The Highland Council
No. 1 2026/2027

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 14 May 2026 at 9.35am.

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

Present:

Ms S Atkin (am only)
Mr M Baird (Remote)
Mr C Ballance
Mr A Baxter (am only, Remote)
Dr C Birt
Mr R Bremner
Mr I Brown
Mr J Bruce
Mr M Cameron (Remote pm)
Mr S Cameron
Mrs I Campbell
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (am only, Remote)
Mr A Christie
Mrs M Cockburn
Mr S Coghill (Remote)
Ms T Collier (Remote)
Ms H Crawford
Mr R Cross
Ms L Dundas
Mr J Edmondson
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)
Mr D Fraser
Mr L Fraser
Mr R Gale
Ms C Gillies
Mr K Gowans
Mr J Grafton
Mr A Graham
Mr M Green
Mr D Gregg
Dr M Gregson
Mr R Gunn (Remote)
Mrs J Hendry (Remote am, present pm)
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)
Mr A Jarvie
Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)
Ms L Johnston
Mr R Jones
Mr S Kennedy
Ms E Knox
Ms L Kraft
Mr B Lobban
Mr P Logue (am only, Remote)
Ms M MacCallum (am only, Remote)
Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr S Mackie
Mr A MacKintosh
Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs A MacLean
Ms K MacLean (Remote)
Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr D Macpherson
Mr D McDonald
Ms J McEwan
Mr D Millar
Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mr P Oldham
Mrs M Paterson
Mr M Prosser (Remote)
Ms C Ramsay
Mrs M Reid (am only, Remote)
Mr M Reiss
Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Rosie (Remote)
Ms M Ross
Mrs L Saggers
Mr A Sinclair (am only, Remote)
Mr R Stewart
Ms K Willis (Remote)

In Attendance:

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive - People
Assistant Chief Executive – Place
Chief Officer – Corporate Finance

Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Chief Officer – Enterprise and Investment
Chief Officer - Facilities and Fleet Management
Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Joint Democratic Services Manager

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd and Mr W MacKay.

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

The Council **NOTED** the following Declaration of Interest:-

Item 4 – Mr P Oldham

The Council also **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 3 – Mr D Gregg
Item 4 – Ms C Ramsay
Items 6 and 7 – Mr J Edmondson
Item 15 (Motion 1) – Mrs B Jarvie

At this juncture, referring to the Scottish Parliament Election on 7 May 2026, the Convener congratulated those Members who had successfully been elected and expressed appreciation to those who had stood but had not quite reached the threshold.

3. Operational Delivery Plan Annual Progress Report 2025/26
Aithisg Adhartais Bhliadhnail Plana an Lìbhrigidh Obrachail

Transparency Statement: Mr D Gregg declared a connection to this item 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/11/26 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- attention was drawn to the positive results in the report, including that 67% of projects and 86% of milestones had either been completed or were on target; the forecasted savings of over £12m; and the return of £1.82 for every pound of additional investment. It was also welcomed that over 90% of the posts funded by the agreed investment to support the Delivery Plan had been filled, providing existing staff with important new skills and experience whilst also attracting new talent into the organisation. Other highlights were the person-centred focus, including the reestablishment of short breaks in Caithness and Inverness, now supporting up to eight families within each area; the Council's Modern Apprenticeship programme remaining strong with 138 places for 2025/26; reconfiguration of the Council's asset base; the successful leveraging of £7.2m in

external funding towards energy efficiency works for Council properties; and the progress in respect of Investors in People and income generation;

- whilst the good work and outcomes associated with the Delivery Plan were acknowledged, concern was expressed regarding the Adult Social Care Workstream, which was RAG-rated Red. It was highlighted that, in 2024, there had been a reduction of £12.6m in the Adult Social Care budget, alongside the establishment of a £20m reserve for a transition fund and the introduction of a new joint strategic plan. In 2025, £3m of the previous year's budget reductions had been reversed, and the overspend on Adult Social Care had been acknowledged to be approximately £18m, rising to an estimated £26m in 2026 despite an additional £7m of investment. There was an increasing elderly population in Highland, people were struggling to get care at home, there were insufficient care home beds, recruitment within the care sector was challenging, and delayed discharge from hospital remained at an unacceptably high level. Little to no progress had been made in addressing these issues or shifting the balance of care, and a request was made for a report to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee tracking investment and interventions over the years and setting out the Administration's plan to ensure that robust, sustainable services were place to give older people in Highland the care they needed;
- in response, it was emphasised that the Delivery Plan was about more than the delivery of savings and was intended to transform the way the Council and its partners operated and how services would be delivered in the future. It was highlighted some of the key achievements in the report, including the expansion of the Handyperson Scheme; the reestablishment of short breaks in Caithness and Inverness, as previously mentioned; the growth in kinship care; and the replacement of the case management system from CareFirst to Mosaic, which would save time, reduce paperwork and minimise risk. In addition, progress had been made in expanding community-based and preventative support services across Adult Social Care, but there was still much to be done. Shifting the balance of care in Scotland, which had been a policy focus since the mid-1990s, remained challenging as it involved effectively reconfiguring an entire system while it continued to operate under constant pressure. Transformation was also challenging as there was a tendency to protect existing services rather than investing in a different future. However, there were indications of real change in service delivery by the Council and its partners. Matters relating to Adult Social Care were also reported to the Highland Council/NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee, and it was confirmed the request for a report to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee would be considered. The importance of forward-looking, preventative risk management, with a focus on keeping people safe at home, strengthening local support networks and using technology to reduce reliance on acute services was emphasised. It was stated that focusing only on items that were rated Red or Amber risked failing to recognise the overall direction of travel and the achievements that had been delivered. Thanks were expressed to Council, NHS, third sector and, importantly, unpaid carers, whose contribution in difficult circumstances was recognised, and a plea was made that all Highland MSPs support a minimum wage of at least £15 per hour for carers and all staff involved in social care services;
- further to the above, a number of other Members raised concerns regarding Adult Social Care and supported the request for a report to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee. The points raised included the need to enable people to live well for longer; the importance of not reducing support for older people, particularly those with complex needs; the need for better communication and networking within communities to ensure that elderly people did not deteriorate

following an incident; the need for increased investment in Adult Social Care; unacceptably long waits for care at home; over-reliance on families to provide care; inadequate pay acting as a disincentive to entering the care sector, and the associated need for a career pathway and pay structure review; the need for greater third sector involvement, at an early stage, in discussions regarding care provision, and for third sector organisations to offer a range of services; the importance of ongoing financial support for initiatives such as lunch clubs and community transport; the need for targeted action and evaluation through Community Partnerships, as well as increased funding at ward level; that Adult Services were not solely for older people but for all adults with disabilities or support needs; concern regarding the use of euphemistic language in reports; the distinction between family care and professional care; that attracting carers depended not only on pay but on support and a strong sense of purpose; the need to ensure that services were tailored to meet individual needs; the importance of prevention and public health investment; the opportunity to work with NHS Highland and the third sector on the Population Health Framework; and the need to focus on neighbourhood-based care models;

- given the importance of the Adult Social Care Workstream, and the requirement to deliver £28m of savings, it was suggested that its inclusion within the Person Centred Solutions Portfolio, the only portfolio with three projects RAG-rated Red, did not provide a strong foundation for success. In addition, the Adult Social Care Workstream was being reconfigured from two projects to four, and it was queried whether it would be more appropriate for it to be established as a separate seventh portfolio;
- the successful re-tendering of the Handyperson Scheme was welcomed, and information was sought, and provided, on the areas in which the scheme was being taken up and how its success was being evidenced and measured. It was also queried what role GPs, District Nurses and Community Link Workers had in proactively referring individuals to the scheme, and where information on the scheme could be accessed. In relation to the latter, it was emphasised that not everyone could access information online, and it was important to ensure that those requiring help and support were not digitally excluded. Reference was also made to the Care and Repair Service, which was on a much more secure footing in terms of funding than it had been previously. Both the Handyperson Scheme and the Care and Repair Service were vital components of Adult Social Care, enabling people to live safely at home for longer and to be discharged from hospital more quickly, and it was necessary to protect them;
- the new Nairn Academy was on target for completion and handover for the new school year in August, and thanks were expressed to officers and the contractor, Balfour Beatty, for their hard work in that regard;
- attention was drawn to the reporting schedule at Appendix 5 of the report, which indicated that projects would be reported to the relevant strategic committee for scrutiny at least twice a year. In addition, Members were encouraged to monitor the real-time data that was available on PRMS;
- in relation to the Net Zero Energy, Investments and Innovations Portfolio, attention was drawn to sections 8.3 and 8.4 of the report which indicated that the year-end forecast was only 39% of the savings and income target and 20% of the investment target. Appendix 1a of the report showed that the Energy Efficient Council Programme was forecast to achieve 66% of its annual target, the Solar PV Council Estate Programme 33%, and the Solar PV Commercial Estate Project none of its target. Appendix 1b indicated that the INV/5 Investment Pipeline had a budget of £2m, none of which had been spent. Information was sought, and

provided, on the issues that had led to the current position; when the Longman Solar PV and Torvean Battery Storage projects were anticipated to come on stream and whether grid connections remained in place for these projects; what would be required to accelerate grid connections; and, given the highly competitive nature of the battery storage market, whether it was considered prudent to continue to pursue the Torvean Battery Storage project when five other projects in the portfolio were RAG-rated Amber. It was added that Inverness was the only area with sufficient firefighting resources should there be a fire at a battery storage site;

- given the anticipated construction boom in Highland, the importance of the proposed Skills Academy being operational as soon as possible was emphasised. The Chief Executive confirmed that a proposition in that regard would be brought to the Full Council for consideration in due course;
- disappointment was expressed regarding the closure of Avonlea Children's Care Home in Wick;
- not all young people were academically inclined, and it would be beneficial to see an increase in the number of apprenticeships to meet the need for trades such as plumbing, electrical work and joinery;
- the need for more age-friendly housing and communities, as well as more Fit Homes, was emphasised. There was also a need for fit-for-purpose sheltered housing, with warden support for those who required it, which would free up larger homes. It was suggested that sheltered housing should form part of every new housing development, and that the Council should have greater influence over housing developments to ensure that they met local needs;
- there was a need for more day centres, not only for elderly people but for young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) who were transitioning from school. It was added that the availability of such services was a key consideration for families with children with ASN when deciding whether to move to an area, and that improved provision would help to attract families to Highland to live and work;
- the work of the Climate Change and Energy Team (CCET) in progressing the Net Zero Programme was welcomed. However, concern was expressed that cross-service engagement and delivery alignment remained a challenge. The strategic report that had come to the Council in March 2026 had highlighted the need for strong leadership and cooperation, and it was hoped that the Administration would commit to continuing to work actively to enable the cross-service engagement that was critical for the delivery of the Net Zero Strategy;
- an update was sought on the timeline for improving recycling infrastructure across schools in Highland, which was desperately needed and had been one of the asks of the Highland Youth Parliament at the recent meeting of the Climate Change Committee, and on the status of the waste disposal site that was being developed in the An Aird car park in Fort William. The Assistant Chief Executive – Place highlighted that a report on the Council's Waste Strategy was due to be presented to the Communities and Place Committee on 21 May, and he undertook to ensure that the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations would provide the updates requested;
- Carers Week 2026 was scheduled to take place from 8 to 14 June 2026, and the Carers Roadshow was due to take place on 2 June 2026. The value of unpaid carers to the care sector was emphasised, both in terms of delaying or preventing the need for families to access Adult Social Care services and in monetary terms. It was further highlighted that, in 2025, if unpaid carers had been remunerated, the cost would have been approximately £15.9bn, compared to £17bn spent on the NHS in Scotland in the same year. It was added that Self Directed Support

(SDS) in Highland operated differently for children and adults, and a plea was made to streamline services to avoid a significant drop-off when young people transitioned into Adult Services. There was also an issue in that individuals were now more likely to receive a budget to arrange their own care (SDS Option 1) rather than being provided with care workers (SDS Option 3). Finally, it was highlighted that unpaid carers were disproportionately affected by poverty as they often had to give up employment or incur additional costs to provide care, and that any measures to support them were therefore incredibly important. Another Member added that family carers in Ireland were remunerated, with a single carer receiving €1,000 per week and a couple receiving €2,000 per week. Whilst this appeared to be a significant amount, it was highlighted that the cost of an extended stay in a hospital bed was a minimum of £2,500 and that this funding could be more effectively directed towards supporting carers. It was therefore suggested that the Council consider the model implemented in Ireland and raise it with the Scottish Government;

- in relation to the Income Generation Portfolio, the savings of over £13 per pound of expenditure were commended;
- with regard to the Campervan/Motorhome project, the initial scepticism expressed by a number of Members appeared to have been warranted as the projected income was only 3% of the annual target of £250k, and it was queried what lessons had been learned from the project. Information was also requested on the income to date in 2026;
- the report indicated that approximately 12% of projects were RAG-rated Red yet only 2.82% of milestones were rated Red, and clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the apparent lack of correlation between the two;
- concern was expressed regarding the impact of the Net Zero agenda on the public purse at a time when many people were struggling to pay their bills. Feedback from some constituents was that they would prefer the Council to do less but do it better, with a focus on core services such as road maintenance and waste collection. With reference to the trial venture whereby two Council vehicles were being powered by Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) fuel, it was highlighted that HVO cost 5p per litre more than diesel. Similarly, in relation to the Corran Ferry, it was stated that people prioritised a reliable ferry service over an electric vessel, and reference was made to Calmac's hybrid ferry, MV Hallaig, which was reported to be operating solely on diesel due to the prohibitive cost of replacing its battery following a failure. Other Members also supported the use of diesel, emphasising that modern diesel vehicles had improved significantly in terms of emissions and environmental performance. However, it was emphasised that the only available funding streams for a new Corran Ferry were for an electric vessel;
- with regard to renewable electricity generation, concerns were raised regarding the Council's Social Value Charter which, it was suggested, had resulted in communities hosting renewable developments being shortchanged of funding that was rightfully theirs;
- thanks were expressed to all officers who had contributed to the complex report, which provided a clear line of sight for the transformation of the Council. Members welcomed the progress that had been made and the improvements in reporting, which enabled better oversight and scrutiny. Project implementation had also improved, and particular reference was made to the new pensions and payroll system which had been delivered on time and within budget and was leading to efficiencies;

- in relation to SSEN's commitment to deliver 500 permanent homes, clarification was sought as to whether this referred to the construction of 500 new homes that would subsequently transfer into Council ownership;
- information was sought, and provided, on the Demonstrator Projects referred to in Appendix 1a of the report in relation to the Single Public Estate project;
- with reference to the successful leveraging of £7.2m in external funding to support energy efficiency works for Council properties, the age of the Council's housing stock and the impact of rising fuel bills on tenants were highlighted, and it was hoped that further external funding could be attracted in the future to supplement constrained Council budgets;
- section 9 of the report set out the real and measurable progress being made, and a number of examples were highlighted including the Council's commitment of £1.6m to Workforce North, strengthened by seed funding of £2m from Skills Development Scotland, which showed clear confidence and direction of ambition; the successful launch of the Highland Employer Charter, to which more than 20 organisations had signed up across a range of sectors, signalling growing collaboration between the public and private sectors and the shared commitment to addressing skill shortages and developing local talent; the innovative Accelerated Degree Pathway developed in partnership with UHI Inverness; and the Council's in-house bus service, which was delivering more reliable and accessible transport options for communities, thereby supporting economic participation, education and social inclusion across the region. Many of these achievements had been made possible through strong collaboration, both internally and with external partners, and the Council was building relationships not only to support stakeholders but to actively contribute to the development of more sustainable and resilient communities across Highland. This represented not only a whole-Council approach but a whole-Highland approach, focused on aligning efforts, strengthening resilience and creating the conditions to attract further co-investment; and
- Council funding remained under significant pressures, and Members acknowledged the efforts of Council officers and staff, who continued to respond with innovation, creativity and determination, to develop new ways of delivering for communities.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **APPROVED** the progress of the Operational Delivery Plan;
ii. **APPROVED** the adjustments to the Operational Delivery Plan which were provided through section 9 of the report and Appendix 4 to the report;
iii. **APPROVED** the reporting schedule for 26/27 at Appendix 5 to the report; and
iv. **NOTED** that project reports would continue to be submitted to strategic committees for scrutiny.

4. Highland Housing Challenge - Update
Dùbhlan Taigheadais na Gàidhealtachd – Fios às Ùr

Declaration of Interest: Mr P Oldham made a Declaration of Interest in respect of this item as he believed he had a connection to this Item in respect of the proposed Masterplan Consent Areas (MCAs) given the potential involvement of a developer who had raised concerns around him in the context of MCAs.

He believed the connection might currently amount to an interest and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting for that part of the meeting.

Transparency Statement: Ms C Ramsay declared a connection to this item as a family member owned a small private development business. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- this was one of the most significant programmes for the Council given that housing underpinned the delivery of core public services, economic growth and the needs and wellbeing of people in Highland;
- the need to use all available tools to increase housing supply in response to the scale of demand and high number of applicants on the Highland Housing Register; this required public, private and community sectors to work together and the Council had a key role;
- the critical need for affordable housing given the difficulties younger people experienced with the current housing landscape, and implications for the Highland demographic;
- the ethos of Masterplan Consent Areas (MCAs) was to accelerate the planning process and deliver developments at scale and pace, based on a principle of co-production between the Council, communities and developer;
- the public had been assured at the MCA consultation events that their feedback would be reported to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for more in-depth discussion;
- the fact MCAs had been incorporated into a report to Council that dealt with other elements of the Highland Housing Challenge created public apprehension and mistrust, and reference was made to the importance of developments having community support;
- the proposed Essich Road (Inverness) MCA site was remote, beyond the edge of and not a natural settlement boundary for Inverness with access by way of a single track road with no pavements; the site was absent from the local development plan and deficient on a range of NPF4 policies including 20 minute neighbourhoods and it lacked community support;
- concern at the disruption to existing householders in widening the access road, road safety issues associated with a junction off Essich Road and suitability of having traffic lights on the Southern Distributor Road; there were uncertainties around active travel and bus service provision, a lack infrastructure, with schools being close to or at capacity, no services, amenities, or health facilities, the site was prone to flooding, and there would be a loss of agricultural green space and impact on wildlife;
- specific concerns in relation to the proposed Ardersier MCA, the community having voiced its dissent against the proposal from the outset with a lack of trust in the Council or developer; this was against a backdrop of significant challenges and delays that had been experienced in terms of the development brief for the area with major housing developments, Council and developer commitments,

and lack of infrastructure, schools, health and other services to support these large scale developments;

- the Essich Road (Inverness) and Ardersier MCAs were therefore contrary to the ethos of building communities and proposing that neither should be progressed to the next stage to allow for further discussions with communities;
- an assurance that MCAs considered not only housing but infrastructure and service requirements to build communities and both the proposed Essich Road (Inverness) and Ardersier MCAs included community use sites and new infrastructure;
- the opportunity to bring forward more MCAs in rural areas, noting the Embo MCA was transformational and supported by the community;
- an assurance that community input would be embedded in the preparation of schemes through a Memorandum of Understanding between the local community and development partners and attendance at monthly design meetings; there would also be a requirement for a Good Neighbour Agreement to be incorporated within each MCA scheme;
- if community issues around MCAs were insurmountable, then ultimately this would be a matter for the Council's Planning Applications Committees to make the final decision on whether or not to approve the schemes;
- concern at the ability to provide health services in new developments given the pressures on NHS Highland's budget;
- the need to ensure MCAs were not overly prescriptive in the design of houses;
- the Council and developers benefited from having time, experience and money and concern as to how communities would be supported in terms of their rights and wishes;
- if Members agreed to move to the next stage of the process, the Council would appoint an independent master planner to pull together the views of the Council, communities and developers. An important element of this would be to support communities in making their representations;
- there was a need to apply a moratorium on houses within MCAs being used as short term lets;
- concern was expressed that Members were being asked to discuss an item that was quasi-judicial and in future MCAs be presented as a stand-alone report so there was no risk of breach of conduct;
- representations should be made to the Scottish Government to make legislative changes to accelerate the planning process in relation to housing development;
- MCA sites would be used to justify the growth opportunities to develop infrastructure and amenities for new developments and provide attractive places in which to live. They would also help retain the population, attract inward investment and people to the Highlands and enhance the quality of life;
- it was hoped the Highland Mid-Market Homes model would help address the gap between social housing and affordability of private rents;
- the Empty Homes Fund demonstrated how the Council could use its fiscal flexibilities to deliver on some of the housing challenges and welcoming the initiative agreed as part for the Budget for 2026/27;
- it was encouraging that properties in Highland had been purchased and were available for keyworkers under the Scottish Government's Rural Keyworker Scheme;

- there was a need for the Council to have discussions with other agencies such as NHS Highland and Police Scotland around housing for key workers;
- there were challenges in attracting teaching staff in some areas, and potential for them to be considered as key workers and a structured system of mid-market rent availability prioritised;
- the proposal to set up an Arm's Length External Organisation (ALEO) that would operate as a separate legal and commercial entity and be independently managed would be welcomed;
- in response to a query, further clarity that consideration had not been given to acquiring a target company as an alternative to setting up an ALEO as done with the Council's in house bus service, the focus being on best practice and learning from other local authorities;
- further clarity was required around the governance and company structure of the ALEO and whether local Members would sit on its Board and continue to have the ability to intervene on behalf of tenants;
- a similar approach to High Life Highland be progressed for the ALEO with scrutiny at a strategic committee and Member representation on the Board;
- a note of caution was expressed that the Mid-Market Rent model might result in displacement of social housing into mid-market rent and deliver a relatively small number of houses surrounded by a complex structure that would not make a significant difference to the housing challenge. There were also concerns around the level of overheads and borrowing required in respect of this model;
- there was concern that private residential tenancies under the Mid-Market Rent model would not be secure and rents significantly higher than social housing rents;
- there was also concern a voluntary grant approach under the Empty Homes Fund might not address the most persistent cases and that a stronger more targeted and joined up approach was required;
- further clarity was sought, and provided, on the specific definitions of empty homes and second homes and that it was anticipated that around 20 to 30 grants from the Empty Homes Fund would be awarded over the course of a year based on the experience of other local authorities; the scheme would be monitored carefully and amended as necessary going forward;
- there was potential to make up-front payments from the Fund given those being targeted by this initiative might not be able to afford the renovations required and that some contractors required advanced payments. It was explained that in terms of the use of public monies, other local authorities paid the grant at the end of the process;
- an assurance was sought that the potential for funding to be offered as an interest free loan to be repaid when the empty property was sold would be considered as part of the next phase of the scheme and brought to Members for consideration;
- there was potential use of the Fund to extend empty properties to make larger family homes and the opportunities to convert empty buildings into houses/flats to accommodate those in the health care sector;
- the need was highlighted for new housing development to deliver more age friendly and intergenerational housing, suitable for all stages of life and the action being taken to encourage and support downsizing and for people to remain in their communities;
- strong governance and transparency was essential in moving forward with more complex partnership arrangements and delivery models, to ensure public confidence and ongoing Member oversight as projects progressed;

- whether a significant proportion of the income generated by Council Tax for second homes would continue to be allocated to the General Fund rather than the Highland Housing Challenge, thereby subsidising the reducing level of central government funding received over a number of years;
- representations needed to be made to the Scottish Government to have the local connection rule reinstated to ensure the Council was only obligated to house people who had a connection to the Highlands;
- there were opportunities to increase the proportion of affordable social housing required as part of new housing developments going forward;
- concern was raised at the lack of consultation by officers with local Members in regard to a specific housing development in Invergordon involving a significant and complex process and that appropriate community consultation and support had not been achieved in this case;
- welcoming the progress made by external organisations such as Scottish and Southern Energy (SSEN) to deliver legacy housing and sites for future housing development was welcomed;
- further information was sought on the arrangements for SSEN housing in Muir of Ord, the number of workers, if their families were to be accommodated and the impact on local schools;
- further information was required on the detail of the legacy arrangements between SSEN and the Council, noting communities deserved to be provided with this information. It was explained that details were not yet available on these issues and would be brought to Members in future;
- a significant proportion of houses were underoccupied by one elderly tenant and the potential to develop communities of one-bedroom properties, with a hub and wardens on the basis, would also deliver benefits in terms of social isolation and adult social care; and
- more housing development would help support major economic projects in Highland, reverse depopulation, allow working adults to remain in their communities and strengthen the workforce, improve health and wellbeing, reduce medical costs, regenerate the town centres, and provide more fluidity and efficiency in the housing market.

Following summing up, Ms S Atkin seconded by Ms L Niven **MOVED** the recommendations detailed in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mr A MacKintosh, **MOVED** that the Council:-

i. **Agreed** the Empty Homes Challenge Fund, as set out at section 6 and appendices 2 and 3, for implementation by end May 2026;
ii. **Agreed** the approach being developed and progress made to develop Highland Mid-Market Homes and that a further report will be brought to Committee before the end of the calendar year, outlining the final proposed structure, governance arrangements and financial model, with a view to establishing Highland Mid-Market Homes as an Arms-Length Organisation for implementation in April 2027;
iii. **Noted** the results of the initial public engagement phase of the Masterplan consent areas at Appendix 5 and that in response to the representations received, that the scale of the Embo development proposal has been reduced and amended as defined at Appendix 6;

iv. **Agreed** to progress a Proposed Masterplan Consent Area Scheme (PMCAS) for the Embo MCA site;
v. **Agree** that the PMCAS be led by the Council but co-authored by the respective developer partner and representatives of the relevant, local community;
vi. **Note** the updates outlined in section 9 and detailed within Appendix 7, against the Highland Housing Challenge Partnership Action Plan; and
vii. **Agree** a Round Table will be held with developers before the end of June, to discuss opportunities to accelerate development in the Highlands.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 38 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 29 votes, with 1 abstention. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

Motion:
Ms S Atkin, Mr C Birt, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr J Bruce, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Cameron, 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, Mr A Jarvie, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Mr S Kennedy, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross Mr R Stewart.

Amendment:
Mr C Ballance, Mr S Cameron, Mr A Baxter, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mrs H Crawford, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mrs J McEwan, Mr M Prosser, Ms C Ramsay, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Ms L Saggers, Mr A Sinclair, Ms K Willis.

Abstentions:
Mrs B Jarvie.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **AGREED** the Empty Homes Challenge Fund, as set out at section 6 and appendices 2 and 3 of the report, for implementation by end May 2026;
ii. **AGREED** the approach being developed and progress made to develop Highland Mid-Market Homes and that a further report would be brought to Committee before the end of the calendar year, outlining the final proposed structure, governance arrangements and financial model, with a view to establishing Highland Mid-Market Homes as an Arms-Length Organisation for implementation in April 2027;
iii. **NOTED** the results of the initial public engagement phase of the Masterplan consent areas at Appendix 5 to the report and that in response to the representations received, that the scale of each development proposal had been reduced and amended as defined at Appendix 6 to the report;
iv. **AGREED** to progress a Proposed Masterplan Consent Area Scheme (PMCAS) for each of the three MCA sites;

v. **AGREED** that each PMCAS be led by the Council but co-authored by the respective developer partner and representatives of the relevant, local community;
vi. **NOTED** the updates outlined in section 9 of the report and detailed within Appendix 7 to the report, against the Highland Housing Challenge Partnership Action Plan; and
vii. **AGREED** a Round Table would be held with developers before the end of June 2026, to discuss opportunities to accelerate development in the Highlands.

5. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

The Council **AGREED** to **RESOLVE** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for Items 6 and 7 on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

6. Public Transport Proposal
Moladh Còmhdhail Phoblaich

Transparency Statement: Mr J Edmondson declared a connection to this item as a member of a local transport forum. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated to Members only Confidential Report No. HC/13/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Decision

Following detailed discussion, the Council **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

7. Bus Operating Model
Modail Obrach Bhusaichean

Transparency Statement: Mr J Edmondson declared a connection to this item as a member of a local transport forum. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated to Members only Confidential Report No. HC/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Decision

Following detailed discussion, the Council **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

8. UK City of Culture Bid 2029
Cultar Cathair-Bhaile na RA 2029

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

Mr J Welsh, Chief Officer - Enterprise and Investment, gave a presentation on the opportunity to submit a bid for UK City of Culture 2029. It was explained that Inverness and Highland had been longlisted as one of nine bids and that the submission was distinctive as the only large scale, non-urban bid. It was emphasised that the proposal covered the whole Highland area and provided an opportunity to celebrate arts and culture across the region. Reference was made to the potential economic benefits, including increased visitor numbers and longer-term uplift, alongside the opportunity to strengthen partnerships with a lasting legacy regardless of the outcome of the bid.

It was further outlined that the Council would act as Lead Partner and Accountable Body, supported by a dedicated bid team led by an experienced Bid Director. An information event hosted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport was scheduled for early June 2026, which would inform the next stage of development and it was proposed that a Cultural Assembly be convened to support engagement with the cultural sector. Members were advised that the timetable for submission was challenging, with the full bid required by 10 August 2026.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- strong support was expressed for the bid, with Members describing it as a significant opportunity to promote the Highlands and showcase the area nationally and internationally;
- it was emphasised that the bid must represent the whole Highland area, with repeated reference made to ensuring that communities across towns, rural areas and islands were included and benefited;
- Members highlighted the potential for considerable economic benefit, including increased tourism, global interest and investment, with comparisons drawn to the substantial gains experienced by previous host locations;
- the bid provided an opportunity to promote both Inverness and the wider Highlands as a destination, with reference made to existing global interest in the area’s landscape, heritage and attractions;
- support was expressed for a collaborative, cross-party approach, with Members stressing the need to present a unified position in order to maximise the prospects of success;
- the programme should be fully inclusive, ensuring participation from all communities and reflecting the diversity of the population, including those who had moved to the Highlands more recently;
- the bid should represent the full breadth of Highland culture, including contemporary arts, literature, performance, music and creative industries and not be limited to traditional imagery;
- engagement with national and international audiences was highlighted, including the opportunity to connect with the wider Scottish and global diaspora, alongside the importance of community involvement in shaping the bid through artists, young people and grassroots organisations;
- Members drew on examples from their own areas to demonstrate how culture and heritage activity had already supported local regeneration and international engagement, recognising the potential to build on this at a regional level;
- it was suggested that engagement activity, including the proposed Cultural Assembly, should consider being hosted in locations across the Highlands to reflect the regional nature of the bid;

- the scale of delivering a year-long programme across a large and dispersed geography and the need to ensure that activity remained realistic and deliverable across all communities was emphasised;
- reference was made to the importance of managing expectations and ensuring that smaller communities were not overlooked;
- questions were raised regarding funding arrangements, including the likelihood of securing match funding and the potential requirement to utilise reserves if necessary; and
- overall, there was consensus that the process of developing the bid would deliver meaningful benefits in its own right, including strengthening partnerships, enhancing cultural strategy and increasing the profile of the Highlands.

