The Highland Council
No. 3 2026/2027

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 25 June 2026 at 9.35am.

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Convener paid tribute to former Chief Executive Mr Arthur McCourt who had recently passed away. His hard work and dedication to the Council was recognised and condolences were conveyed to his family and friends.

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

Present:

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

Youth Convener (non-voting):
Ms L McBain

In Attendance:
Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive - People
Assistant Chief Executive – Place
Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Chief Officer – Enterprise and Investment
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 J Bruce, Mr S Cameron, Mr S Mackie, Mr H Morrison and Mr M Reiss.

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

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

Item 3 – Mr A Christie, Mrs M Ross and Mr R Stewart
Item 5 - Mr D Gregg
Item 7 – Mr M Cameron and Mr K Gowans
Item 8 – Dr M Gregson
Item 9 – Mr A Jarvie
Item 10 - Mr K Gowans

3. Highland Poverty and Equality Commission: Call to Action
Coimisean Bochdainn is Co-ionannachd na Gàidhealtachd: Gairm gu Gnìomh

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

Mr A Christie - as Chief Executive of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau
Mrs M Ross - as a director of two Third Sector organisations
Mr R Stewart - as a Board member of Youth Highland

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

A presentation was provided summarising the creation, findings and calls-to-action of the Commission. Six themes had been identified - ways of working, financial security, access, housing, early years & education, and fair work. The call-to-action themes had been arranged into three broad clusters - Place, People and Prospects.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the Commissioners were thanked for their work, and the comprehensive report was welcomed for its insights into how to make life in the Highlands more equitable;
- Members were urged to attend the workshop planned for August 2026 and reminded that a further report would be considered by the Council in September 2026;
- there were some geographic gaps in the engagement maps that it was hoped would be taken into consideration for future engagement plans;
- reference was made to the need to tackle in-work and fuel poverty, which explained 70% of child poverty experiences, and to the need for a bigger emphasis on social housing provision. Improved data sharing between relevant public agencies would help to pinpoint and tackle areas or groups of people facing poverty;
- attention was drawn to the growing ageing population, a third of which faced fuel poverty nationally, which was likely to be higher in Highland. It was important that appropriate consideration and support be provided to this group including improving the uptake of pension credit;
- the value of early years provision and youth clubs as trusted anchors in communities was highlighted and reference made to their role in tackling poverty. Noting that many youth clubs faced imminent closure, a solution to their ongoing funding should be sought as a matter of urgency so that their work could continue over the summer and beyond. Attention was drawn to work undertaken in Perth & Kinross on ten-year investment programmes for youth work and to the value of trained youth workers being able to provide support and guidance to children from challenging backgrounds or going through the Children's Hearings system;
- the importance of providing third sector groups and other organisations working to tackle poverty with up-front, long-term, sustainable funding was emphasised and this should be further considered at the workshop in August;
- much of the information in the report had been considered at various Committees over the years and it was hoped the gathering of all poverty-related issues into one report would lead to action and outcomes being achieved. Of key importance was working and sharing experiences with the third sector and the development of a dedicated outreach team;
- it was hoped the work of the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission would be put to better use than that of the Commission on Highland Democracy, which had published its final recommendations in December 2017;
- it was suggested there was nothing in the report that had not already been known and that action was now required. By way of example, reference was made to the knowledge that a proportion of Council-owned homes did not meet the required energy standards and that immediate action on this was required and that many of the people in low paid jobs in the Highlands were employed by the Council;
- the value of community hubs and the whole family well-being approach was highlighted, as was the need to invest funding to deliver transformation and stability, with fairness and clear priorities;
- attention was drawn to the impact of health inequalities on poverty and the Council's role in improving the social determinants of health;
- poverty should be a cross-party issue and not a political one;

- national attention was required for rural concerns that impacted poverty, for example recruitment, childcare and transport challenges. A call for a dedicated Highland Minister in the Scottish Government was suggested;
- the education system would benefit from a redesign to focus on life skills as well as qualifications;
- it was queried how the Council intended to engage with the Scottish Government on the report findings;
- noting that many individuals experienced precarious work situations, employers, especially large organisations, should be encouraged to provide more employment security;
- with reference to fuel poverty, attention was drawn to the importance of tackling the backlog of houses that required improved energy efficiency, and to future-proofing any house-building activity;
- the usefulness of the Highland Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment was highlighted and the need to reduce the costs of building new, energy-efficient homes should be communicated to the Scottish and UK governments for cross-party discussion;
- the individual person or family's experience should be the key element of any effort to tackle poverty, rather than the protection of a group or organisation. It was important that funded third sector organisations complied with relevant Council policies;
- the importance of protecting the working poor was emphasised, and attention was drawn to the numerous Council owned properties, including previous janitor's houses at schools, that were empty. It was suggested that only a fifth of the income from second home council tax was being spent on the provision of additional social or affordable housing;
- the reinstatement of the North of Scotland electricity endowment fund was suggested, with any funds generated being spent on new housing investment; and
- a review of the allocation policy for the Community Regeneration Fund was suggested, with priority given to need and to the provision of adequate support for applicants.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **NOTED** the work of the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission and the final report from the Commission which accompanied the report;
ii. **AGREED** that a Workshop be arranged in August 2026 involving Members and Senior Officers, to which the Co-Chairs of the Commission be invited, to discuss in more detail the rationale behind these calls for action and explore potential solutions; and
iii. **NOTED** that a further report setting out the implications and early actions for implementation would be considered at the next meeting of the Council.

4. **Annual Accounts for the Year to 31 March 2026 and Revenue Capital Outturn for the Year**
Cunntasan Bliadhnail airson na Bliadhna gu 31 Màrt 2026 agus Teachd-a-steach is Calpa Làithreach airson na Bliadhna

There had been circulated Report No. HC/17/26 by the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in terms of the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) and Capital Expenditure Out-turn, found at section 8.1 and Appendix 3 of the report, there had been £219m capital expenditure across the HIP and HRA. The recently opened Tain 3-18 Campus and new Nairn Academy had been greatly welcomed by their respective communities;
- there were a number of underspends, particularly on roads and bridges, flood protection and bereavement services, but it was felt that the reasons were well documented and evidenced. It was clarified that underspent capital was carried forward into subsequent financial years. Concern was expressed that where underspends had occurred, this might indicate that services had not been delivered;
- concerns were raised in terms of section 7.1 of the report where it was stated that the Council's General Reserve was £4m short of the expected and targeted position. This was less than 1% of the Budget but disappointment was expressed. It was commented that this year's accounts continued a worrying pattern of overspending, financial pressure, recovery plans and an increasing reliance on Reserves. However, it was also stated that budget controls were tighter, accountability was clear and that plans were reviewed regularly. There was a clear focus on long-term sustainability. Examples were provided in this regard. Good strategic planning included the balanced use of Reserves although this should be infrequent. An example was £20m of non-earmarked Reserves being provided to Adult Social Care;
- Section 7.7 of the report set out actions taken by Senior Management and these were welcomed, however it was suggested that Members had a role to play too. It was important for Members to scrutinise the financial impact of any decision made at Strategic Committees as managing the budget effectively had never been more important. Strategic Committees were often asked to scrutinise accounts for a period of time that was well before the date of the meeting, sometimes three months in arrears, and it was asked how officers might accelerate more dynamic information being provided to Members, and if the timetable of meetings calendar could be looked at;
- the cost of delivering services continued to rise and significant savings were required. Collaboration with community planning partners was important, in addition to transparency;
- it was suggested that the Internal Audit Team, which was considered a vital tool in terms of highlighting areas that needed change, be expanded;
- with reference to saving targets in terms of energy and renewables, as summarised in Appendix 2 of the report, further information was sought, and this would be provided outside of the meeting;

- an explanation was sought in terms of a year on year increase in sundry debt as it suggested that customers were struggling to repay their debts to the Council. In response it was clarified that this was due to timing differences and was not an issue of non-payment; and
- Members found it difficult to undertake thorough scrutiny of complex and detailed reports when they were not provided sufficiently in advance of meetings. In this instance, the accounts had been circulated three days before this meeting. In response, the Chief Officer – Corporate Finance advised that the Finance Team sought to produce the accounts as early as possible but additional reporting and disclosure requirements, together with new accounting standards, had impacted their preparation.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **APPROVED** for issue the unaudited Annual Accounts for the Highland Council, Highland Council Charitable Trust Funds and the Highland Council Pension Fund for the year ending 31 March 2026 and **NOTED** that these would be presented to the appointed auditor by the prescribed date of the 30 June 2026;
ii. **NOTED** the revenue and capital out-turn for the 2025/26 financial year, which were subject to audit, as set out in section 7 and 8 of the report; and
iii. **NOTED** the budget management and control actions already in place and set out in past reports to Members, and the additional actions being implemented by Senior Management in recognition of the need to address financial risks.

5. Highland Investment Plan Update
Plana Tasgaidh na Gàidhealtachd

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/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) was ambitious in terms of infrastructure and the future sustainability and resilience of the Highlands by investing in communities, improving opportunities for future generations and creating modern and sustainable public spaces;
- the importance of Area discussions to feed into the HIP and ensure the Council was getting it right in terms of engagement and that constructive feedback would help ensure the delivery of projects reflected the views of Members and communities;
- there was a need to have discussions with communities and other organisations on all opportunities in relation to Community Points of Delivery (POD), including the potential for asset rationalisation, to deliver the best outcomes for communities;

- workforce skills was a fundamental part of the success of the HIP and the Highland economy and highlighting the benefits of the Construction Skills Academy, Sector Skills Board, and other opportunities to support and grow the workforce in partnership and ensure a smooth collaboration between public, private and education sectors;
- the Workforce North Co Investment Fund would help deliver meaningful opportunities for young people, encourage innovation, create sustainable pathways into employment and career paths and an update sought on when the above Fund would be open for applications;
- Members needed to be provided with a better understanding of the cost pressures on the HIP as referenced in the report and the fact the full extent of the Community POD facilities at each location had still to be established and finalised;
- concern the approach to energy performance was moving away from Passivhaus certification given this was a policy decision, the impacts were not fully understood and savings might not be achieved in the longer term. It was explained a full assessment had been carried out in relation to the impacts and affordability, and that officers could provide Members with further details if required;
- it was suggested that building houses to Passivhaus certification was not affordable, the role of the Council being to provide high quality low-cost public services and this was not compatible with building to net zero standards;
- concern that greater progress was being made was on the LEIP funded schools than on HIP projects and more transparency and openness was required in reports to Members on the reasons for delays;
- capital projects related to the school estate should be considered at the Education Committee to allow for proper Member scrutiny and this be considered by the Administration and recommendations put in place for the next Council, following the Local Government elections in 2027;
- while the HIP was ambitious, Members were not observing construction and building works commencing on the ground and doubt as to what real progress would be achieved before the Local Government elections in 2027;
- concern was expressed at progress with the Charleston project and an assurance was sought that an initial meeting of the stakeholder group would be held early in the new school session; further clarity was also sought on whether the revised construction completion and opening dates for the new Charleston Academy was realistic;
- the need to ensure the stakeholder group for Inverness High School was established early in the new school session was emphasised and that local Members be invited to attend the stakeholder meetings; further clarity was also sought and provided on the expected construction completion and opening dates for the project;
- further clarification was sought, and provided, on the Tornagrain and POD element of the project and the revised delivery date of October 2028 for the project. It was confirmed the planning application was to be submitted in July 2026 and local Members would be updated on progress at a meeting to be held in the near future;
- an assurance was sought in relation to the revised timescales for the Dunvegan Primary project and reference to the positive progress being made on the masterplan due to strong collegiate working and effective stakeholder groups involving the Council, Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association, community council, community trust and parent council;

- the stakeholder group for Broadford Primary was also working well and fully supportive of the plans for their area;
- with regard to the points raised on individual projects, an assurance was provided that the revised dates for construction completion and opening in relation to Phase 1 project delivery timescales set out in Appendix 4 of the report, had been the subject of lengthy discussions between the Council, Hub North Scotland, and contractors and were considered to be realistic and achievable;
- the delay in respect of Beauly Primary was disappointing and opportunities for programme recovery be investigated, noting the revised dates had been scrutinised and considered to be realistic for delivery; a stakeholder meeting was to be held to discuss the programme in more detail and set milestones to ensure no further slippage;
- it was important to fulfil commitments made to local Members, members of the public and parents and to listen to their views in respect of the Dingwall including St Clements School and to accelerate the progress in delivering the opportunities this project would bring;
- in relation to the Thurso project, there had been good engagement with local Members and communities. However, concern was expressed that legacy buildings would be sold and become vacant, and potential for demolition and sites used for housing. An assurance was provided that a full plan for the disposal/demolition would be in place in relation to these buildings;
- concern was expressed at reports in the local press that funding for the Thurso Community POD was at risk and reassurance was sought, and provided, that significant progress was being made with the project with good local and partner engagement and the project continued to be resourced;
- in respect of Alness Academy and Invergordon High School, it was suggested that if the Council was to deliver on the published delivery timescales, then preliminary works needed to be accelerated. In addition, it would be helpful for Members and communities to be provided with a clear timescale for engagement;
- concern was expressed the former Dail Mhor Care Home and former primary school, Strontian continued to be vacant and a cost to the Council in terms of maintenance, despite community interest in working with the Council and partners on potential uses over a number of years, A coherent plan was required for the redevelopment of the site and whether the Council would commit to working with the community to explore and progress options;
- in regard to the above, details were provided on discussions being held between the Council, NHS Highland and Urram and that further updates would be brought to Members going forward;
- concern the above issue would be continually repeated across the Highland area when vacating buildings and urging the Council to take this matter seriously and follow through on potential opportunities;
- in relation to the Lochaber Adult Social Care Provision Project, it was disappointing plans for the Blar Mhor site had not been presented to local Members in the first instance and further clarification was required on the current position with the community consultation;
- the local community council had asked for details of the community stakeholders on the project team established to take forward the Lochaber Adult Social Care transformation work;

- as with previous capital plans, the HIP would experience challenges due to global and national circumstances that could only be overcome through evaluation and review. The updated HIP should therefore be supported given the alternative was to delete projects which would be unfair on the communities benefiting from these projects;
- the review of the HIP did not detract from it being the right and only way to fund and deliver a major part of the Council's capital programme and significant progress was being made towards improving the school estate and wider public infrastructure in communities despite the challenges;
- there would always be geo-political challenges outwith the Council's control that could impact on strategic plans and the need for more focus to be placed on longer term contingency planning to deliver successful projects;
- it was questioned whether officers considered there was sufficient manpower and resources in place to effectively manage and support the ambitions and complexities of the HIP. It was explained that support was provided through Hub North Scotland, an education expert was to be recruited to assist and support the engagement process and the Council's in-house planning and regulatory side was also being strengthened;
- workforce planning was paramount in terms of having the resources to fully implement the HIP and this be considered a priority to ensure continuity;
- in moving forward with the HIP, it was crucial to have early, open, honest, transparent and meaningful dialogue with communities and work in partnership to build trust and make communities the key drivers of transformational progress;
- the Council faced an ageing infrastructure, pressure on roads and transport networks, sustaining schools and public buildings, housing and population decline in some rural areas. A long term approach and political consistency was required and a focus on the next generation rather than the next budget or electoral cycle;
- public investment would help unlock wider economic confidence attracting private sector investment supporting green energy opportunities, strengthening digital infrastructure and creating long term employment;
- the HIP recognised that a successful Plan must continue to ensure all communities felt included through proper planning partnerships and local engagement, so the Highlands remained a prosperous and sustainable place in which to live, work, and build a future;
- concern as to whether there was contractor and developer capacity to deliver on the seven major school projects scheduled in Phase 1 of the HIP, there being a lack of evidence to support this being the case;
- the need to focus on the ongoing maintenance of the existing schools estate and before taking forward any proposals to expand that estate, specific reference being made to a number of individual schools. It was confirmed a report was to be brought to the Housing and Property Committee on 12 August 2026, setting out the priorities for capital spend going forward;
- a request was made for officials to attend the parent council to discuss outstanding accommodation issues at Crown Primary School;
- the HIP was predicated on the Council being able to continue to determine its own Council tax rather than this being set by the Scottish Government and this represented a risk;

- the investment over the previous and current financial year in roads was welcomed and the workforce commended on the work carried out. However, the lack of inhouse white lining resources was detracting from the work undertaken in Skye and across the Highlands and a roads safety issue. An assurance was provided both the tendering of work to attract more interest from external contractors and building an inhouse team was being considered;
- the Administration should be proactive with COSLA to ensure the Council received its fair share of the Scottish Government's Better Surfaces Fund and to make the case this should be a continuous rather than a one-off Fund;
- a query as to how much the HIP had cost to date in terms of consultation, reports and administration costs and an assurance this information would be circulated to Members;
- further clarity was sought, and provided, on the savings to be achieved in respect of accommodation efficiencies and ongoing review of accommodation areas, and the benchmarking undertaken in this regard;
- the Council forward commitment to the Tomich junction scheme on the basis this would send a visible and transformational message, provide confidence to the sector, deliver investment and employment in Invergordon and Easter Ross and demonstrate to communities that the Council was listening to their views;
- the Council had trust and credibility issues with communities in respect of previous capital projects and much work was required to overcome that scepticism;
- concern was expressed as to the high cost of projects costed and whether benchmarking had been undertaken with the private sector in relation to the leverage generated from investment; and
- the HIP had to be affordable so that all phase one projects and the high level of investment in communities was delivered and stakeholder groups were key to overcoming many of the communication difficulties that had been experienced.

