viii. **AGREED** that the Mòd Academy initiative formed part of the Mòd Loch Abar 2025 legacy project.

5. Economic, Linguistic and Cultural Benefits of the Lochaber Royal National Mòd 2025

There had been circulated Report No. G/2/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People and there was a presentation by Mr James Adam, Director, Tourism Resources Company, on behalf of An Comunn Gàidhealach.

The Mòd was said to have attracted over 9,400 attendees and generated £3.9m overall in the Lochaber area, with an excellent return on investment. Feedback suggested that the event had been a great way to meet friends and engage socially and there was a high level of engagement with Fort William as the host town.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, in terms of the connectivity between Provincial and National Mòds and it was asked what plans could be put in place to encourage junior choral members to continue competing at a senior level;
- in response to comments regarding the age demographic, it was thought that the post-event questionnaires were more likely to have been completed by parents or coaches, which could create the impression that the attendee group was older; and
- information was sought, and provided, regarding future funding. It was said that accommodation and venue costs were becoming increasingly challenging.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the details included in the presentation and within the report;
- ii. **NOTED** that the 2029 Mòd would take place in the Highland area; and
- iii. **AGREED** that Officers liaised with An Comunn Gàidhealach Officials to prepare a refreshed Service Delivery Agreement.

6. PRMS Report: Progress against Gaelic Language Plan 2024–29

There had been circulated Report No. G/3/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

It was asked how the Kilmuir Primary School Nursery Case Study might expand going forward.

Information was sought, and provided, in terms of the development of schools delivering Gaelic and the networking support available to Gaelic Medium Education

pupils in secondary schools. It was important to keep the momentum going in terms of the Gaelic Language Plan. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 presented further opportunities, with preparatory work already taking place on Areas of Linguistic Significance.

Members were happy to see targets achieved across the plan and the hard work involved was acknowledged, but it was felt that the good news did not reach far enough. Officers were asked to reflect on how they might actively promote all the work being undertaken and it was said that the role of the Gaelic Committee was fundamental for capturing the breadth of the work of the Gaelic Team.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

7. Gaelic Education

There had been circulated Report No. G/4/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People and there was a presentation by Ms Alison MacLeod, Gaelic Literacy Development Officer.

Members were delighted with the success of the Audiobook Player Pilot Project and they recognised the amount of work involved. It was an intergenerational and collaborative project, linking schools across Highland.

In response to a question on Gaelic Learner Education provision in secondary schools it was confirmed that Highland remained in a strong national position, however, this was dependent on the continued strengthening of collaboration between schools.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the commitment to Gaelic specific Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) focused workstreams alongside partnership working with Education Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and other national bodies to strengthen professional learning pathways, develop high-quality learning resources, and align work with national Gaelic education priorities;
- ii. the positive impact of recent school improvement attainment and achievement focused actions to encourage continued monitoring and evaluation of Gaelic initiatives in schools and their impact and effectiveness; and
- iii. the Scottish Government Gaelic Capital awards and their contribution to improving Gaelic curriculum outcomes for pupils.

8. Internal Gaelic Skills Survey

There had been circulated Report No. G/5/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Conversing in Gaelic, at whatever level, should feel comfortable and it was important to identify and provide comfortable spaces in the workplace where people felt confident enough to try. Gaelic signage was beneficial in this regard. It was hoped

that future surveys would show an increase in the number of people willing to learn and use Gaelic.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the findings of the Gaelic Skills Survey;
- ii. **AGREED** to implement the proposed action plan to address training needs and increase Gaelic visibility in the workplace; and
- iii. **AGREED** to support the development of flexible and accessible Gaelic learning opportunities for staff.

The meeting ended at 4.30pm.

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Geàrr-chunntas coinneamh **Comataidh na Gàidhlig** a chumadh ann an Seòmar na Comhairle, Prìomh Oifis na Comhairle, Rathad Ghlinn Urchadain, Inbhir Nis, air Diciadain, 25 Gearran 2026 aig 2f.

