

The Highland Council

Minutes of the meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 27 May 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr A Jarvie (remotely)
Dr C Birt	Mrs B Jarvie (remotely)
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms L Johnston
Mr R Cross	Ms L Kraft
Mr D Fraser	Mrs K MacLean
Mr R Gale	Mr T MacLennan
Ms C Gillies	Ms C Ramsay
Mr J Grafton	Mrs M Reid
Mr R Gunn (remotely)	

Non-Members present:

Mr J Finlayson	Ms E Knox
Dr M Gregson	Mrs M Ross

NHS Highland representatives:

Ms A Johnstone, Chief Officer

Third sector representatives in attendance:

Dr G Rodger, Inspiring Young Voices

Also in attendance:

Ms L McBain, Youth Convener

Participating Officials:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Ms F Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer, Health and Social Care
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer, Integrated People Services
Mr I Kyle, Lead Officer Strategy, Performance and Quality Assurance
Mr J Libby, Transition Head of Children & Justice
Ms J Park, Strategic Lead (Child Health)
Ms D Sutherland, Strategic Lead Corp. Audit & Performance
Ms D Henderson, Strategic Lead (Care and Support)
Ms L Grant, Strategic Lead, Early Intervention & Protection
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mr D Fraser in the Chair

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs I Mackenzie.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

3. Service Achievements Coileanaidhean Seirbheis

The Committee **NOTED** updates on the following:

- the resumption of the Caithness Short Break service at Thor House;
- Magic Notes making a difference to reduce administrative burden, improve turnaround times, and improve the quality of engagement with the people being supported;
- the successful bid for the Local Learning Partnership (LLP) grant funding;
- third Sector Service Achievements as follows:
 - Inverness Openarts was a community art-for-wellbeing organisation delivering inclusive creative sessions designed to support mental health and wellbeing;
 - The Successful Piloting of Mikeysline's Mental Fitness Workshops; and
 - Tykes Young Carers tackling food insecurity across Sutherland.

Attention was drawn to Carer's Week which would be from 8 to 14 June 2026. Gratitude was expressed to all unpaid carers for their work.

4. Delivery Plan Monitoring & Progress Update – Person Centred Solutions Q4 25/26 Cunntas air Sgrùdadh & Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh – Fuasglaidhean Stèidhichte air an Neach R4 25/26

There was circulated Report No HCW/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- further guidance should be provided on Self-Directed Support (SDS) for children where there were gaps in provision relating to the child's level of disability. Attention was drawn to a review that had led to the development of a new resource allocation model and FAQ document that was to be trialled and reported on in due course;
- the rebranding of Home in Highland as 'residential care' was considered to be less caring language and should be reviewed;
- information was sought and provided on the different levels of checks undertaken on potential kinship carers versus foster carers, and while it was acknowledged that the requirements for kinship care could be less rigorous, assurance was provided that appropriate levels of scrutiny were undertaken. Reference was made to the benefits and drawbacks of kinship care;
- information was sought and provided on how the reported £200k of Children's Services savings detailed at paragraph 5.3 of the report had been achieved, and what the £1.2m of Families First investment had been spent on;
- the risk matrix for child health was queried and would be circulated outwith the meeting, and appended to future reports;
- the timescales for the improvements and savings detailed at paragraph 7 on Improving Transition Outcomes were queried;

- the benefits of the use of home-based technology, and the pursuit of FIT homes as part of service delivery, was referred to and, in this regard, information was sought and provided on the uses and benefits of the Vocala (Alexa) device in homes, as detailed in the report at paragraph 7.5. A pilot was underway and would be reported on in due course;
- it was queried how the elements and themes in the report were supporting the transitions process;
- attention was drawn to the difficulties developing workforces in the care sector and elsewhere because of the housing challenges being faced. While larger housing developments were welcomed, it was important to provide smaller developments in smaller communities. A brainstorming session or forum to source solutions was proposed and, in the first instance, the Chair of the Committee would discuss the matter with the Chair of the Housing and Property Committee. The involvement of partners, including the third sector, in this was vital. Local recruitment days for staff in lower paid jobs should be considered, as well as having due regard to the need to provide career and progression routes to those in lower paid jobs;
- assurance was sought and provided on data security for the magic notes package;
- support for parents and carers was queried and explained, with particular reference to the inclusion of neurodiversity issues; and
- attention was drawn to the importance of considering whole family issues.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Delivery Project updates provided in the report;
- ii. **NOTED** and **AGREED** the proposed changes to the workstream headings set out in paragraph 5.5 of the report; and
- iii. **NOTED**:
 - a. the risk matrix for child health would be circulated after the meeting and appended to future reports as appropriate;
 - b. a review of the language used to refer to residential care would be undertaken; and
 - c. the Chair would liaise with the Chair of the Housing and Property Committee to consider holding a forum or similar to find innovative solutions to the challenges around housing provision, particularly for key workers.

5. **Fostering Update (CAN Digital) Cunntas às Ur mu Dhaltachd (CAN Didseatach)**

There was circulated Report No HCW/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the importance of the fostering service was emphasised and all involved were thanked for the improvement that was being made;
- the value of digital marketing was highlighted and it was queried whether information was gathered on the reasons for people dropping out during the fostering recruitment process;
- in relation to the need for a contingency plan if the approach proved unsuccessful, this would be investigated;

- the required background for recruitment and retention officers was queried and explained, noting that there was no longer a need for them to be qualified social workers;
- reference in the report to the outsourcing of assessments on an interim basis was queried and explained, and reference was made to the value of using technology to source social work expertise from elsewhere, to save travel costs, and to allow investment to be made in other key areas;
- attention was drawn to a recent article published in England which had highlighted the potential to dovetail fostering with work or study from home;
- reference was made to previous considerations by the Design Board of the referral process for foster carers which had highlighted that some potential foster carer leads were being missed. It was urged that this be followed up to ensure blockages identified by the Redesign Board had been addressed, such as the provision of support to furnish a spare room; and
- the importance of hosting more regional recruitment events to improve public awareness was acknowledged.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. national and local context for foster care recruitment and retention, including the sustained challenges facing the fostering service;
- ii. additional resources being directed towards the Fostering Service; and
- iii. range of improvement actions being undertaken to improve performance.

