

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		
Savings Name	Improvement Model – Subject Lead Teachers		
Current Budget (£m)		Current Staffing (FTE)	

Ref. **AC2025/1**

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:-

- i. initial work of the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission; and
- ii. 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:-

- 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;
- NOTED** the opportunities that would be provided for stakeholders and partners to engage in the design process;
- 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;
- AGREED** officers should fully discharge the recommendations from Education Scotland as set out in the Consultation Report at Appendix 2 to the report;
- AGREED** to relocate St Clement's School to the site adjacent to Dingwall Primary School; and
- 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
--------------------------	------------------

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-uk)

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was highlighted that there had been cross-party opposition to the proposals to cut STV North when the matter was discussed in the Scottish parliament;
- attention was drawn to the success of STV North including the fact that it had a 40% audience share and was due to make a profit in 2025;
- it was explained that a significant number of jobs would be lost due to this decision and that the National Union of Journalists had voted to take strike action in protest;
- without a strong STV presence in the Highlands, local stories risked being told from a distance or not being told at all, decisions would be made elsewhere and the lived experience of Highland communities would be lost in translation which was unacceptable;
- the importance of local news reporting in upholding democracy was emphasised;
- it was highlighted that STV North had provided an important pathway for local young people interested in pursuing a career in journalism;
- the importance of local news stories being reported by local people who understood the area was highlighted, especially as the loss of local news reporting in Highland was already being felt due to the closure of local newspapers such as the Nairnshire Telegraph;
- a single nationalised news broadcast would likely focus more on events in Scotland's urban centres with less attention being given to local Highland news; and
- attention was drawn to a comment made by the Convener of the Cairngorm National Park Authority in his letter to Ofcom which explained the importance of local news reporting at a time when the Highlands faced many social and environmental challenges.

Decision

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

4. That a special meeting of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing (HSCW) Committee be convened by mid-January 2026 to review and discuss the domestic abuse interventions strategy for the Highland Council Region and ways to reduce domestic violence generally.

Signed: Mrs J McEwan Mrs T Robertson Mr M Reiss
 Mrs A MacLean

AMENDMENT

That we do not hold a special meeting of HSCW Committee in January 2026, but instead the scheduled meeting on 4 February 2026 will include the agenda item:-

“Update on the Highland Domestic Abuse Service – procurement progress and next steps, including refuge review and support for victim-survivors.”

Signed: Mr D Fraser Mrs M Cockburn

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.