At this juncture, the Council **AGREED** to **RESOLVE** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the remainder of this Item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 8 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **NOTED** the update on the UK City of Culture 2029 application process and timetable;
ii. **NOTED** that the Highland Council would act as Lead Partner and Accountable Body for the bid;
iii. **NOTED** the appointment of a Bid Director under an exemption to Contract Standing Order 3.10, as set out in Paragraph 9.4 of the report;
iv. **AGREED** that a Cultural Assembly be convened in early summer 2026 as part of the preparation of the full UK City of Culture 2029 application;
v. **AGREED** that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Convener, Leader and Leader of the Opposition of the Council, to undertake the actions required to implement and progress delivery of the Inverness-Highland UK City of Culture 2029 bid. This would include (but were not limited to):-
    a. appointment of any additional external support to prepare the bid;
    b. establish appropriate governance arrangements;
    c. approval of expenditure relating to the development of the bid; and
    d. submission of final application.

9. Timetable of Meetings
Clàr-ama Choinneamhan

The Council **AGREED** the:-

i. Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee, due to be held on 3 August 2026, be rescheduled to 31 August 2026; and
ii. Joint meetings of the North and South Planning Applications Committee be held on 9 and 10 September 2026.

10. Membership of Committees, etc
Ballarachd Chomataidhean, msaa

The Council **AGREED**:-

i. Mr K Rosie be appointed to the Planning Review Body;
ii. Mrs M Reid be appointed to the Inverness Cromarty Firth Green Free Port Monitoring Group;
iii. Ms M MacCallum be replaced on the Community and Place and Housing and Property Committees by Ms C Ramsay and Mrs A MacLean respectively; and
iv. Mr A Baxter be replaced on the Corporate Resources and Economy and Infrastructure Committees by Mr P Logue and Mr A Christie respectively.

11. Deeds Executed
Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

It was **NOTED** that a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 26 March 2026 was available on the Council's website.

12. Confirmation of Minutes
Daingneachadh a' Gheàrr-chunntais

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the Minutes of Meeting of the Council held on 26 March 2026 as contained in the Volume which were **APPROVED**.

13. Minutes of Meetings of Committees
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan Chomataidhean

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:

Meeting	**Date**
Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee	27 April 2026
Caithness Committee	27 April 2026
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh Committee	27 April 2026

The Minutes, having been moved and seconded were **APPROVED**.

The Minutes of Meetings not included in the Volume were as follows:

i. **NOTED** - Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 16 December 2025 (approved by the Board on 17 March 2026).

14. Question Time
Am Ceiste

The following Questions had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance:-

Public Question

1. Mr R Polson

To the Leader of the Council

What steps are Highland Council taking to ensure a range of intergenerational housing is provided - including bungalows - in all new Council and private housing developments in the Region?

The response had been circulated.

Members Questions

1. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

Please could the Leader provide information regarding violent incidents or incidents where there has been deemed a threat of risk to persons wellbeing, that have been recorded in our schools in the Academic years 2023/24, 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 (to the Easter break if available). Please can the answer provide data as to what level of establishment (Primary or secondary etc) the incident occurred at, the number of incidents by establishment type, whether the incident related to pupils only or pupils and teachers and any other information that is relevant to answer and inform the question.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, with on average 3000 incidents reported each year, how does this compare with other local authorities within our family group.

In response, the Leader agreed to circulate a response to the Council.

2. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

On the 14 May 2025 the following email was sent to all Members sent on behalf of the Chief Executive.

"Dear Members,

Member Service Standards - Member Correspondence and Enquiries

I would like to take this opportunity to follow up on concerns and issues raised at the recent Members Spring event held on 24 April 2025. In particular, the delay in responses from officers or lack of response to Members enquires and/or requests for information.

We recognise the frustration this causes and have therefore introduced a new approach to ensure that there are clear expectations on timescales for responses to Members. This is also applicable to staff. This aligns with our new approach recently agreed within the ***Customer Experience Strategy*** *to have clear customer service standards for the organisation.*

The service standards for Member response are as follows:

- *General question/enquiry – response to be provided within* ***5 working days***
- *Complex enquiry/question – response to be provided within* ***20 working days***

Please note that the definition of a complex enquiry is one where analysis is needed or there is a need to gather information from a range of sources before this can be provided. If staff believe that the enquiry is complex, they have been advised that they must communicate this to the individual Member within 5 working days along with a date for the final response.

Definition
This approach is for general questions or requests for information members may have for officers. Please note that this process does not replace the normal process for complaints/requests for service that are in place. It is important that Members should continue to log complaints/requests for service through the Council's website forms, or signpost constituents to this route or the service centre/service points if they are unable to do so online. However, where no response has been received and this has been escalated to you, raising with officers in this manner is quite acceptable and in line with current practice.

Escalation process
Should you be unhappy with either the response provided, the classification of the general/complex enquiry or that the officer concerned has not responded, then this should be escalated to the line manager of the officer concerned in the first instance. Should this response be unsatisfactory, this should be escalated to the relevant area manager/service lead.

This approach has been shared across staff teams."

A year on from the email Please can the Leader advise what progress has been made to achieve the targets set in the email and how this has been measured?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

15. Notice of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid

Transparency Statement: Mrs B Jarvie declared a connection to Motion 1 as a member of the Nairn Book and Arts Club. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

The following Notice of Motion had been received by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance:-

Motion 1 - Basic Income for Artists

This Council notes:-

- The importance of the Creative and Cultural sectors in the Highland and Islands, in the context of an estimated overall Scottish Gross Value Added to the economy of £7,711m per annum. The Scottish Government *A Culture Strategy for Scotland* emphasises that "Out creative industries make a unique and vital contribution to society and the economy."
- Following this Strategy document, a Culture Fair Work Taskforce was established. This Taskforce agreed that exploration of a Pilot Basic Income for Artists Scheme should be a next step for Scotland.
- Even in a big and respected sector, many artists have to juggle their creative work with various sources of income to make ends meet. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation showed creatives' incomes to be well below what is needed to survive in the UK.
- A basic income can enable artists and creative arts workers to focus on their creative work, without having to enter into employment in other sectors to sustain themselves.
- Ireland's pilot *Basic Income for Artists* scheme, for three years from 2021, proved very successful: for every €1 invested, €1.39 was contributed to the wider economy through administrative and welfare savings, social impacts, and tax generated. And artists were able to devote more time to creative activity. Over €100 million was generated in social and economic benefits, according to the Irish Government's Department for Culture, Communication & Sport.

Accordingly, the Council agrees:-

- To ask the new Scottish Government to liaise with Highland Council, sectoral stakeholders and across Government Departments to facilitate a Pilot *Basic Income for Artists* Scheme in Highland. This will serve to identify viability, resource, cost, and consequences, with potential national rollout in mind.
- This would make a clear statement of support for our creative and cultural sector, especially in light of Inverness-Highland being one of 9 locations longlisted to be UK City of Culture in 2029. This ambition reflects our pride in our city and region's heritage and creativity.

Signed: Dr M Gregson Mr C Ballance

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

The meeting ended at 5.05pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee** held **remotely** on Monday 11 May 2026, at 10.00 am.

Present:
Sarah Atkin
Sinclair Coghill
Tamala Collier
Richard Cross
Laura Dundas
John Edmondson
Lyndsey Johnston
Connie Ramsay
Maureen Ross

Participating Officials:
Mr P Tomalin, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms C MacIver, Community Development Manager
Mr A Byrne, Principal Housing Officer
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Community Regeneration
Ms L Mackay, Project Officer, Economy & Regeneration
Ms A Tanner, Community Heritage Officer
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead for Housing Investment/Building Maintenance
Mr J MacKay, Amenity Services Manager
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Mr R Robertson, Project Coordinator, Bereavement Services
Ms P Betts, Common Good Fund Officer, Legal & Governance
Mr M Hilton, Project Manager, Energy Investment & Innovation
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in Attendance:
Mr D McAulay, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (Item 3)

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

Ms L Johnston in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Ms M MacCallum.

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

Item 3 - Ms C Ramsay
Item 4 – Mrs M Ross, Mr S Coghill

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

Declaration of Interest – Ms C Ramsay declared an interest in this item as an on-call paid fire fighter and left the meeting for this item.

There was circulated Report No BIER/13/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- an explanation was sought and provided on the process for when a fire safety visit triggered enforcement action, which was generally in relation to commercial premises not complying with legislation following the provision of appropriate support and guidance;
- increased availability, despite fewer staff, at Fortrose Fire Station was largely due to the introduction of improved software which provided more in-depth analysis of availability, and facilitated more targeted resourcing;
- the definition of non-fire injuries was sought and provided;
- queries on specific local issues could be raised and would be answered outwith the meeting;
- assurance was sought and provided on the provisions being put in place as a result of increasing numbers of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS);
- in relation to the provision of information on car accident hot spots, it was clarified that the SFRS only attended particular types of incidents, with the Police and the Ambulance services having more data. The locations of incidents the SFRS had attended was available. Members made reference to the need for evidence of accident hot-spots to help with the call for road improvements;
- assurance was sought and provided that work was being undertaken with partners such as the Police and the Council to tackle anti-social behaviour in relation to deliberate and accidental fires, the categorisation of which was determined by the incident commander;
- the reasons for increased domestic fires during the winter months were provided;
- information was provided on the process for post-domestic incident follow-up;
- reserve appliances were used when appliances were being serviced;
- it was queried whether response times were published, which was not the case. The 7-minute response time aim was highlighted and explained; and
- information was sought and provided on the definition of vehicle fires and further information could be sought outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the attached Area Performance Report.

4. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan na Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd

Declarations of Interest – the following Members declared an interest and left the meeting during this item:

- **Mrs M Ross as a Director of Seaboard Memorial Hall Ltd; and**
- **Mr S Coghill as a close family member was a trustee of Invergordon Development Trust**

There was circulated Report No. BIER/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- in relation to the application for the Royal British Legion Invergordon Hall Refurbishment, concern was expressed at the issues that were red in the RAG assessment appended to the report. Although Members fully supported the project in principle, it was suggested that the application be deferred until the red ragged issues could be resolved and more detailed information provided;
- confirmation was sought and provided that unallocated budget could be carried forward;
- the value of the development of halls and community spaces was emphasised;
- clarification was sought and provided between the differing costs of a consultant versus an employee for projects; and
- following detailed consideration of the applications, and with the removal of the Royal British Legion application for the reasons detailed above, it was proposed that all applications be awarded in full, and the £7085.21 surplus be allocated to Seaboard Memorial Hall Ltd Easter Ross Peninsula - Local Place Plan for the development of a website (around £6k), with the remainder to be awarded to the North Kessock Village Hall project.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the Community Regeneration Funds currently available in Black Isle and Easter Ross;
ii. **NOTED** the applications presented and considered whether to approve, defer or reject the application. An approval of funding should detail the amount approved and outline any conditions of funding that Members wish to attach to the approval over and above the required technical conditions. A deferral would allow an applicant to resubmit the current application at a future date with updated information or for the project to be approved subject to further funding becoming available. A rejection would mean that the application will not proceed and any future application to the fund should be brought forward initially as a new expression of interest; and

- **AGREED** the approved CRF grant award for each application up to the value of the available area allocation, with the exception of the Royal British Legion application which was **DEFERRED**; and
- **AGREED** the £7085.21 surplus be allocated as follows:
    - Seaboard Memorial Hall Ltd Easter Ross Peninsula- Local Place Plan be awarded the additional funds for the development of a website, which had been around £6,000 and had been removed from their application to reduce the amount requested; and
    - North Kessock Village Hall be awarded whatever additional funds remained from the total allocation.

5. Housing Management Performance Report 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026
Aithisg Coileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2025 – 31 Màrt 2026

There was circulated Report No. BIER/15/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- information was sought and provided on the allocation processes for families and individuals, on the sizes of houses available, and on whether unrelated people could be asked to share a property, which was not the case other than for certain types of emergency homeless accommodation;
- the reduction in rent arrears was welcomed;
- information was sought and provided on efforts being made to tackle anti-social behaviour, with particular reference to the disposal of waste, complaints about noise and other nuisance behaviour, and how anonymous complaints were handled. This was a significant issue that would be further considered offline and at a strategic level;
- specific local issues raised would be dealt with offline;
- concern was expressed at the high level of housing allocations for homelessness; and
- attention was drawn to the reporting areas which differed from the area committee's boundary.

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

6. Housing Revenue Account – Garage Rents 2026-27
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais – Màil Gharaidsean 2026-27

There was circulated Report No. BIER/16/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, assurance was sought and provided that the garage review that had been requested was being progressed and would be brought to ward meetings in the first instance, and to the Committee in due course.

In relation to other Area Committees, it was noted that one had approved a 5% rent increase and another 10%, but the majority had agreed to an 8% increase in line with the Council's housing rent increase. The majority of the Members at the meeting voiced support for an 8% rise, though it was also suggested that anything higher than inflation was not acceptable without further information on the budget expenditure on garage maintenance. Although this information was not currently available, further clarity on the budget was intended in future.

Consideration was given to the suggestion of a two-tier rent system with a higher amount being charged to non-Council tenants, although this would be administratively challenging.

The Committee **AGREED** an 8% rent increase to apply to Black Isle and Easter Ross Garages.

7. Scottish Government Play Park Funding
Maoineachadh Phàircean Cluiche Riaghaltas na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No. BIER/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the importance of play parks with regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and with regard to community life, was emphasised;
- in response to concern about the length of time some play park projects were taking to come to fruition, and with particular reference to concerns raised by community councils in this regard, attention was drawn to the large number of play park projects that were ongoing across Highland, all of which required careful scheduling. Attention was also drawn to additional funding that had been sourced for some play parks and the need to ensure all project designs were complete before starting construction, as well as to staffing challenges. Engagement being undertaken with communities on this was summarised. Members asked that a prioritisation list be provided to them to help with community enquiries, even if it was not possible to identify timescales at this stage; and
- an explanation was sought and provided on the allocation process used for the play park funding, which had been decided by the Council.

The Committee **AGREED** £93,390.97 to be allocated to the agreed project as outlined in section 6.4.1 of the report, and that a list of play park project prioritisation be provided to Members.

8. Bereavement Service Update
Cunntas às Ùr mun t-Seirbheis Chaoidh

There was circulated Report No. BIER/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- clarity was sought and provided that pre-purchased lairs were not included in the ‘available lair’ figures;
- assurance was sought and provided that the Rosskeen Burial Ground land acquisition was nearing completion;
- concern was expressed at the tight timescale (1.7 years) to source a location to extend Alness Burial Ground, and information was provided on progress; and
- attention was drawn to the importance of investigating the provision of environmentally friendly burial grounds.

The Committee **NOTED**:

i. the progress of burial ground extensions in the Black Isle and Easter Ross area; and

ii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development

9. Common Good Consultation on the proposal to change the use of Blairliath Grazings
Co-chomhairleachadh Maith Choitchinn mun mholadh gus cleachdadh Ionaltradh a' Bhlàir Liath atharrachadh

There was circulated Report No. BIER/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place and the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- assurance was sought and provided that participation in discussion of this item would not impact on Members' ability to participate in a planning committee item for the future use of the land;
- the public were thanked for their responses to the consultation, and the strong feelings expressed about the use of the land were acknowledged;
- concern was expressed that a considerable number of the responses to the consultation related to the TRACC Campaign and that as the allocation of any income fell outside the scope of the consultation, the consultation analysis had not taken into account comments relating to this. Consideration was given to deferring the matter to explain this to the community, but it was clarified that the consultation had related solely to the change of land use, and no mention had been made in it to the use to which any income would be put. It was suggested that some confusion had arisen because of the circulation of the consultation by the TRACC Campaign, which had inadvertently given the false impression of a link between the two issues. Any income received would be distributed in due course according to the Common Good Fund legislation and guidance;
- issues raised included that the proposal should have been accompanied by a business plan, that the matter be agreed in principle pending further information, that if no action was taken, then no money would be generated, and that Members had a duty to seek best value for the Common Good Fund. It was also pointed out that the matter would have to go to full Council for a final decision;
- information was sought and provided on the ability to reinstate grazing rights in future if the change of use was approved; and
- one suggested option would be to agree the matter in principle pending the provision of figures to demonstrate the potential value of the change of use.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the statutory consultation process and its outcome as detailed in Sections 6 and 7 and Appendix 1 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the representations received, together with the Council's responses as outlined within Appendix 2 and take these into account in the decision-making process, having due regard to the views of the inhabitants of the former Burgh of Tain;
* iii. **AGREED to RECOMMEND** to Full Council that the proposal, having regard to the representations received and the best interests of the Tain Common

Good Fund, should be **APPROVED,** for the reasons detailed in paragraph 8.3 of the report; and

iv. **APPROVED** the publication of the Council's responses to the representations, as set out within Appendix 2 on the Council's website.

10. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

There was circulated and **NOTED** details of the Discretionary Budget applications that had been approved from1st April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** minutes of the meeting of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee held on 26 January 2026, which had been approved by the Council on 26 March 2026.

The meeting ended at 1.30pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, and remotely on **Monday, 11 May 2026 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr S Cameron
Mr J C Grafton
Mr T MacLennan
Mr M Prosser
Ms L Saggers
Ms K Willis

Officials in attendance:

Ms K MacLeod, Roads Operations Manager (Lochaber), Place Cluster
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Officer Traffic & Parking (Acting), Place Cluster
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry, Place Cluster
Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry), Place Cluster
Mr A Maciver, Principal Engineer, Place Cluster
Mr M Culbertson, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager (West & Mid Highland)
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager, Place Cluster
Ms E Wilkinson, Principal Housing Officer, Place Cluster
Ms B Aitken, Senior Environmental Health Officer, Place Cluster
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector D Allan, Police Scotland (item 3 only)

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

Ms K Willis in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Baxter.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declaration of Interest/Transparency Statement:-

Item 5 – Mr M Prosser (Declaration of Interest)

3. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/19/26 by the Area Commander, Police Scotland.

There was commentary on the report by the Chief Inspector, Police Scotland and in particular reference was made to the retirement of Inspector K Duncan. The Inspector had dedicated herself to partnership working in the area and would be

very much missed. A replacement officer had been identified and until this officer was in post, an interim officer would cover duties in the Lochaber area. In terms of road safety and road crime, the Lochaber area had a specialist road safety unit based in Fort William and they made efforts to improve driver behaviour in particular. In addition, the team continued to engage with the Visitor Management Plan, working with various Partners to ensure the Highlands continues to be a safe and enjoyable place to visit. This work included targeted intervention at key sites and pursuing dangerous driving cases through the criminal justice system.

Continuing, anti social behaviour and violence would always be the main focus for officers locally. In particular, there had been an increase in common assaults over the past twelve months but serious assaults had reduced during this period. In relation to Acquisitive crime, fraud cases continued to rise and efforts to address this were being made, such as educating the public. In terms of protecting vulnerable people, the Police provided a robust response to domestic abuse in particular.

In discussion, reference was made to fraud cases and the prevalence of this being perpetrated from abroad. Google had changed their system to make individuals google e-mail address more accessible and as a result a Member stated that the number of fraud calls he received increased substantially. It was queried if there was any contact with Google to inform them of how damaging such action could be. It was advised that this would be something that would be carried out by Police Scotland cyber crime unit. In terms of links with schools to educate young people, the Prevention and Intervention Officers did deliver in schools in relation to internet safety. Focus was also given to internet safety for adults, particularly older and vulnerable adults. An undertaking was given to check if anything more could be done to educate the public on internet safety/security.

In terms of increase in fuel prices, there had not been a rise of fuel theft, but this was something to be aware off if fuel prices continued to increase. The Police would continue to educate the public to keep their fuel secure as possible.

In terms of road safety and the number of visitors involved in fatal crashes, it was queried how Police Scotland were working with their partners in educating visitors about driving behaviour in Highland. It was advised that links were made with car hire companies and tourist sites. There was also publicity on road safety through various mediums.

In terms of unmarked police cars, the public did become aware of them and it was a challenge when social media sites highlighted these cars in the area. An undertaking was given to advise Members if the Police used unmarked motorbikes as a tactic to address motorbike driving behaviour. There was engagement by officers on motorbike driver behaviour. Further, in relation to driver behaviour amongst young people, there had been a programme on this in the past and also included families who had lost members of their families in road traffic incidents. It would be checked if there were currently any programmes on educating young people on driver behaviour.

It was queried how often Police patrolled the A82 Glencoe towards Glasgow. It was advised that this road was a priority for the Police patrol team. Further, detail on the frequency of these patrols would be provided to Members. Lochaber was a

victim of its own success with many people visiting the area and the infrastructure did not always allow for the safest driving conditions.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 01 April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

4. Fort William Common Good Fund – 2024/25 Annual Accounts and 2026/27 Proposed Budget
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Maoin Math Coitcheann a' Ghearasdain

There was circulated Report No. LA/20/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which presented the 2024/25 Annual Accounts and 2026/27 Proposed Budget for Fort William Common Good Fund (FWCGF).

In relation to the proposed budget, clarification was sought on income and costs and it was confirmed that the figures in the report were accurate and as presented in the annual accounts. Parking Services had been asked to provide information on parking income and costs which were separate from this report. Pending any updates on figures from Parking Services, if there were still costs to be paid relating to the 2024/25 accounts these would go into the 2026/27 accounts.

In relation to the damage to the sea wall at the West End Car Park, a survey of the sea wall had been undertaken and a report on this would be submitted to the next meeting of the Area Committee in August. Further, it was queried if there was a timeline for repairs on pre-existing dilapidations to the surface of the car park. It was advised that the Operations and Maintenance service had acknowledged it will be responsible for covering these costs relating to the damage to the sea wall and surface of the West End Car Park.

Clarification was sought on the future liabilities of the FWCGF for the sea wall at the West End Car Park. It was advised that once repairs had been made to the sea wall and the surface of the car park it would be reasonable for the Common Good Fund to contribute 55% of the ongoing maintenance and repair costs, reflecting the Common Good Fund's receipt of 55% of the associated income.

In relation to the annual costs for car parks, there was a £53 per bay cost allocated to car parks and this was removed from the income of car parks. It was queried if this money would be used to cover this cost of upgrading the surface of the West End Car Park and if not, what was it spent on. Information on this would be sought from Parking Services and provided to Members.

The Scottish Six Days Trial held recently had free use of the West End Car Park. A request had been made to the organisers that they consider making a donation to the FWCGF for use of the car park and it was queried whether they had agreed to this or not. Information would be sought on this and an update provided to Members.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** the FWCGF Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) for 2024/25; and
ii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 2.

5. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-bheòthachadh Coimhearsnachd

Declaration of Interest: Mr M Prosser declared an interest in The Island Park Community Field SCIO application as he was a Board member of The Island Park Community Field SCIO. Mr Prosser left the meeting for this application.

There was circulated Report No. LA/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which presented six funding requests to the Lochaber Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) budget for 2025/26, for discussion and decision by Members. The report also updated Members on the Lochaber CRF budget position for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

The report detailed the applications received for consideration with a total grant request value of £231,558.89. If Members were to approve all of these applications, there would be £50,952.17 remaining in the CRF budget for 2025-26. All six applications were eligible for support. Members were asked to consider the applications presented and agree whether to approve, defer or reject the application.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

i **NOTED** the Community Regeneration Funds currently available in Lochaber; and
ii **AGREED** all the applications for Community Regeneration Fund grant award and the grants requested.

6. Lochaber Off-Street Parking Place Order Consideration of Objections

There was circulated Report No. LA/22/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place, which provided Members with information regarding the proposed off-street Parking Place Order in the Lochaber area.

It was advised that if the Parking Place Order was approved car parking pay machines should be on site at the various car parks within the next 4 to 6 weeks.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the locations of the car parks in the proposed Variation Four Order;
ii. **NOTED** the intention to remove West Bay, Mallaig (CP0089) car park from the Order;
iii. **NOTED** the impact assessment in Appendix 1;
iv. **NOTED** the outstanding objections received to The Highland Council (Off Street Parking Places) (Decriminalised Parking Enforcement and Consolidation) Variation Four Order 2025; and
v. **APPROVED** the making of the Parking Place Order.

7. Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26 Update
Pròg ram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2025/26

There was circulated Report No. LA/23/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26.

It was noted that the final capital budget allocation for Lochaber roads was £2,030,660. It was queried what amount was required to keep the Lochaber roads up to a reasonable standard. It was advised that the roads capital programme was an evolving list of priorities and maintenance/improvements to roads would always be required. The weather also placed constraints on when road maintenance could take place. The Roads team were commended for quickly repairing a particularly bad pothole in Upper Achintore which was one of the main roads in Fort William.

It was advised that a substantial amount was spent on the temporary filling of pot holes and this benefitted road users and there were less claims being submitted to the Council for pothole damage to vehicles. The budget for structures was for general maintenance to structures, such as vegetation clearance. This budget was not enough for new bridges and this would fall under the allocation for capital programmes. A gully emptying machine was shared between Lochaber and Badenoch & Strathspey areas and drainage was a priority for the roads team.

In relation to the Council's reporting portal of road defects, such as potholes, the Corporate Communications team could publicise the online portal and phone number for reporting defects. A link to the reporting portal would be shared with Members.

An undertaking was given to provide members with the master spreadsheet of Lochaber area capital works which would outline all the works previously agreed by the Committee.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the final budget allocation for Lochaber area for 2025/26;
ii. **NOTED** the works completed on the approved list to date; and
iii. **APPROVED** the additional works as completed which were identified and prioritised throughout the year.

8. Corran Ferry Update
Cunntas air Aiseag a' Chorrain

There was circulated Report No. LA/24/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme, the Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel and the Corran Ferry Service operations.

It was highlighted that the Corran Ferry was currently operating a full service and the report described the works undertaken on the MV Corran annual winter refit and the ferry had now re-entered service in time for the busy holiday season. Notwithstanding breakdowns, over the long term the MV Corran record was good in terms of service delivery, particularly compared with the wider ferry network which was experiencing considerable issues over the last few months.

The Maid of Glencoul was now away at her own annual refit and this was scheduled to take 2 – 3 months, allowing her to return to Ardgour in time for the busy summer season in July.

In relation to crew, there were a few vacancies in the process of being filled and seasonal Traffic Marshals were in place. Details were also provided on the Corran Ferry Ticketing Project. Further, the launch of Highland Council's new Online Engagement Platform 'Go Vocal' will help facilitate with passenger engagement.

In discussion, reference was made to the lack of marshalling at the Corran Ferry at the start of the Easter holidays. In response, lessons had been learned from this and for example additional marshals had been in place for the Scottish Six Day Trials being held in the area. Further, there was also a need to monitor traffic queues at the Ardgour side of the Corran narrows.

Reference was made to a parking issue stemming from the South Planning Applications Committee and two local Members on that Committee wished it recorded that they had never had involvement with parking issues at the Corran Ferry, but had commented that parking at this site had always been open to the peninsula and local residents and this should be continued.

It was welcomed that the new Corran Ferry crew transfer launch (flit boat) was now in service at Ardgour. Details were provided in relation to the mitigation works for otters and guillemots within the site boundary of the Corran Ferry infrastructure improvement scheme.

In relation to the Corran Ferry new Electric Vessel it was planned that a contract award for a new Electric Vessel would be placed to a shipyard in March, 2027.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme (CFIIS) & Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel (CFNEV) updates; and
ii. the Corran Ferry Service update.

9. Housing Management Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Càraidhean Thaighean

There was circulated Report No. LA/25/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided information on how the Housing Service performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 March, 2026.

Thanks were extended to the work of the Housing team. There were housing surgery drop in sessions and many people had said these had helped them with many issues. Also Housing Management Officers visited rural areas and also held drop in sessions.

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

10. Environmental Health – Annual Report & Activity 2025/26

There was circulated Report No. LA/26/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the Environmental Health team and provided an annual report on local activity during 2025/26.

Following a presentation on the report by the Senior Environmental Health Officer, congratulations were extended to the community group for achieving the Ballachulish bathing water designation. It was noted that should water quality results over consecutive sampling periods fail to meet required standards in future years, there was provision for Scottish Ministers to review and potentially remove the bathing water designation. It was felt that if water quality standards were failing then actions should be taken to improve them, before removing the designations. It was advised that this was the requirement under regulations, that sampling and testing happen after designation has been granted.

In relation to the incident at the local Leisure centre where investigations concluded that the source was likely due to intermittent disposal of chemicals into the sewer network, it was advised that there had been no further incidents, and there would be ongoing monitoring.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the scope and volume of work currently being delivered in the local area;
ii. local issues and current operational priorities;
iii. Highland wide issues impacting Environmental Health services; and
iv. the format and content of the report.

11. Ward Discretionary Fund 2025/26
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund grant awards since the last Committee meeting:-

Ward 11
HLH - Countryside Rangers - Dùthchas project - £900
Loch Sheil Festival - Loch Sheil Festival "Shielings" - £510.92

Ward 21
HLH - Countryside Rangers - Dùthchas project - £900
Nether Lochaber Community Council – Defibrillator - £1,000
URRAM - Ev Charge point - £400
Loch Sheil Festival - Loch Sheil Festival "Shielings" - £439.08
Buzz project - venue costs Youth Drop in sessions - £1,000
Island Park Group – Kinlochleven Gala Day - £1,185
Ewens Room - Wellbeing Explorers - £1,539.89

A full list of Ward Discretionary Budget awards for 2025/26 was available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/421/ward-discretionary-budgets-and-spend

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 26 January, 2026 which were approved by the Council on 26 March, 2026.

