

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Wednesday 20 May 2026 at 9.30am**.

Present:

Ms S Atkin (Vice Chair)	Mr R Jones
Mr I Brown	Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (Chair)	Mrs A Maclean
Ms L Dundas	Mr D Macpherson
Mr J Edmondson (substitute)	Mr P Oldham (substitute)
Mr L Fraser	Mr M Prosser (remote)
Mr R Gale	Mr R Stewart (remote)
Mrs J Hendry (substitute)	

Non-Members also present:

Mr R Cross	Ms C Gilles (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mr M Gregson (remote)	Ms M Ross (remote)

Tenant Representatives in Attendance:

Ms L Richardson

Officials in Attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing & Customer Services
Ms D Delonnette, Service Lead (Housing and Homelessness)
Ms H Jones, HR Business Partner
Ms H Cameron, Service Lead (Housing Development)
Ms I MacMillan, Programme Manager, Climate Change
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms A Macrae, 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.**

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr S Cameron, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr W Mackay and Ms J McEwan.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements:

Item 10: Mr R Cross (Transparency Statement).

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

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

4. Homelessness Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Chion Dachaigh

There had been circulated Report No HP/13/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- further information was sought and provided on the person-centred approach to service delivery, noting this depended on the individual needs of the person;
- in relation to tenancy sustainment, the opportunity for additional counselling services to be considered for more challenging cases to support the wellbeing of staff;
- in response to a query, further details were provided on the type and location of properties offered to homeless clients based on their housing need; and
- the ongoing work of the Welfare Team and CABx to maximise the uptake of benefits for individuals.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the progress in mitigating homelessness and delivering secure housing outcomes in Highland.

5. Housing Performance Report 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 Aithisg Coileanadh Taigheadais 1 An Giblean 2025 gu 31 Màrt 2026

There had been circulated Report No HP/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- it was clarified that it was not feasible for a more detailed breakdown by age banding and reasons of homeless presentations to be provided due to the Scottish Government's reporting criteria. However, officers would continue to lobby the Scottish Government for the criteria to be reviewed;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, on the legal definitions around homelessness and the process by which each homeless application was investigated by officers to determine whether the Council had a statutory duty to provide assistance to the applicant;

- an assurance was sought and provided that while figures for spend on homelessness would be reported to the Committee in August 2026, a more detailed breakdown would be provided to Members in due course;
- in response to a query, it was explained that temporary accommodation was provided through a mix of Council properties, leased properties from other social landlords and private accommodation; the standard of accommodation was managed in the same way as for Council secure tenancies and the focus was on moving people into secure accommodation as quickly as possible;
- staff be commended on the performance achieved on rent arrears and it would be helpful if details could be provided on the level of what could be described as technical arrears due to delays in benefit payments; it was confirmed this issue formed part of the Rent Arrears Management Policy review, noting the difficulties in separating technical arrears from the overall total;
- an explanation was sought and provided that while re-let times had increased compared to 2023/24, there had been a decrease compared to 2024/25; a balance had to be achieved within the available budget in terms of allocating works to the in-house team and use of external contractors, and an assurance this process was subject to ongoing monitoring;
- the benefits of pre-termination inspections being carried out to improve re-let times where access could be gained, noting there were issues with abandonments and high non-access levels; reference was also made to the opportunity to increase the number of tenancy sustainment visits within available resources;
- noting that delays in meter clearance by utility companies on re-let times had been a national issue for all social landlords and the steps being taken to improve the position including with an intermediary company to liaise with the energy companies;
- confirmation was sought and provided that Mr D Macpherson would be provided with details of the shortest time period recorded by the Service for re-letting a house;
- clarification was sought and provided that the Council allocated houses primarily on the basis of housing need, housing supply and its statutory duties on homelessness; Member queries were invited as part of the Allocations Policy review to be presented to the Committee in 2026;
- an update was sought and provided on how well the Council was managing tenant satisfaction levels in Highland; a comprehensive tenant satisfaction survey was to be conducted in the Autumn and tenant input to that survey was actively being sought;
- an assurance was sought and provided that all Council housing should have double glazing installed where technically feasible and the Team would be asked to prioritise works if there were any outstanding cases; and
- whether emergency repairs included damage caused to a property by forced entry by the Police; it was explained this depended on the individual circumstances of the case and that emergency or follow on works would be included in the overall repair statistics.