Decision

The Council **APPROVED** the:-

i. updated consolidated Highland Investment Plan (HIP) covering five years as set out within Appendix 2 to the report; and
ii. continuing work on progressing Phase 1 of the HIP and other major projects, conducting place-based reviews and developing masterplans, all as outlined in the report.

6. Highland Wealth Fund
Maoin Saidhbhreis na Gàidhealtachd

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Social Value Charter had been implemented to ensure that all Highland communities benefited from the large-scale renewable energy developments being hosted across the region. The Highland Wealth Fund (the Fund), which built on the Social Value Charter and drew on similar models successfully implemented in other countries, was intended to create a legacy by enabling investment for future generations, and it was potentially transformational. It was important that the Fund was seen as delivering for the people of Highland and the proposed governance model ensured that not only was there a key role for the Council but also, significantly, for community representatives and developers;

- the proposals were based on transparency, openness and inclusivity of community groups, which was welcomed. However, it would be difficult to demonstrate to community groups that they genuinely had a voice and could influence the direction of the Fund and this was a key issue that required to be addressed. It was highlighted that the Social Value Charter was a Community Planning Partnership (CPP) initiative and concern was expressed that the CPP Board currently met in private. It was questioned how it could be demonstrated that communities were equal partners when they were excluded from attending CPP Board meetings. The need for change was emphasised. It was suggested that the CPP Board should meet in public and that the Leader of the Council raise the matter when he assumed the Chair of the Board in due course. Other Members also expressed support for the points raised;
- the Council should aspire to create a legacy at the same level as the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund. However, this could not be achieved unless contributions were compulsory and the need for change in that regard was emphasised as the current voluntary guidance was not working, with only two developers signed up to the Social Value Charter to date;
- Members commended the letter from the Leader of the Council at Appendix 3 of the report and it was commented that it was necessary to build on it, jointly, to ensure that the Fund was as substantial as possible for future generations;
- as indicated by Mr Jim McCormick, Co-Chair of the Poverty and Equality Commission, under item 3, people with lived experience of poverty and inequality should be at the table when financial decisions were being made;
- concern was expressed that the proposed Highland Wealth Fund Board would not necessarily contribute to the priorities of the Council given that Elected Members would comprise only one third of the membership and it was assumed that those Member positions would be cross-party. Members would also have no responsibility for developing the evaluation criteria by which proposals would be assessed;
- the greatest financial rewards came from ownership, and the need for the Council to own its own renewable energy developments was emphasised. In that regard, concern was expressed regarding the slow pace of progress in respect of the Council's small-scale Solar PV projects. Another Member added that the Council currently owned 2000 kilowatts of installed capacity and it was queried why the Council did not contribute to the Social Value Charter;
- there was a need for greater transparency and public scrutiny in respect of the Social Value Charter and the Council's dealings with energy companies;
- often the Council's priorities did not correspond with those of communities, and there was an opportunity for developers to meet their corporate social responsibility obligations by, for example, contributing staff time to carry out work that communities wished to be undertaken in their locality;
- feedback from Dingwall Community Council was that they were pleased with the potential opportunities the Highland Wealth Fund provided and the prospect of having a say on what they saw as their priorities;

- given that most organisations had a corporate social responsibility to provide staff time or resources, it was queried whether the Council had signed up to do so. In response, it was explained that it was intended to review the Council's Volunteering Policy, which would encompass the social responsibility aspect referred to;
- it was queried whether the staff employed to undertake the work related to the report were paid by the Council or from project funding;
- only small pockets of Highland were in receipt of community benefit at present, and there were limitations as to what the funding could be used for, whereas a substantial Highland Wealth Fund would enable larger projects to take place;
- at Planning Applications Committees, whilst not a material planning consideration, it was often mentioned that officers were negotiating with developers regarding the Social Value Charter, and it was requested that feedback be provided on the outcome of such negotiations;
- it was queried whether any restrictions were going to be applied to the operating costs of the Fund, and whether the Council was going to absorb them;
- it was emphasised that third sector representation was not the same as community representation, and it was important that they were not conflated. In addition, officers' understanding of the term "community" was queried;
- it was right to seek to achieve the greatest possible benefit for the communities of Highland that hosted renewable energy developments;
- comparisons were made with the Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF), a significant fund that had supported major projects such as the redevelopment of the Victorian Market, and it was commented that, if managed appropriately, the Highland Wealth Fund could be similar. It was added that the ICGF worked effectively because it was public, transparent, non-partisan and took a long-term view, and that the same principles should be applied to the Highland Wealth Fund to ensure it was as successful as possible;
- it was anticipated that, at some point, community benefit payments would become mandatory, and establishing a fund at this stage would ensure preparedness for the future;
- if the Fund was seen to be simply a Council fund it was likely to deter businesses that might otherwise contribute;
- it was emphasised that the Fund was in addition to the community benefit received by communities directly affected by renewable energy developments;
- it was highlighted that the governance arrangements for the Fund were not dissimilar to those in place for the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport in relation to non-domestic rates, and that the Council would retain a right of veto to ensure that expenditure aligned with the Council's priorities. However, the intention was not to spend all the money in the Fund but rather to invest it to create a long-term legacy;
- it was necessary to find ways to encourage more developers to contribute to the Fund to build on the excellent start made by officers. However, developers needed to see the benefits to them and to being accepted within the community;
- the proposals presented an excellent opportunity to enable community empowerment, and Members looked forward to priorities such as those identified in section 6.12 of the report. The opportunity for participatory decision-making in partnership was acknowledged to be a bold but necessary step;
- the significant amount of meaningful discussion between officers, Members and others to refine the proposals was acknowledged, and the final composition of the proposed partnership board was welcomed;

- the substantial benefits arising from the Fund would not be realised for many years to come, and its establishment should be a source of pride for Members; and
- the Chief Executive thanked Members for the feedback and gave an assurance that the points raised would be taken on board in future communications with partners.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **AGREED** the proposed governance model for the Highland Wealth Fund, noting that Members would make up one third of the Partnership Board;
ii. **AGREED** that as part of the governance model, the Council took the role of the Accountable Body, and, as with the Inverness and Cromarty Green Freeport, held the right of veto on spend against the Investment Priorities and the annual Delivery Plan;
iii. **AGREED** the Highland Wealth Fund Investment Priorities, noting that Members would be asked to agree the annual delivery plan;
iv. **NOTED** the ongoing activity of the Council to engage with and influence Scottish Government and UK Government in relation to Community Benefits from renewable energy development;
v. **NOTED** the next steps for progressing the Highland Wealth Fund; and
vi. **NOTED** that the agreed model of governance would be subject to an annual review which would be reported to the Highland Council and the Community Planning Partnership Board.

7. Visitor Levy Update
Cunntas air Cìs Luchd-tadhail

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

Mr M Cameron - as he had a short term let licence for a bed and breakfast, yet to start trading
Mr K Gowans - as a close family member was an employee of Highland Council and was part author of the report

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was highlighted that the report was in relation to the ongoing work being undertaken by officers which would ultimately result in a report being submitted to a future Council meeting to decide on whether or not to introduce a visitor levy in Highland. Changes in Scottish Government legislation on this issue which this Council had sought, meant there were more options to consider and therefore the need to consult further and make a final decision based on all the evidence gathered;

- a view was expressed that there should be exemptions to the levy e.g. those requiring to attend hospital for medical treatment; people living in Highland that were working in Highland and staying in accommodation in other parts of Highland; people living in Highland that wanted to go on holiday to other parts of Highland; people under the VAT threshold so they were not faced with an additional administrative burden. The exemptions to the levy and who was expected to pay the levy should be clear when the consultation began. It should also be clear what the Council intended to spend the visitor levy money on, with it being suggested that additional housing was the main priority. There was a need for much wider consultation on the visitor levy options, not just with businesses and communities, but also capturing the individual publics views;
- the officers involved with the work on the visitor levy were thanked for their commitment and professionalism to engage with communities and gain vital feedback. Recent feedback from industry representatives and wider public commentary reflected a growing spirit of constructive collaboration between the sector and the Council. It was also recognised the Council's feedback had on shaping amendments to Scottish Government legislation. This ensured the Highland perspective was reflected at national level;
- it was disappointing that Highland would be one of the last to receive any benefits from a visitor levy, given that some other local authorities would start receiving income very soon. Highland would not receive any benefits until the end of the summer season 2030 at the earliest. There was a growing understanding of the benefits of a percentage levy as opposed to a flat rate levy and it was felt this should be implemented now rather than deferring for another six months;
- a view was expressed for the need to get this right for tourism businesses and therefore the process should not be rushed. There was a need to ensure that the levy would deliver a direct and measurable benefit to businesses expected to administer the levy scheme;
- the visitor levy should be feasible, affordable and the consultation should reflect different tourism operators. If small operators were not exempt, a reasonable fixed rate should be considered for tourism operators who were under the VAT threshold;
- tourism was vital to the Highland economy and a visitor levy should be designed in a way that was fair, workable and did not unintentionally damage the tourist sector. The reality for small and family run operators needed to be recognised as additional administration was a real burden to them. Across Europe, the visitor levy models that were easy to administer, with clear fixed rates and revenue invested locally were more likely to succeed;
- the impact to tourism operators with the uncertainty over the visitor levy was highlighted and it was good to see that concerns had been listened to with changes being made to legislation. With the public and business community being consulted, it should be recognised that they might not be in support of a levy and therefore it was premature to be thinking of ways to spend the levy income. Further, when recording the results from the consultation it was asked to identify whether the responses came from the business community, visitors or local residents to help Members come to the right conclusion;
- the need for engagement with various tourism sectors to gather evidence and make informed decisions was highlighted as well as the need for more details around the proposed income from the levy; and

- the feedback from the initial consultation from all stakeholders was listened to and had influenced what was being recommended in the report. While there were advantages to a visitor levy it should not be an additional burden to small tourism operators. Therefore, it was important to continue engagement with the tourism industry and this must include small tourism operators.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **NOTED** the passage of the Visitor Levy (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2026 and that commencement of the new fixed amount powers was anticipated to be 22 July 2026. Other amendments, including those relating to financial returns were anticipated to come into force in September 2026;
ii. **NOTED** the summary of the Visitor Levy (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2026 as set out in section 6 of the report;
iii. **NOTED** that the Diffley Partnership, in collaboration with the Fraser of Allander Institute, had been appointed to undertake an Economic Impact Assessment (EIA) on the fixed rate options, with an anticipated completion in autumn 2026. This EIA would provide comparative data and findings to the EIA previously undertaken by the Diffley Partnership and the Fraser of Allander Institute on a percentage-based levy, which was published on the Council's website at this link;
iv. **NOTED** the ongoing engagement with industry representatives to co-design a draft visitor levy scheme for Members' consideration;
v. **NOTED** the briefing held for Members on 8 June 2026 and the broad range of matters discussed including the various options available for setting rates; practical considerations relating to the way in which a levy would operate and impacts on accommodation providers; and use of funds should a visitor levy be implemented;
vi. **AGREED** that officers continue to progress the next phase of work, including engagement and co-production with industry and Members on the development of draft proposals;
vii. **AGREED** that a further report be considered by Members as soon as was practicable following completion of further engagement with industry and Members recommending a proposed Visitor Levy scheme for consultation; and
viii. **AGREED** that following consultation, a report be considered by Members as soon as practicable setting out the way forward for Highland. Should Members agree to implement a visitor levy, the statutory minimum18-month lead-in period would follow.

8. UK City of Culture Bid 2029 - Update
Cultar Cathair-Bhaile na RA 2029 - Cunntas às Ùr

Transparency Statement: Dr M Gregson declared a connection to this item as a close family Member was an Ambassador for the bid. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

The Chief Officer - HR & Communications and the Chief Officer - Enterprise and Investment provided a brief update on progress with the Inverness and Highland UK City of Culture 2029 bid and highlighted ongoing work in relation to stakeholder engagement, programme development, governance arrangements and preparation of the full application.

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 **NOTED** the update on the UK City of Culture 2029 bid for Inverness-Highland.

9. Highland Local Development Plan: Evidence Report
Plana Leasachadh Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd: Aithisg Fhianais

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the report represented a considerable undertaking by officers and thanks were extended to the authors and other officers involved for their contributions to this substantial and complex piece of work. The Gate Check process had raised the bar significantly and 68% of local authorities had failed to meet the new standard, therefore it was critical that the evidence in the report was robust and comprehensive to allow the Gate Check to be passed so that the Council could continue to the next stage of the Highland Local Development Plan. This had been a complex task due to the scale of the Highland area, the diversity of its communities and the need to reflect both current circumstances and emerging challenges and opportunities. This report was not intended to be a public facing document, but rather an academic, evidence-based paper. This was a visionary report that looked forward and sought to anticipate the needs of Highland over the next decade. To secure approval, the evidence given needed to justify and demonstrate that the Council's long-term ambitions, as set out in the report, were justified and realistic;
- it was queried why a point about improving the health of the Highland population was absent from Chapter 13 of the Evidence report on Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking. It had been a year since the Council had received the Scottish Government's Population Health Framework and it was hoped that this could be discussed at Council or the relevant Committee in the near future so a plan for improving health in Highland could be developed. In response, it was clarified that improving health was included in Chapter 11 of the report concerning indirect effects;
- going forward the Highland Local Development Plan would play a significant role in deciding where homes, jobs and investment were delivered across Highland communities;

- the influence of the Highland Local Development Plan on the decisions made at Planning Applications Committees, and the frustration expressed by the public concerning some planning decisions was emphasised. In response to a question, it was clarified that public involvement would be sought during the next stage, once the Gate Check had been passed;
- on the point being raised, it was clarified that Local Place Plans would be taken into account as part of the Local Development Plan;
- as it stated in the report that the Local Development Plan should support opportunities for natural greenhouse gas sequestration and storage, it was queried whether this constituted a plea for more woodland, as trees were the only current cost-effective method of greenhouse gas sequestration; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that heritage, biodiversity and design landscapes would be captured in more detail within the policy.

Decision

The Council:-

i. **APPROVED** the Evidence Report for the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) as set out at Appendix 1 and summarised at section 6 of the report;
ii. **AGREED** that officers undertake the statutory and other procedures required to submit the Evidence Report to Scottish Ministers and to progress it through Gate Check including responding to any factual amendment or other non-material matters requested by the Reporter;
iii. **AGREED** that the Assistant Chief Executive - Place, in consultation with the Convener of the Council and the Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee:-
    a. update the Evidence Report to reflect the finalised Housing Need and Demand Assessment and make any other factual or other non-material updates prior to submission to Scottish Ministers;
    b. if necessary, respond to any Further Information Requests issued by the Reporter;
    c. if necessary, withdraw, amend and/or resubmit the Evidence Report;
iv. **NOTED** that the subsequent HLDP preparation stage would include consideration of draft content by relevant Council Committees in line with the Scheme of Delegation and that the Proposed Plan would require approval by Full Council before it was published for formal consultation.