The meeting ended at 12.37 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Monday 18 May 2026 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance
Mr I Brown
Mr M Cameron
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair
Mr A Christie
Ms H Crawford (AM only)
Mr D Fraser
Mr K Gowans
Mr A Graham
Mr D Gregg
Dr M Gregson
Mrs J Hendry
Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr A MacKintosh
Mr R MacKintosh
Ms K MacLean (Remote)
Mr D Macpherson
Mrs D McDonald
Mrs M Reid
Mrs T Robertson

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager
Ms E Hood, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Mr M Greig, Community Development Manager
Mr G Munro, Strategic Lead (Revenues & Welfare)
Ms J Anderson, Policy and Revenues Officer
Ms A Wasko, Principal Housing Officer
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Ms R Robertson, Bereavement Project Co-ordinator
Mr G MacCormick, Area Environmental Health Manager
Mr E McIntosh, Community Support Officer
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr A MacLean, Local Senior Officer for Highlands, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr K Dingwall, Station Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr D Fraser, NatureScot

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

Mr I Brown in the Chair

Business

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, Ms E Knox and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Mr A Christie – Item 4, 6 and 11.
Mr D Gregg – Item 6
Mr M Cameron – Item 9

Preliminaries

The Chair proposed that agenda item 9 be deferred to allow the Member Seminar/Briefing to take place prior to consideration by the Committee, as agreed at the previous meeting.

The Committee **AGREED** that agenda item 9 be deferred.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – Area Performance Report
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba – Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/20/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- information was sought and provided on the main causes and locations of deliberate fires, and efforts being undertaken to reduce their occurrence;
- it was queried how elderly or vulnerable people, and those without online access, were provided with domestic fire safety visit information, with this including referrals from partner agencies and frontline staff;
- concerns were expressed about on-call staffing levels and appliance availability in some fire stations, and attention was drawn to some of the solutions being implemented;
- some of the causes, and proactive preventative measures, in relation to non-domestic fires were outlined;
- an explanation was sought and provided for the usual protocol in relation to the need, at times, to obtain prompt access to a domestic property in the event of a resident being incapacitated inside. This generally involved the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) being called in the first instance. If required, the SAS would involve the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to facilitate entry. The SFRS was not mandated to force entry into properties unless a fire was suspected, but they could assist other agencies;
- work with Police Scotland to address the increase in bin fires in Inverness and along the A82 corridor was summarised, with two suspects having been recently apprehended. Engagement with businesses in relation to improving knowledge of the safe disposal of cigarette and batteries was summarised;
- the definitions of primary and secondary fires was sought and provided;
- a request from Members for more detail on the graphs in the report on deliberate fires was acknowledged;
- the road traffic collision work with secondary schools was praised and assurance sought and provided that the intention was to roll these events out to all secondary schools in the Area, including outwith the City of Inverness;
- the protocol and ability to tackle Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) fires was queried and explained. It was clarified that local fire stations were not referral partners for BESS planning applications, with those being dealt with nationally;

- concern was expressed that in some blocks of flats, flammable materials were being stored in stairwells, and attention was drawn to landlord responsibilities in this regard. The risk of fires from battery-powered bikes, scooters and wheelchairs, and to the role of the SFRS Community Action Team for SFRS-inspected properties were highlighted;
- with reference to the fire in Glasgow that had damaged Central Station, information was sought and provided on fire risk assessments being undertaken to prevent a similar event in Inverness, with particular reference to vape shops;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the new legislation for linked fire alarms in domestic properties was having a positive impact; and
- all retained SFRS crews were thanked for their work, and the renewed operation of Cannich Fire Station was welcomed.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. Gull Management Plan – Pilot Project Report
Plana Stiùiridh nam Faoileag – Aithisg Pròiseict Poidhleit

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Members raised the following concerns about the gull problems, much of them in Inverness, but also in surrounding settlements, with particular reference to Ardersier, which should be included in the proposed study:

- school pupils were unable to eat outside without being attacked by gulls trying to steal their food, and some secondary schools did not have adequate inside provision to seat all pupils at lunchtime;
- attempts to create a 'café culture' for residents and visitors in Inverness city centre were being thwarted by the prevalence of gulls attempting to steal food;
- care home residents were being attacked and some people were being injured by gulls attempting to steal food;
- over a period of years £200k had been spent on nest and egg removal to reduce the gull population with the majority of funding sourced from the Inverness Common Good Fund. However, as this had not been permitted for the previous year, it was anticipated that the gull population and problems would increase;
- the previous coordinating role undertaken by Inverness Business Improvement District was vital and should be replaced;
- attention was drawn to the relatively long lifespan of gulls and the importance of reducing their breeding opportunities in urban areas, given that gulls would tend to stay where they hatched, if food was available. Their webbed feet suggested they should live in a coastal environment;
- attention was drawn to the damage gulls and their faeces could do to vehicle bodywork and buildings; and
- when gulls were removed from one area, this could move the problem to another area.

In response to some of the comments, it was pointed out that many of the problems had been experienced while egg and nest removal measures had been in place and that the solution lay with the removal of food sources for gulls in urban areas through ongoing education, and the provision of gull-proof bins. Attention was drawn to changing human and gull behaviour in recent years, as well as to changed gull protection legislation, which impacted the Council's ability to continue with nest and egg removal. Work with schools and businesses to reduce littering was summarised, as was the need for more data on gull behaviour and food sources to drive action in the future.

Several Members spoke in favour of the use of gull proof bins but expressed concern at the high cost of such bins and asked if adaptations could be made to regular bins to prevent gulls accessing them. Information was also sought and provided on work to ensure businesses did not leave their bins out overnight and educated their customers on the appropriate disposal of take-away food waste.

Ongoing education measures, including direct engagement with school pupils on the importance of not littering or feeding gulls, were welcomed, but some felt that legislation banning the feeding of gulls was required. Attention was drawn to other cities which were trialling such enforcement legislation, and to the need for the Council and NatureScot to follow Scottish Government legislation. Concern was expressed that it would take a year to undertake the intended survey and action plan, by which time the gull population would have further increased. The introduction of natural gull predators, such as eagles or hawks, was suggested but attention was drawn to the challenges that would pose.

While gulls were a significant problem, it was pointed out that they only attacked to obtain food, rather than to deliberately injure. The importance of enforcement in addition to education was emphasised.

Mrs I MacKenzie, seconded by Mr M Gregson, proposed as an amendment, the inclusion of a fifth recommendation, which received no opposition and which was detailed below (v).

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the Inverness City Gull Management Plan;
ii. **NOTED** on locations where gull activity was having a significant impact on local communities;
iii. **NOTED** on locations where gull behaviour was predominantly associated with food scavenging;
iv. **NOTED** the potential implementation of gull mitigation measures on Council-owned buildings where significant impacts had been identified; and
v. **AGREED** that education and awareness measures be complemented by coordinated operational delivery, and therefore instructed officers to bring forward a strengthened delivery plan within this financial year which:

    a. builds on the successful partnership approach previously supported by Inverness BID;
    b. considers the appropriate use of evidence-based interventions, including licensed egg and nest management where required;
    c. addresses identified and emerging hotspot areas across Inverness, including school settings such as Millburn Academy;
    d. supports practical action to reduce food-related gull behaviour, particularly linked to litter; and

e. provided clarity on roles, resources, and how success would be measured and reported to Members.

5. Approval of New Street Names – Ward 19 Inverness South
Aonta Ainmean Ùra Sràide – Uàrd 19 Inbhir Nis a Deas

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/22/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, it was highlighted the naming of streets was a ward issue, rather than for the Committee's consideration. Some local Members expressed concern at the repetition of certain words in the proposed 12 street names, at the naming of streets after living people, and at the lack of guidance on the matter for Members and for Community Councils. Others considered the proposed street names to be acceptable.

Mr I Brown, seconded by Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, **MOVED** that Option 1 in the report be approved.

Mr D Macpherson, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that Option 2 in the report be approved.

On a vote being taken there were 8 votes for the **MOTION** and 6 for the **AMENDMENT**, with 3 **ABSTENTIONS**, and the **MOTION** was therefore carried, the votes having been cast as follows:

For the motion: Mr C Ballance, Mr I Brown Mr M Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr D Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr D Gregg, Mrs J Hendry

For the amendment: Mr A Christie, Mr A Graham, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs T Robertson

Abstentions: Mrs H Crawford, Mr M Gregson, Mr A MacKintosh

The Committee **AGREED** the street names for 12 new streets in Milton of Leys, Inverness as detailed in Option One in the report, and that guidance on street naming be recirculated to Members and Community Councils.

6. Inverness Common Good Fund: Discretionary Scheme for Winter Payments 2026/2027
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis: Sgeama fo Ùghdarras airson Pàighidhean Geamhraidh 2026/2027

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 A Christie - as a Chief Executive of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau
Mr D Gregg - as a Board Member for the Citizens Advice Bureau

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/23/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** an Inverness Winter Payments Discretionary Scheme for 2026/27 be provided having regard to the financial support available from Social Security Scotland (SSS) and other sources as set out in sections 7 and 8 of the report;
ii. **AGREED** applications be accepted from 1 December 2026 to 31 March 2027 inclusive;
iii. **AGREED** a total budget of **£0.250m** inclusive for the 2026/27 Scheme noting that payments for Landward Areas would be sourced from available income within the Inverness Benevolent Funds first, with the ICGF being utilised for the Landward Areas in the event that officers decided it financially prudent to do so;
iv. **AGREED** to a Customer Price Index (CPI) increase being applied to the **£115** award rate for 2025/26 in order to determine the 2026/27 single tier payment rate;
v. **AGREED** to use the annual CPI of **3.4%** (March 2026), noting this would establish the 2026/27 award amount at **£119** for eligible applicants;
vi. **AGREED** that the criteria utilised for the 2025/26 scheme as set out in paragraphs 9.2 to 9.6 of the report would be used as the basis for the 2026/27 Scheme;
vii. **AGREED** this discretionary scheme was to be made available to residents in the City of Inverness and the Landward areas of the seven City Wards; and
viii. **NOTED** BACS payments were used for this discretionary scheme as this was the most secure method of payment for recipients of the payment and the Council alike.

7. Housing Performance Report up to 1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais gu 1 Giblean 2025 - 31 Màrt 2026

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/24/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the report was detailed, informative, and highlighted proactive management;
- in terms of rent arrears, most tenants had arrears of less than £500, and the reason for this was provided. Further information was sought in terms of the approaches taken to tackle their recovery. It was asked how much had been recouped and written off. It was also asked if there was a reason for the marginal increase every year and it was felt by all that early intervention was important. Arrears exceeding £2,500 were a concern but it was recognised that there were very few people who declined to pay rent through choice;
- in terms of the ongoing effort to tackle antisocial behaviour in Raigmore and Diriebught, the collaboration between the Housing Team, Police Scotland and the local community had been particularly effective. It was sought, and provided, regarding what specific interventions had the greatest impact and how this might evolve to ensure early intervention in antisocial hotspots. Further, how they could be sustained long term;
- concern was expressed about whether the Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 remained fit for purpose as it was highlighted that, despite significant work in many areas, antisocial behaviour continued to have a serious impact in some communities. It was said that the policy was undergoing review;

- there was no clear reference to empty homes in the report. It was asked if an outline on what action was being taken to bring long-term empty properties back into use could be provided to a future meeting;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the usefulness of the Housing Need and Demand Assessment data in terms of planning, particularly given the limited stock and range of property types available. It was queried how well the Council was likely to meet its obligations under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2025;
- the number of homeless presentations remained static at around 200, and it was asked what percentage of those were homed in Council properties as opposed to Housing Associations. A response was provided. In relation to homelessness through relationship breakdown, information was sought, and provided, regarding the involvement with other agencies and a tell us once service to avoid applicants having to repeat their circumstances to different people;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the handling of complaints about the smell of cannabis;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding contact made with those named on the housing register;
- in terms of table 3 at paragraph 6.9 of the report, it was highlighted that another Local Authority monitored rent arrears by tracking the number of days outstanding and it was said this approach could be helpful; and
- Housing Officers, alongside colleagues in Health and Social Care, provided important, often hidden, support to the vulnerable people in our communities and staff were thanked for their support, knowledge and good work.

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

8. Bereavement Services – Project Updates
Cunntas às ùr mu sheirbheisean bàis

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/25/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, the positive update on the cremator replacement project was welcomed.

It was emphasised that there was a requirement to safeguard future provision of a new major cemetery in Inverness within the next decade, as a replacement for Kilvean, and it was suggested that this could be included as a separate item in future reports.

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

i. progress of the cremator replacement project at Inverness Crematorium;
ii. progress of burial ground extensions in the Inverness area; and
iii. challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development.

9. Associated School Group Attainment Overview
Foir-shealladh air Buileachadh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

Mr M Cameron made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item he had a family member that worked at Charleston Academy. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/26/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee had **AGREED** that this item be deferred.

10. Environmental Health – Annual Report & Activity 2025/26
Slàinte Àrainneachdail – Aithisg Bhliadhnail & Gnìomhachd 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/27/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- following questions on the report by Members, the Area Environmental Health Manager advised that in relation to short term let renewal applications, officers were being proactive and rather than wait for renewal applications to be submitted, officers when in certain areas would visit properties to undertake compliance checks prior to the renewal being received. This would ensure that the renewal application was dealt with quicker. In Highland there was currently around 9,500 short term let applications;
- in relation to abandoned vehicles, officers were tied to legislation on resolving this issue, as if an owner came forward, officers were restricted on what they could do to remove the vehicle. Officers worked with the DVLA, Police Scotland and other Councils on this as it was a national issue. The DVLA had been to Highland to carry out an enforcement initiative and officers were looking at other ways to address the issue of abandoned vehicles, such as identifying a compound for storing abandoned/nuisance vehicles. There was to be a separate report and workshop on this;
- the issue of commercial vehicles parked in residential areas was raised. Parking Enforcement Officers had certain powers, however if it was not a controlled parking space this was difficult to enforce. Also, Environmental Health Officers were restricted in terms of legislation on what enforcement action they could take;
- Environmental Health Officers worked closely with the Housing team and Police Scotland to tackle antisocial behaviour cases. This might involve the installation of noise monitoring equipment;
- Environmental services were not unique in facing staffing pressures and new licensing provisions and requirements took away an element of resource within the team. The team had moved to a three year plan to proactively manage these work pressures and if there were more resources available these would be welcomed by the team;
- in relation to the team's approach to enforcement, if a formal enforcement route was pursued, this tied up officers completely from their normal duties and therefore a balance had to be made and prioritise service requests. In particular, there was a need for more proactive enforcement in relation to environmental crime dog control;
- there was an Enforcement Policy and officers worked closely with businesses as it was challenging for businesses to keep up with changes in legislation;
- in terms of concerns raised regarding overflowing bins, legislation did not class this as fly tipping and therefore officers were restricted on what enforcement they could take. Officers were liaising with colleagues in other Councils to share best practice on this issue;

- it was highlighted that some of the charts in the report showed Ward 19 Inverness South as Ward 20 Badenoch and Strathspey and confirmation was provided that this would be corrected;
- it was welcomed that the Scottish Government were to introduce new licensing for non-surgical cosmetic procedures. There were many rogue operators providing these surgical procedures in Highland; and
- in relation to the visibility of the environmental health service and the many important functions carried out by the team, the purpose of the report was to try and make the service more visible across Highland. The service was also working on a public enforcement register which should be in place by the end of 2026. Members spoke of their appreciation for the work of the environmental health team.

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

i. scope and volume of work currently being delivered in the local area;
ii. local issues and current operational priorities;
iii. Highland wide issues impacting Environmental Health Services; and
iv. format and content of the report.

11. Inverness and Area Community Funding Update
Cunntas air Maoineachadh Coimhearsnachd Inbhir Nis agus a Sgìre

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director on Inverness BID. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/28/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the use of funding allocations to community projects across the City and Area Committee geography for financial years 2022/23 to 2025/26.

12. Appointments to Other Bodies - Inverness Town Twinning Committee
Cur an Dreuchd gu Buidhnean Eile - Comataidh Chàraideachaidh Baile Inbhir Nis

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr K Gowans and Mr A Mackintosh be appointed to the Inverness Town Twinning Committee.

13. Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF) – Grant Applications over £10,000
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis- Larrtasan Tabhartais thar £10,000

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/29/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee considered the applications for funding and **AGREED** the following:

i. Inverness Sea Cadets- **APPROVED** of a grant of £15,000 from the Poverty and Inequality budget towards a replacement minibus;
ii. Ness Bank Church - **APPROVED** of a grant of £30,000 from the Poverty and Inequality budget towards the Sanctury Project;

iii. Inverness Fringe - **APPROVED** of a grant of £15,000 from the Other Grant budget towards the Inverness Fringe Festival 2026;
iv. Inverness Symphony Orchestra - **APPROVED** of a grant of £9,800 from the Other Grant budget towards music enjoyment to the citizens of Inverness; and
v. Visit Inverness Loch Ness - **REFUSED** the grant of £20,000 from the City Destinations Projects budget towards Business Tourism within Inverness and Loch Ness.

In terms of Standing Order 9.1, with the consent of the meeting, the following item was taken at this point.

17. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes of Meetings were:-

i. **NOTED** - City of Inverness Area Committee held on 2 February 2026;
ii. **APPROVED** - Inverness Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 27 April 2026; and
iii. **APPROVED** - Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 23 April 2026.

14. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

The Committee resolved that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for items 15 and 16 on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

15. Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF) – Grant Applications over £10,000
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis- Larrtasan Tabhartais thar £10,000 leantainn

There had been circulated to Members only Report No CIA/30/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following discussion, the Committee **APPROVED** a grant of £20,750 from the Poverty and Inequality budget to the Highlands and Islands Blood Bikes.

16. Inverness Common Good - Sites and Premises Transaction Report
Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis – Aithisg Gnothachais Làraich is Thogalaichean

There had been circulated to Members only Joint Report No CIA/31/26 by the Head of Development and Regeneration and the Property Manager (Estates).

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED** the recommendations.

The meeting concluded at 2.30pm.

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

Non-Members also present:

Mr R Cross
Mr D Fraser (remote)
Mr M Gregson (remote)
Ms C Gilles (remote)
Ms M Hutchison (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 Bhliadhnail 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' Phobaill

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.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 20 May 2026 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Mrs S Atkin
Mr M Baird
Dr C Birt
Mr R Cross (substitute)
Ms C Gilllies (remote)
Dr M Gregson
Mr P Logue
Mrs T Robertson (substitute)
Mr K Rosie (Vice Chair) (remote)
Ms K Willis (Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Mr S Kennedy
Mrs A MacLean
Mr D Macpherson

In attendance:

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Programme Manager
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
Ms F Conti, Strategic Procurement Manager
Mr S Miller, Project Manager
Ms C Weaver, Climate Change Co-ordinator (Adaptations)
Mr A Fraser, Principal Engineer, Project Design Unit (remote)
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr R Lockett, Lockett Agri-Environmental

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

Ms K Willis in the Chair

Business

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 J Bruce, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Grafton, Mr A Graham and Ms L Niven.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 5iii: Ms C Gillies

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

The Chair summarised the good news that had been circulated, and a video was presented reflecting on the impact of the Caol mixed-tenure retrofit project nearly one year after completion.

The project and the associated videos, which Members were advised were available on SharePoint, were commended, and the Committee **NOTED** the good news as circulated.

4. Presentation: Re-meandering the River Peffery
Taisbeanadh: Ag ath-lùbadh Abhainn Pheofharain

Richard Lockett of Lockett Agri-Environmental gave a presentation on the River Peffery Catchment Restoration Project, showcasing a catchment-scale, nature-based approach to climate resilience and nature recovery. The project had built on earlier restoration at Fodderty, combining large-scale river re-meandering with peatland restoration in the upper catchment on Ben Wyvis National Nature Reserve to restore natural river processes, enhance biodiversity, and reduce flood risk to Dingwall Business Park.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Local Members outlined the background to the partnership project and expressed thanks to former MSP Kate Forbes for her role in bringing stakeholders together, and to Richard Lockett, who was involved in a number of community organisations and was a trusted figure locally, for proposing a cost-effective solution and for his efforts in moving the project forward. The project was a good news story which, in addition to enabling the Business Park to re-open, had delivered benefits in terms of nature restoration, and Members were encouraged to visit the site to view the results;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of matters including the duration of the previous flooding issues at Dingwall Business Park; the costs and timescales associated with the restoration project; the impact of the interventions on the river catchment; whether nearby forestry operations were expected to effect the completed works; the effects of re-meandering on peatland; and whether any further measures could be put in place to reduce run-off from Blackmuir Woods into Strathpeffer;
- the reduced flood risk as a result of the project not only benefited Dingwall Business Park but would also provide reassurance to nearby residents;
- Members welcomed the presentation, particularly the use of Enlightenment era mapping to illustrate the historical context in contrast to the modern-day position;
- the partnership work undertaken to identify and implement an affordable solution that had resulted in real change was commended;
- the nature-based approach and its biodiversity benefits were commended, and it was hoped that the project would serve as an example to others; and
- it was queried whether any action could be taken in relation to the banks to the rear of Burns Crescent in Dingwall.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Net Zero Programme
Pròg ram Neoni Luim

i. Net Zero Programme Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phròg ram Neoni Luim

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was explained that the strategic Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience report to the Council on 26 March 2026 represented the first step in addressing silo working, and that a further report was in development looking at the structure required to ensure effective cross-cluster working. It was added that the Highland Youth Parliament's presentation to the Climate Change Committee in January 2026 had opened conversations with the Education Service, which was a positive development;
- with reference to the waste audit undertaken at Inverness Royal Academy, it was suggested that similar audits could be carried out in all secondary schools, and that a comparative chart could be developed to introduce an element of competition. Reference was also made to Kingussie High School where, as part of the reuseable lunch packaging pilot, pupils had been requested to eat in the dining hall. This appeared to have supported a reduction in waste, and the need for culture change was emphasised. It having been queried whether dining arrangements and waste considerations formed part of the design process for new schools being brought forward under the Highland Investment Plan (HIP), and whether there were links between the design team and the Climate Change and Energy Team, the Net Zero Programme Manager explained that the Net Zero Strategy Group had been collaborating on the HIP, and that Net Zero and Sustainability Design Guidance was currently under development, which would include how to embed circular economy and waste principles in buildings, and would apply to all projects;
- as indicated in Appendix 1 of the report, food production and consumption accounted for around a third of global greenhouse gas emissions. The importance of reducing food waste was emphasised and, with reference to the emissions associated with beef production, it was queried when food production, procurement and consumption would be considered in a more holistic manner. Other Members supported the points raised and suggested that greater emphasis should be placed on plant sources of protein in food production. The Net Zero Programme Manager explained that the Council was currently involved in a number of projects relating to food and food procurement, including the Members' Catering project and the Food in Schools project. In addition, it was confirmed that the first officer working group regarding the Highland Good Food Nation Plan was scheduled to take place the following week, and this was welcomed by Members;
- greening of Highland towns and the city of Inverness was a priority. It was suggested that consideration be given to how nature networks could be supported across Highland, not only in the obviously greener areas, and reassurance was sought that the Forestry and Woodland Strategy currently under development would include urban areas. The Net Zero Programme Manager undertook to feed

the points raised into the group progressing the Strategy, and to report back to Councillor Gregson regarding the scope of the Strategy;

- information was sought on the location of the six Woodland Management Plans for Council woodlands referred to in Appendix 1 of the report. There was also a reference to a hydrological survey of Muir of Ord pond, and it was queried whether this related to a recent presentation regarding the Crested Newt at the Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Business Meeting. It was suggested that Local Members be consulted in advance of such projects as they might be able to assist in identifying additional suitable locations. The Net Zero Programme Manager undertook to feed back the points raised to the Environment Team, and to circulate the response regarding the location of the six Woodland Management Plans to all Members;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the intention was that there would be full alignment between the Council's Net Zero Strategy and the strategic paper on Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience that had been presented to the Council on 26 March 2026, and this would be addressed as work progressed. In terms of how the asks of the Highland Youth Parliament (HYP) would be taken forward, it was explained that a meeting had taken place with Education Service representatives, and it was intended to liaise with the incoming Youth Convener and set up a direct discussion between Members and the HYP. Members emphasised that the Youth Convener's tenure was relatively short and that issues raised by them during that period should be carried forward. It was confirmed that there would be ongoing engagement with the Youth Convener; and
- the Chair confirmed that the previously proposed Member workshop in relation to Elected Member Travel remained an ongoing action.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **NOTED** progress of the Net Zero Programme as outlined in the report and Appendix 1 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** that, following Council approval of the Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience Strategic Paper, proposals relating to governance, performance reporting and long-term programme delivery would be brought to Council for consideration; and
iii. **AGREED** that information on the location of the six Woodland Management Plans for Council woodlands referred to in the report be circulated to all Members.

ii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Procurement & Community Wealth Building
Cunntas às Ùr air Buidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Togail Saidhbhreas Coimhearsnachd Solarachd 8

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- support was expressed for the approach outlined in the report. However, it was questioned whether the proposed 12-month managed engagement with Eden Seven was long enough. In response, it was explained that the one-year period would allow for a clear assessment of the software's capabilities and enable comparison with existing manual processes. The intention would be to continue

using the software if it and the associated data met the Council's requirements, and it was confirmed that, following assessment of the data, further proposals would be brought forward for approval by the Council. Members added that it was essential that the Climate Change and Energy Team was satisfied with the transition period and the translation of the data into a standardised, more robust format, and that extending beyond one year might be appropriate if recommended;

- the report highlighted the need for a robust and consistent baseline of the Council's emissions to support carbon budgeting and decision-making. However, it also referred to current challenges relating to fragmented data sets and manual processes, and it was queried how confident Members could be in the accuracy of the baseline data being used. In response, it was explained that much of the Council's emissions data was underpinned by recognised emissions factors and standard methodologies which officers were required to apply as part of the annual Public Bodies Climate Change Duties report. It was added that the Council did not currently have a baseline for Scope 3 emissions and was among the first in Scotland to begin developing this;
- whilst the benefits of engaging with an external provider were recognised, reservations were expressed regarding reliance on a single company for a core element of the Council's evidence base, and it was queried how the risks associated with supplier dependency would be managed. In that regard, reassurance was provided that the governance and assurance of the pilot rested with the Council, and that the Council would retain ownership of its data;
- it was hoped that the new software would provide a strong foundation for progressing key aspects of work related to climate change and the Net Zero Programme;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Scope 3 emissions encompassed the whole supply chain, including the origin of materials, and that using Scope 3 data to inform procurement of goods and services supported Community Wealth Building and local economic growth; and
- the importance of the proposals in terms of reducing the Council's emissions going forward was emphasised, along with the need for effective cross-service working. In response to a question regarding the potential impact if the required engagement and cross-service collaboration were not achieved, it was explained that the data would identify which service areas required focus, and that failure to act would have cost implications for the Council as a whole, not just the service concerned. Strong stakeholder management and securing collective buy-in would be essential.

The Committee:-

* i. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council approval of the proposed approach to strengthening the Council's carbon reporting, management and decision-support capability;

* ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Council progresses a 12-month managed engagement with Eden Seven, as set out in Section 6 of the report, to support delivery of this approach; and

iii. **NOTED** the role of procurement and the Social Value Charter in supporting emissions reduction and Community Wealth Building outcomes, particularly in relation to supply chain (Scope 3) emissions.

iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Capital Programme & Net Zero Funding Cunntas às Ùr air Buidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Pròg ram Calpa & Maoineachadh Neoni Luim

Transparency Statement: Ms C Gillies declared a connection to this item as director of the anchor organisation in respect of the Carbon Neutral Islands Fund. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the clear and helpful report;
- information was sought, and provided, on the future of Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding, and the Warm Homes Plan. In relation to ECO funding, Members commented that energy companies continued to make significant profits and suggested that they should be required to continue funding energy efficiency measures, which were of utmost important to Council tenants and other householders;
- in relation to Salix funding, whilst the associated financial savings were significant, the resulting reduction in carbon emissions helped to make the benefits more tangible for people. The Project Manager undertook to revert to Councillor Atkin regarding the CO_2e (Carbon Dioxide equivalent) figures;
- innovations such as Carbon Credits made the Net Zero agenda relatable to people; and
- in response to a question regarding Climate Emergency Funding, it was explained that, while timescales were not yet known, projects had been identified for potential delivery through the fund. Based on the £1.3m allocation, Net Zero transition and energy efficiency works could be undertaken at five primary schools where surveys had been completed and measures evaluated and costed. The estimated outcomes were annual financial savings of £12,000 and total emissions reductions of approximately 80 tonnes of CO_2e. The Chair added that it was important to have shovel-ready projects in place as many funding opportunities had short application and delivery timeframes.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the progress of workstreams as outlined in the report.

6. Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment Measadh Chunnartan & Chothroman Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No CCC/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Chair commended the work involved in the development of the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA), as well as the launch event. She advised Members of a recent UK Government report on Global Biodiversity Loss, Ecosystem Collapse and National Security, as well as the National Emergency Briefing on Climate and Nature currently being screened across the country. Both

supported the ongoing work in Highland in relation to adaptation and the climate and nature crises, and she undertook to circulate the relevant links to Members following the meeting.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the contents of the report and its associated appendices; and
* ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment and the Council's internal cross-service engagement should be used to inform the next stage of the Council's climate adaptation work, including the development of the Corporate Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment and the Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan.

7. Just Transition Commission Final Report (2026): No Time to Lose
Aithisg Coimisean an Eadar-ghluasaid Chothromaich: Chan Eil Ùine ri Chall

There had been circulated Report No CCC/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the realism of the Just Transition Commission report, particularly the references to deindustrialisation;
- it was necessary to deliver the transition at a pace that allowed sufficient time for people to adapt;
- the poor progress against peatland restoration targets was of concern;
- Members concurred with the view that local authorities should be afforded greater powers, and supported the mandating of community benefit as well as the introduction of a community right to shared ownership;
- the change needed would only be achieved through local action;
- strategic working on a regional basis, in collaboration with partners, was considered the way ahead; and
- the specific reference in the report to Gaelic-speaking communities in rural and island areas was welcomed, and the benefits of community-led, place-based approaches were highlighted.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the key findings of the Just Transition Commission final report and recognised their direct relevance to the Highland context;
ii. that the Council would continue to develop a place-based, programme-led approach to climate, energy and resilience delivery, aligned with the March 2026 Council report;
iii. that the Council would use the report to support engagement with Scottish and UK Government with a focus on securing increased capacity and funding for local authorities; and
iv. that delivery of a just transition at regional level would require aligned investment, infrastructure planning and community wealth building. This would continue to be reflected in the Council's programme and investment approach.