6. Adult Social Care Assurance and Strategic Update Barantas agus Cunntas Ro-innleachdail mu Chùram Sòisealta Inbheach

There was circulated Report No HCW/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the Care Inspectorate grades detailed in Appendix 1 of the report were praised, noting the small number of red and amber gradings;
- it was queried whether any modelling had been done around the potential cost savings of community care being delivered against the cost of acute care when people were admitted to hospital on a cyclical basis. A small amount of care or support could positively impact their ability to remain at home rather than in hospital. Attention was drawn to the high costs of stays in acute hospitals and to a pilot ‘hospital at home’ project that was being undertaken and would be reported on in due course;
- future plans for Moss Park Care Home in Fort William were queried, with reference to staffing challenges and sector fragility, and an update on this was intended to go to full Council in June 2026;
- the struggle to recruit care staff, particularly for care at home, would be alleviated if better conditions were offered to staff in terms of higher salaries and clearer career progress routes. A summary was provided of work being undertaken to tackle this, including the lobbying of MSPs;
- in relation to reduced delayed discharge from hospital, the importance of people arranging power of attorney was emphasised. A publicity campaign promoting power of attorney was being undertaken by NHS Highland with Highland Council participation; and
- attention was drawn to the rights of unpaid carers, under the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 to be involved in the discharge planning process;

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

7. Update on Highland Domestic Abuse Service – Procurement Progress and Next Steps Including Review’s on Refuge and MARAC and Support for Victim – Survivors
Cunntas às Ùr mu Sheirbheis Droch-Dhiol Teaghlachail na Gàidhealtachd – Pròiseas Solarachd is Ath Cheumannan a’ Gabhail A-steach Ath-sgrùdaidhean mu Thèarmann agus MARAC agus Taic airson Luchd-fulaing

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- it was welcomed that the Highland Domestic Abuse Service had been stabilised and services were continuing under existing or interim arrangements while improvement work was progressed. A summary of the outreach services was provided and a full review of refuge services was underway. It was emphasised that the changes were not about saving money but about developing long-term sustainable solutions using an evidence-based process, and a further update would be provided to the Committee in August 2026. With demand for services increasing, it was welcomed that continuity was being maintained and services were being strengthened for the future. All involved were thanked;
- assurance was sought and provided that women-only spaces would be safeguarded, with alternative provision provided for other service users, that the interim arrangements would meet appropriate quality standards, and that provision was being made for rural and island communities;
- information was sought and provided on staffing levels and service continuity in Lochaber;
- further information was sought on men’s services and would be discussed outwith the meeting, noting that this had been covered in a report at the previous meeting;
- it was highlighted that the exercise was at the data gathering stage at present, with information being sought on any unmet need, especially in rural areas. Other considerations being taken into account included funding, accommodation, comparison with other Local Authority Services, housing issues and complex needs;
- the impact of domestic abuse on population health was highlighted; and
- the review of domestic abuse services to identify best practice was welcomed and all involved were thanked by the Chair.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the current position in relation to outreach provision, with specific reference to HDAS South;
- ii. progress with the review of refuge services;
- iii. in relation to MARAC, the review work being undertaken to agree future delivery arrangements; and
- iv. the continuation of existing arrangements during the review period for all services relating to domestic abuse.

**8. Performance Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Ràitheil**

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

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. performance information for the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing; and
- ii. change to FOI reporting to align with Chief Officer structure.

**9. Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 - 2029
Plana Com-pàirteachais Seirbheisean Chloinne na Gàidhealtachd 2026–2029**

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

During discussion, attention was drawn to improvements in the inclusion of children and young people's voices, and their lived experiences, over the previous decade. Members were encouraged to read the Children and Young People's Voice report, linked in the report, and the third sector partnership approach to deliver and implement the strategy was welcomed.

The Chair referred to the many benefits of the Plan and that any queries could be addressed to the Lead Officer Strategy, Performance and Quality Assurance outwith the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the work undertaken by the Integrated Children's Service Plan Board in producing the Draft - Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 - 2029. This plan would be formally signed off by the Community Planning Partnership Board; and
- ii. provide comment on the plan which had been approved by the Integrated Children's Services Planning Board.

**10. National Review & Public Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation
Ath-sgrùdadh Nàiseanta & Rannsachadh Poblach mu Dhroch-Dhiol is Dubh-shaothrachadh Feiseil air Cloinn**

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

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. scope of the National Review; and
- ii. commencement of the Public Inquiry.

**11. National Social Work Agency and Scottish Social Work Partnership
Buidheann Nàiseanta Obrach-sòisealta agus Com-pàirteachas Obrach-sòisealta na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No HCW/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the creation of the National Social Work Agency and the Scottish Social Work Partnership; and
- ii. **AGREED** that further updates come to Committee with regard to workforce developments and practice improvements in social work – on a national and local level.

12. Minutes **Geàrr-chunntas**

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

- i. Highland Council / NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee held on 4 December 2025;
- ii. Highland Violence Against Women Partnership held on 28 October 2025; and
- iii. Child Protection Committee held 30 October 2025.

The meeting ended at 11.40am.