

The Highland Council

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

Present:

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

In attendance:

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

Also in attendance:

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

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

Mr I Brown in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Boyd, Ms E Knox and Mr A Sinclair.

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

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

Mr A Christie – Item 4, 6 and 11.

Mr D Gregg – Item 6

Mr M Cameron – Item 9

Preliminaries

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

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

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

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

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Inverness City Gull Management Plan;
- ii. **NOTED** on locations where gull activity was having a significant impact on local communities;
- iii. **NOTED** on locations where gull behaviour was predominantly associated with food scavenging;
- iv. **NOTED** the potential implementation of gull mitigation measures on Council-owned buildings where significant impacts had been identified; and
- v. **AGREED** that education and awareness measures be complemented by coordinated operational delivery, and therefore instructed officers to bring forward a strengthened delivery plan within this financial year which:
 - a. builds on the successful partnership approach previously supported by Inverness BID;
 - b. considers the appropriate use of evidence-based interventions, including licensed egg and nest management where required;
 - c. addresses identified and emerging hotspot areas across Inverness, including school settings such as Millburn Academy;
 - d. supports practical action to reduce food-related gull behaviour, particularly linked to litter; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Inverness Common Good Fund: Discretionary Scheme for Winter Payments 2026/2027

Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis: Sgeama fo Ùghdarras airson Pàighidhean Geamhraidh 2026/2027

Transparency Statements: the undernoted Members made Transparency Statements in respect of this item but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

**Mr A Christie - as a Chief Executive of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey
Citizens Advice Bureau**

Mr D Gregg - as a Board Member for the Citizens Advice Bureau

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

The Committee:-

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

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

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

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

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

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

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

11. Inverness and Area Community Funding Update

Cunntas air Maoineachadh Coimhearsnachd Inbhir Nis agus a Sgìre

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

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

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

12. Appointments to Other Bodies - Inverness Town Twinning Committee

Cur an Dreuchd gu Buidhnean Eile - Comataidh Chàraideachaidh Baile Inbhir Nis

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

13. Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF) – Grant Applications over £10,000

Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis- Larrtasan Tabhartais thar £10,000

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

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

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

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

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

17. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes of Meetings were:-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The meeting concluded at 2.30pm.