8. Performance Monitoring Report – Q4 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh – R4 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No CCC/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the Service's performance information.

The meeting concluded at 3.55 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 21 May 2026 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance
Mr S Coghill (remote)
Mr R Cross
Mr R Gale (Substitute)
Mr M Green
Mr R Gunn (remote)
Mrs J Hendry
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Mr S Kennedy
Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr S Mackie (remote)
Ms K MacLean
Mr D Millar
Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Ms C Ramsay
Mrs M Ross

Non-Members also present:

Ms C Gillies (remote)
Dr M Gregson (remote)
Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Mr D McDonald (remote)
Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Mr R Stewart
Ms K Willis (remote)

In attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer – Operations and Maintenance
Mr I Braker, Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Ms H Jones, HR Business Partner
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms G Prince, Partnership Development Manager
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms L Gow, Area Commander and Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce and Mr A Graham.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statements
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithrisean Fhollaiseachd

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declaration of Interest:-

Item 4: Ms C Ramsay

The Committee also **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Mr D Millar made a general Transparency Statement on the basis that a family member was employed by the Council. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

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

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

Declaration of Interest: Ms C Ramsay declared an interest in this item as a paid on-call firefighter and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting for the duration of the item.

There had been circulated the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report for Q3 and Q4 2025/26.

The Area Commander and Local Senior Officer gave an introduction highlighting the key points of the report including the development of the new local fire plan, domestic fire safety, unintentional harm, non-fire emergencies including road traffic collisions, deliberate fire-setting, non-domestic fire safety, and operational resilience and readiness including preparedness for the wildfire season.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the SFRS's involvement in community initiatives was welcomed and encouraged;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of matters including how the availability challenges in North West Sutherland were being addressed; the new contract banding tier system; and the extent of the issue of deliberate fire-setting of waste bins;
- attention was drawn to the recent influx of workers into Tongue and, since there was currently not a District Officer in the area, it was queried whether an SFRS officer could visit to support recruitment efforts among these new residents;
- the increase in appliance availability was commended;
- on the point being raised, the Area Commander undertook to explore the possible use of abandoned vehicles in road safety demonstrations in schools, as part of a joint approach with the Council and Police Scotland;
- the Area Commander's visit to Skye and the increase in availability in the area were welcomed;
- the success of Fire Skills courses was highlighted, and it was hoped that they could be held more regularly; and

- an update was sought, and provided, on the proposed new Fire Stations in Portree and Uig, and it was confirmed that a further update would be provided at the November Committee.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report.

5. Integrated Weed Control Strategy and Action Plan
Ro-innleachd agus Plana Gnìomha Amalaichte airson Smachd air Luibheanaich

There had been circulated Report No CP/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- several Members extended their thanks to the many community groups that volunteered to keep streets and open spaces free of weeds as their work made a visible difference within communities and freed up time for the Council's amenities teams to undertake other duties. In response to Members' questions, it was confirmed that guidance covering the key aspects of weed removal work, including the safe use of herbicides, cutting and managing vegetation, preventative weed-spraying early in the season, risk assessment and understanding public liability considerations, could be distributed to these groups in order to better support them; equipment, including Hi-Viz jackets and refuse bags, was available to volunteers; and the possibility of providing volunteers with NTCP (National Tests Proficiency Council) Certificate-level training in the use of approved chemicals could be considered;
- information was sought, and provided, on mechanical means of weed control;
- in response to questions, the Chief Officer – Operations and Maintenance undertook to provide Councillor Ballance with information on the prevalence of invasive species and the associated biological control trials, the extent of the reduction in Glyphosate use and the number of wildflower meadows created in the last year. The Chair requested that the response be circulated to all Members of the Committee;
- it was encouraging to see a reduction in the use of glyphosate. However, it was highlighted that glyphosate was effective and that any alternatives might be found ineffective;
- in response to questions, it was confirmed that the majority of seasonal posts had been filled, all training in the use of mechanical weed brushes had been completed, and some external contractors were still being used;
- it was good to see a reasoned rationale for when chemical herbicides should, or should not, be used;
- it was noticeable within communities that, since the clearing of roadside weeds had become the responsibility of the roads team, weeds were being cleared less often, and roadsides had become overgrown and untidy. It was suggested that more integration between the amenities and roads teams was needed, and it was confirmed that the Integrated Weed Control Strategy was designed to help with this;
- concern was expressed regarding the lack of amenities staff in Skye, including having no trained driver for the road sweeper. It was confirmed that the recruitment challenges in Skye had been recognised and that members of the current workforce could be trained on the use of road sweepers to prevent this equipment from sitting unused;

- in response to questions, it was confirmed that there was a plan for rewilding old cemeteries to reduce the need for strimming and grass-cutting, and that this would be discussed at local level; and that the use of salt for weed control was mentioned within the Strategy;
- attention was drawn to No Mow May and the fact that the UK was one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. The importance of biodiversity was emphasised, particularly as several of the weeds mentioned in the report were native species which were important for biodiversity. It was also queried how wildflower areas and naturalised zones would be identified, whether such areas were already in place, and whether there were plans to increase the number of naturalised areas; and
- while biodiversity was important, ticks were often present in long grass and wildflower areas. it was important to recognise the dangers of Lyme disease, which was prevalent in Highland, and it was suggested that more education was needed in that regard. It was confirmed that the risks associated with ticks had been considered within the Strategy, and that desire lines were often created in un-mowed areas and wildflower meadows to allow people to cross safely.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
ii. **AGREED** and adopted the Integrated Weed Control Strategy and Action Plan 2026;
iii. **NOTED** that an annual update on progress would be reported to the Communities and Place Committee; and
iv. **AGREED** that the response to Members' queries regarding the prevalence of invasive species and the associated biological control trials; the extent of the reduction in Glyphosate use; and the number of wildflower meadows created in the last year be circulated to all Committee Members.

6. Participation & Engagement Strategy
Ro-innleachd Com-pàirteachaidh

There had been circulated Report No CP/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed regarding the low number of responses to the public engagement on the Strategy, particularly from Community Councils which was considered indicative that they did not feel valued or supported. It was highlighted that, in Sutherland, there was a reluctance amongst Community Council members to take decisions or undertake office-bearer roles due to the perceived risks faced both individually and collectively. As a result, there was concern that a number of Community Councils could go into abeyance, leading to the loss of a valuable link between the Council and local communities. It was suggested that the low response rate reflected a lack of confidence in the Council, and that increased support for Community Councils was required. In response, the importance of the work of Community Councillors was recognised. The recent review of the Scheme of Establishment had highlighted a request for greater support and guidance for Community Councillors and an extensive support pack had been developed based on this feedback and was due out in the coming weeks. It had been recognised

that the draft Strategy did not give sufficient weight to the importance of the role of Community Councils, and this had been strengthened, along with a key action to develop guidance to support Community Councils to engage with their community;
- there was a lot of cynicism amongst the public regarding various aspects of the Council's performance, including responsiveness to enquiries or complaints;
- the statement in the report that there were not considered to be any Gaelic implications was questioned;
- in response to concerns that service provision at Service Points appeared to be reducing in favour of online services, it was confirmed that there had been no change to the services offered at Service Points, although officers would be keen to understand the concerns of constituents in that regard, and that a report on Service Points would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee; and
- attention was drawn to the attendance of the local Roads Officer at Community Council meetings in Ward Six, where they had been able to provide direct feedback and relay queries as required. This had helped Community Councils to have more confidence in the Council which had strengthened relationships.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the extent of the engagement and responses received;
ii. **NOTED** how consideration of these responses had been incorporated into the strategy;
iii. **AGREED** to support the content of the Action Plan contained within the strategy; and
iv. **AGREED** the strategy, noting that reports on progress would be submitted to the Committee as part of the wider Participation and Engagement annual update.

7. Waste Strategy Development Plan
Plana Leasachaidh Ro-innleachd Sgudail

There had been circulated Report No CP/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Chair highlighted that the aims and objectives of the Recycling Improvement Fund had been met, with significantly less waste being sent to landfill, resulting in financial savings, and better quality recyclate being collected, generating increased income;
- members of the public were engaging well with the new waste and recycling arrangements, the success of which was welcomed;
- concern was expressed regarding restrictions, involving booking systems, being placed on smaller rural recycling centres, and it was requested that this be revisited as it could lead to an increase in fly-tipping and was contrary to what the Council was trying to achieve in terms of increasing recycling. It was clarified that booking systems for large trailers and vans were generally only used at the busiest sites for safety reasons, and the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations undertook to provide Councillor Gale with further information in light of a recent Council communication suggesting that small rural sites would also be affected;
- it was suggested that larger general waste bins be made available for families as many had too much general waste for the small bin provided. In response, it was

clarified that households with more than five people or individuals with medical conditions could request a second bin;

- an update was sought, and provided, on the industrial waste shredders that had been commissioned. It was confirmed that there would be a Members' visit to the Longman Waste Transfer Station on 17 June 2026 to see a shredder in operation, and the Chair requested that an invitation be extended to all Members and that transport from Council Headquarters be provided;
- it was highlighted that the current recycling level of 45% was the same as in 2014, despite the Scottish Government funding, and that the target of an increase of 1% over the next four years meant that it would take 20 years to reach a level of 50% recycling while some European countries were already achieving recycling levels of 70%. The need to be more ambitious was emphasised and it was requested that the Waste Strategy include analysis of what this would look like. It was also queried whether focusing on the total levels of residual waste going to landfill and Energy from Waste would be more useful that tracking recycling figures. In response, it was clarified that there had been changes in the way that recycled waste was categorised meaning that although the overall level of recycling had remained the same, the level of household recycling had increased. It was explained that the current predicted increase in recycling levels was based on things remaining as they were and that the changes needed in order to achieve higher levels of recycling were being discussed as part of the Strategy;
- it was suggested that there needed to be a greater focus on enabling people to better understand recycling and how to reduce their general waste, including promoting the use of reusable nappies;
- the importance of the Reuse and Repair fund was emphasised and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that members of the Climate Change and Waste Management teams would be involved in assessing applications to the fund;
- it was important to understand that people in rural areas did not have access to the same number of recycling bins as those in more urban areas, and that this could lead to households in rural areas producing larger amounts of residual waste and possibly needing larger general waste bins;
- in response to a query, the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations, undertook to provide Councillor Morrison with an update on staffing levels and vacancies in Sutherland;
- it was queried whether the number of people paying for a garden waste bin had declined due to the increasing cost of living, as the annual charge for a garden waste bin was almost £50, and if this had led to garden waste being disposed of in residual waste bins. The possibility of combining food and garden waste in one bin, as was the case in some other areas, and of providing households with their first garden waste bin for free, was suggested. In response, it was emphasised that efforts had been made to keep the cost of garden waste bins below £50 per year and that this was relatively cost-effective compared to taking garden waste to a recycling centre. It was also highlighted that green waste collections was one aspect of the potential regulatory changes outlined in the report, consultation on which was ongoing;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the UK Government's Deposit Return Scheme, which it was confirmed was expected to come into effect in 2027;
- further public education was needed around issues such as the use of recycling centres, fly-tipping and rodent control, and social media and information leaflets could be helpful in that regard;
- it having been queried why there was no longer a skip at the Thurso recycling centre for items that could potentially be reused, it was explained that schemes

had been introduced, in partnership with ILM Highland, at some recycling centres, including in Caithness, to try to capture items that could be reused before they went into general recycling;
- in relation to the Reuse and Repair Fund, the impact of the funding awarded to ILM was already being seen; there was enthusiasm within communities for initiatives such as repair cafes; and it was requested that applications from small community groups be considered in the next round of funding;
- it was highlighted that the bin in the Council carpark adjacent to the Seaboard Centre was not large enough to deal with the increased amounts of waste during the summer months;
- recent waste audits in schools had shown that significant amounts of recyclable materials were still going into general waste bins. In light of the request from the Highland Youth Parliament to equip schools with recycling infrastructure, it was queried what the timeline was for providing such infrastructure and whether there was a shovel ready project so that external funding opportunities could be taken up when they arose. It was also queried whether there was a strategy for reducing the amount of food waste in schools;
- in response to questions, it was confirmed that encouraging home composting could be considered; and that some waste wood in Highland was recycled via the biomass facility in Invergordon; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the issue of timber waste being exhumed from Seater landfill facility and subsequently dumped in a car park had been identified and had now ceased.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the forthcoming potential changes to the waste regulations and the operational and financial implications;
ii. **APPROVED** the approach to developing the Council's Waste Strategy;
iii. **AGREED** that the award of funding under the Reuse and Repair Fund be delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive for Place in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Communities and Place Committee; and
iv. **AGREED** that an invitation to the visit to the Longman Waste Transfer Station on 17 June 2026 be extended to all Members.

8. Environmental Health Performance and Strategic Plan 2026-2029
Coileanadh agus Plana Ro-innleachdail Slàinte Àrainneachdail 2026–2029

There had been circulated Report No CP/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the process for dealing with reports of dangerous and out of control dogs; the enforcement of dog fouling legislation; the Council's preparedness for an outbreak of a dangerous disease on a cruise ship in a Highland port; the possibility of creating a more streamlined pathway for dealing with abandoned and nuisance vehicles; and how often fines were issued for fly-tipping;
- in response to a question, the Council's role in investigating work-related deaths was explained and the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement

Services undertook to provide Councillor Ballance with further information regarding the number of such investigations;

- the Environmental Health team was commended for their efforts across a range of areas;
- it was welcomed that the issue of abandoned and nuisance vehicles would be considered by the Redesign Board;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that it was the Council's responsibility to deal with abandoned vehicles wherever they were in Highland, including vehicles abandoned on trunk roads;
- it having been queried whether the Environmental Health team had sufficient staff to deal with the pressures caused by Short-Term Let licensing applications, it was confirmed that, although the workload was significant, income received from the application fees ensured that the team had sufficient resources to deal with it;
- the staff structure table in Appendix 2 of the report was commended, and it was suggested that it would be useful for other teams to include something similar in their reports; and
- it was queried whether an easier mechanism for reporting abandoned vehicles could be introduced, and it was confirmed that the website and online form had recently been improved to allow further information to be provided.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the Environmental Health Strategic Plan 2026-2029 as detailed in Appendix 3 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the Environmental Health performance in 2025/26 as detailed in Appendix 4 of the report including delivering statutory duties to over 6000 properties on private water supplies, over 5000 food businesses, and receiving over 13,500 service requests on a wide range of public health, nuisance, licensing, safety, dog control, animal health and incivility issues; and
iii. **APPROVED** the Food Safety Plan to 31 March 2027 as detailed in Appendix 5 of the report.

9. Bereavement Services Update
Cunntas air Seirbheisean Call Neach-gaoil

There had been circulated Report No CP/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it having been queried whether woodland burial sites were ever considered when looking for new burial grounds, especially in areas where sites had been difficult to identify, it was confirmed that such sites were been considered but were still subject to the same challenges as traditional burial grounds; and
- in response to a question regarding the capacity of the burial ground in Alness, it was confirmed that trial digs had taken place and that a further update should be available at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress of current projects within the burial ground extension programme;

ii. **NOTED** the progress of the cremator replacement project at Inverness Crematorium; and
iii. **APPROVED** the updates to the Burial Ground Management Rules in accordance with recent regulation changes.

10. Place Cluster Workforce Plan Annual Progress Report
Aithisg Adhartais Bhliadhnail Feachd-obrach na Buidhne Àite

There had been circulated Report No CP/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- following the decision by the Full Council in March 2026 to strengthen coordination across Council services, supported by the Council's Climate Change and Energy Team (CCET), to enable a place-based approach to climate change, energy and resilience within infrastructure planning, housing programmes and long-term asset management, surprise was expressed at the lack of reference to climate change within the report, and information was sought, and provided, on the service's preparedness to deliver this agenda, including whether the CCET was included in the workforce analysis and action plan set out in the report; how emerging requirements around climate change adaptations, energy system resilience and place-based delivery were being reflected in workforce planning and service design across the organisation; and whether any workforce gaps or future resourcing requirements had been identified;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that information on the gender pay gap was collected and had been reported to the Committee as part of the Equalities Mainstreaming and Outcomes Report, which it was confirmed could be re-circulated to all Committee Members following the meeting; and
- reference was made to the increasing use of robots in areas such as forestry and, it having been queried whether young people could be encouraged to pursue training in the control of robots, it was confirmed that this could be discussed further.

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

11. Highland Outcome Improvement Plan Update
Cunntas air Plana Leasachadh Thoraidhean na Gàidhealtachd

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

An update was requested on the position once funding for the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme came to an end in March 2027, as support from the Programme had replaced Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for some third sector organisations. It was also queried why some SLAs had been withdrawn, given that the fund had not been intended to replace business-as-usual provision. The Partnership Development Manager undertook to liaise with the Whole Family Wellbeing Team and provide an update to Councillor Gale.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress update on delivery of the 2024–2027 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan.

12. Performance Reporting for Q4 January 2026 – March 2026
Aithris Coileanaidh airson R4 Faoilleach 2026 – Màrt 2026

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

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the service performance information;
ii. **NOTED** the change to absence reporting to align with Chief Officer structure; and
iii. **NOTED** the change to Freedom of Information reporting to align with Chief Officer structure.

13. Membership of the Waste Strategy Working Group
Ballrachd de Bhuidheann Obrach na Ro-innleachd Sgudail

The Committee **AGREED** the revised membership of the Waste Strategy Working Group as tabled.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on Monday 25 May 2026 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr S Kennedy
Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Ms Lynn Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Ms F Shand, Principal Housing Officer
Ms C Murray, Project Officer, Community Regeneration
Mrs G MacPherson, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr P Young, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Ms F Dalgetty, Chief Executive, Fèis Rois

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs A MacLean.

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

There were no Declarations of Interests/Transparency Statements.

3. Dingwall 800 Celebrations Update
Subhachasan Inbhir Pheofharain 800 – Cunntas às Ùr

There had been a presentation by Fiona Dalgetty, Chief Executive, Fèis Rois.

The Committee welcomed the informative presentation, which provided an overview of the wide range of events and activities planned and delivered in Dingwall throughout 2026, along with an update on the funding secured to support them, as well as future projects and opportunities to strengthen community connections.

Members expressed enthusiasm for the upcoming programme and commended the evident hard work and partnership working involved.

During discussion, it was asked if there could be more hard copy advertising as not everyone could access information online and it was confirmed that, following an uplift in funding, there would be a maildrop via Royal Mail soon.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn

There had been circulated Report No DSA/9/26 together with the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the availability of appliances continued to be excellent and the crews were commended for this. A new member of staff would be starting soon and there was still room for more;
- deliberate fires were frustrating, particularly as they could take a crew away from a job elsewhere. Incidents of this nature were passed to the Police;
- community safety engagement and early education continued to be important. Fire safety courses had received good feedback and were in demand, however, resources were limited; and
- the Home Fire Safety Visit system was working well and with the help of carers etc, those most needing a visit were being identified.

The Committee **NOTED** the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report.

5. Housing Management Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No DSA/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- an explanation was sought, and provided, regarding what happens to those who are evicted, in terms of homelessness. The Service worked closely with tenants, although it was said that not everyone chose to work with the Service, and each instance was dealt with on a case-by-case basis;
- it was felt that the report did not reflect the full picture in terms of anti-social behaviour. It was still felt that some tenants were too scared to report their neighbours for fear of repercussion, however, without reports or evidence of any anti-social behaviour, it was difficult for the Service to take action; and
- it was discussed the requirement of more one-bedroom or single-person properties to help address the housing demand, particularly young people currently unable to afford private rents, however, the Council could only offer what housing it had available.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

6. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No DSA/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following a brief discussion on the specific projects, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the Community Regeneration Funds (CRF) currently available in Dingwall and Seaforth, including the previous ringfenced sum of £34,140.60;
ii. considered and **AGREED** to approve the applications; and
iii. **AGREED** that funding be awarded from the CRF as follows:
- Peffery Way Association, Final Path Section - £35,800
- Maryburgh Community Woodland, Accessibility and Sustainable Drainage Improvements - £5,043.

7. Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary budget applications approved since last meeting
Iarrtasan buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàrd Inbhir Pheofharain agus Shìophort air an aontachadh bho choinneamh mu dheireadh

The Committee **NOTED** the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications which had been approved between 17 January and 30 April 2026.

i. Young Enterprise – Strengthening Career Opportunities for Young People in Highland and Moray (Multi-Ward) - £300
ii. Dingwall Academy – Ocean Youth Trust Sailing Experience - £639
iii. Dingwall Community Council – Upgrading PA system - £1,880
iv. Dingwall Fire Brigade Community Group – Senior Citizens Lunch - £525
v. Dingwall Fire Brigade Community Group – Purchase of Gazebos - £1,500
vi. Dingwall Scottish Womens Institure – Dingwall 80th Anniversary Celebrations - £500
vii. Maryburgh Amenities Company – Purchase of New Kitchen Equipment for Community Events - £400
viii. Killearnan Community Council – Connecting Communities Newsletter (Multi-Ward) - £229
ix. Ross County Football Club – Community Engagement and School Engagement pre and post Four Nations Transplant Football Tournament - £1,000

8. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 9 February 2026 which were approved by the Council on 26 March 2026.

The meeting ended at 11.40am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held in the Council Chamber, The Court House, High Street, Nairn on Monday 25 May 2026 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr L Fraser
Mr M Green
Ms B Jarvie
Mr P Oldham

In attendance:

Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Ms C MacKenzie, Principal Housing Officer
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Ms P Sheldon, Senior Environmental Officer
Ms C Strachan, Pensions Manager
Ms J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

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

Mr M Green in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the following Good News:

- Members welcomed the installation of the new slide and ship as part of the Nairn Links play park equipment. It was agreed that engagement would take place with local schools to organise a naming competition for the ship, and the Nairn Common Good Flag would be installed;
- Members commended the street art at a shelter in Nairn, noting pupils from Nairn Academy had selected a local artist from Forres to undertake the work; and
- Members acknowledged the visit by the Stoltman Brothers to Nairn Academy where they gave an inspirational talk to the local pupils on their achievements.

4. Housing Management Performance Report up to 31 March 2026
Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais - 31 Màrt 2026

There had been circulated Report No NC/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- Members commented on the level of rent arrears, in particular the positive stability of the figures. It was suggested that this might have been the result of the increased accessibility of the Service Point, especially the more accessible hours;
- information was sought, and provided, on the length of time individuals spent in temporary accommodation, and whether this could be reduced. Members were informed that the service was operating within the constraints of available housing stock; however, the figure remained unchanged from previous reports. Every effort would be made to bring this figure down where possible;
- the importance of regular meetings between the Housing Team and Police Scotland was encouraged to ensure information regarding antisocial behaviour was shared effectively and accurately; and
- Members queried the new housing being built at Delnies and Tornagrain and whether Housing would have any involvement in these properties. Members were informed that the properties would be managed by Cairn Housing; however, the Housing Team would be able to nominate eligible applicants although there was no guarantee of allocation to any individual client.

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

5. Bereavement Services – Project Updates
Cunntas às ùr mu sheirbheisean bàis

There had been circulated Report No NC/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- Members queried the rationale for purchasing a new site at Gregorhill when there was up to 10 years' capacity remaining at the original site. The purchase was historical however the additional capacity at the original site had become available only following ground clearance; and
- as there were no challenges within the Nairn area for identifying or developing suitable land for burial the second recommendation was not required.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Nairnshire area**.**

6. Environmental Health – Annual Report & Activity 2025/2026
Slàinte Àrainneachdail – Aithisg Bhliadhnail & Gnìomhachd 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No NC/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED to DEFER** the item to the next meeting.

7. Nairn Common Good Fund – Annual Review
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann

There had been circulated Report No NC/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion the following main points were raised:

- clarification was sought on the charging framework uplift linked to RPI and Members were informed this would generate approximately £16,000 a year for the Common Good Fund;
- the Chair spoke of the Nairn Highland Games, highlighting efforts to create a safer event. Highland Council had responsibility for funding and infrastructure with the support of local charities including the Nairn Book & Arts Festive, SSAFA-Armed Forces Charity, Nairn CAB, St John Scotland and Mikeysline as well as the Nairn Highland Games Committee;
- funding of up to £21,000 would be allocated to support the Games. It was anticipated that the event would break even; however, a modest surplus might be achievable;
- Members supported the use of the Nairn Bandstand as a welfare and communication hub; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding responsibility for grounds maintenance at the event. This work had previously been undertaken by private contractors appointed by the Nairn Highland Games Committee, and the same arrangement would be in place for this year's Highland Games.

Thereafter, the Committee:

i. **NOTED** the progress over the last 12 months in relation to the Nairn Common Good Fund projects detailed within section 5 of the report;
ii. **AGREED** the installation of the artwork proposed for the Nairn Common Good land at the Riverside as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
iii. **NOTED** the update in respect of the 2026 Nairn Highland Games within section 7 of the report; and
iv. **NOTED** the review of the Nairn Common Good Lettings Framework and **AGREED** the revised charging structure for 2026/27 detailed at Appendix 2 of the report.

8. **Ward 18 Discretionary Fund**
Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

Having requested that the balance be circulated, the Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund payments that had been approved since the previous meeting of this Committee:

Applicant	Project	WDF Award
Nairn Academy Parent Council	Seating at new Academy (Sakura reflection area)	£2,800.00
Nairn BID	Seagull Prevention	£3,000.00
Nairn BID	Seafront noticeboard renovation	£254.48
Nairn West & Suburban Community Council	Cold Caller Control Zone	£697.20
Laikenbuie Ecology Trust	Woodland Diversification Tools	£792.50
Nairn Academy Parent Council	"Schools Out" Farewell to old school building	£2,000.00

9. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 9 February 2026 which were approved by the Council on 26 March 2026.

10. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

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 involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

11. Nairn Common Good Fund – Investment Strategy and Benchmarks
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Ro-innleachd agus Slatan-tomhais Tasgaidh

There had been circulated to **Members only** Confidential Report No NC/13/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following discussion, while **AGREEING** the recommendations, Members requested a summary report be made available at the next meeting.

The meeting concluded at 10.35am

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

Non-Members present:

Mr J Finlayson
Dr M Gregson
Ms E Knox
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 Ùr 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-Dhìol 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 20026 - 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-Dhìol 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.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 27 May 2026 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr M Baird
Mr C Ballance
Mr L Fraser
Mr R Jones (Remote)
Ms L Kraft
Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs A MacLean
Mr D McDonald
Mrs T Robertson
Ms M Ross
Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Mr K Gowans (Remote)
Mr D Macpherson (Remote)
Mr P Oldham (Remote)
Ms M Reid (Remote)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Ms S Armstrong, Chief Officer – Revenues and Commercialisation
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management
Mr J Shepherd, Chief Officer – Business Solutions
Mr S McBride, Strategic Lead (ICT)
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead (Finance) – Place
Miss D Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk)
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager
Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Internal Audit
Ms E Barrie, Head of HR
Mrs A MacPherson, Strategic Lead (Resources)
Ms A MacKenzie, Pay and HR Transaction Manager
Mr D MacKenzie, Trading Standards Manager
Mr T Murdison, Service Lead (Corporate Property)
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms E Scoburgh, Audit Scotland

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

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Mr A Christie and Mr A Jarvie.

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

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report
Ath-sgrùdaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais

There had been circulated Report No. AC/6/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

The Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk) drew the Committee's attention to the copy of the Scottish Local Authorities Chief Internal Auditors Group Annual Report provided at Appendix 2 of the report.

An explanation was sought, and provided, regarding the identification of audit opinions, which depended on individual audit findings.

a) Preventative Maintenance – Place (Reasonable Assurance)

During discussion, clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the priorities for property maintenance, particularly in terms of climate change, energy and resilience. Further, what options were available to the Council, as corporate landlord, in terms of the projected backlog of essential maintenance work totalling £217m. In response, it was a priority to keep buildings safe, compliant, and wind and water tight, however resources were limited.

b) ICT and Digital Services, Review of Service Desk Support and Performance – Corporate (Reasonable Assurance)

c) CiA General Ledger – Corporate (Reasonable Assurance)

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the Final Reports referred to in section 5.1 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at sections 6 and 7 of the report, and the status of work in progress detailed at Appendix 1;
iii. **AGREED** to the removal of the planned audit of Asset Management for the reasons set out in section 6.1 of the report; and
iv. **NOTED** the Scottish Local Authorities Chief Internal Auditors Group Annual Report 2025 provided at Appendix 2.

4. Internal Audit Action Tracking
Tracadh Ghnìomhan In-sgrùdaidh

There had been circulated Report No. AC/7/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was explained that the audit of cessation of utility supplies report did not include domestic properties;
- the revised action dates of high priority actions were a concern, particularly for the Human Resources Learning and Development, and Roads Maintenance audits. This would be followed up by the Corporate Audit Manager and the Committee's concern would be voiced to the relevant officers.

The Committee **NOTED** the action tracking information provided including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions.

5. Salary Overpayments Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phàighidhean Anabarrach Rola-pàighidh

There had been circulated Report No. AC/8/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

Prior to discussion, the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate highlighted that total net overpayments had decreased by 13% in 2025/26, payroll accuracy had reached 99.89%, up from 99.86% the previous year, and that recovery processes had been effective.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the improvements were welcomed and while some were concerned that the overpayments were still in excess of £0.5m, others recognised that in context the impact was small and that salary data changed constantly;
- Members hoped to see further improvements within the Education Service over the next 6 months and it was asked what specific action had been taken. A response and assurances were provided in terms of ongoing priorities for the Service; and
- in response to questions regarding late notification to Payroll, it was confirmed that the majority of these cases were where the manager had failed to inform Payroll timeously. These included changes to conditions, reduced hours, changed roles, etc. However, staff had equal responsibility to inform Payroll.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the positive payment accuracy, which increased to 99.89% in 2025/26;
ii. **NOTED** the reduction in overpayments across all three Clusters compared to 2024/25; and
iii. **AGREED** that performance information would continue to be shared with Cluster Management, and that appropriate action would be taken to support the Payroll Team being advised timeously of all changes. The sharing of

performance information would be included in future Cluster performance reports presented to strategic committees.