10. Eden Court Highlands: Amendments to Memorandum and Articles of Association
Gàidhealtachd Chùirt an Easbaig: Atharrachaidhean dhan Mheòrachan is do na h-Artaigilean Companaidh

Transparency Statement: Mr K Gowans declared a connection to this item as a a Friend of Eden Court. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. HC/23/26 by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** that the:-

i. Highland Council, as a Member of Eden Court Highlands, approve the amendments to the Company's Memorandum and Articles of Association as described in Section 5 of the report; and
ii. Chief Executive, or nominee, approve the text of the required Special Resolution and sign this on behalf of the Council.

11. Appointment of Office Bearers
Cur an Dreuchd Luchd-oifis

Following Mr Stewart standing down as the Vice Chair of Audit Committee, the Council was invited to appoint a new Vice Chair, usually a non-Administration Member. The Vice Chair of the Audit Committee would also sit on the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal and Inverness and Cromarty Firth Monitoring Groups.

The Council **AGREED** that Mr D McDonald be appointed as Vice Chair of Audit Committee.

12. Membership of Committees, etc
Ballrachd air Comataidhean, msaa

The Council **AGREED** that Mr B Boyd be replaced on the undernoted committees as follows:-

- Housing and Property Committee – Mrs J Hendry
- Audit Committee – Mrs K MacLean
- Climate Change Committee – Mrs K MacLean
- Redesign Board – Mr K Gowans

13. Timetable of Meetings
Clàr-ama Choinneamhan

The Council **AGREED** that a Special meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee be held on Monday 28 September 2026.

14. Deeds Executed
Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh

The Council **NOTED** a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 14 May 2026.

15. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Council **AGREED** that, during the recess period, powers be granted to the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executives, in consultation with the Convener, Leader of the Council, relevant Committee Chair and the Leader of the Opposition, to deal with issues arising during that time and that a report be prepared for the first meeting of the Council or relevant Committee following the period where these powers had been exercised.

16. 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 14 May 2026 as contained in the Volume which were **APPROVED**.

17. 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**
*Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee	11 May 2026

Starred Item as follows:-

Item 9: Common Good Consultation on the proposal to change the use of Blairliath Grazings – AGREED 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.

Lochaber Area Committee	11 May 2026
City of Inverness Area Committee	18 May 2026
Housing and Property Committee	20 May 2026
*Climate Change Committee	20 May 2026

Starred Item as follows:-

Item 5ii: Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Procurement & Community Wealth Building – AGREED i) approval of the proposed approach to strengthening the Council's carbon reporting, management and decision-support capability; and ii) that the Council progresses a 12-month managed engagement with Eden Seven, as set out in Section 6 of the report, to support delivery of this approach.

Item 6: Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment – AGREED that the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment and the Council's internal cross-service engagement should be used to inform the next stage of the Council's climate adaptation work, including the development of the Corporate Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment and the Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan.

Communities and Place Committee	21 May 2026
Dingwall and Seaforth Committee	25 May 2026
Nairnshire Committee	25 May 2026
Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee	27 May 2026
*Audit Committee	27 May 2026

Starred Item as follows:-

Item 8: Audit Committee Annual Report 2025/26 – AGREED the report to acknowledge that the necessary assurances had been provided by the Audit Committee to demonstrate that it had fulfilled its purpose and could demonstrate its impact for 2025/26.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee	28 May 2026
Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee	1 June 2026
Sutherland County Committee	1 June 2026
*Education Committee	3 June 2026

Starred Item as follows:-

Item 5: Statutory Consultation: Relocation of Beauly Primary School – Final Report – AGREED that Beauly Primary School be relocated from its current site to a new site west of Cnoc na Ràth, Beauly, as part of a new Community Point of Delivery.

Item 18: Membership of Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee – AGREED that Ms L Dundas be appointed to the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee.

*Gaelic Committee	3 June 2026
*Comataidh na Gaidhlig	3 An t-Og Mhios 2026

Starred Item as follows:-

Item 8: Scottish Languages Act – Areas of Linguistic Significance Progress Report – AGREED that the Gaelic Committee's Scheme of Delegation be amended to allocate responsibility for oversight of Gaelic Areas of Linguistic Significance designation processes.

*Corporate Resources Committee	4 June 2026

Starred Item as follows:-

Item 5: Appointment to Sub-Committees, Working Groups etc – AGREED that Ms C Ramsay replace Ms M MacCallum on the Appeals and Disputes Sub Committee.

Item 6: Establishment of the Fuel Poverty Working Group – **AGREED** that Mr R Gale, Mr R Jones and Mrs K MacLean be appointed to the Fuel Poverty Working Group.

The following Minutes of Meetings not included in the Volume were:-

i. **NOTED** Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board held on 17 March 2026 (approved by the Board on 11 June 2026);
ii. **NOTED** Community Planning Board held on 10 March 2026 (approved by the Board on 12 June 2026);
iii. **APPROVED** Recruitment Panel: Chief Officer held on 8 June 2026; and
iv. **APPROVED** Redesign Board held on 4 June 2026.

18. Question Time
Àm Ceiste

There had been circulated separately in Booklet A Member Questions received by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance as follows:-

1. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

Please list the dates of meetings you have attended in 2026 with Scottish Government where the Transient Visitors Levy (TVL) was discussed, who was present, a summary of the points of the discussion and any agreed outcomes.

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

2. Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

Please can the Leader provide an itemised redacted departmental list of all current and past employees who have had a salary overpayment between the period 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2026 together with the amount of the original overpayment and the current balance outstanding.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried how much of the £2.1 million overspend, if any, had been written off?

In response, the Leader indicated that a response would be circulated to Members outwith the meeting.

3. Ms J McEwan

To the Leader

Given that the Scottish Government gave £750k for the Caithness Demonstrator project and to date £445 has been allocated to the cost of running the project, with only £44k allocated to improve two community halls. Will the Leader write to NHS and HIE requesting a full breakdown on the running costs and administration of this project.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, approximately £445,229 of the £750,000, had been used on administration consultant costs and it was queried if this funding could have been better utilised if it had been given to Local Members to allocate?

In response, it was indicated that whilst an evaluation was needed as to what the bid was for, it could include costs such as administration and fuller details of the requirements of the funding would be set out in the original bid.

4. **Mr M Prosser**

To the Chair of Education

Given that the Scottish Guidance on Home Schooling states that the decision to allow home schooled children access to local authority owned community and sports facilities on the same basis as for school children and informing home educating families of any projects or programmes which might reasonably be accessed by home educated children, is at the discretion of the local authority, will you work with the senior education officers to ensure that home schooled children can participate in extracurricular sports activities organised by the Council and are not excluded from such activities?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried if home educated children could take part in extracurricular activities which were operated on behalf of Highland Council run schools?

In response, although not legally obliged, the Council could choose to do so at a local level at their discretion. The Council's public liability insurance would cover home educated children who were accessing school facilities however, assessments would still need to be undertaken of the risks and mitigating actions.

5. **Mr M Gregson**

To Leader of the Council:

Since August 2025 there have been 15 School Inspections conducted and published or awaiting publication by His Majesty's inspectorate (HMIE).

A number of Areas for Improvement have been identified. We are informed that 80% of schools gaining less than satisfactory ratings have new or acting head teachers.

Instability in school leadership can undermine all aspects of school life. As this 80% statistic seems high, can the Leader of the Council state how many Head Teachers and Depute Head Teachers have left post unexpectedly in the last three years?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried to what extent was the Council making sufficient interventions and being compliant with the national target to retain senior leaders of schools in post as opposed to them leaving?

In response, the Leader gave assurance that the Council had done everything it could to ensure it provided a strong workforce and delivery. He welcomed discussion about other ideas and mitigations that could be put in place.

19. Notices of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid

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

Motion 1 - Steps to Reduce Misogyny

Council notes:-

This Council recognises that, while anyone can experience abuse, the evidence shows that women and girls are disproportionately affected. To help reduce this widening inequality, Highland Council commits to the following:

- Investigate accreditation with White Ribbon UK to address issues like sexism and harassment, raising awareness, and fostering a positive, respectful culture where men are part of the solution.
- Carrying out a Highland wide version of the 'just say mate' campaign, taking the onus off women by encouraging men and boys to stand up to their friends and family when they see misogyny.
- Providing training to all councillors on misogyny, focusing on recognising misogyny, empowering all to speak up against misogyny and how to address this issue.
- Report back to full council by March 2027 on progress made and the next steps to be taken.

Signed: Ms M MacCallum Mr P Logue

The Proposer of the Motion explained that the aim of it was to take the onus of women. For too long women had been told to watch their drinks in an attempt to prevent spiking. Women had been told to take taxis home rather than walk and as had been seen, taxis were not always safe. It was on the onus of women to keep themselves safe and they were often blamed when this was not possible. The Motion sought to change that by empowering men to speak out about other men's misogynistic behaviour. Violence against women and girls was at an all-time high and this could not be accepted. The people of Highland needed to come together and not tolerate such behaviour.

It was highlighted that Ross-shire Women's Aid had worked closely with the White Ribbon campaign and football stadiums, so there was work going on to tackle this problem. Also, there was a need to address misogyny in schools.

There was a study from Engender which revealed that 90% of female Councillors in Scotland experienced sexism, misogyny or gender based violence during their careers. In this respect, women would not come forward for public office if they felt all they would get was abuse. This was a societal issue that needed to be addressed.

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

Motion 2 - Request to Designate Highlands as a Transponder Mandatory Zone

Almost all windfarm, development these days now involved turbines over 150m, the height at which aviation lighting was required. Aviation lights, peppered across the Highland sky would ruin any dark sky policy, damaging dark sky tourism, which had potential to play a significant role during the quieter, dark winter months.

There was now technology which only switched on when aircraft were passing nearby, so-called Aircraft Detection Lighting System (ADLS). However, to deploy ADLS it was currently necessary to obtain CAA approval to designate the airspace surrounding the wind farm as a 'Transponder Mandatory Zone' (TMZ) which would also require all aircraft operating therein to be carrying and operating a transponder. The vast majority of aircraft do already carry a transponder.

The Council **AGREED** to ask officers to lobby the Civil Aviation Authority to designate the Highlands as a Transponder Mandatory Zone.

Signed: Mr C Ballance Ms K Willis

Motion 3 - Review of Rural Maternity Services

The Highland Council:

1. Notes the cross-party motion passed by the Scottish Parliament on the 5th November 2025 (S6M-19512), regarding serious patient safety concerns within Scotland's maternity services and the need for improved oversight and accountability;
2. Further notes that, following the downgrading of the consultant-led maternity unit at Caithness General Hospital in 2016, women and families in Caithness can face journeys of approximately 100 miles to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness in order to access consultant-led maternity care;
3. Recognises the continuing concerns expressed by local communities, clinicians, campaign groups and elected representatives regarding the safety, accessibility and sustainability of maternity services in Caithness and the wider Far North;
4. Believes that rural and remote communities must have equitable access to safe, high-quality maternity care and that service design must properly reflect the realities of geography, weather conditions, transport infrastructure and workforce challenges in the Highlands;
5. Calls on the new Scottish Government to implement the full intent of the Parliamentary motion by commissioning, without delay, a fully independent review of maternity services in Caithness, chaired outwith NHS Highland's leadership team and fully independent of Scottish Government oversight.

Signed: Mr S Mackie Mr R Gunn

It was **NOTED** that this Motion had been withdrawn.

Motion 4 - Climate Change Education

This Council notes:-

- That Council has agreed the Highland Youth Parliament ask that climate change and environmental education is a part of the core curriculum for all young people.
- That Council has agreed to "Embed the voice of young people within the Council's approach to climate change, energy and community resilience, recognising the long-term impact of these decisions on future generations, and to develop mechanisms to ensure that youth perspectives are reflected in policy development, investment planning and programme delivery."
- Service Priority 1.3 in the Council's Education and Learning Service Plan (2023/24) to work towards Net Zero carbon targets by investing in the development of the curriculum rationale and design to improve children and young people's understanding of the benefits of acting on climate change.
- The target date of September 2026 in the Council's Education and Learning Service Plan (2023/24) to develop a promotional plan to support the Learning for Sustainability agenda in the context of the school curriculum, connecting with the Council's Net Zero Strategy.

The Council agrees:-

- That the *Education Improvement Plan and Raising Attainment and Achievement Strategy* is updated by the Education Service, with the support of the Climate Change and Energy Team, to ensure that all pupils develop a strong understanding of climate science, environmental stewardship, and the transition to a low-carbon economy, recognising the central role of Highland in Scotland's transition to Net Zero, the renewable sector, and the opportunities this presents for future skills, careers, and regional economic development.
- That opportunities are explored by the Education Service, with the support of the Climate Change and Energy Team, to strengthen links between schools, local industry and the regions renewable energy, environmental, and engineering sectors to support knowledge-based learning and awareness of emerging pathways.

Signed: Ms K Willis Mr C Ballance

The Chair of the Education Committee commented that he had considered submitting an amendment to the motion, not because he disagreed with it but because it did not fully reflect the work already being undertaken. He urged Councillor Willis to speak with officers within the Education Service to gain a fuller understanding of the actions already taking place, including what was in the Education Improvement Plan and what had recently been presented to the Education Committee. An update on recent engagement between Education officers and officers from the Climate Change and Energy Team could also be provided.

Decision

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

The meeting ended at 5.00pm.

APPENDIX

QUESTION 2: 25 JUNE 2026: RESPONSE TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Mr A Christie

To the Leader of the Council

Original Question

Please can the Leader provide an itemised redacted departmental list of all current and past employees who have had a salary overpayment between the period 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2026 together with the amount of the original overpayment and the current balance outstanding.

Original Answer

Salary overpayments for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 26 were £2.180m. The balance outstanding is £0.699m. Over the four-year period salary costs were £1.774 billion with overpayments of £2.180m which amount to 0.12% of this total.

Salary overpayments, per Cluster, for the period 1 April 22 to 31 Match 26 are as follows:

Cluster	Overpayments (£m)	Staff Costs Budget (£m)	Overpayments (% of Staff Cost Budget)
People	1.57	1,148.72	0.14%
Place	0.58	495.05	0.12%
Corporate	0.03	130.27	0.02%
Total	**2.18**	**1,774.04**	**0.12%**

Supplementary Question

It was queried how much of the £2.1 million overspend, if any, had been written off?

Supplementary Answer

Of the overpayments made in this period, £25,436.72 had been written off.

The Highland Council
No. 4 2026/2027

Minutes of Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Tuesday, 4 August 2026 at 11.00 am.

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

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

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Strategic Lead (Legal and Regulatory)
Democratic Services Manager

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr B Boyd, Mr J Bruce, Mrs H Crawford, Mr D Gregg, Mrs B Jarvie, Mr S Kennedy, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mrs M Reid, Mr A Sinclair, Mr R Stewart and Ms K Willis.

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

The Council **NOTED** that there were no Declaraions of Interest/Transparency Statements.

3. **Exclusion of the Public**
Às-dùnadh a' Phobaill

The Council **NOTED** that, as a result of recent events, there was no need to exclude the public from the meeting.

4. **Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982**
Taxi driver's / operator's licences
Achd Riaghaltais Chatharra (Alba) 1982
Ceadachdan Dhràibhearan / Oibrichean Tagsaidh

As David Brown, the holder of two taxi operator's licences (Ward 17 – Culloden & Ardersier), had surrendered these on 3 August 2026, the Council **NOTED** there was now no longer a requirement to consider confidential Report No HLC/79/26 by the Strategic Lead (Legal and Regulatory).

5. **Urgent Motion**
Gluasad Èiginneach

This Council supports the decision of the Chief Officer - Legal and Governance to bring the decision taken by Licensing Committee on 23 June 2026 to a special meeting of the Highland Council for further consideration. The surrender of these licences today (3 August 2026) means that they immediately ceased to have effect and consequently there is no decision for the special Council to reach today. We nevertheless wish it to be made known that this unprecedented action was justified.