The Tenant's Representative asked how the new legislation on domestic abuse would be promoted Highland wide to existing and prospective tenants, specific reference being made to the new policy whereby perpetrators would lose their tenancy. It was confirmed that once the final guidance had been received, from the Scottish Government, officers would ensure this was widely promoted across Highland to raise awareness. There was also a role for Members, the Housing Service in linking up with NHS Highland and the third sector colleagues, and for tenant representatives in this regard.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

6. Place Cluster Workforce Plan Annual Progress Report Aithisg Adhartais Bhliadhna Plana Feachd-obrach na Buidhne Àite

There had been circulated Report No HP/15/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- it was encouraging that the ageing demographic was reducing and there was more balance in this regard, however the Council had to address the fact that only 11% of the Cluster's workforce was aged 30 or younger;
- consideration be given to reducing agency numbers by having more multi skilled teams within the Council, noting this could be a rewarding position for an employee and provide them with a wide range of knowledge;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the work undertaken to engage with area staff on the ground and ensure they had the same opportunities to be involved as Inverness based staff;
- in regard to the above, Housing & Communities and Property & Assets had both received Investors in People Standard Accreditation, and as a next step area staff sessions would be held and action plans developed to improve workplace practices and organisational culture and that updates would be provided to Members going forward;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Council's Audit Team had responsibility for the Council's whistle blowing policy and process;
- whether exit interviews were held with employees leaving the Council to understand and learn from their experience and make improvements going forward; it was confirmed a new exit interview process was in place and that an ongoing challenge was to increase the uptake of these interviews;
- further clarity was sought and provided on how strengthening staff structures and delivery of a budget recovery plan in relation to the Corran Ferry was expected to have a positive impact on workforce planning;
- the update on Building Maintenance apprentices provided in the report was welcomed particularly given the continued challenges in attracting trades staff to the Council;
- it was important there was a clear path beyond the entry route for graduates, apprentices and trainees within the Council so they were retained after completion of their courses and training;

- a point as to whether private contractors would have the same number of long-term absences as some Council services which might benefit from more favourable terms and conditions; it was explained that reducing absence rates was a particular focus for the Service and more detail was provided in the Service Performance report;
- the need for the Council to focus on addressing the reasons for its recruitment challenges and not to continue to reference Brexit as a contributory factor;
- information be provided on how many EU nationals had cited Brexit as a reason for leaving in their exit interviews and the number currently employed by the Council compared to pre-Brexit; and
- in relation to technology being a driver for change, the need for smarter working by ensuring the right tools, equipment, skills and training were in place for staff, particularly given the opportunities for more interaction with the public through the Council's new website.

The Committee **NOTED** the Place Cluster workforce planning progress report.

**7. Delivery Plan Monitoring & Progress Update - Reconfiguring our Asset Base & Net Zero, Energy, Investment & Innovation - Q4 25/26
Cunntas às Ùr mun Phlana Lìbhrigidh - R4 25/26**

There had been circulated Report No HP/16/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- an explanation was sought, and provided, that in building affordable housing to the minimum standards, the Council continued to build to a larger size than the private sector and complied with the Scottish Government's housing for varying needs space standards;
- concern at the loss of the Terra Tracker project, this having been a valuable service to Members and officers; in terms of the lessons learned, this formed part of the project closure process and a report would be brought to a future Committee on this matter;
- the ongoing work to identify sites for housing development in rural areas be welcomed on the basis that small scale developments made a significant difference to rural communities;
- the potential to engage with small housing developers to reduce the high build costs in rural areas;
- in regard to the above, a range of alternative build and construction options were being considered to reduce build costs in rural areas and make it more cost effective for manufacturers;
- issues in relation to long term empty properties where the owner would not engage with the Council despite the time and effort officers invested in seeking to bring these properties back into use;
- an update was sought, and provided, on progress with the conversion of an older part of Council Headquarters, Inverness into affordable flats, the project currently being on hold due to the prohibitive costs of the works required to this listed building; any proposed change to this position would be subject to Committee approval;