An làthair:

Mgr R Bremner (Air astar)	Dr M Gregson
Mgr I MacIlleDhuinn	Mgr P Logue
Mgr S Camshron (Air astar)	Mgr A Mac an Tòisich
A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul (Air astar)	A' Bh-uas C NicIlleathain (Air astar)
A' Bh-uas C NicIlliosa	Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir
Mgr I Grafton (Air astar)	A' Bh-uas M NicPheadrais (Air astar)

Neo-Bhuill cuideachd an làthair:

Mgr D Mac a' Phearsain

A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr D MacIlleDhuinn, Àrd-Oifigear
 A' Bh-uas B Scott, Àrd-Oifigear – Foghlam Thràth-bhliadhnaichean is Bun-sgoile
 A' Bh-uas C Macklin, Ceannard Seirbheis, Seirbheisean Amalaichte Dhaoine
 A' Bh-uas L Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig
 A' Bh-uas M A NicLeòid Mitchell, Oifigear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig
 A' Bh-uas E Rodgers, Oifigear Poileasaidh Gàidhlig
 Mgr R MacAoidh, Oifigear Leasachaidh, Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh
 A' Bh-uas A NicLeòid, Oifigear Leasachaidh Curraicealam Gàidhlig
 A' Bh-uas S NicPhàdraig, Oifigear Ionnsachadh agus Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd
 A' Bh-uas S NicIllinnein, Manaidsear Cho-Sheirbheisean Deamocratach
 A' Bh-uas G Nic a' Phearsain, Oifigear Comataidh

Cuideachd a' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr C Mac a' Mhaoilein, Àrd-Oifigear, Fèisean nan Gàidheal
 A' Bh-uas E NicCoinnich, Manaidsear Fèisgoil, Fèisean nan Gàidheal
 Mgr S Adam, Stiùiriche, Tourism Resources Company
 A' Bh-uas M Choineagan, Ceann-suidhe, An Comunn Gàidhealach
 A' Bh-uas P NicIllinnein, Àrd-Oifigear, An Comunn Gàidhealach
 Mgr I Robasdan, Ball Bùird, An Comunn Gàidhealach agus Cathraiche, Mòd Loch Abar 2025

Tha rionnag air iomall na duilleige a' comharrachadh moladh a thèid chun na Comhairle. Tha co-dhùnaidhean gun chomharra fo ùghdarras na Comataidh.

Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir anns a' Chathair

Gnothach

1. **Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Thugadh leisgeul seachad às leth Mhgr U MhicAoidh.

2. **Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

Cha tugadh seachad Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt no Aithrisean Follaiseachd.

3. **Naidheachdan Matha**

Bha raon farsaing chleasan is thachartasan a' dol air adhart air feadh na Gàidhealtachd airson Seachdain na Gàidhlig.

Chaidh latha Gàidhlig soirbheachail a chumail ann an Luirg o chionn ghoirid, a' taisbeanadh tàlant ionadail, às dèidh do dhraghan a bhith air an cur an cèill mu fhollaiseachd na Gàidhlig san sgìre.

Bha fèill dhreuchdan Siuthad 2026, am-bliadhna ag amas air luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig is na cothroman dreuchdail a bha rim faotainn dhaibh, air 110 sgoilear bho 6 àrd-sgoiltean a tharraing.

Bha Sgioba Gàidhlig Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd, ann an com-pàirteachas le Ionad Tasglann Didseatach na Gàidhlig aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, air bùth-obrach chom-pàirteach is eadar-obrachail a leasachadh do sgoilearan ÀS4 gu ÀS6.

Chaidh taing a thoirt do dh'Fhèisgoil agus Fèisean nan Gàidheal airson pàirt a ghabhail ann am pròiseact pileatach a chaidh a chrìochnachadh o chionn ghoirid agus a bha a' libhrigeadh na Gàidhlig tro gheamaichean is òrain air feadh Chataibh.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na Naidheachdan Matha a chaidh a thaisbeanadh.

4. **Tachartasan agus Buaidh Eaconamach, Cànanach is Cultarach Blas 2025**

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/1/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine agus bha taisbeanadh ann bho Mhgr Calum Ailig Mac a' Mhaoilein, Àrd-Oifigear, Fèisean nan Gàidheal agus a' Bh-uas Eilidh NicCoinnich, Manaidsear Fèisgoil, Fèisean nan Gàidheal.

Thug an taisbeanadh seachad geàrr-chunntas mu bhuidh leantainneach Fèis Bhlas agus chaidh iomradh a thoirt air na prìomh thachartasan is choileanaidhean bho phrògram 2025, a bha a' gabhail a-steach consairtean, cèilidhean, tachartasan, seiseanan ciùil is òran, agus grunn thaisbeanaidhean sgoile air feadh na Gàidhealtachd. Bha fios air ais bhon choimhearsnachd agus bho luchd-tadhail air a bhith math. Bha planaichean airson Blas 2026 aig ìre thràth.