Signed: Mr B Lobban Mr A Christie

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Christie, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, concurred with the Motion but with the following addition:-

"Additionally, Council agrees that a letter be sent requesting the Scottish Government to review the rules, regulations and eligibility criteria for convicted criminals both incarcerated and released to be granted licences associated with the taxi industry".

This was accepted by the signatories to the Motion

Decision

This Council supports the decision of the Chief Officer Legal and Governance to bring the decision taken by Licensing Committee on 23 June 2026 to a special meeting of the Highland Council for further consideration. The surrender of these licences today (3 August 2026) means that they immediately ceased to have effect and consequently there is no decision for the special Council to reach today. We nevertheless wish it to be made known that this unprecedented action was justified.

Additionally, Council agrees that a letter be sent requesting the Scottish Government to review the rules, regulations and eligibility criteria for convicted criminals both incarcerated and released to be granted licences associated with the taxi industry.

At this juncture, the Convener referred to recent events and the decision taken, by a majority vote, of the Licensing Committee to take no action on two taxi operator licences issued to David Brown. Many Members had been disturbed and upset by that decision and it was hoped that the Council, if it had had the opportunity, would have reached a different outcome.

The Council needed to reconsider how to deal with Licensing within the boundaries of the law and discussions would be ongoing regarding this as a matter of urgency. It was essential to remember the victim and, at times, there had been a lack of attention or focus on them. The Convener, on behalf of the Council, expressed sympathy with the victim, acknowledging the significant stress that the consequences of the original decision would have had on them.

For information, he informed Members that at the September Full Council meeting the Convener, Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition would bring forward a Motion of No Confidence in Councillors Kennedy, Birt, Grafton, Stewart and Macpherson.

The meeting concluded at 11.08am.

The Highland Council
No. 13 2025/2026

Minutes of Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Tuesday, 25 August 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Chief Executive
Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Chief Officer - Finance
Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Joint Democratic Services Manager

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Baxter, Mr M Cameron, Mr J Grafton

Mr D Gregg, Mrs B Jarvie, Ms E Knox and Mr A Sinclair.

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

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

Item 3 – Mrs I Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mrs L Dundas, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Ms M MacCallum, Ms M Hutchison, Mr D Macpherson, Mr H Morrison, Mr M Prosser, Ms C Ramsay and Mr K Rosie.

3. Proposal for a Visitor Levy in Highland
Moladh airson Cìs Luchd-tadhail sa Ghàidhealtachd

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

Mrs I Campbell – as an owner of holiday accommodation
Mr A Christie - as a member of Living Rent
Mrs L Dundas - as the owner of a short-term let property, the owner of a restaurant business, undertaking management consultancy work for a hotel, and as a member of Highland Tourism CIC
Mr K Gowans - as a close family member is part author of the report
Mr M Green - as the owner of holiday accommodation
Ms M Hutchison - as a close family relative was applying for planning permission for a change of use / Short Term Let
Ms M MacCallum - as a caravan owner which is let out over summer, which is sited on a caravan park
Mr D Macpherson – as family members run a Short Term Letting (STL) property in Fort William
Mr H Morrison – owner of Smoo Cave Hotel
Mr M Prosser – as chair of a charity who holds a public entertainment license and also on occasion occasional licenses
Ms C Ramsay – as an applicant for planning permission for a short term let
Mr K Rosie – as a tourism business owner

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

The Leader, Mr R Bremner, explained that the proposed consultation would provide an opportunity for the Council to listen to the people and communities of the Highlands, and to provide a formal route for people to submit their concerns and opinions. He reiterated the importance of not pre-judging the outcome of the consultation and he referred to the considerable discussions that had taken place already with businesses in the tourist sector, which were fundamental to the Highland economy. He summarised some of the benefits that could be derived from the proposed levy, including as a source of funding for Place Plan projects and infrastructure. Efforts had been made to minimise any negative impact on businesses, such as lobbying for a change in proposed legislation to include a fixed rate levy. There would be continued lobbying on camper van and cruise ship issues, and the importance of finding an outcome to address the potential application of the levy on Highland residents travelling within the Highlands for medical or work reasons was emphasised.

The Leader of the Opposition, Mr A Christie, reiterated the importance of the residents and communities of the Highlands and that residents should be exempt from the levy. He suggested the bureaucracy of providing funds to NHS Highland to reimburse Highland residents attending medical appointments for the levy was not appropriate or efficient; Further the levy should be collected all year round, not only for nine months. He summarised the purposes that certain percentages of the levy should be used for, and other key proposals from his amendment (detailed in full below).

Mr Stewart proposed an amendment deferring a decision on the consultation until the Economic Impact Assessment (EIA) had been completed. He pointed out that it might be that the amount of money raised by the levy could be less than the total value to the economy of lost accommodation nights as a result of the introduction of the levy. Until a proper assessment had been completed, it was not appropriate to start the consultation process.

Other Members raised the following issues:-

- the Council was not being asked to implement the levy, only to undertake a statutory consultation, and the scheme at present was draft and subject to change;
- some Members felt that any money raised by the levy should in whole or in part be retained to fund improvements in the local area where it was raised, i.e. so that areas with significantly higher levels of tourism would receive a higher percentage of the funds. The Area Committees might have a role in this. Other Members pointed out that it was likely Inverness would raise the highest levels of funds due to its size, while some more remote tourist destinations might be more in need of the funds for additional tourism infrastructure. It was queried whether a financial model detailing the percentage of the levy that would be retained in the local area could be included in the consultation;
- concerns were raised about the impact on businesses of the levy in addition to rising employment and energy costs, VAT, and the non-domestic rate review, which was not yet completed, leaving businesses with additional financial uncertainty. Some businesses might be pushed above the VAT threshold by the levy income, which could lead to decisions to limit business operation;
- support was expressed for Highland residents being exempted from the levy, or for having the levy refunded for overnight stays that related to medical appointments or work, and various ways of administering this were proposed, including accommodation providers excluding Highland postcodes from the levy. The administrative, financial and data protection burden of the levy collection on tourism businesses was highlighted. Some Members felt that it was acceptable for Highland residents to pay the levy if holidaying in Highland, while others did not. The issue of people travelling from outwith Highland to attend medical appointments or undertaken essential work was raised;
- noting there might be no means of charging the levy to people staying in camper vans and motor homes outwith campsites, and visitors from cruise ships, this was being considered separately;
- it was queried whether the 5% retention allowance for businesses administering the scheme had been modelled to ensure it was sufficient to cover the administrative burden, and attention was drawn to the importance of the tourism sector to the Highland economy. Whatever modelling had been done should be shared with Members;
- some Members felt the levy should be collected for 12 months of the year, while others suggested it should not be collected during the quieter winter months;
- in relation to overnight stays, there should be a distinction between the hire of a room for one person, versus one person hiring a rental property with several rooms;
- it was suggested that an implementation date of 2030 rather than 2029 might be more realistic to include in the consultation, and the importance of the Council paying

due attention to the information gathered during the consultation process was emphasised;
- the use of visitor levies across Europe was highlighted;
- a higher tier levy for more expensive hotel stays was suggested;
- information was sought, and provided, on the possibility of introducing a by-law in certain areas to prevent people sleeping in vehicles outwith designated overnight campsites, but this was a complicated legal process that would be further discussed outwith the meeting;
- a wide geographic spread was vital for consultation events;
- it was queried whether sufficient evidence had been gathered that all sectors were being listened to;
- an informal working group comprising Members with hands-on experience of the tourist sector was suggested;
- the money raised from second home tax was queried, as was the amount of funding being allocated to the provision of housing. It was important safeguards were put in place to ensure money raised from the levy was used to combat issues caused by tourism;
- several Members spoke in favour of postponing the consultation until the outcome of the EIA was known, especially with regard to the amount of time considerations about the levy had already taken; and
- Mr Bremner, Mr Christie and Mr Stewart summarised the motion and amendments they had outlined at the start of the discussion, which were detailed below.

Mr R Bremner, seconded by Mr B Lobban, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr A Christie, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the consultation document at Appendix 4 and consequent recommendation be amended to reflect the following:-

i. That Highland Residents are exempt from paying the levy upon production of agreed documentation that proves that their home address is within Highland.
ii. That the levy will be all year round i.e. 12 months.
iii. With regard to the Indicative areas for investment these are proposed as being:
    - 35% - Effective Visitor Management, Infrastructure and Services: Supporting the infrastructure, facilities and services needed to manage visitor activity and maintain a high-quality visitor experience.
    - 10% - Unlocking Tourism Benefits for Communities: Helping communities' benefit from tourism through place-based investment, local projects and initiatives that address visitor-related opportunities and challenges.
    - 15% - Celebrating Culture and Heritage: Supporting the cultural, heritage, Gaelic and events assets that contribute to Highland's distinct identity and visitor appeal.
    - 15% - Business Growth and Skilled Workforce: Strengthening the visitor economy through investment in business development, skills, workforce capacity and destination development.
    - 25% - Sustaining Communities, Addressing De-population, Housing our Workforce: Providing homes across Highland tourist areas of mixed tenure including Social, Affordable, Mid-Market and Professional for rent this will enable staff directly engaged in the tourist industry to be housed and folk who are key to supporting communities that sustain tourism.

Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mrs I MacKenzie, moved a **SECOND AMENDMENT** that the Council agrees to defer the statutory public consultation pending publication of the independent economic impact assessment, to allow businesses, trade bodies, the public and key stakeholders to make informed responses to the consultation.

On a vote being taken between the **FIRST AMENDMENT** and the **SECOND AMENDMENT, t**he **FIRST AMENDMENT** received 24 votes and the **SECOND AMENDMENT** received 12 votes, with 28 abstentions. The **FIRST AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the First Amendment:
Mr C Ballance, Mr M Baird, Dr C Birt, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mrs L Dundas, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Mr R Gunn, Mr M Green, Dr M Gregson, Mr P Logue, Mr A MacKintosh, Ms M MacCallum, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr S Mackie, Mr J Murray, Mr M Prosser, Ms C Ramsay, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Ms K Willis.

For the Second Amendment:
Mr J Bruce, Mr S Cameron, Mrs H Crawford, Mr A Jarvie, Mr S Kennedy, Mr B Lobban, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs M Reid, Mrs L Saggers, Mr R Stewart.

Abstentions:
Ms S Atkin, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms L Kraft, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross.

On a further vote being taken between the **MOTION** and the **FIRST AMENDMENT**, the **MOTION** received 36 votes and the **FIRST AMENDMENT** received 24 votes, with 5 abstentions. The **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:
Ms S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr S Cameron, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Findlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr M Green, Dr M Gregson, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr J Murray, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Mrs M Reid, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross.

For the First Amendment:
Mr C Ballance, Dr C Birt, Mr A Christie, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr J Edmondson, Mr R Gale, Mr A Graham, Mr R Gunn, Mr A Jarvie, Mr S Kennedy, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr S Mackie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mr M Prosser, Ms C Ramsay, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Roberson, Ms K Willis.

Abstentions:
Mr J Bruce, Mrs H Crawford, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mrs L Saggers, Mr R Stewart,

The Council **AGREED**:-

i. for the purpose of undertaking statutory public consultation, the Draft Visitor Levy Scheme (as set out in the report and within Appendix 4 to the report) based on a tiered fixed-amount levy per room/area per night;
ii. that officers undertake the statutory public consultation in accordance with the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 and the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Amendment Act 2026, and to further develop the Draft Scheme, including refinement of the tiered fixed-amount model, exemptions, governance arrangements and proposed use of revenues, having regard to consultation feedback; and
iii. that a further report be presented to the Highland Council meeting on 10 December 2026 following completion of a statutory public consultation of 12 weeks setting out:-

- the outcome of consultation;
- a finalised proposed Visitor Levy Scheme (including recommended levy rate);
- detailed implementation, governance and administrative arrangements; and
- a recommendation on whether to adopt a Visitor Levy in Highland.

The meeting ended at 11.20 am

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held r**emotely** on Monday 3 August 2026 at 10.00am

Present:
Mr R Bremner
Mr R Gunn
Mr A Jarvie
Mr S Mackie
Ms J McEwan
Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie

In attendance:
Ms C MacIver, Community Development Manager
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration
Mr R Macleod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance
Mr G Mackay, Senior Maintenance Officer
Mr P Dent, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mr A Jarvie in the Chair

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
Gairm a' 1hlài ragus Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Caithness Committee.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report
Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No CC/16/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

The Chair advised that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was unable to attend the meeting due to the ongoing Cairngorm wildfire, and Members commended the Service for their hard work in tackling this and other serious incidents.

Thereafter, Members asked for this item to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting and for the Service to provide the most up to date performance report.

The Service also be requested to attend the meeting on the basis this was of significant benefit from a scrutiny perspective.

A further issue raised was the need for reassurance that the Service had the facilities and resources in place locally to enable an early response to wildfires in the area.

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

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

There was circulated Report No CC/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the application presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

Organisation	**Project Title**	**Grant Approved**
Castletown Drill Hall	Disability access and car park improvements	£41,000
Wick Development Trust	Wick Riverside Lighting	£93,257.37
Wick Paths Group	Paths Around Wick – Access Improvement Project	£ 71,030.32
Wick Golf Club	167 Acres of Joy	£ 26,120.00

6. Housing Repairs and Capital Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais

There was circulated Report No CC/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

- further clarity was sought and provided that while damp was not categorised as an emergency repair, the Service was committed to fast responses and improving communication with tenants and a response would be provided directly to Mrs J McEwan on a specific case;
- a new Scottish Government regulation was to be introduced in October 2026 that set out response timescales for reports of damp in properties and further details were provided in this regard;
- it would be helpful for an update to be provided to the Member/officer monthly housing meetings on progress with the projects previously approved under the environmental budget;
- planned Member and officer housing estate walkabouts were to be held in the area to help inform the current year's spend on the environmental budget and potential to enhance the capital programme;
- the opportunity for discussions be held locally on the new HRA Capital Programme 2027-2032 to consider local needs and priorities and confirmation this would be brought to a Ward Business Meeting; and

- an update was sought and provided on the success of the Void Plus pilot implemented in Caithness and positive feedback received from tenants and in response to a query, it was confirmed Members would be provided with a breakdown of the costs involved in the scheme.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026;
ii. **NOTED** the progress of the Void-Plus policy which has been implemented on a trial basis in Caithness since July 2024; and
iii. **APPROVED** the continuation of the Void-Plus policy in Caithness as part of mainstream efforts to re-let low demand houses and support new tenants to sustain their tenancies

7. Wick Common Good Fund Q4 2025/2026 and Q1 2026/27 Monitoring Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige Ràithe 4 2025/2026 agus Ràithe 1 2026/27

There was circulated Report No CC/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members welcomed the fact that the offices in Wick Town Hall had been successfully leased and that while increased costs were being incurred, this was generating increased rental income and benefits for the Fund. In noting the good progress being made with the Fund, it was important that a strategic approach for the dispersal of funds be considered going forward.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 4 2025/2026 and Quarter 1 2026/2027 monitoring statements for the Wick Common Good Fund.

8. Thurso Common Good Fund Q4 2025/2026 Q1 2026/27 Monitoring Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Theòrsa Ràithe 1 2025/2026 Sgrùdadh Ràithe 1 2026/2027

There was circulated Report No CC/20/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members welcomed the good progress being made with the Fund and it was requested that a meeting be arranged between the officer working group, local Members and community organisations to provde a focus and consider the opportunities going forward.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 4 2025/2026 and Quarter 1 2026/2027 monitoring statement for the Thurso Common Good Fund.