- concern at the lack of electricity supply for housing developments on the east side of Inverness and whether this would impact on the building of affordable homes; it was explained that SSEN's target for upgrading the network was 2029 and in terms of development, the Council was working towards that date and continued to apply pressure and have regular meetings with SSEN to have these connections at the earliest possible opportunity;
- the potential for the Council to repopulate the Town House, Inverness with its own services, reference being made to the loss of revenue to the Inverness Common Good Fund when the building had been vacated; it was confirmed that it would be helpful to have further discussions with Inverness Members on the Inverness asset review, including future use of this building and that the use of the Town House was a matter for the City of Inverness Area Committee;
- concern that Council tenants with solar panels installed on their properties, were not permitted a battery and any excess energy generated was fed back into the national grid to the benefit of suppliers with the tenant not able to apply for a Smart Export Guarantee; it was explained that policies to maximise the benefit of the energy generated for tenants were to be brought forward to future Committees, however due to the size of solar panels, it was unlikely they would generate a surplus of energy;
- confirmation that in terms of the Social Value Charter and in addition to SSEN, discussions were being held with renewable energy and other developers on legacy housing;
- in response to a query, further clarity that it was a requirement of new build developments to provide EV connection points for houses with provision being made in communal areas for flats;
- the potential for the Arm's Length External Organisation model for Mid-Market Rent to have wider involvement within the Housing Service;
- further information was sought, and provided, on key worker housing provision under the Mid-Market Rent model and an assurance the Service was actively seeking to purchase properties in areas with recruitment challenges due to housing and had good data on the location of key workers in Highland; and
- it would be helpful for Members to be circulated with a copy of the presentation given to the Highland Community Planning Partnership Annual Conference on the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment on the basis it covered many of the topics raised in discussion.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the Delivery Project updates provided in the report; and
- ii. that Members would be circulated with a copy of the presentation given to the Highland Community Planning Partnership Annual Conference on the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment.

**8. Service Performance Report Q4 1 January 2026 to 31 March 2026
Aithisg Coileanadh Seirbheis R4 1 Am Faoilleach gu 31 Màrt 2026**

There had been circulated Report No HP/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- confirmation was sought, and provided, that consideration would be given to the median days for absence also being presented in future reports given that some long term absences skewed the average figures;
- a point as to the number of absences due to accidents at work and the absence figures for staff working from home;
- concern in relation to performance in Quarter 4, on the response times for Service complaints and freedom of information requests; it was explained that the detail around performance in both areas was being considered and would be included in the next report to the Committee; and
- how to make more information readily available across the Council and on its website to reduce the number of freedom of information requests.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. performance information for the Housing and Property Service; and
- ii. change to Absence and Freedom of Information reporting to align with the Chief Officer structure.

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

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

10. Housing Development Initiatives Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais

Transparency Statement:- Mr R Cross declared a connection to this item as he lived beside the development at Rosskeen, Invergordon. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following discussion, Mr J Edmondson seconded by Mr M Prosser **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report with the exception of recommendation iii. being deferred until after the Council fully consulted Local Members and following which a report be brought back to the Committee.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair seconded by Ms S Atkin **MOVED** the recommendations detailed in the report.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 5 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 8 votes, with no abstentions. The **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

Motion:

Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mrs A MacLean, Mr M Prosser, Mr R Stewart.

Amendment:

Ms S Atkin, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Ms L Dundas, Mr L Fraser, Mrs J Hendry, Mr R Jones, Mr P Oldham.

Decision

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

The meeting was closed at 12.30pm.