Bha Blas air a dhol bho neart gu neart thar nam bliadhnaichean. Bha na h-ealain, gu h-àraid ceòl traidiseanta, fìor chudromach a thaobh a bhith a' leasachadh is a' brosnachadh na Gàidhlig. Bha an fhèis a' toirt cothrom do chloinn cluiche còmhla ris na gaisgich chiùil aca agus ceangal a thogail le cultar na Gàidhlig. Bha cothroman gus a' Ghàidhlig a chleachdadh, agus na ceumannan a bhathar a' gabhail gus misneachd ann an cleachdadh na Gàidhlig a mheudachadh, fìor chudromach. Bhathar an dòchas gun leanadh taic na Comhairle airson Blas san àm ri teachd.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gun deigheadh maoinachadh bliadhna a leantainn air adhart airson Fèis Bhlas, a' toirt fa-near gum biodh riarachaidhean uile san àm ri teachd fhathast fo ùmhlachd ath-sgrùdadh buidseit bhliadhna na Comhairle agus cuingealachaidhean maoinachaidh on taobh a-muigh;
- ii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** gun robh comas na fèise maoinachadh on taobh a-muigh a ghleidheadh an crochadh air taic leantainneach gach bliadhna bho Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd. Bhiodh lùghdachadh no tarraing air ais sam bith dhen mhaoineachadh seo a' cur a' phasgain mhaoineachaidh san fharsaingeachd ann an cunnart;
- iii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh taic a chur ri obair air sealbh choimhearsnachd Blas leis an luchd-brosnachaidh ionadail agus ri bhith a' co-roinn teachd a-steach gus com-pàirteachadh ionadail a neartachadh;
- iv. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gun deigheadh brosnachadh a thoirt do FnanG rannsachadh a ghabhail os làimh leis an lìonra luchd-brosnachaidh aca gus dèanamh cinnteach gum biodh guth aig an luchd-brosnachaidh sa phrògramadh;
- v. **DH'AONTAICH a' Chomataidh** leantainn air adhart a' neartachadh nan dòighean tomhais airson buaidh eaconamach agus taisbeanairan a' buntainn ri cànan na Gàidhlig a rèir bhuilean Plana na Gàidhlig;
- vi. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh leantainn air adhart a' neartachadh nan ceanglaichean eadar Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus luchd-eagrachaidh Fèis Bhlas airson tachartas 2026;
- vii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan obair a thathar a' gabhail os làimh le FnanG agus An Comunn Gàidhealach le taic bho Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus Bòrd na Gàidhlig a thaobh Acadamaidh a' Mhòid a chaidh a chumail ann an sgoiltean air feadh sgìre Loch Abar ro Mhòd Loch Abar (**Eàrr-ràdh 1**); agus
- viii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gun robh iomairt Acadamaidh a' Mhòid na pàirt de phròiseact dìleab Mòd Loch Abar 2025.

5. Buannachdan Eaconamach, Cànanach is Cultarach Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail Loch Abar 2025

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/2/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine agus thug Mgr Seumas Adam, Stiùiriche, Tourism Resources Company, taisbeanadh seachad às leth a' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich.

Chaidh aithris gun robh am Mòd air còrr is 9,400 neach a thàladh agus air £3.9m a thogail uile gu lèir ann an sgìre Loch Abar, le toradh math dha-rìribh air an airgead a chaidh a thasgadh. Bha fios air ais a' sealltainn gun robh an tachartas air a bhith fìor mhath airson coinneachadh ri caraidean is ceanglaichean sòisealta a thogail agus bha com-pàirteachadh làidir ann leis a' Ghearasdan mar bhaile aoigheachd.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingeon a leanas a thogail:-

- chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh, agus fhaotainn, a thaobh a' cheangail eadar mòdan sgìreil is nàiseanta agus chaidh faighneachd dè na planaichean a dheigheadh a chur air dòigh gus buill de chòisirean òigridh a bhrosnachadh gus leantainn orra a' farpais aig ìre nas àirde;
- mar fhreagairt do bheachdan mun deamografaig aoise, bhathar an dùil gun robh pàrantan no oidean na bu bhualtiche na suirbhidhean a lìonadh às dèidh

an tachartais, agus dh'fhaodadh seo beachd a thoirt seachad gun robh na bha an làthair na bu shine mar bhuidheann na bha iad; agus

- chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh, agus fhaotainn, a thaobh maoineachadh san àm ri teachd. Chaidh a ràdh gun robh cosgaisean àiteachan-fuirich is ionadan a' sìor fhàs dùbhlach.

Às dèidh sin:-

- THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan fhiosrachadh a bha san taisbeanadh agus san aithisg;
- THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** gum biodh Mòd 2029 ga chumail ann an sgìre na Gàidhealtachd; agus
- DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gun dèanadh oifigearan ceangal ri oifigearan a' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich gus Aonta Libhrigeadh Seirbheis ùraichte ullachadh.