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

There was circulated Report No CC/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the action being taken in relation to specific issues of fly tipping/nuisance from accumulation in Thurso and Lybster was appreciated by local Members and communities;
- concern as to whether the number of stray dogs and associated dog fouling in Thurso had increased and noting while this was a Police matter, the Council's dog warden was also undertaking work in this regard; an increase in numbers had not been noted by officers, however this would checked further;
- in response to a query, further clarity was provided on the role of the Service in dealing with asbestos in shed/building demolitions and referral to the Health and Safety Executive as and when required;
- concern in relation to the number of animal welfare cases being reported to the Procurator Fiscal; it was confirmed these related to agricultural settings and the Service was engaging with farming and other relevant organisations in response to this issue;
- a robust approach be taken to enforcement around abandoned vehicles, in the area, with reference to specific issues in Castletown; in response, details were provided on the action taken by the Service on this issue within the boundaries of the legislation and available staff resource, and it was confirmed updates on progress would be provided to local Members;
- the issue of abandoned and nuisance vehicles and the resource required to deal with this problem was being considered by the Council's Redesign Board and Members were welcome to engage in and contribute to that process;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the procedure showing the definition of and process for dealing with abandoned and nuisance vehicles would be shared with Members; it was also confirmed that registered owners were charged by the Council for the uplift of vehicles;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the role of the Service, Planning Service and SEPA in terms of scrapyards extending beyond their boundaries; Members were encouraged to report concerns on this and any of the above issues to the Service in the first instance and for onward referral if required; and
- further clarification was sought and provided on the increase in the number of noise complaints, the majority involving neighbour disputes, and that a breakdown of complaints by type could be provided if required.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

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

10. Winter Service Plan for 2026/27
Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh airson 2026/27

There was circulated Report No CC/22/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- an explanation was sought and provided on the lessons learned from the previous winter season, particulary on how the Council reacted to extreme weather events and pulled together inhouse and external resources;
- confirmation was sought and provided that there was a dedicated list of contractors who could respond at short notice in extreme winter conditions and this was reviewed annually;
- the need for a broader discussion on how the requirement for more external help and assistance in emergency conditions could be escalated and for this to be raised with Corporate Communications;
- in regard to the above, it was important to ensure those engaged were competent and there was the available resource to guide and manage where they were located on the road network;
- further clarification was sought and provided in relation to the treatment of footpaths within policy and challenges in having the full resource to deliver this element of the service at peak times;
- confirmation was sought and provided that Members would be provided with details of community winter resilience requests received over the previous winter season; it was highlighted that such requests had to be supported by community councils and the scheme applied to those areas with footpaths;
- in response to a query, further clarity was provided that the emergency response for individuals element using 4X4 vehicles was led and coordinated by NHS Highland;
- in terms of the publication of the Winter Service Plan on the Council’s website, it would be helpful if the primary and secondary routes on the map were more clearly identifiable; the potential for routes to be added to the Council’s GIS mapping software also be raised with Corporate Communications;
- in regard to the above, an assurance was provided that more detailed maps for Wick and Thurso would be added to the Website; it was explained that roads was being considered by the Council’s Redesign Board, and this included route optimisation software and Members comments on this matter would be fed back as part of the process; and
- it would be helpful for the Council to make it as clear as possible to the public and on the map of routes, the extent of BEAR Scotland’s responsibility for winter services on trunk roads in the area.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27.

11. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved–

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved for the period 1st April 2026 – 20 July 2026:

Scottish Surfing – Scottish National ChampionshipsHighlife	£4,000.00
Highland Active Schools & Coaching EquipmentThurso	£2,250.00
Football Academy – Professional Football Training CampNorth	£950.00
Highland Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
	£1,924.50

Vivis Roots CollectionThurso Beach & Town initiative – Thurso Tennis Court Flower Beds	£460.00
Join in More (Caithness)	£500.00

Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved for the period 1st April 2026 – 20 July 2026:

North Highland Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Vivid Roots Collection	£1,924.50

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 27 April 2026 which were approved by the Council on 14 May 2026.

Following on from this item, Members welcomed the good news that funding had been confirmed for the continuation of Wick Public Service Obligation (PSO) air services to Aberdeen and Glasgow and paid tribute to all involved on the excellent work undertaken to secure these services. Members were also thanked for their support in relation to this item and an assurance provided that the early release of the news in the press by sources outwith the Council and prior to Members being informed would be raised with all relevant parties.

The meeting ended at 12.05pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely on 3 August 2026 at 11am.

Present:

Dr C Birt	Ms L Kraft
Mrs I Campbell	Mr P Logue

In attendance:
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr K MacKenzie, Principal Repairs Officer
Mr B Cumming, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:
Mr D Jack, Area inspector, Police Scotland (Item 4)

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

Ms L Kraft in the chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following declaration of interest:-

Item 6 – Mrs I Campbell

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee.

4. Police – Area Performance Report
Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Coileanaidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/11/26 by the Chief Inspector - Area Commander.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- clarification was sought on whether a police officer had been appointed to Lochcarron. It was advised that an update would be obtained and provided to Members outwith the meeting;
- the increase in mobile phone offences was queried, including whether this reflected increased use of mobile phones while driving or improved detection methods;
- concern was raised regarding the increasing number of drink and drug driving offences and whether the increase principally related to alcohol or controlled substances;
- the distinction between assault and serious assault offences was queried;
- clarification was sought on the difference between detection rates and conviction rates;
- comments that public confidence in reporting incidents to Police Scotland had increased were welcomed and an update was sought on engagement with Community Councils; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the arrangements and timescales for road closures following fatal and non-fatal road traffic collisions.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026; and
ii. **AGREED** that an update on the appointment of a police officer to Lochcarron would be provided to Members outwith the meeting.

5. Housing Repairs and Capital Report – 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026
Aithisg Choileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2026 gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was raised regarding a former janitor's house in Plockton which had remained vacant for several years and whether it could be utilised to provide accommodation for a key worker currently living in temporary accommodation. In this regard, it was advised that the matter would be followed up with Housing Officers and a response provided outwith the meeting;
- concern was raised regarding the higher rental costs associated with temporary accommodation when compared with standard Council housing;
- the criteria used to determine whether a repair was classified as an emergency or non-emergency repair were queried;
- information was sought on how repair completion times were measured, including whether travel time formed part of the calculation;

- the Environmental Capital Programme was welcomed and clarification was sought on the process for identifying and prioritising projects within the Ward; and
- information was requested on arrangements for Members to contribute project suggestions and priorities for future Environmental Capital funding.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026; and
ii. **AGREED** that further information would be provided outwith the meeting regarding the former janitor's house in Plockton and the matters raised in relation to key worker and temporary accommodation.

6. Short Term Let Control Area – Post Consultation Update
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-Ùine – Ùrachadh Às dèidh a' Cho-chomhairleachaidh

Mrs I Campbell made a Declaration of Interest in respect of this item, as the owner of a self-catering property. In accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, she left the meeting for the duration of the item.

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the decision-making process was queried, including whether any recommendation made by the Committee would be referred to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for final consideration;
- the status of the report and consultation documents as public documents was queried, including whether they could be shared with interested constituents;
- a question was raised regarding how the cumulative impact of short term lets would be assessed across a large and diverse rural area and whether individual local circumstances would be taken into account;
- information was sought on how future planning applications for short term lets would be assessed should a Control Area be designated, including the consideration of site-specific factors and local planning policies;
- the implications for existing short term let operators were queried, including the requirement to demonstrate planning status when renewing licences;
- further information was requested on the purpose and process of obtaining a Certificate of Lawfulness and how this differed from a planning application;
- assurance was sought that any future planning applications would be assessed on their individual merits rather than through a blanket approach across the Control Area; and
- the relationship between the proposed Control Area, the licensing regime and the evidence required from existing operators at licence renewal stage was queried.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the consultation feedback and the potential implications that a STL Control Area would have on communities within Wester Ross Strathpeffer and Lochalsh as set out in Appendix 2 of the report and summarised in Section 8, 9 and 10 of the report; and
ii. **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Economy and Infrastructure Committee that Wester Ross Strathpeffer and Lochalsh be included within the proposed Highland Rural Short Term Let Control Area, should any decision to submit a proposal for designation to Scottish Ministers be taken.

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

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was provided on a vehicle reported as abandoned in the Achnasheen area and advice was sought on the process for reporting and investigating abandoned vehicles, including how ownership was established and the circumstances in which enforcement action could be taken;
- information was sought on the Council's role in relation to dangerous and aggressive dogs, including the distinction between matters dealt with by the Council and those dealt with by Police Scotland;
- clarification was sought on the Housing Scheme of Assistance grants, including the Environmental Health team's role in assessing and administering adaptation grants;
- information was sought on the Council's approach to issues relating to gulls, including current policy, reporting arrangements and measures available to reduce nuisance and nesting activity;
- concern was raised regarding gull activity in parts of the Ward and the potential impact on local communities;
- information was sought on the disposal of abandoned vehicles and whether any value could be recovered from vehicles removed by the Council; and
- it was suggested that vehicles with a residual value should, where possible, be sold rather than destroyed.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

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

8. Bereavement Services – Project Updates
Seirbheisean Bròin – Ùrachaidhean Pròiseict

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought on the remaining capacity at Clachan Duich Burial Ground and the high standard of maintenance at the burial ground was commended.;
- an update was sought on ongoing discussions regarding access arrangements and maintenance at Kinlochewe Burial Ground. In this regard, it was advised that the matter would be checked with the local team and an update provided outwith the meeting; and
- information was sought on progress with proposals to improve accessible access at Clachan Church. It was advised that discussions had taken place with representatives of the Trust and that a further update would be provided.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh area;
ii. **NOTED** the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development;
iii. **AGREED** that an update would be provided outwith the meeting regarding access arrangements and maintenance at Kinlochewe Burial Ground; and
iv. **AGREED** that a further update would be provided regarding proposals to improve accessible access at Clachan Church.

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

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

During discussion, clarification was sought on the options that would be considered as part of the feasibility study for the provision of public toilets at Achnasheen, including the potential use or sale of land associated with the former facility. Information was also sought on whether the availability of land for a replacement facility would be examined as part of the feasibility study.

The Committee **AGREED** that funding be awarded from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

- Plockton Village Hall – £21,480.00
- Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust – £85,381.10
- The Highland Council – £20,000.00

10. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Fund applications have been approved from 1 April to 30 June 2026.

- Kyle Public Hall - A Fresh Face Remedial work to repair and refresh external walls - £1,000.00
- Strathpeffer Residents' Association - Strathpeffer Community Park - Insurance shortfall - £1,500.00
- Shieldaig Community Association SCIO - Annual Power sweep to maintain MUGA for the school, nursery, and community use - £840.00
- Coigach Community Trust - Signage and car bay markings for new EV Charging Points - £269.55
- Dornie and District Community Hall - Energy Improvements - £1,000.00
- Stromeferry & Achmore Community Council - New noticeboards for Stromeferry and Achmore villages - £381.94
- Gairloch Primary School Parent Council - Gairloch Nursery Play Gym Equipment - £499.29
- Kinlochshiel Shinty & Community Sports Club Limited – "Bring on The Girls" Purchase of Materials/Equipment for women's shinty team - £1,000.00
- Welcome Ullapool - Ullapool Hill Paths Map Signs - £1,000.00
- Peffery Way Association - Installing an outdoor bike repair station - £1,275.00
- Gairloch Museum - "A walk through time" A creation of a 4.5 km outdoor geological Timeline - £1,000.00

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 27 April 2026 which were approved by the Council on 14 May 2026.

The meeting ended at 12:50 pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday 10 August 2026 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mrs S Atkin
Mr S Coghill
Mrs T Collier
Mr R Cross
Ms L Dundas
Mr J Edmondson
Ms L Johnston
Ms C Ramsay
Mrs M Ross

Officials in Attendance:

Mr P Tomalin, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mr M Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Operations), Place Service
Mr B Cumming, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Mr J Kellas, Community Support Co-ordinator
Ms L Bradley, Housing Investment Officer
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms G MacPherson, Senior Community Officer

Also in Attendance:

Chief Inspector D McAlpine, North Highland Area Commander, Police Scotland

**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**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Ms M MacCallum.

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

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

Item 7: Mr S Coghill

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

Item 5: Mr J Edmondson, Ms L Johnston, Mrs M Ross
Item 7: Mr J Edmondson

3. **Recess Powers**
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee.

4. **Police – Area Performance Report**
Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadas Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BIER/20/26 by the Area Commander, North Highland Area Command, Police Scotland.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- in terms of the reported increase in sexual offences, it was asked whether this reflected a rise in offending or an increase in victims feeling more able to come forward and report crimes;
- it was asked if it was possible for future reports to include information more specific to the Black Isle and Easter Ross area. The Area Commander confirmed that he would raise the question with senior officers;
- in response to concerns regarding drink and drug driving, the Committee was informed that the Roads Policing Unit continued to work collaboratively with stakeholders and partners to raise awareness of the dangers of drink and drug driving. This included school visits;
- alcohol and drugs continued to be significant factors in offending behaviour. While some offences, including shoplifting, could be linked to financial pressures, addiction was also recognised as a contributing factor. The increasing availability and variety of drugs presented ongoing challenges and there was concern that the perception within communities was that little action was being taken when incidents were reported. Education, community engagement and crime reporting were highlighted as key elements of the continued effort to reduce harm and tackle substance-related crime;
- bank fraud against elderly residents was a concern, particularly in light of the closure of banks within the Black Isle and Easter Ross area. Information was sought, and provided, regarding what work had been undertaken to address this;
- vandalism and anti-social behaviour continued to affect local businesses. Information was sought, and provided, on Police engagement in this regard and it was asked if Community Councils could be kept informed of any developments;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the measures in place to tackle repeat offending;
- clarification was sought, and an explanation was provided, regarding the reported marked increase in the cruel and unnatural treatment of children;
- the number of road traffic incidents on the A9, particularly near the Dalmore and Tomich junctions, and the impact they had on road users, remained a concern. It was asked what input Police Scotland had in the Transport Scotland Road Safety Group;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the process for dealing with abandoned vehicles, including where the responsibility lay and the

powers the Police had in this regard. The Area Commander undertook to liaise with the Road Traffic Unit for more information;

- in response to a query regarding the closure of the B9176 Struie Road for 10 days during the winter due to a stranded vehicle, it was explained that although the Police had powers to remove vehicles obstructing the road, the area had experienced exceptional weather conditions. The incident would, however, provide learning points for future severe weather events; and
- information was sought, and provided, regarding officer numbers. A breakdown was given of the specialist roles undertaken by Police Scotland in the area, including Harm Prevention and Intervention Officers.

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

5. Easter Ross Community Partnership Area Place Plan Progress
Plana Àite Sgìre Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd Rois an Ear Aithisg Adhartais

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

Mr J Edmondson - as Chair of the Place Subgroup of the Easter Ross Community Partnership
Ms L Johnston - as a Youth Leader within the Scout Association
Mrs M Ross - as a Director of Seaboard Memorial Hall, which had received funding from Whole Family Wellbeing Fund Element 1.

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Committee welcomed the progress on the Easter Ross Area Place Plan, recognised the positive work being undertaken and thanked officers for their work in this regard;
- concern was expressed that competition for available funding could result in new transformational projects, such as Planet Youth, being supported at the expense of established youth hubs, clubs and other existing services. It was highlighted that these vital services, delivered by qualified youth workers, were at risk of failing due to a lack of funding, and it was asked if this could be reviewed. Reference having been made to the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme, the Committee was informed that a Highland-wide Whole Family Wellbeing Programme report had been submitted to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee due to be held on 19 August;
- Area Committees had an important role in supporting community involvement, promoting local initiatives and addressing social disadvantage. The Easter Ross Area Place Plan identified youth and family support, including whole-family support, as a key priority linked to improving outcomes for young people;

- reference was made to the Poverty and Equality Commission Report, which recognised the positive work being undertaken in the Black Isle and Easter Ross area, particularly by the third sector, and Members suggested that a shift from project-based funding to a core funding model was required; and
- it was highlighted that the Black Isle and Easter Ross Place Plans remained separate, reflecting the position at the time the Place Based Framework was approved in December 2021, when the Black Isle and Easter Ross operated as separate Area Committees.

At this juncture, Mr J Edmondson proposed the following additional recommendation, and this was supported by other Members of the Committee:-

"This Committee agrees that Youth and Family Support are a key priority and that the Poverty and Equality Commission's core funding approach is the correct approach; and therefore a Report is requested for the whole Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee Area that:-

- identifies the Youth Work Services and Clubs in the Committee Area across all sectors and the aims of these Services and Clubs;
- identifies the support that these Services and Clubs require; and
- suggests possible participatory resource approaches to help plan for working together to achieve the aims of the Area Place Plans in these services."