6. Internal Audit Annual Report 2025/26
Aithisg Bhliadhnail In-Sgrùdaidh 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. AC/9/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

During discussion, the following points were raised with regard to the survey responses at Appendices 2 and 3:-

- Client Officer feedback had identified the Internal Audit report's accessible language and identification of salient points as a strength in its audit reports and other Clusters were encouraged to do likewise;
- the Chair expressed her disappointment at the low level of response to the Members' survey and she reminded Members of the CIPFA requirement for the need for a self-assessment to be undertaken annually. It was hoped this would be improved in 2026/27; and
- some Members had difficulty in accessing surveys but they were encouraged to contact the relevant Council Officer who might be able to assist.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report, the audit opinion provided and that Members could raise any relevant points with the Strategic Lead (Audit & Risk).

7. Fraud and Whistleblowing Annual Report 2025/26
Cunntas Bliadhnail Foille agus Innsireachd 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. AC/10/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the possibility of using external contractors to investigate Whistleblowing had been investigated but the general consensus was that it best sat with the Internal Audit team. The Trade Unions had also been consulted and their preferred option was to keep it in-house;
- some other local authorities had the Leader of the Council and members of the Audit Committee as Whistleblowing contacts to protect their anonymity. Whilst individuals could report concerns anonymously if they so wished, this meant that the Internal Audit team were unable to seek clarification and/or provide feedback. If an individual felt uncomfortable raising a concern internally, they could report to Audit Scotland;
- given the size of the organisation it was suggested that there might be a degree of under-reporting of sexual harassment. In response it was acknowledged at the time the incidents had been reported, responsibility for dealing with these was within the remit of Human Resources so the number of sexual harassment complaints was likely higher;
- assurance was sought, and provided, that the Whistleblowing policy was clearly available and accessible to all staff; and
- the time to investigate concerns would depend on the allegations made.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. details of the fraud investigations and activities undertaken as detailed in section 5.1 of the report;
ii. the information at section 5.2 including the low number of whistleblowing concerns requiring investigation;
iii. that where a fraud or whistleblowing investigation identified any control weakness, fraudulent activity or areas for improvement, this would be addressed through an Internal Audit report which would be provided to Committee for scrutiny purposes; and
iv. the updated self-assessment against the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption set out at Appendix 1.

8. Audit Committee Annual Report 2025/26
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Comataidh an Sgrùdaidh 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. AC/11/26 by the Audit Committee Chair.

With several new Members on the Committee, it was requested that any requirement for further information be brought to the attention of the Audit Committee Chair or Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk) so that training might be arranged where necessary.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

i. the Audit Committee Chair's annual report, provided at Appendix 1 of the report, which included the identified areas for improvement; and
ii. **TO RECOMMEND** to Council the report to acknowledge that the necessary assurances had been provided by the Audit Committee to demonstrate that it had fulfilled its purpose and could demonstrate its impact for 2025/26.

9. Internal Audit Annual Plan 2026/27
Plana Sgrùdaidh Bliadhnail In-sgrùdaidh

There had been circulated Report No. AC/12/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- a question was raised regarding an insurance matter but it was clarified that individual circumstances could not be discussed in Committee and it did not form part of the Audit Annual Plan. Nonetheless, it was explained a control weakness audit would not be planned and were only identified as part of the output from an audit review;
- it was queried if, with the establishment consisting of 8 full time posts, this was sufficient given the size of Highland Council;
- additional capacity would enable an element of random audits to take place;
- in response to a question, it was explained that the Audit Section was assessed by external auditors;
- given that there were audits outstanding from the Internal Audit Plan 2025/26, the likelihood of reaching the reserve audits in 2026/27 was

doubtful. This would be disappointing as one related to the Governance of Arms-Length External Organisations, the number of which was increasing, and it was suggested this should be of a higher priority. If it was not reached it was hoped it would be taken into consideration for the Audit Plan for 2027/28;

- referring to the carry forward of the Insurance Audit, it was hoped the installation of solar PV panels on Council properties would be within the audit's scope;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, as to how the number of Audit days required was determined; and
- in response to a question, how the scope of any audit was determined was outlined.

The Committee **APPROVED** the 2026/27 Internal Audit Plan which was provided at Appendix 1 of the report.

10. Draft 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement
Dreachd Aithris Riaghlachais Bhliadhnail 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. AC/13/26 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the draft 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement provided at Appendix 1, and the CIPFA requirements set out at section 5.2.

11. Review of Corporate Risks
Ath-Sgrùdadh air Cunnartan Corporra

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to how the likelihood of a Pandemic Disease outbreak was rated as "4", as detailed under Risk No. HCR8;
- in relation to Risk No. HCR2.4 (Single Public Estate – New Area Community Pods) clarification was also sought, and provided, as to the arrangements for other services to become involved and the responsibility for the buildings and their maintenance; and
- the work being undertaken to reduce the risk rating of Risk No. HCR9 was commended.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. Corporate Risk Register provided at Appendix 1 of the report; and
ii. risk profile at Appendix 2 of the report.

12. Regulatory of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act
Achd Riaghladh Chumhachdan Sgrùdaidh (Alba)

Seven applications for authorisation in terms of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 had been approved between 1 October 2025 and 30 April 2026. The seven applications were for directed surveillance.

The Committee **NOTED** the number of approvals and that the Council continued to be a modest user of the powers. A report would be forthcoming to the November meeting.

13. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a'Phobaill

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 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

14. Internal Audit Reviews and Progress Report
Ath-sgrùdaidhean In-sgrùdaidh agus Aithisg Adhartais

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. AC/15/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk) the following final confidential audit report.

Place Cluster - Harbours.

The Committee **AGREED** the recommendations detailed in the report and **NOTED** that the Harbours Strategy would need to be considered by the Harbours Management Board, before submitting for approval to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 28 May 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mr I Brown
Mr M Cameron
Mr A Christie
Mr S Coghill (Remote)
Mr J Edmondson
Ms C Gillies
Mr K Gowans
Mr M Green
Mr R Jones
Mr P Logue
Mr D Macpherson
Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mrs T Robertson
Mrs M Ross (Substitute)
Mr R Stewart (Remote)
Ms K Willis (Remote)

Non-Members also present:

Mr C Ballance (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)
Mr D Fraser
Dr M Gregson
Mr M Hutchison (Remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (Remote)
Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr D Millar (Remote)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr J Welsh, Chief Officer - Enterprise and Investment
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer - Facilities & Fleet Management
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead - Environment Development and Active Travel
Mr D Mudie, Strategic Lead - Planning and Building Standards
Mr M Sutherland, Strategic Lead – Operations
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change Manager
Mr T Stott, Development Plans Manager
Mr A Webster, Economy and Regeneration Manager
Ms H Jones, HR Business Partner
Mr D Cowie, Principal Planner
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Ms L MacGillivray, Community Support Co-ordinator
Mr T Francis, Project Officer
Ms J MacLeod, Developer Contributions Officer
Mr D Summers, Principal Transport Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs O Bayon, 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 K Gowans in the Chair

Business

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

   Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce and Ms L Dundas.

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

   The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

   Item 4 – Mr M Gregson
   Item 7 – Mr J Edmondson
   Item 12 – Ms C Gillies

3. **Good News**
   Naidheachdan Matha

   The Committee **NOTED** the following items of Good News:-

   In-House Bus

   The in-house bus service had fully wrapped two buses with an Inverness Castle Experience (ICE) livery. This had provided highly visible promotion of ICE and was expected to encourage more visitors to the attraction. The wraps had been funded by Transport Scotland's Bus Improvement Fund. Visitors using the in-house bus service from Torvean Park and Ride to the Castle had been able to access a 10 per cent discount on food at the Castle's bistro on production of their bus ticket.

   Access Rangers

   The recruitment and deployment of the 2026 Seasonal Access Ranger team supported communities and protected the environment during the busy visitor season. The team would operate from 20 May to October 2026 across key Highland locations, promoting responsible access and addressing issues such as unmanaged camping and parking.

   Great Glen Way - Bunloit off-road section

   Progress had been made on a new off-road section of the Great Glen Way at Bunloit, which had been due for completion by the end of May and had been delivered in partnership with Highlands Rewilding. Located south of Drumnadrochit, the 3 kilometre route had improved safety and user experience by diverting walkers and cyclists off the road.

   New Glencoe Village Car Park Confirmed

   The Council's Tourism team had progressed a key infrastructure project to deliver the new Glencoe Village Car Park. The project had been funded by

VisitScotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Highland Council, and the new purpose built car park had been linked to the wider Glencoe Greenway initiative.

Ardvreck Castle Car Park completed

The Council's Tourism team had also completed a major infrastructure project at Ardvreck Castle in Sutherland. Funded by VisitScotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the project had expanded parking to 25 spaces, including dedicated motorhome bays, and had enhanced road safety by reconfiguring laybys and closing hazardous ones.

4. Developer Contributions
Tabhartasan Luchd-leasachaidh

Transparency Statements: Dr M Gregson and Mr R Jones declared connections to this item as a close family member had prepared the report and as a member of the Cairngorm National Park Authority respectively. However, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members required greater awareness of developer contribution pots within their own wards, including the potential to review and repurpose long-standing unspent funds, with early engagement with officers advised where appropriate;
- concern was expressed that the information within the appendices lacked sufficient detail to allow effective scrutiny. In this regard, it was requested that future reports include clearer descriptions of obligations, improved linkage between appendices and more accessible explanations of how contributions had been utilised;
- questions were raised regarding significant drawdowns linked to specific schools, including Inverness Royal Academy and Culloden Academy, with uncertainty expressed as to whether this related to capital works or historic loan repayments;
- it was suggested that the presentation of financial information did not allow Members to clearly track how individual pots had been spent or depleted, limiting transparency and accountability and that improved reporting, including clearer audit trails and publication of planning references, would assist scrutiny;
- support was expressed for the provision of a Members' seminar or workshop to allow all Members to better understand the framework, recognising that some had already received briefings;
- queries were raised in relation to specific pots and projects, including active travel funding, school-related contributions and infrastructure schemes, with Members seeking clarity on progress and intended use of funds;

- concern was expressed regarding delays in utilising developer contributions in some areas, including examples where significant balances remained unspent despite identified community needs. Frustration was expressed that discussions in some cases had been ongoing for several years without measurable progress or clarity on decision-making;
- communities were not always aware of the existence of developer contributions or how these could be accessed and that clearer communication and processes were required;
- support was expressed for linking developer contributions more effectively with local place plans to ensure that locally identified priorities could be progressed;
- concern was raised regarding potential inconsistencies in how developer contributions operated across different planning authorities, with a request for improved coordination where responsibilities overlapped;
- it was suggested that the Council's website and reporting approach could be developed into a more accessible and regularly updated resource to provide up-to-date information on contribution pots, their origin and their use, which would help address perceived lack of confidence and understanding among Members;
- comments were made regarding the importance of ensuring that projects funded through developer contributions, including city centre improvements such as signage and cycle infrastructure, were of appropriate quality and design;
- broader support was expressed for the principle of developer contributions, including their role in supporting infrastructure delivery and reducing pressure on capital budgets; and
- it was emphasised that robust scrutiny of financial information remained an essential responsibility for Members.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the updated explanation of how developer contributions operate, including the policy basis and requirements;
ii. **NOTED** alignment with National Planning Framework 4 and the Council's adopted Supplementary Guidance;
iii. **NOTED** the current balances of all active Developer Contribution pots for information;
iv. **NOTED** Developer Contribution drawdowns during the 2025/26 financial year; and
v. **AGREED** that an update report was brought back to Committee as soon as practicable following the end of the 2026/27 financial year.

5. Flow Country World Heritage Site – Article 4 Direction
Làrach Dualchas na Cruinne anns na Flobhachan – Stiùireadh Alt 4

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

During discussion, clarification was sought on the exclusion of Class 33 from the proposed Article 4 Direction, including its scope in relation to local authority works and the rationale for it not being included within the proposed restrictions. Questions were raised regarding the implications of the Flow Country being designated as a World Heritage Site for planning decisions, including how this status would influence future development considerations. It was further questioned whether earlier designation as a World Heritage Site would have altered previous decisions relating to wind turbine developments in the area and clarification was sought, and provided, on the practical differences between the position prior to designation and the current position.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

i. that the proposed Article 4 Direction, to be made under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 as amended, would cover the whole of the area within the boundary of The Flow Country World Heritage Site;
ii. to the extended list of Classes of Permitted Development proposed to be removed by the Article 4 Direction, being Classes 8, 14, 15, 18A, 19, 20, 22, 22A, 22B, 27, 38, 39, 40, 53, 54, 55 and 67 of Schedule 1 of the Order;
iii. that officers collate the documentation for the proposed Article 4 Direction and statement of the planning authority's reasons for making the Direction, in line with the report, and submit those documents to Scottish Ministers for approval; and
iv. that subject to gaining Scottish Ministers' approval of the proposed Article 4 Direction (with or without modifications), officers undertake the subsequent administrative steps required to implement it.

6. Play Sufficiency Assessment – Consultation Outcomes
Measadh Foghantas Cluiche – Builean Co-chomhairleachaidh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the report and the evidence base it provided, recognising its value in informing future planning, investment decisions and the preparation of the Highland Local Development Plan;
- concern was expressed regarding the limited number of public consultation responses, which was attributed in part to the inclusion of inappropriate sites as informal play areas, including locations such as drainage ponds, riverbanks and car parks. It was suggested that future consultation exercises should include greater scrutiny of potential play spaces prior to publication;
- specific local issues were raised, including a play area provided through development funding where equipment had not yet been delivered despite funding having been transferred to the Council;
- the importance of considering play provision at a local level was highlighted, recognising that Area Committees would provide a more appropriate forum for detailed discussion and prioritisation;

- concerns were raised regarding the condition of play equipment, including examples of facilities only being upgraded once they had significantly deteriorated. The need for a more planned approach to maintenance, lifecycle management and reinvestment was emphasised;
- the importance of taking account of local demographics when assessing play provision was emphasised, observing that reliance on overall population figures did not always reflect the distribution and needs of children and young people. Clarification was sought on provision for older children and teenagers, including the potential for more suitable or exercise-based equipment;
- the importance of inclusive play and direct engagement with young people to inform provision and improve outcomes was highlighted;
- reference was made to workforce and resource constraints affecting delivery timescales, alongside positive examples of community involvement and fundraising supporting improvements, although it was recognised that not all communities had the same capacity. Members had a role in representing areas with less ability to advocate for themselves;
- wider discussion took place on the need for a more holistic approach to open space provision, including links to health and wellbeing, intergenerational use of facilities and improving access to existing assets such as school grounds and other managed spaces;
- concern was expressed regarding restricted access to facilities, particularly school grounds, and Members highlighted the need to explore opportunities to increase community access out with operational hours, with officers indicating that they would contact High Life Highland to explore this further;
- concerns were raised regarding coordination between Council services and partners, with examples provided of operational issues arising from a lack of communication and it was suggested that improved joint working would lead to better outcomes for communities; and
- concern was expressed regarding the quality of play provision delivered through new housing developments and it was suggested that the Council should take a more robust approach in setting and enforcing expectations for developers.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the finalised PSA Report in Appendix 2 of the report, noting the changes incorporated in the PSA Report and associated Map following public consultation as summarised in Section 7 of the report;
ii. **AGREED** that the finalised PSA along with the consultation feedback would be available as part of the evidence to inform future budgeting, funding bids and investment decisions in the context of Council's Play Park Strategy;
iii. **NOTED** that, following approval, the finalised PSA Report would be submitted to the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) as part of the submission of the Evidence Report for Gate Check and would be used to inform the preparation of the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP); and
iv. **AGREED** that officers contact High Life Highland to explore the scope to improve access to play and open space provision, including the use of existing facilities.

7. Public Transport Strategy
Ro-innleachd Còmhdhalach Poblaich

Transparency Statement: Mr J Edmondson declared a connection to this item as a member of a local transport forum. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the draft Public Transport Strategy and the progress made in developing a more structured approach to public transport provision across the Highlands were welcomed;
- significant reliability issues had been experienced with some commercial operators, including services not running as timetabled and instances where published services were known not to be operating in practice, which had caused disruption for passengers and impacts on those reliant on public transport;
- concern was expressed regarding inaccurate or misleading published timetables, where services were shown as operating more frequently than in practice;
- the need for a balanced and genuine partnership approach with external operators was emphasised, including concerns regarding potential displacement of private sector activity and the Council's role in the market;
- it was highlighted that operators had raised concerns regarding staff recruitment, including the cost of training drivers and the movement of staff to Council operated services;
- concerns were also raised regarding contractual arrangements, including short termination periods, which could impact operators' ability to secure financing and invest in vehicles;
- queries were raised regarding the Council's in-house bus operations, including fleet size, environmental performance, transition to electric vehicles and availability of financial information;
- the importance of partnership working with existing operators was emphasised, given the reliance on external providers to deliver services across the area;
- the importance of improving integration across transport modes was highlighted, including better coordination between buses, trains and ferries to support seamless journeys;
- specific issues were raised regarding poor connections, including missed links between ferry services and buses, particularly in rural areas;
- it was suggested that improved coordination of timetables, including learning from examples elsewhere, could support better integration of services;
- some services, including school transport routes open to the public, were not widely known and that improved publicity and information provision was required;

- support was expressed for the development of park and ride and local interchange facilities to support combined journeys;
- the success of Council operated bus services in some areas was welcomed, including improvements in reliability and public confidence;
- expansion of services to rural areas was important and it was requested that a timetable for the expansion of the Council's bus operations be provided, including indicative timescales for rollout to other areas. It was indicated that this would be brought forward, subject to consideration of confidentiality requirements;
- reference was made to ongoing work in areas such as Lochaber, with a need for clarity on delivery timescales and scope;
- the importance of providing services that connect with new housing developments and key destinations was highlighted;
- support was expressed for the continued development of community transport, alongside recognition of challenges relating to reliance on volunteers and capacity within communities;
- concern was expressed regarding the impact of the £2 fare cap scheme, including potential unintended consequences for local operators and pressures on public funding;
- workforce availability, particularly trained drivers, was highlighted as an ongoing constraint affecting delivery and expansion of services;
- the importance of infrastructure was highlighted, including bus shelters, with concerns raised regarding condition, vandalism and graffiti and the impact on perceptions of safety and attractiveness;
- comments were made on the need to improve passenger information, including real-time displays and provision for those not using digital platforms;
- service provision should reflect travel patterns, including early morning services and connections for employment and onward travel;
- the wider benefits of improved public transport were recognised, including reducing congestion, supporting economic activity and improving access to services;
- it was highlighted that improved connectivity could support tourism by improving access to rural areas and spreading visitor benefits;
- the complexity of the transport environment was acknowledged, including the need to balance competition, partnership working and public service delivery;
- the importance of continued communication and transparency with Members was emphasised as the strategy progressed; and
- overall support was expressed for the direction of the strategy, while recognising the scale of the challenges in delivery.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the draft Public Transport Strategy attached within Appendix 2 of the report, for consultation;
ii. **NOTED** that within the overall draft strategy, work was proceeding to develop sub-strategies for community transport and public transport information;
iii. **AGREED** that bids for community transport grants for the three years commencing in April 2027 be invited, and recommendations for award made to the Committee in November 2026;

iv. **AGREED** that a timescale for public and school transport contract renewal was developed, with existing contracts being extended in some areas where achievable, to create a more phased renewal programme; and

v. **AGREED** that a timetable for the expansion of the Council's bus operations be prepared and reported to Members, subject to consideration of confidentiality requirements.

8. Nature Restoration Fund
Maoin Ath-stèidheachadh Nàdair

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, on the total allocation figures presented in the report, including how the overall total of £1.85m had been calculated and the treatment of the 2024/25 allocation within this;
- clarification was also sought, and provided, on the administration cost of £12,000, including how this was applied across the fund and whether it was proportionately split between community grants and in-house projects;
- further explanation was requested on specific budget lines, including the Nature Networks post costs and how these related to delivery of the programme;
- concern was expressed regarding the presentation of information within Appendix 1 of the report, including inconsistencies in how geographic areas were described and a perceived lack of parity in how projects were categorised;
- support was expressed for investment in nature restoration and biodiversity projects and the positive impact of funded projects across Highland was welcomed;
- clarification was sought on the anticipated allocation from the Scottish Government for 2026/27, including timing of any announcement and the potential for increases or reductions in funding levels;
- concern was raised regarding the proposal to prioritise funding for in-house Council projects in the event of a reduced allocation, with the importance of ensuring benefit across all areas of Highland highlighted;
- it was emphasised that previous community-led projects had delivered positive outcomes and that continued support for such projects should be considered where possible;
- clarification was sought on the process for community organisations to apply for funding, including how projects were identified, assessed and monitored and whether repeat applications were permitted;
- it was highlighted that Members would benefit from clearer information on how to support local projects and access funding opportunities within their wards;
- concern was expressed regarding the accessibility of the scheme, including visibility of funding rounds and whether communities were sufficiently aware of available funding;
- it was highlighted that some Members had experienced difficulty identifying routes to access funding for Council owned land and local projects;

- support was expressed for exploring opportunities to apply the fund to address specific issues such as coastal erosion and habitat restoration;
- it was highlighted that a wide range of community projects had been supported through the fund, including biodiversity, habitat restoration and environmental enhancement initiatives across Highland;
- clarification was sought on the rationale for the potential reduction in funding and whether this reflected wider indications from the Scottish Government; and
- overall support was expressed for the continued use of the Nature Restoration Fund to deliver biodiversity improvements, alongside the need for clarity, transparency and accessibility in how the fund operates.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** allocation and spend progress to date;
ii. **AGREED** to continue to use existing allocation and governance structures for any future allocation(s);
iii. **AGREED** to target funds to in-house council projects if NRF allocation was significantly reduced; and
iv. **AGREED** to continue to delegate decision making to the Assistant Chief Executive – Place in consultation with the Chair of this Committee.

9. Ardersier Local Nature Reserve Declaration
Dearbhadh Tèarmann Nàdair Ionadail Àird nan Saor

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

Support was expressed for the proposal, with reference made to the strong community involvement throughout the process and the importance of the site to local residents. It was highlighted that the area was well used by the community and formed part of local identity, including links to local schools and community representation. Designation as a Local Nature Reserve would support the protection of locally important species and help safeguard the area from potential encroachment, which remained a concern for the community.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

i. that the proposed area shown in Appendix 2 of the report be declared the Ardersier Common Local Nature Reserve; and
ii. to delegate authority to the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee, to conclude, and thereafter declare in pursuance of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 the area to be managed as a Local Nature Reserve.

10. UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Delivery Plan Update
Maoin Soirbheachais Cho-roinnte na Ra – Cunntas mun Phlana Lìbhrigidh

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion Members sought clarification on the 4% administration allocation included within the Delivery Plan, observing that guidance indicated that local authorities could retain up to 4% rather than being required to do so, and further justification for this level of allocation was requested.

Clarification was also sought on how the UK Shared Prosperity Fund compared to previous European Union funding, with reference made to its role as a successor to EU funding streams and whether it reflected similar levels of financial support. It was stated that the current level of funding did not match previous EU funding levels and that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund had been a time-limited programme, with no confirmed successor arrangement. Reference was made to the increasing uncertainty and variability of external funding streams and the need for the Council to consider alternative approaches to funding and income generation.

The Committee **NOTED** the 2025/26 UKSPF Delivery Plan progress.

11. Dark Skies Draft Planning Policy
Dreachd Phoileasaidh Dealbhachaidh nan Iarmailtean Dorcha

There had been circulated Report No. ECI20/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the guidance would help in the future to mitigate the amount of light pollution in sizable developments;
- Members and communities generally welcomed this policy;
- new technology advances could be used in developments in “dark sky” areas. However, LED lighting could have a negative effect on insect and bird life and this needed to be investigated further;
- it was queried if this would help when complaints were made to environmental health about light pollution;
- in terms of windfarm developments, in particular where turbines were over 160m, aviation lighting was required. New technology meant that lights were switched on when aircraft were nearby but that required aircraft to be fitted with an operating transponder and for Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to have designated the airspace surrounding the windfarm as a transponder mandatory zone. Whilst the policy was being developed calls were made for the CAA to designate the Highlands as a transponder mandatory zone. However, concern was expressed that the need for aircraft to be fitted with transponders could have a negative effect on the highland economy and make Highland less attractive to visit;
- it was queried if low level lighting could come on as and when pedestrians approach and went off thereafter;
- as and when upgrades took place, there was an opportunity to move towards more dark sky friendly lighting;

- the timing of lighting could be considered e.g. turning it off between midnight and 6 am;
- reduced lighting had had a negative impact at the Baptist Church, Firhill and had limited use of this facility, especially during the winter months;
- a dark sky policy opened up another potential form of tourism and income generation highlighting the beauty of the Highland at night as well as during the day;
- the lighting of ancient monuments and tourism attractions would be done on an individual basis taking into account good guidance;
- the choice of lighting would be determined on a case-by-case basis. A one-size approach would not fit all;
- the introduction of low level lighting could increase developer costs thus deterring investment;
- some communities wanted enhanced lighting as a result of safety and security fears; and
- public consultation was to take place on the light pollution policy as part of the Highland Local Development Plan and this would allow the skills and experience of local groups to be considered.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the benefits of reducing light pollution outlined in section 5 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the practicalities of achieving such a reduction and the range of policy and guidance options available to the Council as outlined in section 6 of the report; and
iii. **AGREED** that officers formulate and consult on a specific light pollution reduction policy within the new Highland Local Development Plan and that interim technical guidance be brought to this committee for approval before the end of this calendar year.

12. Community Regeneration Fund – Allocation of HCCF Tranche 7 and CRF Review
Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd – Riarachadh Earrainn 7 HCCF agus Aithisg Ath-sgrùdaidh CRF

Transparency Statement: Ms C Gillies declared a connection to this item as a member of the Community of Raasay Retail Association. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- a variety of projects across Highland had benefited from this Community Regeneration Fund;
- the importance of Community Regeneration Funding was emphasised, especially in rural areas as it empowered communities and signposted

match funding for projects. The work of the Community Regeneration Fund team, both with Members and communities, was recognised and they were well respected across the authority;

- disappointment was expressed of the £50k de minimis uplift to four local area committees, which otherwise would stand to receive less than £12k each, as this diminished the benefit for the remaining areas;
- well prepared and resourced communities were often best paced to take up this funding opportunity and to submit good quality applications. However, there seemed to be limited capacity to seek applications from communities most in need and it perhaps fell to Members to promote this to these communities;
- it was important not to use acronyms and to explain that HCCF stood for the Highland Coastal Communities Fund;
- it was important to be transparent in relation to the papers, decision making and minutes where funding decisions were made. The Chair explained that the fund was advertised, Members meetings took place to determine applications and minutes were reported to Committee; and
- there was an onus on Members to promote the Community Regeneration Fund and that, if there was difficulty in completing forms, Community Support officers were available to assist.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** the Scottish Crown Estate Net Revenue allocation to local area committees as set out within Appendix 1 of the report; and
ii. **NOTED** the CRF Brochure attached within Appendix 2 and the full list of funded projects within Appendix 3 of the report.

13. Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan – Update and Amendment Report
Plana Leasachaidh Bun-structair Turasachd Ro-innleachdail – Aithisg Ùrachaidh is Atharrachaidh

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/22/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the inclusion of Altnafeadh as a Tier 1 project and the expansion of 'Hotspot 1: Glen Etive & Glencoe' was welcomed. The lack of car parking facilities in these areas on the A82 was proving hazardous and, as a result, Ward Discretionary Funding had been allocated toward a feasibility study with a view to improving provision;
- the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund was targeted at hotspots but there were other areas also requiring support; and
- the benefits of the Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan had already reaped rewards at tourism hotspots. Many tourists looked to visit free attractions and the example in the Inverness South Ward was the Culloden Viaduct and, particularly the Clava Cairns, a location which had featured in the popular television series "Outlander" thus raising its profile.

However, the roads infrastructure needed to be improved, not only for sustainable tourism, but for the businesses and farms locally. It was important however to be more self-sufficient and the visitor levy, it was suggested, was one way to achieve this.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the positive progress being made in delivering the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan (STIDP) and in securing Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund support for vital projects across the Highland area;
ii. **AGREED** to the following amendments to the STIDP:-
    a. Reclassification of Whaligoe Steps to a 'Tier 1' project and the creation of a corresponding 'hotspot', as set out in Section 6 and Appendix 1 of the report; and
    b. Slight eastern expansion of 'Hotspot 1: Glen Etive & Glencoe' and the identification of an additional Tier 1 project at the Devil's Staircase (Altnafeadh, Glencoe), as set out in Section 6 and Appendix 1 of the report; and
iii. **NOTED** the intent to develop a Sustainable Tourism Strategy Delivery Programme, which would incorporate the revised content of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan (STIDP) and, in due course, supersede it.

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

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/23/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- reference was made the Full Council meeting on 26 March 2026 where Members had reinforced the strategic direction in relation to Climate Change and Net Zero. The workforce capacity and coordination to support the delivery of the Climate Change resilience programme had been emphasised. As a result, clarification was sought, and provided, as to how resourcing requirement for this team was being made and that the Climate Change and Energy team were included in the workforce analysis action plan set out in the report; and
- the Place Cluster had approximately 3,300 employees with a turnover of 16%. Although this seemed a relatively high percentage it was explained that catering and cleaning staff represented a significant proportion of the establishment and these posts traditionally had a higher turnover.

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

15. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update – My Highland (Future Reconfiguring our Asset Base and Net Zero, Energy Investment and innovation – Q4 2025/26)

Sgrùdadh Buidseit agus Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh – M' Am Ri Teachd anns à Ghàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/24/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Having sought clarification as to the meaning as a "soft launch" in relation to Temporary and Traffic Regulation Order Software, the Committee **NOTED** the Delivery Project updates provided in the report.

16. Performance Monitoring Report Q4 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R4 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/25/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the service performance information; and
ii. the change to Freedom of Information reporting to align with Chief Officer structure.

17. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Planning Applications Committees (PAC) for:-

i. South PAC – 3 December 2025;
ii. South PAC – 18 December 2025;
iii. North PAC – 21 January 2026;
iv. South PAC – 5 February 2026;
v. South PAC – 18 February 2026;
vi. North PAC – 11 March 2026;
vii. South PAC – 1 April 2026;

and, **APPROVED:-**

viii. City Region Deal Monitoring Group held on 3 February 2026;
ix. Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group held on the 2 April 2026; and
x. Harbours Management Board held on 22 May 2026.

The meeting ended at 12.40 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee** (**Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair**) held remotely on **Monday, 1 June 2026 at 10.30 am.**

Present:
Mr J Finlayson
Ms C Gillies
Mr D Millar

Officials in attendance:
Mr A Bone, Acting Roads Operations Manager, Place Service
Mr D Hopwood, Area Environmental Health Manager, Place Service
Ms M Ross, Assistant Housing Manager, Place Service
Mr D Swanson, Active Travel Project Manager, Place Service
Ms M A Gray, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund, Place Service
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Officer (West & Mid Highland)
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Also in attendance:
Inspector A Mackenzie, Police Scotland
Mr D MacDonald, Sleat Community Development Trust

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

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There was an apology for absence from Mr R Stewart.

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

Item 3 – Mr D Millar (Transparency Statement)

3. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba

Transparency Statement - Councillor D Millar declared a transparency statement in relation to this item as he had a family member who works for Police Scotland, but not serving in the Highland division. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No SR/11/26 by the Area Commander for Police Scotland.

Following commentary on the report by the Inspector, Members noted that Inspector Ali Mackenzie was due to retire soon following 30 years Police service.

Members thanked the Inspector for his service to Police Scotland and to this area and they wished him the best for the future, with a long and happy retirement.

In terms of the report, reference was made to concerns raised at Community Council meetings in relation to Police staffing numbers; drugs available in the area; driver behaviour particularly by tourists in hired vehicles/motorhomes, and an update on the Police house in Dunvegan was requested. In response the Inspector advised that tourists when hiring motorhomes as long as they had the required permissions on their driving licence had every right to use the vehicle. Road accidents involving tourists often was due to lack of awareness or understanding of narrow roads, passing places and changing from 2 lanes to single carriageway. Officers had worked in the past with hire companies in order to educate tourists on the limitations of our roads. Officers also stopped vehicles to educate drivers. Telematics of vehicles from phones, watches and motorbikes with collision alert, triggered a response from Police which took up significant resource time for Officers and at times it had been found to be unnecessary for them to attend. Drivers were also using Sat Navs as opposed to road markings/signage to dictate their driver behaviour, and for example, they may drive at slower speeds as a result.

Continuing, there was still an Officer for the Dunvegan area and the Police station was still active. The Police were working with the local community to identify a location for a new station for Dunvegan.

It was advised that Community Councils appreciated Police Officers attending their meetings. Given the number of incidents and the apparent lack of Police resources, there was a feeling that people did not want to bother the Police with lower level incidents. In response, staffing numbers had always been a challenge in this area, but this was also a national issue.

In relation to the biggest changes to policing over the long term and challenges facing the Police, the Inspector advised that the perception was that policing was always better in the past. The Police had always wanted more Officers. However, 30 years ago there were not the same challenges such as with the internet or mobile phones. People now had the ability to contact the Police much quicker and therefore the demand on Police resources was much greater now. Working with partners in respect of mental health calls and the demand this had on Police resources was highlighted. Continuing, in relation to drug issues, people were encouraged to report any criminality to Police by the 101 or 999 telephone numbers or online at Police Scotland or contacting Crimestoppers.

It was requested that a briefing note be prepared on how the Police service operates nowadays on Skye/Raasay and circulate to local Members/Community Councils. This would be useful to understand the different approaches and pressures to policing and the best way to contact local Police officers.

The Committee **NOTED**:

i. progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2025 – 31 March 2026;
ii. the change in format necessitate by a reduction in back-office capacity to prepare additional area committee reports; and

iii a briefing note would be prepared for Members/Community Councils on how the Police operates on Skye/Raasay.

4. Sleat Community Development Trust
Urras Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd Shlèite

Mr D MacDonald, Chair, Sleat Community Development Trust was in attendance and gave a presentation in relation to work undertaken by the Trust in the community and key projects that the Trust are delivering and some of the challenges faced by the Trust.

It was highlighted that the Trust was established around 20 years ago to try and bring more focus to the various sustainability, economical, environmental and social welfare matters in Sleat. The main assets in the Trust were the Armadale stores and garage and Tormore community woodland. Volunteers were essential to the work of the Trust and there was an ongoing challenge in attracting volunteers for the Trust's activities.

The Trust looked for new opportunities and while they did not want to buy the whole of the Clan Donald Land Estate Trust last year, a community due diligence exercise was undertaken to understand this asset and what opportunities there may be. The Clan Donald Land Estate had now been sold and it was positive that the new owners did want to work with the community and the Trust were engaging with them.

The Trust also interfaced with Sabhal Mor Ostaig and Bun-Sgoil Shleite and acted as the finance vehicle for the Drumfearn to Breakish public/cycle path. The Trust also worked with the Ferry Users Group; operated an electric community minibus, and introduced Skyenet Community broadband. There was also a community café which helped link people.

The Trust had funding for a Community Development Officer to assist them in their activities. The recruitment process was underway. The Trust were developing a list of future projects including potential projects with the new Armadale Estate. The new Development Officer would assist progressing projects. The ambition was for this post to be self sustaining after 3 years as it was believed that there were some projects that could generate income to achieve this aim.

Following the presentation, Members referred to the impressive length of time the Trust had been in existence. One of the key factors for trusts and community groups was sustainability and longevity and the Sleat Community Development Trust had shown this was possible with strong management and working with other community partners. Trusts had an important role in communities where more activities were requiring to be done by communities themselves.

In relation to income generation, the Tormore hydro scheme had been very successful and surplus funds generated were reinvested in community projects.

The Committee thanked Mr MacDonald for his attendance and the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd

There was circulated Report No. SR/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which presented a funding application to the Isle of Skye and Raasay Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) allocation for discussion and decision by Members. The report also updated Members on the Isle of Skye & Raasay CRF budget position for 2025-26 and 2026-27.

Members were supportive of the application from the Portree Community Centre Association and the Committee therefore **APPROVED** the CRF grant award, subject to any conditions, up to the value of £39,493.16.

6. Portree Mobility Hubs
Co-ionadan So-ghluasadachd Phort Rìgh

There was circulated Report No. SR/13/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided Members with an update on work undertaken to date on the provision of a Mobility Hub or Hubs for Portree, and to ask them to agree on the proposed next steps recommended following the initial summary report.

In discussion, there was some frustration over the lack of progress on Portree Mobility Hubs and the length of time it had taken to progress matters. It was queried how quickly could matters be progressed and what funding avenues were being explored to deliver mobility hubs. Also, clarity was sought on the areas identified for the mobility hubs and an undertaking was given to provide Councillor D Millar with a site visit to the areas identified. In response, it was acknowledged that this was a priority and that the Active Travel Project Manager would submit an update report to an Area Business Meeting with more detail on the proposed sites. There would also be community engagement on the project.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the findings of the initial summary report on Mobility Hubs; and
ii.**AGREED** that officers should further explore the deliverability of the emerging preferred options identified in the report.

7. Housing Management Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais

There was circulated Report No. SR/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided information on how the Housing Service performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 March 2026.

The Assistant Housing Manager highlighted key aspects of the report and in response to questions from Members, it was advised that the Right Sizing Scheme for Council homes had been approved and Officers would look to incentivise anyone who wished to move into a more appropriate sized property. Further, the Council had purchased a number of properties for social housing and the Council's Development team could provide more information on this. The Manager had been involved in the Caithness Stakeholder project a few years ago where the formation of care villages was discussed. It had been proposed that there would

be extra care housing next to health centres which was an excellent idea. For various reasons this proposal never happened but care villages could improve the lives of people.

In terms of rent arrears, it was advised that the Department of Work and Pensions paid the universal credit housing element, which was the rental payment, in arrears. Therefore, anyone in receipt of the full housing element would be in rent arrears.

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

With the agreement of the Committee, the following item was taken after item 6 of this minute.

8. Environmental Health Annual Report and Activity 2025/26
Aithisg Bhliadhnail agus Gnìomhachd Slàinte Àrainneachdail 2025/26

There was circulated Report No. SR/15/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the Environmental Health team and an annual report on local activity during 2025/26.

Following a presentation on the report by the Area Environmental Health Manager and in response to questions, the Manager confirmed that the data in the report relating to short term lets was accurate and the Manager was unaware of large number of short term lets operating without the required licences. However, the Environmental Health team would be interested in information of any short term let operating without the required licences, so that they could be brought into compliance. In relation to timescales for consultations on planning applications and licences, there had been delays due to the volume of work the team had and the recruitment issues faced by the Service. Efforts to address these recruitment challenges were detailed. Further, there was cross working between specialist officers and staff resources were used in an effective way.

There was a workshop on the issue of abandoned vehicles scheduled for 4 June and following this a report would be submitted to the Communities and Place Committee in August which would give a better understanding of what could be done to address this issue. Also, the Service was working with the DVLA to undertake an operation to tackle this problem in the Highland area.

Other than using the environmental health team online service via the Council website, contact details of local offices were on the Highland Council website, and the public could visit Service Points for assistance and appointments could be made with local Officers.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the scope and volume of work currently being delivered in the local area;
ii. **NOTED** local issues and current operational priorities;
iii. **NOTED** Highland wide issues impacting Environmental Health services; and
iv. **AGREED** the format and content of the report.

9. Road Maintenance Update
Cunntas air Càradh Rathaidean

There was circulated Report No. SR/16/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the Area Roads Capital Programme completed, at the time of writing, from the 2026/27 programme and works programmed for the remainder of the financial year.

In response to questions from Members, the Acting Roads Operations Manager advised that the surface dressing programme was slightly behind schedule and it was hoped to start this work very soon. The road lining programme would also start soon and in terms of emergency repairs to roads, resources could be brought in from other areas to assist with this. A staffing update was provided at the meeting and it was advised that there were a number of roads still requiring to be adopted and work was ongoing on this.

There was positive feedback from Members on the road maintenance work that was ongoing in what was a comprehensive capital programme. The Acting Roads Operations Manager was thanked for his attendance at the recent Ward Forum with Community Councils. It was useful for Community Councils to understand the issues of capital and revenue funding.

The Committee **NOTED** the update report.

10. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward 10 Discretionary Budget applications approved since the last meeting of the Committee.

Glendale Trust - Glendale Film Show & Archive Event - £910
Highland Good Food Partnership & ReRoot - Feel Heal Real Food -£608
Radio Skye - Young Woman In Radio - £1,894

A full list of Ward Discretionary Budget awards for 2025/26 was available at:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/421/ward-discretionary-budgets-and-spend

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 16 February, 2026 the terms of which were approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 26 March, 2026.

The meeting ended at 12.47 p.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummuie, Golspie on Monday, 1 June 2026 at 10.00 pm.

Present:
Mr M Baird
Mr R Gale
Ms M Hutchison
Mr H Morrison
Ms LA Niven

In attendance:
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Mr J Mitchell, Housing Manager
Mr T Lush, Environmental Health Manager
Ms K Van Voornveld, AQIM (Farr KLB Thurso Wick Golspie)
Mr M Dent, Access Officer
Ms C Murray Project Officer, Community Regeneration
Mr J MacKay, Amenity Services Manager
Ms I Jamieson, Service Support Officer 2, Operations and Maintenance

Also in attendance:
Mr J Thrower, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr K Ettles, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr R Gale in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

There were none.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Area Performance Report
Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No SCC/09/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, clarification was sought and provided on the following issues:

- the reporting of fire and non-fire casualties;
- fire station staff availability and recruitment in various locations including Durness, Scourie, Thurso, Bettyhill, Lochinver and Tongue;

- the benefits of holding joint meetings with Members, SFRS representatives and local businesses to encourage staff to consider on-call fire fighting. Talks on this would take place outwith the meeting;
- the young leader of the Lochinver team was commended for their work, as were all the SFRS officers;
- engagement with schools was appreciated and details of which schools had experienced direct engagement could be provided outwith the meeting;
- information was sought and provided on recruitment challenges and progress at Bonar Bridge; and
- plans to share fire officers across different areas, and to engage with communities and schools, were summarised.

The Committee **NOTED** the Sutherland Performance report.

4. Bereavement Services – Project Updates
Cunntas às ùr mu sheirbheisean bàis

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members requested that the number of lairs reported to be available at Golspie burial ground be reviewed and confirmed in due course;
- the work to secure additional land for Melness burial ground was welcomed; and
- assurance was sought and provided that consideration would be given to undertaking early discussions in relation to the possible extension of Balnakeil burial ground.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Sutherland area;
ii. **NOTED** the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development; and
iii. **AGREED** the reported number of available lairs in Golspie Cemetery and Balnakeil Burial Ground be checked.

5. Housing Management Performance Report up to 31 March 2026
Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais - 31 Màrt 2026

There had been circulated Report No SCC/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- appreciation was expressed for the work of the Housing Service in Sutherland, with particular reference to the low levels of rent arrears;
- information on the number of people housed in temporary accommodation across Highland was sought and would be provided after the meeting; and

- an explanation was sought and provided on how the figures within the Sutherland area compared with other parts of Highland, which was generally positive given the relatively lower demand.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026 and **AGREED** information on the number of people housed in temporary accommodation across Highland was sought and would be provided after the meeting.

6. Environmental Health – Annual Report & Activity 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No SCC/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

A presentation was provided on local Environmental Health activities, including environment health duties, operational areas, and a summary of reactive, pro-active and enforcement activities, locally and Highland-wide.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- information was sought and provided on the dog fouling activity taking place in the Sutherland area, and the number of fines that had been issued, which was zero at present, with visibility of officers being a preventative measure. Members were invited to email officers with any areas of particular concern. The benefits of providing communities with posters and leaflets was highlighted;
- attention was drawn to the need for some private housing emergency repair assistance and to the lack of budget for this, which would be further discussed with the lead officer for grants after the meeting; and
- concern was expressed at the poor state of repair of a derelict building in Lairg and efforts to contact the deceased owners estate could be discussed out with the meeting.

The Committee:

i. **AGREED** the Lead Officer for Housing repair grants would contact Ms Hutchison after the meeting about a case she had information on; and
ii. **NOTED**:-
    a. the scope and volume of work currently being delivered in the local area;
    b. local issues and current operational priorities;
    c. Highland wide issues impacting Environmental Health services; and
    d. the format and content of the report.

7. Associated School Group Attainment Overview
Foir-shealladh air Buileachadh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

Members pointed out that information on Ullapool High School had been requested for the Sutherland County Committee on several occasions, noting that a number of Sutherland-resident children attended secondary school in Ullapool. They also expressed disappointment that there was no Service representative in attendance to speak to the reports for Dornoch Academy and Golspie High School.

7i. Dornoch Academy

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

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and **AGREED** that a representative from the Service be asked to attend the meeting in August 2026 to speak to this report, and to provide information on the Sutherland pupils who attended Ullapool High School.

7ii. Golspie High School

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

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and **AGREED** that a representative from the Service be asked to attend the meeting in August 2026 to speak to this report,

7iii. Farr High School

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

Farr Highland School was considered alongside discussion of Kinlochbervie High School, below.

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

7iv. Kinlochbervie High School

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to concern being expressed that the figures for Kinlochbervie and Farr were from two years earlier, an update on more recent figures would be provided outwith the meeting;
- consideration was given to the staffing challenges being faced and a summary was provided of work being undertaken to address this, including recruitment initiatives and digital solutions; and
- Members offered their help and support to assist with any improvement measures, which included sharing recruitment adverts whenever possible;

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and **AGREED** that more up to date figures for Kinlochbervie and Farr be provided outwith the meeting.

8. Core Path Amendment - SU06.02 Loch Brora – West Track
Atharrachadh Prìomh Cheuma – SU06.02 Loch Bhrùra – Slighe an Iar

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

The Committee **AGREED** the Council promote the diversion of the Loch Brora – West Track core path (SU06.02) by notifying the relevant landowners, occupiers and those with an interest in the area and undertake a formal 12-week public consultation.

9. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan na Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No SCC/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the Community Regeneration Funds currently available in Sutherland;
ii. **NOTED** the CRF application presented and whether to approve, defer or reject each application; and
iii. **AGREED** the approved CRF grant award, subject to any conditions, up to the value of £95,000.

10. Scottish Government Play Park Funding
Maoineachadh Phàircean-cluiche Riaghaltas na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No SCC/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** £150,500 be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined in sections 6.4.1 of the report, and that the Amenity Services Manager would provide the Committee with information on the timescales for completion of Kinlochbervie – Innes Place Play Park after the meeting.

11. Ward 1 & 4 Discretionary Fund Approvals 25-26
Aontaidhean Maoin fo Ùghdarras Uaird 1 & 4 25 –26

The Committee **NOTED** the following awards:

North West & Central Sutherland Discretionary Budget Applications Approved 1 April 2026 – 31 March 2027

Budget £19381 Approved £961.98 Balance £18419.02

- Lochview Rural Training Lairg £961.98

Total £961.98

East Sutherland & Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2026 – 31 March 2027

Budget £19381.00 Balance £19381.00

No applications approved to date

Total **£0.00**

North West & Central Sutherland Discretionary Budget Applications Approved 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

Budget £14381.00 **Approved £14381.00** **Balance £0.00**

– Durness Community Council - Multimedia & TV Equipment	£1400.00
– Kyle of Sutherland Hub - Community Cycling Project	£500.00
– Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust - Kyle Feeds	£1000.00
– Scourie Community Development Company - Repopulating Scourie	£5.384.71
– CFINE - Fareshare in Highland	£3,585.00
– Lochinver Weed Whackers - Lamp Post Planters	£750.00
– Lady Haig Poppies - 3 x Poppy Wreaths	£90.00
– Bonar Bridge Community Hall - Running Costs	£1250.00
– The Flow Country partnership - Flowing Forward	£412.99

Total **£14381.00**

East Sutherland & Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

Budget £14381.00 **Approved £14381.00** **Balance £0.00**

– Golspie Youth Action Project - Youth Club Core Costs	£1000.00
– Go Golspie Development Trust - Go Golspie Community Car Service	£1000.00
– Embo Football Club - Football Pitch Development/Update	£975.00
– CFINE - Fareshare in Highland	£2105.00
– Golspie Sutherland FC - Season's Transport	£1000.00
– Golspie High School - Higher Geography Field Trip	£1598.00
– Lady Haig - 3 x Poppy Wreaths	£99.00
– The Flow Country Partnership - Flowing Forward	£412.29
– Golspie High School - Small Schools Football Competition	£1220.00
– Go Golspie Development Trust - Securing Go Golspie Active Travel	£200.00
– Engaging with Activity CIC - Christmas Hamper Project 2025	£1000.00
– Sutherland Sports Council - Funding Top-Up	£999.00
– Brora Development Trust - Food Relief Project	£1000.00
– Dornoch Academy School Transport	£1772.71

Total **£14381.00**

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 16 February 2026, which had been approved by the Council on 26 March 2026.

The meeting ended at 12.05pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 3 June 2026 at 9.35 am.

Present:

Mrs S Atkin
Mrs I Campbell (remote)
Mr A Christie
Mrs M Cockburn
Mrs H Crawford
Mr R Cross
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)
Mr D Fraser
Mr R Gale
Ms C Gillies (substitute)
Mr J Grafton (substitute)
Ms M Hutchison
Ms E Knox
Ms L Kraft
Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Ms C Ramsay
Mr R Stewart

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Ms S Lamont
Mr J Maxwell

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms L McBain

Non-Members also present:

Dr M Gregson (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)
Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Mrs M Ross (remote)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services
Ms B Martin-Scott, Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years
Ms C Macklin, Head of Education
Mr R Campbell, Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy and Planning (remote)
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead – Resources
Mr D Martin, Strategic Lead – Operations
Ms G Winter, Head Teacher, Newmore Primary School
Ms S Kevill, Project Manager (Whole Family Wellbeing)
Ms A Anthoney, Senior Youth Development Officer
Ms G Rodger, Chief Officer, Inspiring Young Voices (Third Sector) (remote)
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr A Standing, Head of Operations – North, Skills Development Scotland
Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland
Ms J Corcoran, Head of Libraries and Archives, High Life Highland

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

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Gregg and Mr K Rosie.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

Mr R Cross made a general Transparency Statement on the basis that a close family member was on the supply bank for nurseries as an Early Years Practitioner and was a Youth Support Officer at a youth club. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

3. Good News/Outstanding Achievements
Naidheachdan Matha/Coileanaidhean Air Leth

A presentation on outstanding achievements by pupils and schools had been circulated.

Congratulations having been extended to all the schools involved, the Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

4. Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to consultation on the relocation of Thurso High, Pennyland Primary and Miller Academy Primary Schools to a new setting serving all three schools
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Iarrtas a dhol air adhart gu co-chomhairleachadh a thaobh a bhith a' gluasad Àrd-Sgoil Inbhir Theòrsa, Bun-Sgoil Pennyland agus Bun-Sgoil Acadamaidh Mhic a' Mhuilleir gu àite ùr a bhios a' frithealadh nan trì sgoiltean

There had been circulated Report No EDU/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Assistant Chief Executive – People highlighted that a correction was required to the covering report and the proposal paper at Appendix 2 as both documents referred to Mount Pleasant Primary School having a standalone Croileagan which would be required to close. In fact, the Croileagan no longer existed, and the reference to it would be removed from the proposal paper before it was published for public consultation.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation based on the proposal attached to the report at Appendix 2, subject to removal of the reference to Mount Pleasant Primary School having a standalone Croileagan.

5. Statutory Consultation: Relocation of Beauly Primary School – Final Report Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Gluasad Bun-Sgoil na Manachainn gu àite ùr – Aithisg Dheireannach

There had been circulated Report No EDU/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, Local Members spoke to the background to the proposal to relocate Beauly Primary School and expressed thanks to the Parent Council and local stakeholders for their efforts in helping to identify a new site for the school.

It was commented by one Local Member that expectations had been raised previously and progress had repeatedly stalled, and it was highlighted that there was significant scepticism within the community as to whether the new school would be delivered by 2028 as stated. In order to demonstrate how it was intended to progress from the current position to a new school in 2028, a number of questions were raised including the status of negotiations with the landowner and whether a purchase price had been agreed in principle; whether a concluded contract was in place, subject to planning permission, or if heads of terms been agreed; the level of confidence officers had that the land transaction would be completed in sufficient time to allow the school to open in 2028; in the event that the new site did not proceed for any reason, what contingency plans were in place – eg would the Council revert to the playing fields site, and what impact would that have on the 2028 target date; if a purchase price had been agreed, was the project still on budget; and, for the purposes of transparency and to instil confidence that the new school would be operational in 2028, could officers provide a clear delivery programme, covering key stages from conveyancing and planning consent to procurement, construction and handover, and share it with parents and teachers.

It was intended to move an amendment reflecting the questions raised, which had also been asked at previous meetings of the stakeholder group but remained unanswered. However, the Chair emphasised that the report related solely to the outcome of the statutory consultation and the decision to relocate Beauly Primary School from its current site, and he undertook to liaise with Estates officers to ensure that the questions would be addressed at the forthcoming stakeholder meeting. In addition, as the matters raised fell within the remit of the Housing and Property Committee, the Vice Chair of the Housing and Property Committee undertook to take them forward.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress being made in relation to the Highland Investment Plan and the development of a Community Point of Delivery in Beauly;
ii. **NOTED** the outcome of the statutory consultation on the proposal to relocate Beauly Primary School;
iii. **NOTED** the report from Education Scotland at Appendix 4 of the report, and the educational benefits identified;
* iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that Beauly Primary School be relocated from its current site to a new site west of Cnoc na Ràth, Beauly, as part of a new Community Point of Delivery; and
v. **AGREED**, subject to iv. above, that officers should fully address and discharge the recommendations and matters raised by Education Scotland as set out in the Consultation Report at Appendix 2 of the report.

6. Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to consultation on the relocation of Plockton Primary School
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Iarrtas a dhol air adhart gu co-chomhairleachadh reachdail a thaobh a bhith a' gluasad Bun-Sgoil a' Phluic gu àite ùr

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

Local Members welcomed the report being brought forward, adding that the local community looked forward to participating in the consultation process and the associated public meeting. It was highlighted that one of the questions likely to be raised was what would happen to the building that was being vacated, and the Chair confirmed that this matter would be addressed by officers.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** that the Council proceed to a statutory consultation, in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, on the proposal to permanently relocate Plockton Primary School to the Plockton High School campus;
ii. **AGREED** that the Council use the opportunity to engage on an informal basis about the future location of Plockton Nursery Early Learning and Childcare to the High School campus; and
iii. **NOTED** that a further report would be brought back to Committee following the conclusion of the statutory consultation.

7. Temporary School Closures – Statutory Guidance, Governance and Adoption of Policy
Dùnaidhean Sealach Sgoiltean – Stiùireadh Reachdail, Riaghlachas agus Gabhail ri Poileasaidh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- schools in remote and rural areas were at the heart of communities, providing confidence for new families to move into the area, and a school closure weakened the whole community. The Scottish Government guidance made it clear that temporary closures should not be used to circumvent the statutory consultation requirements for permanent school closures, and that consideration must be given to issues such as depopulation, sustainability, future housing, employment opportunities and the long-term attractiveness of an area. It was suggested that the draft policy did not place these considerations at the centre of decision-making, there being no mandatory rural sustainability or depopulation assessment, no clear test in relation to future housing or population growth, no published reporting of re-opening criteria, no requirement to retain enrolment forms, and no duty to publish expressions of interest from families. There was a risk of temporary closures becoming permanent due to families moving away and there then being no demand to re-open the school, and it was emphasised that every reasonable alternative should be exhausted before any decision was taken to close a school.

It was suggested that the matter be deferred to allow for a Members' workshop, and that a revised policy be brought back incorporating appropriate safeguards in relation to depopulation and sustainability, together with transparency around the criteria for re-opening schools. In response, the Chair drew attention to the Engagement and Communication section of the policy which indicated that there would be extensive engagement with children and young people, parents, staff and community representatives prior to any decision being taken. In terms of the request for a workshop, whilst a Members' workshop was planned in respect of school catchment areas in Inverness, it was not intended to hold a workshop in relation to this item. The Assistant Chief Executive – People highlighted the Evidence Base section of the policy, explaining that all of the information listed therein would be presented to the Committee every time a proposal for a temporary closure was brought forward, together with an Integrated Impact Assessment covering equalities, poverty and human rights, children's rights and wellbeing, climate change, island and mainland rural communities, and data protection. Other than in emergency circumstances, all Members would have the opportunity to engage fully with every proposed temporary closure, and all relevant information would be published on the Council's website. It was emphasised that decision-making rested with Elected Members, not officers, and it was confirmed that re-opening criteria would be brought forward;

- Members welcomed the replacement of the term "mothballing", which had led to a lot of misunderstanding within communities;
- the clarity and quality of the updated statutory guidance was welcomed, particularly the emphasis on the importance of community engagement and consultation, even where formal statutory consultation was not triggered;
- as set out in the recommendations, planned temporary school closures would be brought to the Committee for approval prior to implementation. Accordingly, Members had a responsibility to give due consideration to the concerns raised earlier in the discussion;
- attention was drawn to point 71 in Appendix 3 of the report, which recommended that local authorities consider alignment to the 2024 Addressing Depopulation Action Plan and encompass within any decision-making process active consideration of broader rural development and demographic outcomes, recognising the key role of schools and nurseries in creating attractive places for households to locate themselves;
- whilst the draft policy made it clear that it applied to both schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings, the report and recommendations made no specific reference to ELC settings, and the importance of considering ELC settings in their own right was emphasised. The Chair proposed that recommendation ii. be amended to "approve the Highland Council Temporary School and ELC Settings Closures Policy, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report";
- the Council's default position should be a presumption against the closure of rural schools;
- with reference to the temporary closure of Edderton Primary School, concern was expressed regarding reports of parents asking to place their children at the school only to be told it was closed, and that the community was not being provided with sufficient information on the current status of the school. Particular reference was made to assets being removed from the school which could lead people to think that it was closing permanently if an explanation was not provided. The importance of engaging with communities and providing regular updates, on a monthly basis if necessary, when a school was temporarily closed was emphasised. The Assistant Chief Executive – People concurred regarding the

importance of community engagement and communication, explaining that the intention of the policy was that this would become standard practice. Whilst monthly updates might not be feasible given the size of the school estate, it was important that stakeholders were kept informed whenever there was a change, and it would be helpful to receive input from Local Members to ensure that all relevant stakeholders were included. The Chair added that there was a need for consistency so that the level of engagement taking place in some instances was applied across the authority area;

- reference was made to instances of schools being temporarily closed for an extended period, and it was hoped that the new policy would lead to quicker resolution of issues and a less reactive approach;
- children had a right to an education, and that should be at the centre of decision-making; and
- social interaction was an important aspect of a child's education.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the updated statutory guidance relating to temporary school closures and the distinction between temporary and permanent school closures;
ii. **APPROVED** the Highland Council Temporary School and ELC Settings Closures Policy, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report;
iii. **AGREED** that planned temporary school closures be brought to the Education Committee for approval prior to implementation; and
iv. **AGREED** that unplanned or immediate temporary school closures be reported to the Education Committee as soon as practicable after a decision is taken.