6. Aithisg PRMS: Adhartas mu Choinneimh Plana na Gàidhlig 2024–29

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/3/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Chaidh faighneachd ciamar a dh'fhaodadh Sgoil-Àraich Bun-Sgoil Chille Mhoire leudachadh a' dol air adhart.

Chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh, agus fhaotainn, a thaobh a bhith a' leasachadh sgoiltean a tha a' toirt seachad Gàidhlig agus an taic lìonrachaidh a tha ri fhaotainn do sgoilearan ann am Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig ann an àrd-sgoiltean. Bha e cudromach gluasad a chumail a' dol a thaobh Plana na Gàidhlig. Bha Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005 a' toirt seachad cothroman a bharrachd, agus bhathar a' dèanamh obair ullachaidh mar-thà a thaobh Sgìrean Cànain Sònraichte.

Bha buill toilichte faicinn gun robhar a' coileanadh nan targaidean thar a' Phlana agus chaidh an obair chruaidh a bha an lùib seo aithneachadh. Bhathar an dùil, ge-tà, nach robh na naidheachdan matha air an sgaoileadh farsaing gu leòr. Chaidh iarraidh air oifigearan beachdachadh air ciamar a b' urrainn dhaibh a bhith gnìomhach a' toirt na bhathar a' dèanamh am follais agus chaidh a ràdh gun robh dreuchd Comataidh na Gàidhlig riatanach airson a bhith a' glacadh farsaingeachd obair Sgioba na Gàidhlig.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan aithisg.

7. Foghlam Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/4/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine agus bha taisbeanadh ann bhon Bh-uas Alison NicLeòid, Oifigear Leasachaidh Curraicealam na Gàidhlig.

Bha buill fìor thoilichte le soirbheachas Pròiseact Pileatach nan Leabhraichean-èisteachd agus dh'aithnich iad an obair mhòr a bha na lùib. B' e pròiseact eadar-ghinealaich is co-obrachail a bh' ann, a' ceangal sgoiltean air feadh na Gàidhealtachd.

Mar fhreagairt do cheist mu sholar Foghlam Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig ann an àrd-sgoiltean, chaidh innse gun robh suidheachadh na Gàidhealtachd fhathast làidir

ann an co-theacsa nàiseanta, ach gun robh seo an crochadh air neartachadh leantainneach a thaobh co-obrachadh eadar sgoiltean.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

- i. dhan dealas a thaobh sruthan-obrach Ionnsachadh Proifeiseanta Fad-Dreuchd a tha sònraichte dhan Ghàidhlig, cuide ri obair chom-pàirteach le Foghlam Alba, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, agus buidhnean nàiseanta eile gus slighean ionnsachaidh proifeiseanta a neartachadh, goireasan ionnsachaidh àrd-inbhe a leasachadh, agus obair a cho-thaobhadh ri prìomhachasan nàiseanta foghlaim Ghàidhlig;
- ii. dhan bhuidhe mhath a tha air a bhith aig gnìomhan leasachadh sgoile a thaobh buileachadh is coileanadh a chaidh a ghabhail os làimh o chionn ghoirid gus sgrùdadh is measadh leantainneach a bhrosnachadh a thaobh iomairtean Gàidhlig ann an sgoiltean agus am buaidh is an èifeachdais; agus
- iii. do dhuaisean Calpa Gàidhlig Riaghaltas na h-Alba agus na tha iad a' cur ri bhith a' leasachadh builean curraicealaim Ghàidhlig do sgoilearan.

8. Suirbhidh Sgilean Gàidhlig air an Taobh A-staigh

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/5/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Bu chòir do dhaoine a bhith a' faireachdainn cofhurtail a' còmhradh sa Ghàidhlig, aig ìre sam bith, agus bha e cudromach àiteachan cofhurtail a chomharrachadh is a thoirt seachad san àite-obrach far am biodh daoine a' faireachdainn misneachail oidhirp a dhèanamh. Bha soidhnichean Gàidhlig cudromach a thaobh seo. Bhathar an dòchas gum biodh suirbhidhean san àm ri teachd a' sealltainn àrdachadh san àireimh dhaoine a bha deònach a' Ghàidhlig ionnsachadh is a chleachdadh.

Às dèidh sin:-

- i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do thoraidhean Suirbhidh Sgilean na Gàidhlig;
- ii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gun deigheadh am plana-gnìomha a thathar a' moladh a chur an gnìomh gus feumalachdan trèanaidh a choinneachadh agus a' Ghàidhlig a dhèanamh nas follaisiche san àite-obrach; agus
- iii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh taic a thoirt do bhith a' leasachadh chothroman ionnsachaidh subailte is ruigsinneach do luchd-obrach.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 4.30f.