Mr Edmondson clarified that, when referring to Services, he was referring to the wide range of work undertaken by volunteers, and his approach was one of community engagement.

During continued discussion, the following points were raised:-

- with reference to page 20 of Appendix 1 of the report, it was queried why education was not mentioned under the Prosperity priorities, and it was felt that, although officers were heavily involved in delivering elements of the Place Plan, some priority areas, particularly employability, were not receiving the same level of support;
- distribution of funding needed to be fair. An audit of youth development funding was suggested to provide a clearer understanding of what funding was available, how it was allocated, the impact it had and whether it could be used more effectively. In response, the Committee was informed that a briefing on youth services in Highland had been prepared for a forthcoming Easter Ross Ward Business Meeting, to which Black Isle Members would be invited;
- Members were pleased to learn that the recently appointed Development Officer had experience in taking forward community-led activities; and
- although there was a shared commitment to supporting local communities, it was necessary for charities and organisations to work more collaboratively to achieve better outcomes for families.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the annual report, recognising the progress made by the Easter Ross Community Partnership;

ii. **AGREED** to support the targeting of service programmes and external funding to meet the Area Place Plan priorities when appropriate; and
iii. **AGREED** that Youth and Family Support were a key priority and that the Poverty and Equality Commission's core funding approach was the correct approach; and therefore requested a Report for the whole Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee Area that:-
   - identified the Youth Work Services and Clubs in the Committee Area across all sectors and the aims of these Services and Clubs;
   - identified the support that these Services and Clubs required; and
   - suggested possible participatory resource approaches to help plan for working together to achieve the aims of the Area Place Plans in these services.

6. Winter Service Plan 2026/27
Plana Seirbheis a' Gheamhraidh 2026/27

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

During discussion on the Winter Service Plan 2026/27, the following points were raised:-

- in response to a question regarding the winter route map at Appendix 2 of the report, it was clarified that the routes that fell partially or wholly outwith the Black Isle and Easter Ross area had been included for information purposes. It was explained that the maps were developed with other areas in mind and that, in some cases, it was more practical for a depot in one area to maintain a route located within another area;
- concern was expressed regarding the potential impact of the possible closure of the Dingwall and Brora depots on the Winter Service Plan. It was highlighted that these depots housed waste, lighting and roads fleet, together with foremen's offices, welfare stores, PPE, lighting stock and parts for vehicles. Reassurance was sought that Council vehicles requiring repairs would be prioritised should garages outwith Highland have to be used. Questions were raised regarding the capacity of the Council's Inverness workshop to accommodate a significant increase in vehicles and whether Inverness area vehicles would be prioritised over those from the Black Isle and Easter Ross area. It was added that Ross and Cromarty had the second largest fleet of bin lorries and gritters in Highland, not far behind Inverness. Clarification was also sought on the proposed arrangements for vehicles from the Sutherland area should the Brora workshop close, including whether repairs would be undertaken at the Inverness workshop or elsewhere. In addition, information was requested on the types of repairs that would be carried out by mobile mechanics and where such repairs would be undertaken. It was commented that, whilst the rationalisation of depots might deliver savings in one area of the budget, there was a risk that these savings could be offset by increased operational costs, reduced service reliance and additional pressure on staff, vehicles and infrastructure. Given the importance of roads maintenance and winter service provision across the Black Isle and Easter Ross area, it was essential that Members fully understood the implications of the potential depot closures before any final decisions were made, and it was queried how it was planned to ensure

Members were fully briefed and given the opportunity to scrutinise the proposals. Reference was also made to staff shortages in Ward 7, which were affecting service delivery, and it was queried what impact the proposals would have on the roads team. The Strategic Lead (Operations) explained that he did not have the detailed information requested to hand and undertook to obtain an update from the Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Maintenance. The Chair requested that further information be provided to the Committee, and that it be clarified whether decisions regarding depot closures had been taken or were subject to consultation;

- other Members echoed the concerns raised regarding the rationalisation of depots, referring to previous difficulties in accessing equipment when Easter Ross had formed part of the same operational area as Caithness and Sutherland;
- reference was made to a 2018 report to the former Ross and Cromarty Committee which indicated that winter maintenance operations had been supported by a fleet of 105 gritters, 42 footpath tractors and 200 staff. Members commended current winter maintenance staff for their efforts in delivering the service with significantly reduced resources; and
- with reference to the forthcoming budget-setting process, it was suggested that there would be merit in investing in footpath tractors for villages across Highland to enable communities to assist with clearing pavements. It was reasoned that this could help to reduce the risk of slips and falls, thereby potentially reducing associated hospital admissions and care requirements.

At this stage, a separate discussion took place on the winter maintenance operations on the B9176 Struie Road following the severe snow falls in January 2026, which was the subject of a Bulletin on the Members' Intranet.

The Strategic Lead (Operations) spoke to the Bulletin, which explained that the Winter Service Policy 2018 ensured a consistent level of winter service for roads and footways across all areas. As it was impossible to provide winter maintenance service across all roads at the same time, roads were classed as either Primary, Secondary or Other, depending on the road hierarchy. Primary routes were treated first, then Secondary and finally Others as resources permitted. The Winter Service Plan report which had been approved by the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee on 11 August 2025 summarised the resources available to undertake winter maintenance operations and provided a route map detailing the roads to be treated. Appendix 2 of that report showed the B9176 as a Primary route.

The Roads Operations Manager then spoke to winter service operations on the B9176 Struie Road, explaining that, for operational reasons, these were partly managed by the Sutherland office, utilising both the Dornoch and Ardgay depots. It was not unusual for routes to span operational boundaries, and examples of similar arrangements elsewhere in Highland were provided. It was explained that current resource levels were based on a routine frost and that extreme weather conditions, such as those experienced in January 2026, together with a reduced service on public holidays, had a significant impact on service provision. Staff shortages, a vehicle being unavailable for service and the need to deploy resources to Primary routes north of Ardgay had also contributed to the operational challenges experienced in January.

The Strategic Lead (Operations) added that the period of extreme weather in January had been one of the worst he had experienced. Communities across Highland had been affected, and difficult decisions had had to be made regarding the prioritisation of resources. Vehicle-related issues, such as broken springs, together with a number of incidents involving lorries coming off the road, had added to the challenges. While lessons had been learned regarding the need for improved management arrangements and reporting processes, staffing levels and vehicle numbers remained the same, and there was a risk that similar challenges could arise in the event of future periods of prolonged extreme weather.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- appreciation was expressed for the assurances provided in the Bulletin, which it was highlighted had not formed part of the published agenda and papers, and it was requested that reference to the Bulletin be included in the Committee's decision;
- 10 days was a long time for such an important route to remain closed, and thanks were expressed to the communities affected for their patience during the resulting disruption;
- the Struie Road spanned the boundaries of two Area Committees, and it was important that the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee had a say in the priority assigned to the route;
- it was highlighted that the Council was entitled to use contractors to clear roads. In addition, Members indicated that they had been informed that, when the storm in January had abated, resources in Easter Ross had not been called upon to assist in re-opening the Struie Road, and a decision had been made that the A9 was a suitable diversion. However, this did not align with the Winter Service Policy, which sought to ensure that Primary routes were re-opened as soon as possible. It was hoped that officers would learn from this experience and seek assistance from private contractors and other areas in future. The Strategic Lead (Operations) confirmed that he would welcome further information from Members outwith the meeting regarding the suggestion that resources from Easter Ross had not being called upon. It was explained that, at that point in time, Highland had been managed as one large operational area and resources had been deployed from across the region, including Lochaber. It was further confirmed that contractors were utilised where available and that efforts had been made in recent years to develop a larger list of approved contractors. However, it was necessary to consider the potential damage to the road surface arising from the use of contractors' vehicles, and the costs involved;
- extreme weather events were to be expected in the future, and it was essential to have plans and processes in place to respond to them. However, concern was expressed that the Council did not have sufficient resources or capacity and that, in the case of the event in January, staff shortages had had a significant impact on the Council's ability to re-open the Struie Road. Information was sought on the resilience plans in place to ensure an adequate workforce was available during periods of extreme weather so that a similar situation did not arise in the future. Further discussion took place, during which officers spoke to the challenges relating to recruitment and resilience planning, including the significant shortage of HGV drivers in Highland, as well as the budgetary pressures. It was also

explained that, in some instances, gritting operations could not be undertaken due to the treacherous road conditions. It was highlighted that the current Winter Service Policy had been developed at a time when winters were becoming milder. It was suggested that, if extreme weather events were expected to become more frequent, it might be necessary to review the Policy. However, this would have resource implications;

- many residents and businesses relied on timely information, and it was queried if the Council had reviewed how it communicated operational updates, including when roads were expected to re-open;
- thanks were expressed to operatives for their heroic efforts in keeping the roads open throughout the winter;
- recruitment challenges were not confined to the roads service, and it was necessary, as a Council, to think more creatively about how to recruit and retain staff for critical roles;
- it was understood that contractors had offered their services to assist in clearing the Struie Road but this had not been taken up. The Strategic Lead (Operations) explained that he was unaware of contractors offering services being refused, but he undertook to investigate; and
- Members reiterated the concerns raised earlier regarding the potential closure of depots and the impact on winter maintenance operations. It was highlighted that newer fleet did not necessarily result in fewer issues, and that more modern vehicles, with more electrical systems, often had faults which could not be fixed by mobile mechanics. It was suggested that winter service operations in the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area were in a precarious position, and that a wider discussion was necessary on how additional financial resources could be allocated to deliver the level of service required.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27;
ii. **AGREED** that further information be provided to the Committee on the matters raised during discussion regarding the rationalisation of depots, including clarification on whether decisions regarding depot closures had been taken or were subject to consultation; and
iii. **NOTED** the update provided on the B9176 Struie Road Winter Maintenance 2025/26, as detailed in the Bulletin.

7. Community Asset Transfer Request: Invergordon Town Hall
Iarrtas Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd: Talla Baile Inbhir Ghòrdain

Declaration of Interest: Mr S Coghill declared an interest in this item as a former Trustee of Invergordon Development Trust, and as a close family member was a current Trustee. In accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, he left the meeting for the duration of the item.

Transparency Statement: Mr J Edmondson declared a connection to this item as a Director of Ardross Community Hall. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Committee welcomed the report and commended the considerable effort of all involved, particularly Invergordon Development Trust. It was felt that the Community Asset Transfer would secure the Town Hall's future and make it a great resource for the benefit of the community of Invergordon;
- in response to a question regarding any future works or alterations, which required landlord's consent, assurance was provided that the Trust would continue to receive support from the Community Development Manager in progressing these matters; and
- information was sought, and provided, regarding what safeguards were in place should the Trust experience financial difficulties in the future, how community access to the facility would be maintained, and the demographic and skills and knowledge base of the Trustees.

The Committee **AGREED** the Community Asset Transfer request for Invergordon Town Hall, with the Hall being leased to the Invergordon Development Trust for the period of 99 years at the nominal cost of £1.00.

8. Environmental Health - Annual Report & Activity 2025/26
Slàinte Àrainneachdail - Aithisg Bhliadhnail & Gnìomhachd 2025/26

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Environmental Health Service played a vital role in protecting public health and safety by identifying and reducing risks, in addition to its role in Short Term Let Licensing, and this was welcomed;
- Members appreciated the concise report and the information provided, particularly the operational team structure at Appendix 1;
- members of the public looked to local Councillors for advice on issues such as abandoned vehicles and noise nuisance, so updates from Environmental Health were helpful;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding out-of-hours Dog Warden support in relation to aggressive or dangerous dogs;
- in relation to section 6.7 of the report and the number of abandoned vehicles, the Committee was informed that the increase might, in part, be attributable to the reporting process on the Council's website. It was reported that the website would be reviewed to provide greater clarity for members of the public on what constituted an abandoned vehicle and the appropriate agency to contact in different circumstances. An update was also sought, and provided, regarding the proposed use of a storage compound in the Balintore area to facilitate the removal of abandoned and nuisance vehicles, which remained an issue;
- it was asked how often the Short Term Let Register on the Council's website was updated and what procedures were in place to ensure that all Short Term Let operators were licensed. The Senior Environmental Health Officer undertook to liaise with the relevant team and provide a response outwith the meeting;

- in relation to section 6.9 of the report, it was confirmed that the reference to Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh was a typographical error. However, the statistics provided in the table were correct;
- in relation to section 6.2 of the report, and in response to a question, it was confirmed that Other Statutory Nuisances included incidents such as smoke, odours and flies affecting neighbouring properties;
- an update was sought, and provided, regarding long-term plans to address the ongoing issue of seagulls, which remained a concern during the spring and summer seasons and throughout periods of increased visitor activity associated with cruise ships;
- complaints had been received from constituents in close proximity to distillery warehousing within the Cromarty Firth Ward, where ethanol evaporation was causing black mould. The Senior Environmental Health Officer (EHO) undertook to investigate the current position and provide an update outwith the meeting. It was asked that any further complaints be forwarded directly to the Environmental Health Service so that any issues could be appropriately monitored and addressed;
- in response to comments regarding rat management, the Committee was informed that the British Pest Control Association website contained useful guidance and that the Council’s website would be reviewed to incorporate similar helpful information and signpost communities appropriately; and
- education and community engagement were important, and it was felt that distributing information on seagull and rat deterrence through a mail drop might be more effective than residents having to seek information themselves. The Senior Environmental Health Officer undertook to explore the possibility of a maildrop.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

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

9. Common Good Funds
Maoin Maith Choitchinn

a. Cromarty Common Good Fund - Q4 2025/26 and Q1 to 31 May 2026/27 Monitoring Report
Maoin Math Coitcheann Chromba - Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteal 4 2025/26 agus Cairteal 1 gu 31 Cèitean 2026/27

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

In response to a question, the Committee was informed that income would be generated from the interest earned on the Fund reserves. Discussions were also underway with a community group regarding a lease agreement for East Church Hall.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of Cromarty Common Good Fund as shown in the end of year statement for 2025/26 and Quarter 1 to 31 May 2026/27 Monitoring Statement.

b. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund - Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund – Q4 2025/26 and Q1 to 31 May 2026/27 Monitoring Report
Maoin Math Coitcheann na Cananaich agus Ros Mhaircnidh - Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteal 4 2025/26 agus Cairteal 1 gu 31 Cèitean 2026/27

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

The Chair welcomed the increased income as highlighted in section 5.1 of the report, as this allowed more funds to be made available for the community.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund as shown in the 2025/26 Quarter 4 and Quarter 1 to 31 May 2026/27 Monitoring Statements.

c. Invergordon Common Good Fund - 2025/26 Outturn and Q1 Monitoring Statement to 31 May 2026
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain - Aithris Dheireannach 2025/26 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh Cairteal 1 gu 31 Cèitean 2026

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

During discussion, it was asked if the costs associated with the sale of the Bouchardon Bust were recoverable and, if so, if they would be reimbursed to the Common Good Fund. The Community Development Manager undertook to confirm the position with the Common Good Fund Officer.

With reference to item 7 and the Committee’s decision to approve the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) request for Invergordon Town Hall, an update was sought regarding rental income. The Community Development Manager explained that the loss of rental income had been considered as part of the CAT assessment. However, it had been concluded that the proposed community hub would deliver greater community benefit than the current annual rental income of £3,500.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 4 Outturn 2025/26 and Quarter 1 (April and May) 2026/27 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund.

d. Tain Common Good Fund – 2025/26 Outturn and Q1 Monitoring to 31 May 2026
Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich - Aithris Dheireannach 2025/26 agus Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteal 1 gu 31 Cèitean 2026

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

An update was sought on the recent asset review, and it was asked what support the Common Good Fund could provide in relation to the ongoing vandalism of the Rose Garden. In response, it was explained that the cost of undertaking a condition review was currently being obtained and an update would be provided at a future Ward Business Meeting. Consideration would then be given to the most appropriate use of available funds, opportunities to involve community groups, and potential sources of additional funding. Decisions would be informed by the findings of the condition review and the budget available for the current financial year.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 4 Outturn 2025/26 and Quarter 1 (April and May) 2026/27 monitoring reports for the Tain Common Good Fund.

