

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday, 19 March 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin (sub for Mr Kennedy)	Mr B Lobban
Mr M Baird	Mr P Logue (sub for Mr Baxter)
Mr R Bremner	Mr G Mackenzie
Mr J Bruce	Mr S Mackie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (remote)	Mr D McDonald
Mr A Christie	Mr P Oldham (Chair)
Mr L Fraser	Ms M Reid (Vice Chair)
Mr K Gowans	Mr M Reiss
Mr A Jarvie	Mr R Stewart (remote)

Non-Members present:

Mr J Finlayson (remote)	Ms C Gillies (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mr T MacLennan (remote)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Mrs S Armstrong, Chief Officer - Revenues and Commercialisation
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer - Corporate Finance
Mr J Shepherd, Chief Officer - Business Solutions
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer Facilities & Fleet Management
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer, Operations & Maintenance
Ms E Barrie, Head of People
Mr M Bailey, Strategic Lead – Commercialisation
Ms D Sutherland, Strategic Lead Corp. Audit & Performance
Mr C Kershaw, Insurance and Risk Manager
Mr A Dempsey-Reid, Principal Accountant
Ms N MacLennan, Programme Manager IIP
Ms L McGunnigle, HR Manager
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 P Oldham in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Mr S Kennedy and Mr A Baxter.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest, and the following Transparency Statements were received:

- Mr R Stewart declared a connection to all items on the agenda as a close family member was an employee of the Council but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.
- Item 7 – Mr A Christie

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the good news as follows:

- Bryony McDiarmid and Jodi Morris, Team Leaders in Business Support, completed and passed their SCQF Level 7 Management Award in just over 6 months and in 2026 would embark on SCQF Level 9 Management Award;
- Alison Foggo, Solicitor in Revenues & Commercialisation, joined the Council in January 2026 from the private sector;
- the Council's new web site went live as planned on 17 February 2026 and would be the basis for an ongoing programme of improved access to online Council services; and
- Pensions Officer Karen Miller was retiring after 39 years and was wished well.

4. Appointment to Sub-Committees, Working Groups, etc Cur an Dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidhean, Buidhnean-obrach is eile

The Chair and Vice Chair pointed out the need for an improved gender balance on the Appeals and Disputes Committee, noting there was a current high male membership on the Corporate Resources Committee. Detail was provided on the current gender balance of the Council and of various committees and attention was drawn to the value of having a gender balance across committees, while acknowledging the challenges in facilitating this.

The Committee **AGREED** the revised membership of the Appeals and Disputes Committee as follows:

The Chair and Vice Chair of Corporate Resources Committee, the Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant Service committee plus six other Members as follows:-

Mrs J Hendry*
Mr B Lobban
Mr R Gale*
Ms M MacCallum*
Mr D MacDonald
Mrs I MacKenzie*

5. Corporate Revenue and Capital Monitoring Report to 31 December 2025 Aithisg Teachd-a-steach Corporra agus Sgrùdadh Calpa gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2025

a. Corporate Revenue Monitoring to 31 December 2025 Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2025

There had been circulated Report No RES/01/26 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

During discussion the following issues were raised:

- the Inverness Castle Experience was highlighted as a significant benefit to the Highlands but, given the delayed opening, lack of marketing and the cost of staff training, it was unsurprising that the Council's commitment to underwriting year one of the project had become necessary. The long-term nature of the Castle Experience project was emphasised, and it was anticipated that it would become an embedded and valuable cultural asset over the longer-term, with regular reports on the initial year of operation to be provided to the Committee;
- attention was drawn to the importance of the role of the Corporate Resources Committee, with some Members suggesting that its budget monitoring role was more significant than that of other strategic committees. Consideration should be given to managing the committee calendar to facilitate Corporate Resources Committee having earlier sight of key and up to date financial information. The Chief Officer- Corporate Finance summarised the range of support provided by his team to the Council and the need to balance the implementation of financial strategies supporting budget recovery with the provision of additional monitoring reports. The Chair highlighted that Corporate Resources was scheduled towards the end of the committee cycle to allow the relevant strategic committees to scrutinise their service's finances in the first instance;
- information was sought and provided on work being undertaken to monitor the impact of the ongoing situation in the Middle East on interest rates, inflation and energy costs. It was thought that further information on this might be available by the next meeting of the committee; and
- information was sought and provided on the Council's financial borrowing behaviour, including details on the use of the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), a UK government lending facility operated by the Debt Management Office on behalf of HM Treasury.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the forecasted financial position for the year as set out in the report and appendices attached;
- NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed;
- NOTED** the improvement in the forecast from Quarter 2 to Quarter 3;
- NOTED** the further adjustments and forecasts relating to 2025/26, arising as a result of budget decisions made by the Council on 5 March 2026;
- NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery; and
- AGREED** to the one-off under-write of the Inverness Castle Experience year one (part year) costs as set out within the report, consisting of pre-opening costs, setup costs and initial off-peak opening period net costs.

**b. Corporate Capital Monitoring Report to 31 December 2025
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Calpa Corporra gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2025**

There had been circulated Report No RES/02/26 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the net spend for Q3 2025/26, the forecast year end outturn and the funding profile.

