

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	Ms M MacCallum
Mr S Coghill (remote)	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr R Cross (remote)	Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr L Fraser	Mr S Mackie
Mr A Graham	Ms K MacLean (remote)
Mr M Green	Mr D Millar
Mr R Gunn (remote)	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mrs J Hendry	Mr M Reiss
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)	

Non-Members also present:

Ms L Dundas (remote)	Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mr J Finlayson (remote)	Mr R Jones (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Ms C Gillies (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr J Grafton	Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Dr M Gregson (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:-

- 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;
- scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
- NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
- 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:-

- 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
- 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:-

- NOTED** the work being carried out by the Council to meet its statutory obligations under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act; and
- 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:-

- scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance information;
- 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
- 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.