

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

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

4. Highland Housing Challenge - Update Dùbhlán 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 Sagers, 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' Phobail

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 Glusaid

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 “Our 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.