

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

Non-Members also present:

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

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:-

- NOTED** allocation and spend progress to date;
- AGREED** to continue to use existing allocation and governance structures for any future allocation(s);
- AGREED** to target funds to in-house council projects if NRF allocation was significantly reduced; and
- 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**:-

- that the proposed area shown in Appendix 2 of the report be declared the Ardersier Common Local Nature Reserve; and
- 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:-

- NOTED** the benefits of reducing light pollution outlined in section 5 of the report;
- 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
- 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 placed 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 Bhliadhnaile 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.