8. Learning Estate Strategy Update
Cunntas air Ro-innleachd na h-Oighreachd Ionnsachaidh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was queried whether Lochaber as whole could benefit from a similar approach to that being taken in Inverness in terms of catchment reviews, as a number of schools in the area were operating at 20-30% occupancy and were rated C for overall condition;
- thanks were expressed for the work taken forward in relation to Inverness catchment areas, and the proposed workshop in that regard was welcomed. It was highlighted that there were areas within Inverness, such as the Crown area, where four or five primary school catchment areas converged, resulting in situations where children did not attend their nearest school, and it was necessary to review the position and introduce more sensible boundaries. Many catchment boundaries were historic and encompassed areas that had previously been green fields but had since been developed for housing. It was difficult to explain to parents why their children could not attend their nearest school, and it was necessary to address the situation as it did not reflect well on the Council. It was also essential that the Masterplan Consent Areas for both Ardersier and Essich Road were taken into account. In relation to Essich Road in particular, should the proposed development of 300 houses proceed, the designated catchment school would require a new wing, whereas the closest school had capacity. The review

presented an opportunity to address the concerns of families and to achieve a more balanced distribution across the school estate in terms of occupancy, and it was emphasised that the matter should be progressed without delay as it would be a complex and lengthy task. On the point being raised, the Chair reaffirmed the commitment in the report that a workshop would be held in advance of the July recess and that an update would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee;

- the Learning Estate Strategy Guiding Principles indicated that the condition and suitability of learning environments should support and enhance their function. However, of the 195 schools listed in Appendix 2 of the report, 41 schools were rated C for both condition and suitability. Whilst 10 of those schools were in the process of being replaced, that left 31 schools in which it appeared that little substantive progress was being made in terms of improvement works. Whilst the scale of the challenge, the historic causes and the funding constraints were understood, concern was expressed that some pupils were attending schools that were wholly inadequate, and it was queried what was being done to support those pupils. In particular, unsuitable toilet facilities could give rise to bullying which had a detrimental impact on pupils' mental health. The need for action to address these issues was emphasised, and a challenge was extended to the Administration to bring forward a proposal in that regard. In responding to the points raised, the Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy and Planning explained that other capital fundings streams, comprising approximately £5m per annum for schools and £9-10m for all Council buildings and assets, were available to address more immediate issues in schools that were not currently part of the Highland Investment Plan (HIP), and officers would be liaising with all Ward Members regarding planned investment in their local schools;
- information was sought, and provided, on the timescale, from commissioning design work to occupation, for the delivery of a new school, and for the new Tain campus in particular;
- concern was expressed that, of the secondary school and two primary schools in Invergordon, five out of six condition and suitability ratings were category C, and there was no programme in place for the replacement of Park Primary School, which had closed following a fire in 2020. In response to concerns regarding the timescale for works to upgrade the toilet facilities at Invergordon Academy, it was explained that this was an extensive project which could not be completed within the summer holiday period, and it was confirmed that officers would provide an update to Ward Members in due course;
- reference was made to instances of schools in close proximity operating at less than 50% occupancy where one of the schools was in considerably better condition. It was requested that, as part of any review, consideration be given to co-location in such circumstances, given the potential benefits in terms of educational outcomes and rationalisation of the school estate. Following consultation with the Chair, the Assistant Chief Executive – People proposed an addition to the Learning Estate Strategy Guiding Principles regarding looking at the wider estate and where co-location made sense. It was emphasised that this would require to be part of the place-based approach and would be subject to formal processes and without presumption. The Chair suggested that proposed wording be circulated to Members of the Committee;
- whilst the concerns regarding the condition of the school estate were acknowledged, it was highlighted that, prior to the HIP, there had been no plan in place;
- the results achieved by Head Teachers and school staff, despite operating in less than suitable school facilities, were commended;

- it was highlighted that housing development did not necessarily result in increasing school rolls, as illustrated by the example of the Black Isle Ward, and the complexities associated with the Highland Housing Challenge, population decline and school roll forecasting were recognised;
- all Members, not only those representing remote and rural areas, had a responsibility to consider the rationalisation of schools in light of the figures in Appendix 2 of the report;
- further to earlier comments regarding the number of category C schools, the need to implement a programme of maintenance to bring the schools not scheduled for replacement up to a reasonable standard was emphasised. Particular reference was made to Golspie High School and Golspie Primary School, both of which had leaking roofs that had resulted in damage to flooring and classrooms being rendered unusable;
- the significant amount of work undertaken to assess and evidence the condition and suitability of every school in Highland was recognised. Improvements had begun to be seen, and it was suggested that consideration should be given not only to the current ratings but to the target ratings, how that would be achieved, and how this could be supported;
- the importance of adequate provision of gathering spaces, such as assembly halls, and canteen facilities was emphasised, and information was sought, and provided, on what provision had been made for such spaces in new build schools;
- whilst the new Tain campus being fully operational was welcomed, it was highlighted that there were now four vacant education sites in the town and that instances of vandalism had occurred. It was understood that demolition plans were in place for two of the sites. However, concern was expressed that, unless plans were brought forward quickly for the remaining two sites, further issues could arise, and assurance was sought, and provided, that work was being progressed on this matter;
- Members acknowledged the contribution of Finlay MacDonald, Chief Officer – Property and Assets, who had recently retired, to the Council's estates work over many years;
- the work on Inverness High School as part of the HIP was welcomed, and it was hoped that Crown Primary School would be able to celebrate its 150th anniversary with repairs having been completed;
- the Guiding Principle relating to outdoor learning was welcomed, and would be important to bear in mind as work progressed on constructing Community Points of Delivery; and
- lack of green space was an issue, several schools having no green space at all, and it was confirmed that this matter was being taken seriously going forward.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the updated Learning Estate Strategy included in Appendix 1 of the report, subject to the proposed addition to the Guiding Principles regarding co-location, the wording of which to be circulated to Members of the Committee;
ii. **NOTED** the Core School Facts Summary included in Appendix 2 of the report; and
iii. **AGREED** to a Member and officer workshop to consider school catchments in the Inverness area with the aim of bringing an update on progress and next steps to the next meeting of the Education Committee.

9. Improving School Inspection Outcomes
A' Leasachadh Bhuilean Sgrùdaidhean Sgoile

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

In addition to the report, the Head Teacher of Newmore Primary School gave a presentation on the recent inspection of the school, detailing the inspection process, the inspection findings, the support received from the area quality improvement team in the lead up to, and during, the inspection, and how it was intended to address any areas identified for improvement.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the report and congratulated all those involved in the inspection of Newmore Primary School on the excellent outcome, adding that it was necessary to ensure that all schools were routinely achieving such inspection results;
- it was suggested that every school inspection report should be analysed, and that consideration should be given to how the learning could be applied to other schools;
- the sample report to Area Committees at Appendix 1 of the report indicated that the themes of the inspection report would be summarised and that there would be a link to the summarised inspection findings on the Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) website. The need for greater transparency and openness was emphasised, and it was suggested that the full inspection report should be appended to the report. The Chair confirmed that the inspection report and the summarised inspection findings could be appended to the Area Committee report;
- it was suggested that, following a school inspection, the inspection report should be published on the homepage on the school's website. The Chair confirmed that this was already taking place, but advised that it could be followed up to ensure it was happening in every case;
- it having been suggested that a Parent Council meeting should be convened promptly after the publication of a school inspection report, the Chair concurred that Parent Council engagement was key, and explained that, aside from the Council, the relevant Parent Council Chair was the first person to receive the inspection report and should take it forward for discussion by the Parent Council;
- it was suggested that, where a school inspection report was less than satisfactory, it should be reported not only to the relevant Area Committee but to the Education Committee, in the interests of transparency and awareness;
- with reference to the table at section 8.1 of the report, Members queried the figures in respect of special schools, and whether it was necessary to change the assessment process or the values of assessment for Additional Support Needs (ASN) or special school pupils;
- in response to a question regarding the 64% of pupils at Newmore Primary School with ASN, it was confirmed that, while this presented challenges, an appropriate level of support was in place to meet the range of needs and abilities that existed. The Chair added that it was important to recognise that there was a no single definition of ASN, and that the type and duration of support required varied;
- given that Newmore Primary School had been under threat of closure in the 1980s, it was welcomed that it was now thriving, and the role of small rural schools in supporting children was emphasised. It was added that, had the school closed,

pupils would have attended either Park Primary School or South Lodge Primary School, which would have placed significant additional pressure on those schools;
- further to discussions under item 8, it was highlighted that Newmore Primary School was rated C for both condition and suitability, which made the inspection results even more impressive;
- there was a misconception that schools in areas with higher levels of deprivation were of a lower standard, and it was welcomed that the report indicated that, although contexts differed, there was a high level of consistency in the areas identified for improvement;
- information was sought, and provided, on how the new model for delivering improvement supported Head Teachers, particularly Acting Head Teachers or those who were new in post;
- it was suggested that there was a risk that the core focus on learning and teaching might be diminished due to the wide-ranging expectations placed upon Primary Head Teachers;
- the stress associated with school inspections was recognised and, in response to a question, the Head Teacher of Newmore Primary School spoke to her positive experience of the inspection process and the support provided both by the Area Quality Improvement Manager and the inspection team; and
- it was positive that support staff within Newmore Primary School undertook multiple roles, and information was sought, and provided, on how challenging it had been to implement this approach and the benefits arising from multi-tasking roles.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the contents of the report; and
ii. **APPROVED** the plan for reporting to Area Committees shown in Appendix 1 of the report, subject to the inspection report and the summarised inspection findings being appended to the report; and
iii. **AGREED** that it be ensured that, following a school inspection, the inspection report was published on the homepage of the school's website.

10. Delivery Plan Monitoring & Progress Update – My Highland Future Q4 2025/26 Sgrùdadh & Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh – Àm Ri Teachd Mo Ghàidhealtachd R4 2025/26

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

In addition to the report, the Head of Operations – North, Skills Development Scotland gave a presentation on Workforce North and how it aligned in with My Highland Future and work already being carried out within the Council. In particular, information was provided on the place-based workforce strategy, the work underway to grow apprenticeships, the wider partnership working taking place, and the Employer Board.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the vast majority of Highland students who went on to university did not attend the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) but rather left Highland to go to university in the Central Belt or Aberdeen, often staying there after graduation. It was queried whether greater partnership work between universities, for example,

allowing students to gain an accredited degree from a Central Belt university while studying at a UHI campus, would encourage more young people to stay in Highland and help tackle the problem of depopulation, which led to there not being enough people to fill jobs in Highland. In response, information was provided on efforts to encourage young people to remain in or return to Highland, including the summer placement programme, accelerated degree pathways, the use of aspiration data from S2 and S3 pupils, and sector specific skills events in partnership the UHI;

- information was sought, and provided, on what had been gained from the skills intelligence work being carried out by Workforce Highland; the Workforce Response Team; and the skills shortages that had been identified in rural areas and what was being done to address these;
- the employer roadshow around the North Coast 500 was welcomed; the importance of working to meet employment needs across Highland, rather than focusing on Inverness, was emphasised; and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Employer Board included representation from all areas of Highland and many different industries;
- it was queried whether Workforce North was working with SSE to expand the provision of SSE apprenticeships throughout Highland;
- the Workforce Response Team pilot scheme in Easter Ross was welcomed; the importance of early intervention for disengaged young people was emphasised; and, in response to a query, it was confirmed that the Workforce Response Team was already working with For You Training who ran the Grow for You project;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that some of the Key Milestones and Requests for Change had been RAG-rated Green but not marked as completed because the activity had been successfully implemented and was ongoing;
- information was sought, and provided, on several points relating to the Digital School. In particular, it was confirmed that the £1.3m of efficiency savings relating to Devolved School Management Adjustments and Digital Learning had been met, and it was confirmed that £64,000 of the original investment had been spent to pay staff who taught one day per week in the Digital School and the rest remained within restricted reserves for the running of the Digital School; and
- it was suggested that it would be better to second staff to work on short-term projects such as the School-Based Interventions project rather than employing temporary staff who might move on to other employment before the end of the project. However, it was explained that secondment would not have helped in that case as it would have created the need to employ someone on a short-term contract in a different role.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Delivery Project updates provided in the report; and
ii. **NOTED** the extensive activity and progress to date across all workstreams and headings.

11. High Life Highland Progress Update
Cunntas air Adhartas High Life na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/18/26 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

In addition to the report, Julie Corcoran, Head of Libraries and Archives, High Life Highland, gave a presentation on the services provided by libraries, highlighting customer engagement, support for schools and learning, and the impact of libraries on communities.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- High Life Highland was commended for its great work across the whole of Highland, particularly its Library Service;
- the proactive, innovative and enterprising work of Fortrose Library was highlighted, and thanks were extended to the librarian;
- in response to a query regarding Summer of Sport funding, it was confirmed that the funding opportunities would be publicised over the coming weeks, and Members were asked to encourage community sports groups to apply for funding;
- the high quality and wide-ranging work carried out by Countryside Rangers, particularly in Sutherland, was highlighted;
- in response to a request for an update on the mobile library service, it was explained that new vehicles had been on order for some time, and the Council's Fleet Management Team had been working to ensure that they would be ready as soon as possible while also being fit for purpose. It was hoped that these vehicles would be operational soon and, in the meantime, a "click and collect" service using small vans was being provided to the three areas that did not currently have a mobile library;
- the summary of how High Life Highland services promoted Gaelic language and culture was welcomed, and the success of the Gaelic-speaking shinty session at Bught Park, which demonstrated the importance of using Gaelic in everyday life and not only in school, was commended;
- the importance of getting as many young people as possible participating in sport throughout Highland was emphasised;
- in response to a request, the Chief Executive, High Life Highland confirmed that an update on High Life Highland activity in the Skye and Raasay Ward could be provided at the Ward Business Meeting; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the engagement of young people with the Library Service, through both school and public libraries;

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the contributions made by High Life Highland to the Highland Council's Corporate Plan in Appendix A of the report;
ii. the information on the annual performance indicators;
iii. the information on the externally funded summer of sport programme;
iv. the general updates provided in Appendix B of the report; and
v. the information on the libraries service in Appendix C of the report.

12. Highland Sport Strategy Update
Cunntas air Ro-innleachd Spòrs na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Strategy was welcomed and the need for it was emphasised, but it was suggested that it may have come too late given the pressures already being faced by facilities and communities. Particular attention was drawn to the Tain Royal Academy Community Complex (TRACC) which was due to lose its swimming pool, and the implications of this for the local community were highlighted. However, the five-year reprieve was welcomed, and the work of the local TRACC Steering Group towards building a new facility was recognised;
- some of the challenges, including the loss of girls from sport around the age of 13, transport barriers, buildings not being up to standard, and increased running costs, were already known, and it was emphasised that the focus should be on investigating the underlying causes of these issues and identifying possible solutions, rather than gathering the same information again;
- the importance of all types of physical activity and exercise was highlighted, and it was suggested that including other forms of activity, such as dance, could help address the issue of girls leaving sport in their teenage years. In response to a query, it was confirmed that consideration would be given to a broader and more holistic title for the Strategy to better reflect this;
- the importance of having a strategy for the whole of highland, to ensure that opportunities and amenities were evenly distributed, was emphasised; and
- the need to include active travel within the Strategy was highlighted.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the commissioning of Hub North and Mott MacDonald to develop a Highland Sport Strategy proposal;
ii. **NOTED** the commission brief at Appendix 1 of the report and the programme timeline at Appendix 2 of the report; and
iii. **AGREED** that consideration be given to a broader and more holistic title for the Strategy.

13. Presentation: Youth Convener Update
Taisbeanadh: Cunntas air Neach-gairm na h-Òigridh

Highland Youth Convener, Leah McBain, gave a presentation on her term as Youth Convener, highlighting the work of the Highland Youth Parliament, the Youth Convenor Roadshow, her focus on online safety and technology, and the importance of youth work and partnership working.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- congratulations were extended to the Youth Convenor on a successful term and thanks were expressed for her hard work and the work of everyone who had supported her;
- it was highlighted that a new Youth Convener would be appointed imminently, and it was hoped that Leah would pass on the knowledge she had gained; and
- the work undertaken on technology and online safety was commended, and its importance in the lives of young people was emphasised.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

14. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – Q4 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanadh Ràitheil – R4 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No EDU/20/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Concern was expressed regarding the late payment of invoices, which did not reflect well on the Council and could create cash flow difficulties for small local businesses. It was highlighted that, when members of the public failed to pay bills to the Council on time, swift action was taken, and it was suggested that the Council should hold itself to the same standard. It was hoped that improvements could be made prior to the next performance report. In response, the Assistant Chief Executive – People explained that, whilst the target for invoice payments within 30 days had not yet been achieved, there was an improving trend in payments made both within 10 days and 30 days. She undertook to investigate the value of late payments, as well as how overdue they were and the type of invoices involved, and to bring forward further information in that regard.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the performance information for the Education Service; and
ii. **AGREED** that further information be brought forward on late invoice payments.

15. SEEMiS Update
Cunntas air SEEMiS

There had been circulated Report No EDU/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

It was queried whether the Council should be working with other local authorities to develop a new system given that technology had moved on so much. In response, it was confirmed that the Council was working closely with leading providers on the development of a new Scotland-wide system to ensure that it was fit for purpose.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the current position of SEEMiS as the Management Information System used by all schools;
ii. the challenges and limitations associated with the current system; and
iii. the risks associated with both continuing with SEEMiS and sourcing an alternative solution.

16. Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 - 2029
Plana Com-pàirteach Seirbheisean Chloinne na Gàidhealtachd 2026–2029

There had been circulated Report No EDU/22/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the work undertaken by the Integrated Children's Services 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. the plan, which had been approved by the Integrated Children's Services Planning Board.

17. Minutes of Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee
Geàrr-chunntas Fo-Chomataidh Maoin Urras an Fhoghlaim

There had been circulated, and were **NOTED**, draft Minutes of the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee held on 16 March 2026.

18. Membership of Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee

The Committee:-

***** i. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that Ms L Dundas be appointed to the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee; and
ii. otherwise **AGREED** the revised membership of the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee as tabled.

At this stage, the Chair paid tribute to Fiona Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education, who was leaving the Council. He thanked her for her contribution to education in Highland as a teacher, Head Teacher and Chief Officer, and wished her well for the future.

The meeting concluded at 1.00 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 3 June 2026 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr R Bremner (Remote)
Mr I Brown
Mr S Cameron
Mrs I Campbell (Remote)
Ms C Gillies
Mr J Grafton
Dr M Gregson
Mr P Logue
Mr W Mackay (Remote)
Ms K MacLean
Mr D Millar
Mrs M Paterson (Remote)

Non-Member also present:

Mr J Finlayson (Remote)
Mr P Oldham (Remote)

In attendance:
Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Ms C Macklin, Head of Service, Integrated People Services
Mr D Martin, Strategic Lead, Integrated People Services
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager
Ms E Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer
Mr R MacKay, Development Officer, Education and Learning
Ms L Collie, Project Officer (Active Travel)
Ms D Roberts, Principal Teacher, Tongue Primary School
Ms M Mulholland, Community Learning & Development Officer, Primary and Early Years Education
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Senior Committee Officer
Mr C Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:
Mr D Mackenzie, Gaelic Development Officer, Skills Development Scotland
Ms E Mackenzie, Fèisgoil Manager, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

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

Mr D Millar in the Chair

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A MacKintosh.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Good News

The Committee **NOTED** the following items of Good News:-

Seachdain na Gàidhlig

A lot of good work was taking place across Highland bringing Gaelic medium pupils and learners together to celebrate the language. As part of the week, Tobar an Dualchais had visited 6 schools in Highland delivering a workshop on how to use their resource database and the new interactive map to find recordings from their area.

Ullapool High School

Pupils had developed and organised a Gaelic Sports Day for other GME Secondary pupils. Special congratulations went to Thurso High School who were awarded the shield for the strongest effort to use Gaelic.

FilmG

There had been a high number of entries of Gaelic Short Films from across Highland, many of which had been short listed for the finals scheduled to take place in Glasgow on 11 June.

Cuach na Cloinne

The annual Cuach na Cloinne football competition was taking place at Bught Park, Inverness with teams from across Scotland. Councillor Ian Brown, a member of the Gaelic Committee, was in attendance and would present the winners with the Cuach na Cloinne.

Skye Provincial Mod

The competitors at the previous week's Provincial Mod were thanked and the winners congratulated for their excellent performances and for the high skills displayed in the musical events and the high quality of Gaelic.

4. Inverness City Centre Wayfinding Project

There was a presentation by Lizbeth Collie, Project Officer (Active Travel).

The presentation outlined the rationale behind the project, and how it had improved the condition and durability of signage, navigation and footfall to west of the River Ness, as well as the promotion of active travel. The central focus on Gaelic in the signage was emphasised throughout the presentation.

The project was welcomed and it highlighted the importance and contribution of Gaelic to the Highland tourism sector. In response to a question regarding a fingerpost for Cultarlann, it was explained that due to space restrictions it had not been possible to include all desired destinations.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Fèis-sgoil Gaelic Learners North Area Project

There were presentations by Ms Eilidh Mackenzie, Fèisgoil Manager, Fèisean nan Gàidheal and Ms Dee Roberts, Principal Teacher, Tongue Primary School where they outlined the progress in establishing and promoting Gaelic education in schools and highlighted the challenges of teacher confidence and capacity.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the initiatives were welcomed;
- Members commended the accessible Gaelic education and learning opportunities that had been extended across Highland; and
- it was proposed that the creation of an online Gaelic learning platform be considered. The opportunity this might bring to expand Gaelic learning globally and act as a revenue stream was suggested.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentations.

6. Siuthad! Annual Gaelic Careers Event

There had been circulated Report No. G/6/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People and there was a presentation by Mr Derek MacKenzie, Skills Development Scotland.

Siuthad was a unique event primarily for S2/S3 Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learner pupils, organised by Highland Council and Skills Development Scotland, with funding also provided from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The event aimed to encourage continued study of Gaelic and highlight the wide range of careers available with exhibitions and interactive workshops.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Chair, having attended this year's event, was encouraged to see so many young people present and hoped that the Council would continue to support the event for many years to come;
- it was important to promote career opportunities as early as possible, and Members welcomed that they were also shared with Gaelic Learners;
- it was asked if there had been any discussions with Workforce North in respect of promoting the Gaelic language as part of the workplace, and acknowledging the language as part of the Workforce North vision. In

response, initial discussions had taken place and promotional material had been produced;
- speaking a second language was recognised as beneficial; and
- pupils were inspired after participating in events such as Siuthad and FilmG and it was welcomed that Skills Development Scotland took this seriously.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the contents of this Siuthad update report;
ii. **AGREED** to continue to support the participation of secondary pupils in Siuthad; and
iii. **AGREED** to continue to work with Skills Development Scotland to organise Siuthad.

7. Charitable Trusts Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/7/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. existing contribution of Educational Trust Funds to Gaelic education and activity;
ii. wider landscape of affiliated Gaelic trusts and bursary schemes; and
iii. ongoing work to align funding approaches and information sharing across Gaelic-related funding streams.

8. Scottish Languages Act - Areas of Linguistic Significance Progress Report

There had been circulated Report No. G/8/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Prior to discussion, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee made it clear that what was proposed was a framework for consultation on Areas of Linguistic Significance (ASL), not a finalised designation model. The proposal to consult on a Highland-wide approach was a starting point for engagement. While targeted intervention in stronger Gaelic communities was essential, this should not come at the cost of a balanced Highland-wide approach to consult and seek feedback from all areas. Gaelic in Highland existed on a continuum and sustaining the language required both strengthening traditional communities as well as supporting emerging or developing ones. The consultation would allow feedback on where communities might meet the other criteria of ALS and a whole authority consultation would assess if a more refined approach was needed. If only one part was considered in the consultation, it would rely heavily on a single destination criterion to define priority in the consultation, hence why the wider place-based approach was needed.

The Scottish Language Act set out the criteria by which an area might be considered for designation. These were:- if it contained a significant number of people with Gaelic language skills (taken to be 20% of the area's population); historical connections to Gaelic; Education provision; and Gaelic Cultural activity. The recommendations had been arrived at following input, scrutiny and oversight

of officers, senior management and Elected Members, thus presenting a corporate position. The public were encouraged to engage with the consultation so views could inform the final approach. The Scottish Language Act 2025 was a landmark moment for Gaelic and, by granting it official status, was a positive step forward. It offered a strong legislative framework for growth as well as signalling a national commitment to the future of the language.

Disappointment was expressed at the tone of recent social media posts where officers and Members had been identified. Whilst accepting the importance of public scrutiny, this was unacceptable behaviour. All work undertaken had been within the Council's expected standards and conduct and officers had carried out their duties in a respectful and professional manner.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- this was one of the most important reports that had come before the Gaelic Committee which had huge potential for both the language and the Highlands;
- it was acknowledged some areas might not want to be identified as an ALS but there were others already working on Gaelic Language Plans;
- the consultation exercise was a huge amount of work;
- it was important there were opportunities for the entire region but it was recognised there were different levels of Gaelic;
- the involvement of the wider Highland community was essential;
- the personal experience of Members' Gaelic learning was explained and it was important that there were safe spaces for learners to listen, understand and talk without the fear of making mistakes;
- communities had to be given opportunities and communication was important. Nothing had been decided yet – this was the first step in the process;
- Members had to think about this as a matter affecting the whole Highlands, not just their own area;
- Members and officers' commitment to deliver Gaelic was commended, often going beyond what was required. It was important all worked together cooperatively and considerately to ensure all Highland, with variable degrees of Gaelic interest, were offered the opportunity to deliver Gaelic language and heritage when opportunities arose;
- the consultation process commenced in September and there was no presumptive conclusion as to what would come forth;
- a Highland-wide approach would ensure all areas could be considered as an ALS in terms of the Act following representation and to demonstrate the inclusive nature of the presentation; and
- the steps to the consultation laid out in the report were reasonable and any argument otherwise was unreasonable.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the provisions of the Scottish Languages Act 2025 relating to Areas of Linguistic Significance;
ii. **NOTED** that Corporate Management Team had approved a whole authority ALS approach;

iii. **AGREED** that a whole-authority designation, supported by a place based delivery framework, provided the most proportionate and effective way to implement ALS in Highland;
iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the Gaelic Committee's Scheme of Delegation be amended to allocate responsibility for oversight of Gaelic Areas of Linguistic Significance designation processes; and
v. **NOTED** that further reports would be brought to the Committee on delivery phasing, governance and consultation.

9. Gaelic Language Plan Progress Report

There had been circulated Report No. G/9/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. contents of this PRMS progress report;
ii. submission and positive assessment of the Council's Bòrd na Gàidhlig annual return for May 2024 to May 2025; and
iii. Council's response to the BBC Royal Charter consultation, as included in the appendices.

10. Gaelic Education Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members were encouraged by the positive progress being made in Gaelic education across Highland, however, it was important to look critically at the progress made. The value of joint working between this Committee and the Education Committee was highlighted;
- ongoing challenges across Highland included geography, resource pressures, and the number of schools;
- representation should be made to new Scottish Government Ministers in terms of the support sought, given Highland's leading role in Gaelic Medium Education delivery;
- there was concern that many pupils chose not to study Gaelic after S3; and
- there was no statutory requirement to deliver Gaelic Learner Education (GLE) and it was asked if this could be explored with the Scottish

Government. However, the Gaelic Team was committed to supporting and promoting GLE, and had a long history of delivering this.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** to welcome the continued expansion of Gaelic Education in the North Area;
ii. **AGREED** to recognise the growth across sectors for Gaelic pupil numbers; and
iii. **NOTED** Seachdain na Gàidhlig activities and commitment from schools to contribute and participate in the annual initiative.

The meeting ended at 4.30pm.

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Geàrr-chunntas coinneamh **Comataidh na Gàidhlig** a chumadh ann an Seòmar na Comhairle, Prìomh Oifis na Comhairle, Rathad Ghlinn Urchadain, Inbhir Nis air Diciadain 3 Ògmhios 2026 aig 2f.

An làthair:

Mgr R Bremner (Air astar)
Mgr I MacIlleDhuinn
Mgr S Camshron
A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul (Air astar)
A' Bh-uas C NicIlliosa
Mgr I Grafton
Dr M Gregson
Mgr P Logue
Mgr U MacAoidh (Air astar)
A' Bh-uas C NicIlleathain
Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir
A' Bh-uas M NicPheadrais (Air astar)

Neo-Bhuill cuideachd an làthair:

Mgr I MacFhionnlaigh (Air astar)
Mgr P Oldham (Air astar)

A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

A' Bh-uas C Lackie, Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine
A' Bh-uas C Macklin, Ceannard Seirbheis, Seirbheisean Amalaichte Dhaoine
Mgr D Màrtainn, Ceannard Ro-innleachdail, Seirbheisean Amalaichte Dhaoine
A' Bh-uas L Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig
A' Bh-uas E Rodgers, Oifigear Poileasaidh Gàidhlig
Mgr R MacAoidh, Oifigear Leasachaidh, Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh
A' Bh-uas L Collie, Oifigear Pròiseict (Siubhal Gnìomhach)
A' Bh-uas D NicDhonnchaidh, Prìomh Thidsear, Bun-Sgoil Thunga
A' Bh-uas M Mulholland, Oifigear Ionnsachadh is Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd
A' Bh-uas S NicIllinnein, Manaidsear Cho-Sheirbheisean Deamocratach
A' Bh-uas G Nic a' Phearsain, Prìomh Oifigear Comataidh
Mgr C Ros, Oifigear Comataidh

Cuideachd a' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Mgr D MacCoinnich, Oifigear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig, Leasachadh Sgilean na h-Alba
A' Bh-uas E NicCoinnich, Manaidsear Fèisgoil, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Tha rionnag air iomall na duilleige a' comharrachadh moladh a thèid chun na Comhairle. Tha co-dhùnaidhean gun chomharra fo ùghdarras na Comataidh.

Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir anns a' Chathair

Gnothach

1. Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Thugadh leisgeul seachad às leth Mhgr A Mhic an Tòisich.

2. Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd

3. Naidheachdan Matha

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na Naidheachdan Matha a leanas:-

Seachdain na Gàidhlig

Bhathar a' dèanamh deagh obair air feadh na Gàidhealtachd a' toirt sgoilearan ann am Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig agus luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig còmhla gus an cànan a chomharrachadh. Mar phàirt dhen t-seachdain, bha Tobar an Dualchais air tadhal air 6 sgoiltean sa Ghàidhealtachd, a' cumail bùth-obrach mun dòigh sam bu chòir an stòr-dàta ghoireasan agus am mapa ùr eadar-obrachail aca a chleachdadh gus clàraidhean bhon sgìre aca fhèin a lorg.

Àrd-Sgoil Ullapuil

Bha sgoilearan air Latha Spòrs Gàidhlig a chur air dòigh do sgoilearan àrd-sgoile eile ann am FtG. Chuireadh meal an naidheachd sònraichte air Àrd-Sgoil Inbhir Theòrsa a choisinn an sgiath airson a bhith a' dèanamh na h-oidhirp a bu làidire gus a' Ghàidhlig a chleachdadh.

