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

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