**6. Treasury Management – Summary of Transactions to 31 December 2025
Rianachd Ionmhais – Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2025**

There had been circulated Report No RES/03/26 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

The Chair drew attention to section 6.1 of the report which stated that the Bank Rate had reduced to 3.75% in December 2025 and that the Council's Treasury Management advisor, MUFG, forecasted it would reduce to 3.50% by June 2026. However, at the Investment Sub Committee meeting on 16 March 2026, it had been advised that the reduction to 3.50% might no longer be the case, and that it might increase in future.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management - Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 October 2025 to 31 December 2025.

**7. Corporate Cluster Service Q3 2025-26
Seirbheis nam Buidhnean Corporra R3 2025–26**

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item in his capacity as a Non Executive Director of Inverness BID and as Chief Executive of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

**a. Revenue Budget Monitoring and Forecast Report
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach agus Ro-aithris**

There had been circulated Report No RES/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

With reference to the work of the welfare team, and in relation to unclaimed benefits, the Vice Chair reported that she had recently chaired a meeting of the Armed Forces Covenant, and the attendance of a member of the welfare team to explain the ways in which people could be supported had been welcomed and informative. She thanked the team personally for their excellent work.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendix 1 to the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and

iii. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery.

**b. Performance Monitoring Q3 2025/26
Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R3 2025/26**

There had been circulated Report No RES/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion the following issues were raised:

- attention was drawn to the latest statistics published by the Department for Work and Pensions for Housing Benefit, which reported that the Highland Council had been ranked eighth equal for New Claims and first equal (with Orkney) for Changes in Circumstances in Scotland, which was to be commended;
- information was sought and provided on steps being taken to address the continued high rates of sickness absence across the Council, and these steps included long-term investment in early intervention management, the offering of the flu vaccination for all staff, and mental health support; and
- the ICT team was thanked for their excellent work.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. performance information for the Corporate Cluster;
- ii. change to absence reporting to align with Chief Officer structure;
- iii. changes to presentation of Corporate Cluster 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.

**8. Additional Bank Holiday
Saor-latha Banca a Bharrachd**

There had been circulated Report No RES/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

During discussion the following issues were raised:

- disappointment was expressed that the Scottish Government had not provided funding to cover the estimated £150k cost of the bank holiday. The Chair confirmed, in response to a query on whether the Council would seek compensation from the Scottish Government, that this would not be undertaken;
- although Scotland's participation in the men's football world cup was commendable, it was pointed out that not everyone shared an interest in football;
- the estimated cost of an additional bank holiday of £150k was not an appropriate use of public funds, noting that many people working in private companies would not be provided with an additional day of leave, and it could cause inconvenience and expense to working parents;
- setting a precedent for providing bank holidays for significant sporting achievements could create challenges; and

- the first Scottish match would take place on a Saturday 13 June 2026, not Monday 15 June 2026.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** option 2:

- Monday 15 June 2026 was not granted as a bank holiday and services would continue to operate as a standard working day;
- Leave requests, where appropriate, should be requested for 15 June 2026 following the standard process and granted on the basis there was a level of staffing which would maintain a safe service delivery. Leave would not apply to staff working in schools; and
- Unauthorised absences would be dealt with through the normal disciplinary procedure.

9. Corporate Occupational Health, Safety, Welfare and Wellbeing Policy Poileasaidh Slàinte, Sàbhailteachd, Sochair is Sunnd Dreuchdail Corporra

There had been circulated Report No RES/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Corporate Occupational Health, Safety, Welfare and Wellbeing Policy.

10. Smoke Free Workplace Policy Poileasaidh Àite-obrach Saor o Smocadh

There had been circulated Report No RES/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

During discussion assurance was sought and provided in relation to risk assessment and individual arrangements being made for vulnerable staff undertaking home visits to people who smoked in their homes.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Smoke Free Workplace Policy.

11. Secondment Policy and Guidance Poileasaidh agus Stiùireadh Fo-fhastaidh

There had been circulated Report No RES/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

During discussion the following issues were raised:

- it was welcomed that public sector organisations tended to consider the needs of the employee as well as the needs of the organisation;
- clarity was sought and provided on:
 - whether someone required to move to take up a secondment would be paid a rate typical of the new location;
 - whether someone taking a lower grade secondment would maintain their substantive salary; and
 - issues around the need for a competitive interview process to be undertaken at some point in the process for someone to become a permanent member of staff.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the updated Secondment Policy and Guidance.

12. Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy Poileasaidh Inntinn Fhuadain

There had been circulated Report No RES/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

During discussion the following issues were raised:

- it was important that Members were included in the policy, and information was due to be issued on this;
- a briefing for Members on AI use, cyber security, and data protection would be beneficial; and
- attention was drawn to the issue of data storage and the need to provide AI with adequate information to allow it to learn and be of ongoing use, as well as to the fast-moving nature of AI development and the need for a balanced approach to ensure information security and also allow the Council to benefit from the technology.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Artificial Intelligence Policy; and
- ii. **NOTED** the supporting guidance and templates provided in the report.