FilmG

Bha mòran thagraidhean air a dhol a-steach bho air feadh na Gàidhealtachd gu farpais nam Filmichean Goirid Gàidhlig, agus bha mòran dhiubh seo air a' gheàrr-liosta airson na cuairt deireannaich a bhathar a' cumail ann an Glaschu air 11 Ògmhios.

Cuach na Cloinne

Bha farpais ball-coise bliadhnail Cuach na Cloinne ga cumail aig Pàirc a' Bhucht, Inbhir Nis, le sgiobaidhean bho air feadh Alba a' gabhail pàirt. Bhiodh an Comhairliche Iain MacIlleDhuinn, ball de Chomataidh na Gàidhlig, an làthair gus Cuach na Cloinne a thoirt seachad dha na buannaichean.

Mòd Ionadail an Eilein Sgitheanaich

Chaidh taing a thoirt do dh'fharpaisich aig Mòd Ionadail an Eilein Sgitheanaich an t-seachdain roimhe agus chaidh meal an naidheachd a chur air na buannaichean airson sàr thaisbeanaidhean a lìbhrigeadh agus airson nan sgilean àrda a bha follaiseach sna tachartasan ciùil agus ann an càileachd àrd na Gàidhlig.

4. Pròiseact Slighean Meadhan Baile Inbhir Nis

Bha taisbeanadh ann bho Lizbeth Collie, Oifigear Pròiseict (Siubhal Gnìomhach).

Mhìnich an taisbeanadh an fheallsanachd a bh' air cùl a' phròiseict, agus mar a bhathar air coltas is maireannachd nan soidhnichean a leasachadh, air daoine a chuideachadh gus slighean a lorg, air barrachd dhaoine a thàladh gu taobh siar Abhainn Nis, agus air siubhal gnìomhach a bhrosnachadh cuideachd. Bha fòcas air a' Ghàidhlig air na soidhnichean air a chur an cèill tron taisbeanadh.

Chaidh fàilte a chur air a' phròiseact agus bha e a' sealltainn cho cudromach 's a bha a' Ghàidhlig do roinn turasachd na Gàidhealtachd. Mar fhreagairt do cheist a thaobh soidhne airson a' Chultarlainn, chaidh mìneachadh nach robh e air a bhith comasach gach ceann-uidhe cudromach a chur air na soidhnichean air sàillibh cion rùim.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan taisbeanadh.

5. Pròiseact Luchd-ionnsachaidh Gàidhlig Fèis-sgoil na Sgìre a Tuath

Bha taisbeanaidhean ann bhon Bh-uas Eilidh NicCoinnich, Manaidsear Fèisgoil, Fèisean nan Gàidheal agus bhon Bh-uas Dee NicDhonnchaidh, Prìomh Thidsear Bun-Sgoil Thunga, far an do mhìnich iad an t-adhartas a bhathar air a dhèanamh ann a bhith a' stèidheachadh is a' brosnachadh foghlam Gàidhlig ann an sgoiltean agus far an do chuir iad an cèill na dùbhlain a bha an lùib misneachd thidsearan agus na bha e comasach a dhèanamh.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:

- bhathar a' cur fàilte air na h-iomairtean;
- rinn Buill moladh air an fhoghlam Ghàidhlig ruigsinneach is air na cothroman ionnsachaidh a chaidh a leudachadh air feadh na Gàidhealtachd; agus
- chaidh moladh gum bu chòir beachdachadh air ùrlar air-loidhne a chruthachadh airson Gàidhlig ionnsachadh. Chaidh meòrachadh gum faodadh seo cothrom a thoirt seachad gus ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig a leudachadh air feadh an t-saoghail agus gum faodadh teachd-a-steach tighinn às cuideachd.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dha na taisbeanaidhean.

.

6. Siuthad! Tachartas Bliadhnail Dreuchdan Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/6/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine agus bha taisbeanadh ann bho Mhgr Derek MacCoinnich, Leasachadh Sgilean na h-Alba.

B' e tachartas gun samhail a bh' ann an Siuthad! agus bha e ag amas air sgoilearan ÀS2/ÀS3 ann am Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig agus Foghlam Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig. Bha e air a chur air dòigh le Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus Leasachadh Sgilean na h-Alba, le maoineachadh cuideachd bho Bhòrd na Gàidhlig agus Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean. Bha an tachartas ag amas air sgoilearan a bhrosnachadh gus cumail a' dol leis a' Ghàidhlig san sgoil agus sealltainn na bha de dhreuchdan rim faotainn tro thaisbeanaidhean is tro bhùithtean-obrach co-obrachail.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:

- bha an Cathraiche, às dèidh a bhith an làthair aig tachartas na bliadhna seo, air a mhisneachadh a bhith a' faicinn na h-uimhir de dhaoine òga an làthair

agus bha e an dòchas gun leanadh a’ Chomhairle air adhart a’ toirt taic dhan tachartas airson iomadh bliadhna ri thighinn;
- bha e cudromach cothroman dreuchdail a bhrosnachadh cho tràth ’s a b’ urrainnear, agus chuir Buill fàilte air luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig a bhith na lùib cuideachd;
- chaidh faighneachd co-dhiù a bha còmhraidhean sam bith air a bhith ann le Workforce North a thaobh a bhith a’ cur na Gàidhlig air adhart mar phàirt dhen àite-obrach, agus a’ toirt aithne dhan chànan mar phàirt de lèirsinn Workforce North. Mar fhreagairt, bhathar air còmhraidhean tùsail a chumail agus bhathar air stuthan brosnachaidh a dhèanamh;
- bhathar ag aithneachadh gun robh buannachd an lùib a bhith a’ bruidhinn dàrna cànan; agus
- bha sgoilearan air am brosnachadh às dèidh pàirt a ghabhail ann an tachartasan a leithid Siuthad! agus FilmG agus bhathar toilichte gun robh Leasachadh Sgilean na h-Alba a’ cur luach air a seo.

Às dèidh sin:-

i. **THUG** a’ Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do shusbaint na h-aithisge seo mu Shiuthad!;
ii. **DH’AONTAICH a’ Chomataidh** leantainn air adhart a’ toirt taic do chom-pàirteachas sgoilearan àrd-sgoile ann an Siuthad!; agus
iii. **DH’AONTAICH** a’ Chomataidh leantainn air adhart ag obair còmhla ri Leasachadh Sgilean na h-Alba gus Siuthad! a chur air dòigh.

7. Cunntas air Maoinean Urras an Fhoghlaim

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/7/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

THUG a’ Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na leanas:-

i. na tha Maoinean Urras an Fhoghlaim a’ cur ri foghlam Gàidhlig is gnìomhachd Ghàidhlig;
ii. an raon farsaing de dh’urrasan is sgeamaichean bursaraidh Gàidhlig a th’ ann an dlùth chompanas;
iii. an obair leantainneach gus dòighean-obrach maoineachaidh is co-roinn fiosrachaidh a cho-thaobhadh thar sruthan maoineachaidh a’ buntainn ris a’ Ghàidhlig.

8. Achd nan Cànan Albannach – Aithisg Adhartais nan Sgìrean Cànain Sònraichte

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/8/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Mus do thòisich an deasbad, chuir an Cathraiche agus an t-Iar-Chathraiche an cèill gur e frèam-obrach airson co-chomhairleachadh air Sgìrean Cànain Sònraichte (SCS) a bhathar a’ moladh, is nach b’ e modail ainmeachaidh crìochnaichte. B’ e àite tòiseachaidh airson com-pàirteachadh a bh’ anns a’ mholadh airson dòigh-obrach airson na Gàidhealtachd air fad. Ged a bha e riatanach gum biodh eadar-theachd ann a bha ag amas air na coimhearsnachdan Gàidhlig as làidire, cha bu chòir dìmeas a dhèanamh air dòigh-obrach chothromach a bhiodh a’ gabhail a-steach na Gàidhealtachd air fad gus co-

chomhairleachadh a chumail agus fios air ais a shireadh bho gach sgìre. Bha leantaileachd an cois na Gàidhlig sa Ghàidhealtachd agus gus an cànan a chumail suas dh'fheumadh coimhearsnachdan dùthchasach a bhith air an neartachadh a bharrachd air a bhith a' toirt taic do choimhearsnachdan a bha a' tighinn am bàrr no a' leasachadh. Bheireadh an co-chomhairleachadh seachad cothrom gus fios air ais fhaighinn a thaobh far am faodadh coimhearsnachdan na slatan-tomhais eile de SCS a choinneachadh agus bheireadh co-chomhairleachadh làn-ùghdarrais seachad cothrom gus measadh a dhèanamh air co-dhiù a bha feum air dòigh-obrach na bu ghleusta. Mura deigheadh beachdachadh ach air aon phàirt sa cho-chomhairleachadh, bhiodh seo an crochadh gu trom air aon shlat-tomhais gus prìomhachas a mhìneachadh sa cho-chomhairleachadh, agus sin as coireach gun robh feum air dòigh-obrach na b' fharsainge stèidhichte air àite.

Mhìnich Achd nan Cànan Albannach na slatan-tomhais fon deigheadh beachdachadh air sgìre airson ainmeachadh. B' iad seo: ma bha àireamh shusbainteach de dhaoine san sgìre le sgilean Gàidhlig (co-dhiù 20% de shluagh na sgìre); ceanglaichean eachdraidheil ris a' Ghàidhlig; solar foghlaim; agus gnìomhachd chultarach Ghàidhlig. Bhathar air na molaidhean a ruigsinn às dèidh beachdan, sgrùdadh is stiùireadh bho oifigearan, àrd-luchd-stiùiridh agus Buill Thaghte, mar sin a' taisbeanadh suidheachadh corporra. Bhathar a' brosnachadh a' phobaill com-pàirt a ghabhail sa cho-chomhairleachadh gus am b' urrainn beachdan cur ris an dòigh-obrach dheireannaich. Bha Achd nan Cànan Albannach 2025 fìor chudromach airson na Gàidhlig agus, le bhith a' toirt inbhe oifigeil dhith, b' e ceum mòr air adhart a bha seo. Bha i a' tabhann frèam-obrach reachdail làidir airson fàs, a bharrachd air a bhith a' comharrachadh dealas nàiseanta do dh'àm ri teachd a' chànain.

Chaidh briseadh-dùil a chur an cèill mu phuist a bha air nochdadh air na meadhanan sòisealta o chionn ghoirid, far an robh oifigearan agus Buill air an comharrachadh. Fhad 's a bhathar a' gabhail ris gun robh sgrùdadh poblach cudromach, cha robh an giùlan seo iomchaidh. Bha an obair air fad a chaidh a dhèanamh a rèir inbhean is giùlan na Comhairle ris am biodh dùil agus bha oifigearan air an dleastanasan a ghabhail os làimh ann an dòigh spèiseil is phroifeiseanta.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:

- b' i seo tè de na h-aithisgean a bu chudromaiche a bha air tighinn fa chomhair Comataidh na Gàidhlig agus bha cothroman mòra na lùib an dà chuid airson a' chànain agus airson na Gàidhealtachd;
- chaidh aithneachadh gura dòcha nach biodh cuid de sgìrean airson a bhith air an comharrachadh mar SCS ach gun robh feadhainn eile mar-thà ag obair air planaichean Gàidhlig;
- bhiodh obair mhòr an lùib na h-eacarsaich co-chomhairleachaidh;
- bha e cudromach gun robh cothroman ann dhan sgìre air fad ach chaidh aithneachadh gun robh diofar ìrean de Ghàidhlig ann;
- bha e riatanach gum biodh com-pàirt aig coimhearsnachd na Gàidhealtachd san fharsaingeachd;
- chaidh eòlas pearsanta nam Ball a thaobh a bhith ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig a mhìneachadh agus bha e cudromach gun robh àiteachan sàbhailte ann far am b' urrainn do luchd-ionnsachaidh èisteachd, tuigsinn is bruidhinn gun eagal a bhith orra mu bhith a' dèanamh mhearachdan;

- dh'fheumadh coimhearsnachdan cothroman fhaighinn agus bha conaltradh cudromach. Cha deach càil a cho-dhùnadh fhathast – b' e seo a' chiad cheum sa phròiseas;
- dh'fheumadh Buill smaoineachadh air a seo mar chùis a bha a' toirt buaidh air a' Ghàidhealtachd air fad, chan e dìreach an sgìre aca fhèin;
- chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air dealas nam Ball is nan oifigearan gus a' Ghàidhlig a lìbhrigeadh, is iad tric a' dèanamh barrachd air na bha riatanach. Bha e cudromach gun robh a h-uile duine ag obair còmhla ann an dòigh cho-obrachail is shuimeil airson dèanamh cinnteach gun robhar a' tabhann cothrom dhan Ghàidhealtachd air fad, le diofar ìrean de dh'ùidh sa Ghàidhlig, gus cànan is dualchas na Gàidhlig a lìbhrigeadh nuair a thigeadh an cothrom am bàrr;
- bhiodh am pròiseas co-chomhairleachaidh a' tòiseachadh san t-Sultain agus cha robh co-dhùnadh sam bith ann fhathast a thaobh na thigeadh às;
- dhèanadh dòigh-obrach a bhiodh a' com-pàirteachadh na Gàidhealtachd air fad cinnteach gum faodadh beachdachadh air gach sgìre mar SCS a rèir na h-Achd agus gus ion-ghabhaltas a shealltainn; agus
- bha na ceumannan a thaobh a' cho-chomhairleachaidh a bha air am mìneachadh san aithisg reusanta agus bha argamaid sam bith an aghaidh seo mì-reusanta.

Às dèidh sin:-

i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do dh'ullachaidhean Achd nan Cànan Albannach 2025 a thaobh Sgìrean Cànain Sònraichte;
ii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** gu bheil an Sgioba Stiùiridh Corporra air dòigh-obrach làn-ùghdarrais aontachadh a thaobh SCS;
iii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh gu bheil sònrachadh làn-ùghdarrais, le taic bho fhrèam-obrach a tha stèidhichte air àiteachan, a' toirt seachad na dòigh as co-rèiriche agus as èifeachdaiche gus CSC a bhuileachadh sa Ghàidhealtachd;
iv. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh **MOLADH** dhan làn-Chomhairle gun tèid Sgeama Tiomnaidh Chomataidh na Gàidhlig atharrachadh gus dleastanas a shuidheachadh airson a bhith a' stiùireadh phròiseasan sònrachaidh nan Sgìrean Cànain Sònraichte; agus
v. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** gun deigheadh aithisgean a bharrachd a thoirt chun na Comataidh a thaobh cheumannan lìbhrigidh, riaghlachas is co-chomhairleachadh.

9. Aithisg Adhartais Plana na Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/9/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na leanas:-

i. susbaint na h-aithisg adhartais PRMS seo;
ii. cur a-steach is measadh fàbharach bileag-thuairisgeil sgrùdadh bliadhnail Bhòrd na Gàidhlig airson Cèitean 2024 gu Cèitean 2025; agus
iii. freagairt na Comhairle do cho-chomhairleachadh Cairt Rìoghail a' BhBC, mar a chithear sna h-eàrr-ràdhan.

10. Cunntas air Foghlam Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/4/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:

- bha Buill air am brosnachadh leis an deagh adhartas a bhathar a' dèanamh ann am foghlam Gàidhlig air feadh sgìre Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd, ach bha e cudromach coimhead gu breithneachail air an adhartas a bhathar air a dhèanamh. Chaidh luach a' cho-obrachaidh eadar a' Chomataidh seo agus Comataidh an Fhoghlaim a shoilleireachadh;
- bha dùbhlain leantainneach air feadh na Gàidhealtachd air sàillibh nithean a leithid cruinn-eòlas, cuideam air goireasan, agus an àireamh sgoiltean;
- bu chòir riochdachadh a dhèanamh do mhinistearan ùra Riaghaltas na h-Alba a thaobh na taic a bhathar a' sireadh, air sàillibh 's mar a bha Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd air thoiseach ann a bhith a' lìbhrigeadh FtG;
- bha dragh ann gun robh mòran sgoilearan a' roghnachadh gun a bhith a' leantainn air adhart leis a' Ghàidhlig san sgoil às dèidh ÀS3; agus
- cha robh e na riatanas reachdail Foghlam Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig (FLI) a lìbhrigeadh agus chaidh iarraidh gun deigheadh seo a rannsachadh le Riaghaltas na h-Alba. Ach, bha dealas aig Sgioba na Gàidhlig taic is brosnachadh a thoirt do FtG agus bha eachdraidh fhada aig an sgioba a thaobh a bhith a' lìbhrigeadh seo.

Às dèidh sin:-

i. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh fàilte a chur air leudachadh leantainneach Foghlaim Ghàidhlig san Sgìre a Tuath;
ii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh aithneachadh gu bheil àireamhan sgoilearan Gàidhlig a' fàs thar nan roinnean; agus
iii. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do ghnìomhan Seachdain na Gàidhlig agus an dealas a th' aig sgoiltean com-pàirt a ghabhail san iomairt bhliadhnail.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 4.30f.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday, 4 June 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mr M Baird
Mr R Bremner
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (remotely)
Mr A Christie
Mr K Gowans
Mr A Jarvie (remotely)
Mr S Kennedy
Mr B Lobban
Mr P Logue (remotely)
Mr G Mackenzie
Mr S Mackie (remotely)
Mr T MacLennan
Mr P Oldham (Chair) (remotely)
Mr M Prosser (remotely)
Ms M Reid (Vice Chair)
Mr M Reiss
Mr R Stewart (remotely)

Non-Members present:

Mr J Finlayson
Mrs T Robertson

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Mrs S Armstrong, Chief Officer - Revenues and Commercialisation
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer - Corporate Finance
Mr J Shepherd, Chief Officer - Business Solutions
Ms E Barrie, Head of People
Mr D MacKenzie, Trading Standards Manager
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer
Mr C Ross, 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 M Reid 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 Mr J Bruce.

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

   Mr A Christie – Items 12 and 14 (Transparency Statement)

3. **Good News**
   Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the good news on the following topics, the detail of which had been circulated:The Committee **NOTED** the good news on the following topics, the details of which had been circulated:

- Housing Benefit Processing
- Revenues & Commercialisation - Corporate Business Support
- Safety, Health and Emergency Planning
- 2026 Summer Placement Programme
- Business Solutions

4. Late Submission of Expenses Claims
A' Cur A-steach airson Cosgaisean Anmoch

The Council Convener expressed disappointment at the late submission of expenses, particularly as they were from the previous financial year, and he reiterated that this should not happen unless for reasons of illness.

The Committee **APPROVED** the claim from Mr Laurie Fraser £45.90 for mileage in November and December 2025.

∗ **5. Appointment to Sub-Committees, Working Groups, etc**
Cur an Dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidhean, Buidhnean-obrach is eile

The Committee **AGREED** Mr S Mackie replace Mr A Baxter on the Non-Domestic Rates Appeals Committee and Ms C Ramsay***** replace Ms M MacCallum on the Appeals and Disputes Sub Committee.

∗ **6. Establishment of the Fuel Poverty Working Group**
Stèidheachadh Buidheann Obrach na Bochdainn Connaidh

The Committee **AGREED** the group comprise of eight Members, 3 Independent, 3 SNP, 2 Liberal Democrats, as follows:

Glynis Campbell-Sinclair
Richard Gale*
Russell Jones*
Kate MacLean*
Thomas MacLennan
Paul Oldham
Matthew Prosser
Morven Reid

7. Treasury Management – Summary of Transactions to 31 March 2026
Rianachd Ionmhais - Geàrr-chunntas air Gnothaichean gu 31 Màrt 2026

There had been circulated Report No RES/19/26 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 January 2026 to 31 March 2026.

8. Investors in People Programme Update
Cunntas air Pròg ram Luchd-tasgaidh ann an Daoine

There had been circulated Report No RES/20/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. progress in rolling out Investors in People across the Council;
ii. high-level actions at paragraph 8.3 of the report; and
iii. Corporate 1 and Corporate 2 assessment reports.

9. Learning and Development Strategy
Ro-innleachd Ionnsachaidh is Leasachaidh

There had been circulated Report No RES/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Learning and Development Strategy and Action Plan.

10. People Strategy Update
Cunntas air Ro-innleachd nan Daoine

There had been circulated Report No RES/22/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the strategy was welcomed, particularly the references to mental health support. While the overall demographic of Council staff was moving to a higher proportion of younger staff, as a result of the learning strategy and modern apprenticeships, it was hoped that the expertise and knowledge that came with long-term older staff was not lost.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress of commitment provided in the People Strategy; and
ii. **AGREED** the People Strategy action plan as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report and updated Talent Strategy Action Plan in Appendix 2 to the report.

11. Corporate Cluster Workforce Action Plan - Annual Update
Plana-gnìomha Feachd-obrach na Buidhne Corporra – Cunntas Bliadhnail

There had been circulated Report No RES/23/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

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

12. Trading Standards Performance 2025/26 and Operational Plan 2026/27 Coileanadh Inbhean Malairt 2025/26 agus Plana Obrachaidh 2026/27

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/24/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised: -

- the depth and breadth of the work undertaken by Trading Standards was acknowledged and the team praised for their work;
- it was hoped the banning of single use vapes had helped to reduce both the prevalence of vapes and the associated littering. Confirmation was provided that the ban had, in combination with other factors, resulted in improvement. However, attention was drawn to the industry's response which meant that relatively inexpensive vapes could now be purchased and discarded, which was disappointing;
- the provision of Trading Standards modern apprenticeships was welcomed;
- concern was expressed that in response to an increased potential risk to officers, stab vests had been purchased and would be used in certain situations. It was hoped that any incidents of violence towards officers were appropriately reported and it was confirmed that officers had received appropriate training in the use of the vests;
- it was suggested that at the appropriate time the Committee should support calls by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute to introduce Closure Order powers for Scottish local authorities. It was confirmed that any proposed legislative changes would be reported to Committee in due course;
- much of the information in the report would be useful for all Members of the Council;
- with reference to the recent significant fire in central Glasgow that was reported to have originated in a vape shop, information was sought and provided on efforts that could be made to minimise risks in this regard;
- the geographic spread of intelligence gathering and enforcement work was queried and summarised;
- in relation to inspection visits to premises where no wrong doing was detected, attention was drawn to the preventative benefits of such visits being known to be undertaken;
- with reference to the useful work being undertaken by Trading Standards, it was hoped the team might be expanded in future, and that the Highlands could maintain its reputation as a safe place to live and visit, with particular reference to health and safety adherence;

- the increasing challenges associated with the use of AI, including deep fake imagery and phishing scams, were highlighted and acknowledged, and some of the beneficial uses of AI in terms of compliance with legislation were summarised. The benefits and limitations of call blockers were highlighted;
- growing areas of concern included the prevalence of organised crime, and the sale of counterfeit goods. Members were urged to report any intelligence on this to Trading Standards;
- attention was drawn to the value of Trusted Trader Schemes; and

- concern was expressed that there had been reports of car park fines being issued when payment machines were out of order, and the legislation around car park charging was summarised. Specific incidences of this should be reported.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the performance of the Trading Standards team during the year 2025/26 as detailed in its Annual Report;
ii. **APPROVED** the Trading Standards Operational Plan for 2026/27; and
iii. **NOTED** the steps being taken to modernise performance measurement in relation to Trading Standards.

13. Delivery of ICT Strategy
Lìbhrigeadh Ro-innleachd ICT

There had been circulated Report No RES/25/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised: -

- the Chief Officer – Business Solutions was thanked for his contribution to the Committee during his time in the role;
- the decision to move to in-house ICT service provision was praised, with particular reference to improved data security, which tied into reducing corporate risk HC4;
- the strategy's impact/focus on local employment and job creation was credited and cited as a benefit to the wider Highland economy; and
- the saving of around £3m was highlighted.

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

i. benefits delivered so far from Project Dòchas;
ii. validation of benefits provided by Internal Audit; and
iii. progress in the delivery of the ICT Strategy.

14. Corporate Service – Performance Monitoring Q4 2025/26
Seirbheis Chorporra - Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R4 2025/26

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item in his capacity as a Non-executive director of Inverness BID but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

During discussion, information was sought and provided as to why the HR and Communications compliance with Freedom of Information (FOI) response timescales had reduced in Quarter 4. It was explained that the response period for FOI requests was bound by legislation and was not reflective of the complexity of each case. It was suggested that a breakdown of the FOI requests by completion time would be helpful.

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

i. performance information for the Corporate Cluster; and
ii. change to Freedom of Information reporting to align with the Chief Officer structure.

15. Corporate Systems Update – HR & Payroll Programme
Cunntas air Siostaman Corporra – Pròg ram Ghoireasan Daonna & Rola Pàighidh

There had been circulated Report No RES/27/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. progress, financial position, and risk management of the HR & Payroll Programme; and
ii. the summary in section 4.5 of the report to support the decision-making process.

16. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update Q4 2025/26
Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh R4 2025/26

a) Corporate Solutions
Freagairtean Corporra

There had been circulated Report No RES/28/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED** progress on the projects covered in the report.

b) Income Generation
Togail Teachd-a-steach

There had been circulated Report No RES/29/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, Members were urged to attend the in-person Redesign Board income generation workshop that was taking place that afternoon. The huge success of the visitor centre at the Storr in Skye was welcomed and it was hoped the model could be replicated elsewhere. Attention was drawn to the partnership working that had been instrumental in the success of the Storr project, with staff and Members working closely with the local community and suppliers, not only to generate income and support the local economy but also to protect and value the site and locality. Local recruitment was a vital aspect of this and should be replicated for other projects.

Given that there were around 9m visitors to the Highlands each year, attention was drawn to the costs of this to the Council, in the provision and maintenance of facilities and infrastructure. In this regard, the importance of developing income generation projects was emphasised. It was suggested further specific income generation projects should be presented to the Committee at its next meeting.

In relation to the possible income generation project at Torvean, it was suggested that the historically significant Boar Stone, which had been moved from the Essich area of Inverness to a display at the entrance to the Council chamber, should be moved to Torvean.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** progress on the projects covered in the report.

17. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

The following Minutes of Meetings were:

i. **NOTED** – Non-Domestic Rates Appeals Committee held on 30 April 2026;
ii. **APPROVED** - Staff Partnership Forum held on 6 May 2026; and
iii. **NOTED** –Appeals and Disputes Sub Committee held on 29 April 2026 and 20 May 2026.

Closing remarks

The Chair paid tribute to Mr Jon Shepherd, Chief Officer - Business Solutions, and Ms Elaine Barrie, Head of People, both of whom had enjoyed long careers with the Council and been instrumental in implementing significant projects and system changes. Their outstanding contributions to the work of the Council, both for over three decades, was greatly appreciated and they were wished well on behalf of the Council for their imminent retirement.

The meeting ended at 10.50am.

The Highland Council
Pensions Committee and Pension Board

Minutes of Meeting of the **Pensions Committee and Pension Board** held in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness/remotely on Thursday 18 June 2026 at 10.30am.

Present:

Pensions Committee
Mr S Coghill (remote)
Mrs J Hendry
Mr B Lobban
Mr P Logue (remote)
Mr A MacKintosh (remote)
Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Mr P Oldham
Ms C Ramsay (substitute)

Pension Board
Dr C Birt, Highland Council
Mr S Kennedy
Mr R Fea (remote)
Mr D MacDonald, Unison (remote)
Mr W Munro, Unison

Non-Member in attendance:-
Mr L Fraser

Officers in attendance:
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer Corporate Finance, Corporate Service
Ms C Strachan, Pension Fund Manager, Corporate Service
Ms L Junor, Operations Manager (Pensions), Corporate Service
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager, Corporate Service
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Corporate Service
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Also in attendance:
Ms L Rofe, Senior Audit Manager, Audit Scotland (remote)

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

Mr P Oldham in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs T Robertson and Mr R Boyle.

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

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Pension Fund Administration
Rianachd Maoin Peinnsein

There was circulated Report No. PC/07/26 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance which provided an update on matters relating to the administration of the Highland Pension Fund (HPF).

It was highlighted that pension fund administration performance continued to improve and this was evident, for example, with improvements in the time taken to process widow and dependant benefits.

Further, reference was made to national discussions and developments regarding Scottish LGPS investments and collaboration with these matters initially being considered by the Investment Sub-Committee later this afternoon and Members of the Pensions Committee were welcomed to attend this meeting. A concern was expressed regarding developments happening on this issue which could affect the HPF.

In relation to training sessions for Pensions Committee and Pension Board Members, the Actuarial Valuation training on 29 September 2026 was highlighted in advance of the initial triennial Actuarial Valuation results being presented to Pensions Committee in October.

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

i. current HPF administration performance and performance updates (section 6);
ii. update on England and Wales Pension Bill (Fit for the Future) (section 7);
iii. update on Pension Dashboard (section 8); and
iv. training update (section 9).

4. Conflict of Interest Policy
Poileasaidh Strì Eadar Com-pàirtean

There was circulated Report No. PC/08/26 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance which presented a Conflict of Interest Policy for approval.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Conflict of Interest Policy (Appendix 2).

5. Policy on Investment Services Appointment and Management
Poileasaidh Cur an Dreuchd is Stiùireadh Sholaraichean Seirbheisean Tasgaidh

There was circulated Report No. PC/09/26 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance which presented a policy on investment services appointment and management for approval.

The Committee **APPROVED** the investment services appointment and management policy (Appendix 2).

6. Pension Fund Internal Audit Annual Report 2025/26
Aithisg Bhliadhnail In-Sgrùdaidh Maoin Peinnsein 2025/26

There was circulated Report No. PC/10/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit & Risk) which included an assessment of the Pension Fund's framework of governance, risk management and control, and the associated opinion which provided information for the Fund's Annual Governance Statement.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and the audit opinion provided.

7. Risk Management Update 2026/27
Cunntas às Ùr air Poileasaidh Rianachd Cunnairt agus Cunnart Làithreach

There was circulated Report No. PC/11/26 by the Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated risk register extract (Appendix 1).

8. Investment Sub Committee: Minutes of Meeting
Fo-chomataidh Tasgaidh: Geàrr-chunntas na Coinneimh

The Minutes of the meeting of the Investment Sub-Committee held on 16 March 2026 were circulated and **APPROVED**.

The meeting ended at 10.52am.