13. Future Operating Model Programme: Progress Update Prògram Modail Obrachaidh an Ama ri Teachd: Cunntas air Adhartas

There had been circulated Report No RES/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

During discussion, clarification was sought and provided on the definition of 'presenteeism'. Assurance was provided that if staff wished to be present in an office full time, then this would be facilitated, recognising that homeworking was not possible or suitable for all.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress to date;
- ii. **AGREED** the next steps to be delivered by the Programme (as outlined at Section 7 of the report); and
- iii. **AGREED** that progress reports would be presented to each Corporate Resources Committee unless / until Members of this Committee agreed otherwise.

14. Investors in People (IIP) Programme Update Cunntas air Prògram Creideas nar Cosnaichean

There had been circulated Report No RES/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

During discussion the IIP programme progress was welcomed and the advantages of the scheme were recognised. It was highlighted that the car parking concerns raised were realistic.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of the Investors in People programme.

15. Insurance Arrangements **Ullachaidhean Àrachais**

There had been circulated Report No RES/13/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

During discussion the following issues were raised:

- given that car hire was a significant cost in relation to the claims being progressed, it was queried whether purchasing vehicles would assist with the cost management of claims;
- data benchmarking with other local authorities was welcomed;
- information was sought and provided on the timescales for the financial strategy, which was aimed to be in place prior to budget setting for 2027-28;
- clarification was sought and provided that Members and officers were insured for liable and slander when on Council business, even if off-site;
- it was queried and confirmed that the Council was liable for the excess on buildings that were Council-owned but leased to other organisations;
- it was queried and confirmed that the Council was not able to provide insurance for community councils;
- clarity was sought and provided that claims under Motor (MO) in Appendix One of the report related to third party damage, while pothole claims were detailed under Public Liability Claims;
- in relation to the responsibility for the processing of claims reverting to Council staff in June 2026, it was queried and confirmed that adequate staffing resources were being put in place. Information on staff recruitment and training was provided, in addition to the reasons why the Council's insurer was now confident this could be dealt with in-house, and the benefits of doing so. Attention was drawn to the value of having access to national insurance claim databases to help with the detection of fraudulent claims, which might be removed if the Council started to process claims in-house. This would be looked into outwith the meeting;
- it was noted that some people were using the small claims court to seek damages against the Council, and the process for addressing small claims was summarised;
- in the past a Members' handbook had been produced which had included detail on insurance for Members. It was requested that the updating of this information for Members be investigated outwith the meeting;
- assurance was provided in relation to professional insurance indemnity; and
- with reference to the insurance fund being topped up in 2024 and most recently in the 26/27 budget, it was queried why there had been no further update to this, and it was suggested that funds should be put aside on a regular basis if the Council was to become self-insuring, to minimise risk. Assurance was provided that this would be looked at as part of the planned strategy, with information to be sought on the practices of other local authorities in this regard.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report;
- ii. **AGREED** the future activities as set out at Section 9 of the report; and
- iii. **NOTED** that annual reports on Insurance would be presented to this Committee.

16. ICT Annual User Satisfaction Survey 2025-26 PP.238-243
Suirbhidh Bhliadhnail Riarachas Luchd-cleachdaidh ICT 2025–26

There had been circulated Report No RES/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the results of the 2025/26 survey, including at Section 7 of the report details of the key areas of strength and improvement opportunities; and
- ii. that the scores remain positive overall and that the findings will be shared with Council Services, High Life Highland and the Valuation Joint Board to support collaborative service improvement planning.

17. Corporate Systems Update – HR & Payroll Programme
Cunntas air Siostraman Corporra – Prògram Ghoireasan Daonna & Rola Pàighidh

There had been circulated Report No RES/15/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. updates and progress of the HR & Payroll Programme; and
- ii. integrated impact assessment summary provided in section 4.5 of the report.

18. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update
Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh

a. Corporate Solutions – Q3 25/26
Fuasglaidhean Corporra – R3 25/26

There had been circulated Report No RES/16/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. progress on the projects covered in the report; and
- ii. completion of the Service Improvement Solutions project.

b. Income Generation
Togail Teachd-a-steach

There had been circulated Report No RES/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

With reference to the estimated 21 Mountain Rescue Team call outs that had been avoided as a result of the on-site visitor centre at the Old Man of Storr on the Isle of Skye, thanks were extended to the staff.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of each of the Income Generation Projects.

19. Minutes of Meetings Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

The following Minutes of Meetings were:-

- i. **APPROVED** - Central Safety Committee held on 15 December 2025 and 9 March 2026;
- ii. **NOTED** – Appeals and Disputes Sub-Committee held on 23 February 2026 ;
- iii. **APPROVED** - Staff Partnership Forum held on 26 February 2026; and
- iv. **NOTED** – Non Domestic Rates Appeals Committee held on 27 February 2026.

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

The Committee is asked to resolve that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

21. Sundry Debts Fiachan Measgaichte

There had been circulated Report No RES/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

The Committee **AGEED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

The meeting closed at 11.20am.