10. Housing Repairs and Capital Report - 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026
Aithisg air Càraidhean Thaighean agus Calpa - 1 Giblean 2026 gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

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

Prior to discussion, it was highlighted that the title of section 7 in the report should be Tenancy Voids.

During discussion, the Committee welcomed the report and was encouraged by the improvements in relation to emergency works. In relation to section 7 of the report and the average re-let time for void properties, it was suggested that additional context be included in future reports where individual properties required significant refurbishment work, to provide a better understanding of the overall figures. In response, the Housing Investment Officer confirmed that this would be requested.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026.

11. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

There had been circulated and were **NOTED**, details of the Discretionary Budget applications that had been approved between 1 April and 21 July 2026.

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED**, Minutes of the meeting of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee held on 11 May 2026, which had been approved by the Council on 25 June 2026.

The meeting ended at 2.00 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, and remotely on **Monday, 10 August 2026 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

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

Officials in attendance:

Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager (West & Mid Highland)
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager, Place Cluster
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr M Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Operations)
Ms A Martin, FW2040 Project Manager
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry, Place Cluster
Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry), Place Cluster
Mr A Maciver, Principal Engineer, Place Cluster
Mr M Culbertson, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund
Mr L MacDonald, Repairs Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr C Scott, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (item 3 only)

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

Ms K Willis in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

There were none.

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Lochaber Committee.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report

Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/27/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, information was sought and provided on the following:

- attention was drawn to the wildfire risks associated with the operation of the Jacobite steam train and whether the agreement in place that the diesel rather than steam engine be used during periods of high wildfire alerts was being appropriately adhere to, and what enforcement around this could be undertaken. Attention was drawn to ongoing discussions that were taking place between the operators, national rail, the landowners, the Council and other partner agencies. The SFRS was not an enforcing service but could provide advice and guidance;
- the ‘Stay on Side’ Fire Skills course was welcomed and it was hoped would be continued; and
- the resources available to the SFRS in Lochaber to tackle wildfires was queried and summarised. In relation to historic land management practices, attention was drawn to the benefits of fire breaks and the provision of fire beaters in key locations. Much more scientific information was available nowadays to understand how wildfires behaved and how best to tackle them, with continuous learning from each incident.

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

5. Fort William Common Good Fund - Q4 2025/26 and Q1 2026/27 (to 31.05.26 only) Monitoring Report
Maoin a’ Mhaith Choitcheann a’ Ghearasdain - Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteal 4 2025/26 agus Cairteal 1 2026/27 (gu 31.05.26 a-mhàin)

There was circulated Report No. LA/28/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the positive position in relation to the reserves was welcomed and it was queried when the fund might be open to community grant applications. While this was the long term aspiration, further clarity on the Fund’s liabilities was required in the shorter term;
- information was sought, and would be provided outwith the meeting, on the following:
    - progress with the seawall of the West End carpark;
    - the situation with the anticipated donation from the Scottish 6-day trials for their use of the West End carpark; and
    - timescales for advertising the putting green shed on the Parade for community use.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of Fort William Common Good Fund as shown in the end of year statement for 2025/26 and Quarter 1 2026/27 (to 31.05.26 only) Monitoring Statement and **AGREED** to provide to Members after the meeting the information requested during discussion.

6. Short Term Let Control Area – Post Consultation Update
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine – Cunntas às Ùr às Dèidh Co-chomhairleachaidh

There is circulated Report No. LA/29/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- while the principle of a Short Term Let Control Area (STLCA) was supported, concern was expressed at the inconsistent answers to questions that it was felt had been provided at area and strategic level. A particular query included whether, given the large and diverse nature of the area, specific settlements or communities which were not experiencing housing pressures could be excluded from the STLCA. However, the view was also expressed that excluding a particular village could, over time, shift the housing pressures to that village. A summary was provided of the planning and development plan processes, some of which were relevant to the implementation of the STLCA, and of the localised evidence basis which would be used. It was important to note that while the STLCA boundary could be amended, a STLCA could only be considered in areas which had been subject to consultation;
- concern was expressed in relation to instances where existing operators may need to evidence their planning status, including some who already required planning permission, and the fairness of this on people who had been running a short-term let business for a significant amount of time but did not have proof of their planning permission status. It was suggested that in the past planning advice had sometimes been provided verbally, and that some historical planning permission records had proved difficult to source. In this regard, attention was drawn to the possibility of seeking a certificate of lawful use, which could be obtained by the provision of evidence that planning permission was not required (the use was not a material change of use at that time), or if in the past been required, the change of use could be evidenced to have become lawful through the passage of time, noting that if a letting business had been in operation for more than ten years and where the change of use from residential use to short term letting had continued for at least 10 years without interruption and no enforcement action had been taken, it might become lawful and be capable of being certified through a Certificate of Lawfulness of Existing Use or Development (CLEUD), and could be proven through the provision of receipts, booking, tax or insurance information, then retrospective planning permission might not be required. It was pointed out that HMRC only required records to be stored for six years, not ten, but in Scotland, the 10-year rule generally applied to an unauthorised material change of use, including many changes to or from residential accommodation. The 10-year rule was not set by the Council. It came from national planning legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament and contained within the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended). Local planning

authorities must apply the law; they did not have discretion to create their own immunity periods. It was also clarified that if planning permission was required at present for a property, this was the case regardless of a STLCA, and that the planning permission and STL Licensing processes were separate. It was queried whether the system would place additional pressure on the planning application process;

- Members asked what the response would be to a member of the public who suggested that the STLCA was being introduced because of the Council's failure to build adequate new homes, and it was explained, with reference to the Council's housing policies, that STLCA was not a replacement for home-building, but a means of tackling housing pressures, with particular reference to the number of new build homes that were being converted to short-term let properties. It was also explained why a STLCA was preferable to using planning permission conditions to control the use of properties for short term lets;
- it was queried whether there was a difference in housing pressures between Wards 11 and 21 and attention was drawn to the statement of reasons in the report which showed there was no significant evidence base that supported the removal of either ward from the STLCA;
- attention was drawn to the importance of prioritising the housing needs of young people in the area; and
- it was clarified that there could be significant differences in material considerations for a single detached house in the countryside being used as a short term let, versus an urban flat which had issues such as parking, waste management, and shared communal areas with other residential properties.

Following further discussion, although some reservations were expressed about the proposals, there was consensus among Members to agree the recommendations unopposed.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the consultation feedback and the potential implications that a STLCA will have on communities within Lochaber as set out in Appendix 2 and summarised in Sections 8, 9 and 10; and
ii. **AGREED** to recommend to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee that Lochaber be included within the proposed Highland Rural STLCA, should any decision to submit a proposal for designation to Scottish Ministers be taken.

7. Winter Service Plan 2026/27
Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh 2026/27

Due to officer availability, the Committee **AGREED** to consider Item 7 between Items 11 and 12.

There was circulated Report No. LA/30/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, confirmation was sought and provided that the Roads and Amenities review would not result in job losses but was a means of those services working more closely and cooperatively with one another. Further information was sought and would be provided outwith the meeting on the following issues:

- confirmation that Juniper Wynd was included in the Plan, and whether reference to Elm Road was an error;
- the arrangements in place, including the location of maintenance workforce, for the repair of leased gritters;
- information on the provision and replenishment of grit bins on the Fersit road, off the A86; and
- progress with the adoption of roads in the vicinity of The Grazings, on the Blar Mhor.

The Committee:

i. **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27;
ii. **APPROVED** the additional roads on route maps Appendix B; and
iii. **AGREED** to provide the information requested during discussion outwith the meeting.

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

There was circulated Report No. LA/31/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

The Committee **NOTED** that the application that had been circulated had since received the amount requested (£54,160) from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the CRF application had been withdrawn. A further request for EV fast-charging points might be made in future.

9. Fort William 2040 Bi-Annual Update
Cunntas Leth-bhliadhnail a' Ghearasdain 2040

There was circulated Report No. LA/32/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

Following a summary of the report, the following issues were raised:

- Members expressed concern that there was no political representation on the FW2040 Board and the Council's Leader and Chief Executive be asked to consider this, noting that FW2040 funding requests might impact on Members' need to declare a financial interest when making Council decisions;
- a summary was sought and provided on progress with the bus gates on the Blar Mhor (which was moving towards the final stages) and at Upper Achintore (which was still going through the Planning process;
- it was important that bus station plans did not adversely impact parking availability in the vicinity;

- it was hoped the Blar Mhor Liaison Group would be able to take forward issues around the land for community use on the Blar Mhor;
- in relation to active travel, updates were sought and would be provided after the meeting on the Upper Achintore Path adoption and maintenance issues; and
- the need for a community approach to the management of waste and litter on the High Street was emphasised and assurance was provided that work to coordinate this was ongoing.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the progress that has been made with the individual projects within the FW2040 Masterplan as summarised at Appendix 1: FW2040 Bi-annual Masterplan Project Update, July 2026;
ii. **NOTED** the findings from the Greater Fort William Culture and Leisure Options Appraisal as per section 6.2 of the report;
iii. **NOTED** the public consultation on the Fort William Integrated Transport Plan (FW ITP). Further detail is provided in section 6.4 of the report; and
iv. **NOTED** the identified priority FW2040 work areas for the coming year also summarised in section 6 of this report;
v. **AGREED** information be provided after the meeting on the Upper Achintore Path adoption and maintenance issues; and
vi. **AGREED** to request that the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive review the governance of the FW2040 Programme Board to consider appropriate councillor representation from both a political administration and Lochaber level.

10. Corran Ferry Update
Cunntas air Aiseag a' Chorrain

There was circulated Report No. LA/33/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

Following a summary of the report, Members thanked the staff for their effective management of the recent service outages. The plan to introduce smart ticketing was welcomed and information was sought on the estimated revenue from foot passengers, and whether this was predicated to reach the budgeted levels. It was clarified that 'Bhusa' as referenced at para 7.5 of the report referred to straw debris. Attention was drawn to the potential lack of clarity about bicycles being listed as 'free' when the rider would still have to buy a foot passenger ticket.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme & Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel updates;
ii. **NOTED** Corran Ferry Service update; and
iii. **AGREED** to provide Members with information on the foot passenger income as requested during discussion.

11. Housing Repairs and Capital Report – 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026

Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais- Càradh Thaighean agus Prògram Calpa – 1 Giblean 2026 gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

There was circulated Report No. LA/34/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion the following issues were considered:

- assurance was sought and provided that no further complaints had been received from residents about water issues in Mallaig;
- in response to a query about why the Caol and Mallaig re-let times were slightly longer than those of Fort William and Ardnamurchan, it was explained that the re-let times were largely dependent on the condition of the properties, and the volume of work required; and
- the capital programmes detailed in para 8.2 of the report were welcomed for improving energy efficiency. Information on the number of properties included was sought and would be provided outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026 and **AGREED** to provide information on the number of properties impacted by the work detailed in para 8.2 of the report.

12. Lochaber Local Access Forum
Fòram Inntrigeadh Ionadail Loch Abar

The Council has a statutory duty under Section 25 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 to establish Local Access Forums for its area. There were six Local Access Forums in the Highland area which advised on matters in relation to the exercise of access rights, the existence of delineation of rights of way or the drawing up and adoption of the Core Path Plan. In addition, they also offered and gave assistance to parties in terms of the resolution of any disputes in this respect.

There was currently a vacancy for Ward 11 on the Lochaber Local Access Forum and the Committee **AGREED** that Councillor S Cameron be appointed to the Forum.

13. Ward Discretionary Fund 2026/27
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

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

Ward 11
- Isle of Eigg Resident Association - Community Orchard - £300
- Mallaig Football Club - Mallaig All Weather Pitch - £2,000

Ward 21
- Nether Lochaber Community Association - Maintain and enhance floral displays - £982.60

- Morvern Community Development Company - Improvements Lochaline Harbour - £600
- National Trust for Scotland, Altnafeadh parking design Devil’s Staircase & Buachaille Etive Mor - £2,000

14. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** the minutes of the Lochaber Committee held on 11 May 2026 which had been approved by the Council on 25 June 2026.

The meeting ended at 12.55pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Wednesday 12 August 2026** at **9.30am**.

Present:

Ms S Atkin (Vice Chair)
Mr R Bremner (remote)
Mr I Brown (remote)
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (Chair)
Ms L Dundas
Mr L Fraser
Mr R Gale
Mrs J Hendry
Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs A MacLean
Mr D Macpherson
Ms J McEwan (remote)
Mr M Prosser (remote)
Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Christie
Mrs T Collier (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)
Ms C Gillies (remote)
Dr M Gregson
Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Ms L Johnston (remote)
Mr D Millar (remote)
Mr J Murray (remote)
Ms M Ross (remote)

Tenant Representatives in Attendance:

Mr A Dick
Ms L Richardson

Officials in Attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Ms S Barrie, Strategic Lead (Design and Construction)
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead (Housing and Customer Services)
Mr R Campbell, Strategic Lead (Investment Strategy)
Mr S Dalgarno, Strategic Lead (Asset and Property Management)
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead Finance (Place)
Ms H Cameron, Service Lead (Housing Development)
Ms D Delonnette, Service Lead (Housing and Homelessness)
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead (Housing Investment and Building Maintenance)
Ms J Ross, Service Lead (Housing Policy and Performance)
Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager Inverness & South
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr S Cameron, Mr R Jones, Mrs I MacKenzie, and Mr R Stewart.

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

   There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. **Recess Powers**
   Cumhachdan Fosaidh

   The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Housing and Property Committee.

4. **Good News**
   Naidheachdan Matha

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

5. **Housing & Property Developments Overview**
   Cunntas air Leasachaidhean Taigheadais & Seilbhe

   Due to technical difficulties during the meeting, the Committee **NOTED** that the presentation on the latest completed developments from Housing & Property would be circulated to Members and uploaded to the Council website following the meeting.

6. **Property & Facilities Management Services Revenue Budget; Final Outturn for 2025/26 and Monitoring Statement to 31 May 2026**
   Buidseat Teachd-a-steach Seirbheisean Seilbhe is Stiùireadh Ghoireasan; Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach airson 2025/26 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh gu 31 Cèitean 2026

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

   In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

   - in terms of Appendix 1 of the report, further information was sought and provided regarding other expenditure and it was confirmed that a breakdown of these non-staff costs, such as travel and stationery costs, would be provided outside of the meeting;
   - it was questioned why planned improvement works did not take place in some schools during the holidays, despite contractors being available. There was concern that this might lead to further overspending and it was queried when the works would be completed. Clarification would be provided outside of the meeting; and
   - in terms of section 6.2 of the report, Asset Rationalisation Savings, further information was sought, and would be provided, regarding the consideration of £400k savings during the current financial year.

   Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the:-

i. final outturn figures for the 2025/26 Property and Facilities Management Services Revenue Budget;
ii. forecast financial position for 2026/27 as set out in the report and appendices to the report; and
iii. explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed.

7. Property Capital Monitoring Statement and Progress Update
Aithris Sgrùdaidh agus Cunntas air Adhartas Calpa Seilbhe

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- in terms of section 8.7 of the report, Major Capital Projects in Dingwall, concerns were raised regarding differing expectations of design plans and it was queried when these would be presented to a stakeholder meeting. The importance of ensuring all parties had access to the same information was emphasised. Regarding the Dingwall Sports Centre, the first and next steps should be clearly set out, together with associated timelines, including confirmation of when elements would, or would not, be delivered;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the progress of the works to replace the toilet blocks at Rosebank Primary School;
- concern was expressed regarding the scale of the Major Capital Projects and it was queried if contractors were in place to complete the works. There was further concern that while significant investment was being directed towards new projects, some existing schools continued to face issues such as leaking roofs and poor facilities, with no planned upgrades. Therefore, clarification was sought on the level of capital investment being allocated to repairs and improvements within the existing school estate;
- reference was made to the importance of the Major Capital Projects having realistic completion dates. Reports should be transparent to indicate that the completion date was rescheduled or, if changed, refer to the original completion date that had been set. In addition, a specific request was made in terms of Appendix 4, School Estate Improvement Programme – Priority Projects, confirmation was provided that indicative dates (both original and any revised) would be included against each stage of the projects on future reports to provide transparency;
- attention was drawn to Appendix 2 of the report which indicated that £8k of expenditure had been incurred during Quarter 1 on improvements for Council owned care homes that were managed by NHS Highland. Concern was expressed at the low level of investment and the need for further maintenance and improvement works was emphasised. Major assets owned by the Council but operated by NHS Highland, Eden Court Highlands and High Life Highland often received less scrutiny as they were not operationally managed by the Council. It was therefore requested that a report be provided on the condition of these assets along with details of any planned works, the benefits of these and the proposed timescales for delivery;
- in terms of section 8.9 of the report, confirmation was sought that the stakeholder group at Inverness High School had been established;

- information was sought, and provided, regarding repairs and maintenance at Culloden Academy and the use of rolling maintenance plans; and
- confirmation was provided that further details would be provided outwith the meeting on the number of empty janitor houses.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the:-

i. final capital monitoring position for the 2025/26 financial year;
ii. capital monitoring position for the 2026/27 financial year to 31 May 2026 and the forecast year-end position; and
iii. programme and project updates included in the report and the projects to be funded from the various budget allocations in 2026/27 and 2027/28, including a contribution of £0.4M to the Cromarty Courthouse project.

8. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Non-HRA Budget; Final Outturn 2025/26 and Monitoring Statement to 31 May 2026
Buidseat Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais is Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Neo-Thaigheadais; Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach 2025/26 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh gu 31 Cèitean 2026

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- funding for heating improvements and grants to improve properties were welcomed. The importance of rental income in supporting these improvements was highlighted and the work being undertaken by the Revenues Service to help tenants access benefits was recognised. Referring to forthcoming damp and mould legislation, it was suggested that a more joined-up approach, with Housing Management and Maintenance Officers undertaking joint visits to support vulnerable tenants and assess property conditions, should be considered. It was further suggested that a pilot scheme in a Highland area, taking a proactive "spend to save" approach to meet new legislative requirements, could benefit both tenants and the Council. The Chair welcomed the suggestion and agreed to discuss the matter further with officers outwith the meeting. While the legislation was welcomed, it was felt that additional funding would be required nationally to deliver the necessary work;
- a breakdown of the rent arrears by current and ex tenants was requested and this would be provided outside of the meeting;
- it was suggested that, in terms of section 7.3 of the report and the low levels of usage at some of the four Highland gypsy traveller sites, consideration be given to reducing the number of sites from four to three. In response it was indicated that ongoing engagement was taking place with the representative body;
- there was concern that the 2025/26 outturn suggested an underspend on repairs and maintenance. An explanation was sought, and clarification provided;
- disappointment was expressed that the Council had been unable to provide an alternative Council-owned premises for a small business owner following a fire and an update to the Member Enquiry would be provided after the meeting;
- community-based tenant forums could provide useful information to officers or Members, which would help identify and raise concerns at an earlier stage;

- it was asked when the snagging jobs in the Easter Ross area were planned in relation to the capital works being undertaken; and
- in welcoming the positive financial outturn highlighted in sections 6.4 and 6.5 of the report, bad debt provision and loan charges, information was sought, and provided regarding the HRA Financial Strategy which set out how the Council intended to reduce HRA debt levels and progress towards the recommended borrowing threshold, thereby maximising resources available for investment in housing stock and repairs.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the:-

i. final outturn figures for the Housing Revenue Account and Non-Housing Revenue Account 2025/26;
ii. forecast financial position for 2026/27 as set out in the report and appendices to the report; and
iii. explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed.

9. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Outturns 2025/26 to 31 March 2026 and HRA Capital Monitoring 2026/27 to 31 May 2026
Suidheachaidhean Làithreach Sgrùdadh Calpa Cunntas Teachd A-steach Taigheadais 2025/26 gu 31 Màrt 2026 agus Sgrùdadh Calpa Cunntas Teachd A-steach Taigheadais 2026/27 gu 31 Cèitean 2026

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- an explanation was sought, and provided, regarding the cause of the £23.6m underspend as highlighted in section 6.2 of the report. It was suggested that consideration be given to using some of the underspend on adapted kitchens and bathrooms within sheltered housing to support tenants living in their own home for longer. Members were informed that for any underspend left over at the end of the 2022-2027 programme a recommendation would be made to a future Committee to profile those funds into a following programme;
- the Healthy, Safe and Secure Project was a welcome investment. Information was sought, and provided, in terms of the number of ground floor accessible homes;
- responding to concerns, it was clarified that the Council part of the aids and adaptations process was not lengthy. It was asked what the Council could do in order to make properties more suitable for older tenants to meet the needs of an ageing population;
- it was raised whether prospective tenants, particularly those considering downsizing, could be invited to view new housing developments to learn of the accommodation and facilities available;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the main factors contributing to delays in housing project delivery, which varied from year to year;
- following community concerns after a recent private house fire, information was sought, and provided, regarding safety measures in place surrounding solar panels;

- information was sought, and provided, in terms of sound insulation. All new properties had to meet certain standards and initiatives carried out on existing stock had had varying levels of success;
- in response to a question regarding the impact of air source heat pumps, Members were informed that positive feedback had been received in terms of affordability, alongside other measures;
- it was asked and confirmed that an information board be erected on Balloan Road, Inverness, which would highlight future project works to be carried out; and
- the tenant representative highlighted the importance of educating tenants and reference was made to the ongoing national work to review and improve the adaptations process, including measures to reduce delays associated with NHS Occupational Therapy assessments.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the:-

i. final outturn figures for the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2025/26: and
ii. May 2026 figures and projected outturn for the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2026/27.

10. Highland Housing Register (HHR) Allocations Monitoring Report 2025/26 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Riarachaidhean Clàr Taigheadais na Gàidhealtachd 2025/26

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the report was welcomed, however, there was a need to be more realistic with applicants about their prospects of securing a council house. Reference was made to tables 1 and 2 in the appendix to the report and it was highlighted the shortage of four-bedroom properties, and the impact this had on families with significant housing needs, including those with disabled children that had an urgent need of additional or ground floor space. It was suggested that the Strategic Highland Investment Plan should place greater emphasis on the provision of larger family homes. It was requested that a Member workshop to explore potential solutions and innovative ways to increase housing allocations, particularly for larger family homes, be arranged;
- table 2, which covered applicants aged 16 to 25, was concerning as it highlighted the number of young people in temporary accommodation or living with parents/relatives. In addition, youth homelessness figures might be underestimated due to sofa surfing and applicants not maintaining registration;
- assurance was sought and provided that key worker status was verified with appropriate checks made both at application and allocation stage. It was highlighted that the definitions of key workers could vary between urban and remote and rural communities. As an example, reference was made to the importance of other sectors such as retail workers providing an essential service and maintaining local communities;
- it was clarified that there was no fixed points threshold for sheltered housing allocations;

- disappointment was expressed at the lack of modern practices to assist applicants with mental health, depression or neurodivergent needs, particularly where medical evidence was difficult to obtain, and it was queried whether it was feasible to update processes without putting extra pressure on Occupational Health;
- further information was sought and provided regarding purchasing former council houses and using the empty homes policy to bring more properties back into use for local housing needs, particularly as an alternative to their use as short term let accommodation;
- reference was made to the changing demographics and family structures and the impact of this on the demand for housing. It was queried if these statistics could be provided by way of explanation of the increasing housing demand;
- it was queried whether the current approach was delivering fair outcomes for those that were homeless but trying to maintain employment and contribute to local communities and if these factors had any weight when assessing need. It was explained that housing needs were assessed against the Housing Allocations policy along with evidence and points, which could include need to reside; and
- confirmation was provided that support was available for young people entering a tenancy agreement for the first time. Further reference was made to the need to balance tenancy sustainment with expectations that tenants complied with their tenancy agreements.

Thereafter, the Committee:

i. **NOTED** the information contained in the Annual Monitoring Report on Housing Allocations, which demonstrated that the policy was achieving its objectives and that the Highland Housing Partnership continued to provide affordable and secure social housing in Highland communities; and
ii. **AGREED** that a workshop be held to explore developing innovative ways to overcome the supply challenges, encourage tenants to downsize and improve housing outcomes.

11. Highland Housing Register (HHR) – Review of Allocations Policy
Clàr Taigheadais na Gàidhealtachd – Ath-sgrùdadh Poileasaidh Riarachaidhean

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- confirmation was sought and provided that the Rightsizing policy would be included in the Member workshop (as agreed at Item 10), to allow for further consideration of incentives to make it more attractive for tenants to downsize;
- a point that tenants in rent arrears should not be offered incentives to downsize;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that consideration would be given in advance as to how those Members unable to attend could feed into the workshop and how broader information could be gathered from tenants to help inform the discussions;

- it would be helpful if the date of the Member workshop was arranged primarily to suit Committee Members, while acknowledging it would be open for all Members to attend;
- the report demonstrated the Council was compliant, transparent and open to robust scrutiny in terms of the Allocations Policy; this provided reassurance to Members, tenant representatives and tenants that the stock was being managed correctly and those on the Highland Housing Register that there was a fair system in place;
- the review of the Allocations Policy should also consider the approach taken elsewhere in the UK and Europe, and all other available measures to manage the housing stock in a way that helped more people; and
- it was important to recognise that a one size fits all approach was not appropriate for the Highlands and that the Areas might have different requirements and needs.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the findings of the HHR Policy Review and the work undertaken to date;
ii. **NOTED** that the review confirms the HHR Allocations Policy was in line with national legislation and guidance such as the Housing (Scotland) Act(s) 1987, 2001, 2014, 2025 and Social Housing Allocations Legal Framework: Statutory Guidance for Social Landlords;
iii. **AGREED** to enhancing the Rightsizing Scheme, including revised and enhanced incentives;
iv. **AGREED** that Accessible Housing provision was progressed as a separate, partnership-led workstream and be reported back to this Committee; and
v. **NOTED** that any future proposed policy changes would be subject to discussions with the HHR partnership group, must be legislatively compliant and would be subject to a full Integrated Impact Assessment.

12. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Plan 2027-2032
Plana Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2027-2032

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the proposed investment of £116.151m over the five-year period of the Plan was a good news story;
- further clarity was sought and provided on the rationale for £5m being allocated for equipment and adaptations, noting this was a demand led budget and would be monitored annually;
- an assurance was sought and provided that a comparison of the average lifecycle of components included in the Capital Programme could be provided and in terms of building this into investment plans and providing more transparency on costings;
- whether it would be prudent for the Council to invest in a supply of bathrooms, kitchens, windows and doors to reduce costs. It was explained there were challenges in having sufficient facilities for storage and different dimensions being required for individual properties, however the Service considered any opportunities for savings in this regard; and

- whether sufficient consideration had been given to inflation in the figures for the proposed annual level of planned investment to be delivered over the five-year period of the Plan and the action being taken to future proof the investment going forward. It was confirmed inflationary projections were considered as part of the annual monitoring of the Plan and if adjustments were required, the Service would continue to prioritise works according to people's needs.

  The Tenant Representative advised that the installation of dark floors in properties could be problematic as tenants become older on the basis they were unsuitable for those with a visual impairment or dementia and an assurance was provided that officers would reflect on this feedback. She also complimented officers on citing articles from the Human Rights Act within the report and further referenced relevant articles within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the overall HRA Mainstream Capital Plan 2027-2032 budget of £116.151m, an increase of £28m from the previous 5-year capital plan;
ii. **APPROVED** the proposed investment priorities for the Mainstream Capital Plan, as set out in Section 5 of the report;
iii. **NOTED** that this was a 5-year plan and, as with all long-term programmes, there would be a level of reprofiling reported to Committee during the course of the 2027-2032 Plan. This would manage delivery risk, price fluctuations, funding variances and unavoidable pressure arising from urgent or compliance-driven works;
iv. **APPROVED** the continued bi-annual reporting of the programme to Area Committees to ensure ward Members were fully informed of progress of projects in their communities; and
v. **NOTED** that future revenue budget agreements and rent setting decisions would continue to be on an annual basis, and any resulting implications for / amendments to, the capital plan, would be managed as part of that annual process.

13. Annual Assurance Statement
Aithris Barantais Bhliadhnail

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

The Tenant Representative suggested that the fire safety section was vague, particularly in relation to the issues around ensuring people with a disability could escape and were safe and whether the Council was undertaking further work on this issue. In response, details were provided on ongoing discussions with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service around the need for a proportionate and individual property response, and in relation home fire safety visits. The HRA Capital Plan included an indicative budget for the investment needs around the new legislative requirements for single building assessments and this included fire safety, some of which would involve promotional work with tenants.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Annual Assurance Statement for 2026 detailed in Appendix 1 to the report which would be subsequently submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

14. Annual Community Asset Transfer Report 2025/26
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd 2025/26

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

The Committee **AGREED** the annual report on Community Asset Transfer as detailed in the report, summarised at Appendix 1 of the report and a copy of the full version was circulated separately as an Excel file, for submission to the Scottish Government.

15. Housing Performance Report to 30 June 2026
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

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

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026.

16. Service Performance Report Q1 2026/27
Aithisg Coileanaidh Seirbheis R1 2026/27

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

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. performance information for the Housing & Property Service; and
ii. change to Absence and Freedom of Information reporting to align with Chief Officer structure.

17. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update
Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas Adhartais a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh

There had been circulated Report No HP/30/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the project/programme updates provided in the report.

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

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

19. Housing Development Initiatives
Iomairtean Leasachaidh Taigheadais

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/31/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

20. Land and Property
Fearann agus Seilbh

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/32/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, Mr R Gale moved an amendment for an additional recommendation in relation to one of the leases within the report. However, the Chair deemed that the amendment was not competent.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

21. Property Transactions Monitoring
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ghnothachasan Seilbhe

There had been circulated to Members only Report No HP/33/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting was concluded at 1.05pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 12 August 2026 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Mrs S Atkin
Mr M Baird
Dr C Birt
Mr R Cross (substitute)
Ms C Gillies (remote)
Mr A Graham
Dr M Gregson
Mr P Logue
Ms K MacLean (remote)
Ms K Willis (Chair)

Non-Members also present:

Ms L Johnston (remote)
Ms E Knox (remote)
Mr D Macpherson
Mr P Oldham (remote)

In attendance:

Mr N Osborne, Climate Change and Energy Team Manager
Ms F Daschofsky, Net Zero Programme Manager
Mr R Macdonald, Energy Manager
Mr I Braker, Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations
Ms I Percy-Bell, Principal Waste Management Officer
Ms N Wallace, Service Lead – Environment, Development and Transport Planning
Mr A Fraser, Principal Engineer
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner (remote)
Ms C Weaver, Climate Change Coordinator
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Mr C Ross, Committee Officer

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

Ms K Willis in the Chair

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr S Coghill, Mr J Grafton, Ms L Niven and Mr K Rosie.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. **Recess Powers**
   Cumhachdan Fosaidh

   The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Climate Change Committee.

4. **Good News**
   Naidheachdan Matha

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

5. **Net Zero Programme**
   Prògram Neoni Luim

   i. **Net Zero Programme Update**
      Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Neoni Luim

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

   In introducing the report, the Net Zero Programme Manager drew attention to section 7.4, which stated that the first stage of the proposed implementation framework for the strategic direction agreed by the Full Council on 26 March 2026 was scheduled to be presented to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) at the end of July 2026. It was explained that, following review by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, further revisions were required and, as a result, presentation to the CMT was now expected by the end of August 2026.

   During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- attention was drawn to section 3.3 of the report, which stated that failure to proactively address the climate and ecological emergency across all service areas carried significant reputational, operational and financial risk;
- in response to questions regarding progress with the milestones that had been RAG-rated Amber and the establishment of the governance and performance framework to support delivery of the strategic direction agreed by the Council, it was explained that work was ongoing on a number of areas, including resourcing and the proposed governance model, that would determine how carbon budgeting would be introduced across services. As highlighted in the introduction, a report was due to be considered by the CMT at the end of August, which was expected to progress matters. This would subsequently be presented to the Full Council. In terms of the 12-month managed engagement with Eden Seven, this had been approved by the Council. The next stage was to develop the contract and commence delivery, and the Committee would be updated on progress throughout the year;
- concern was expressed regarding the delay in submitting the report to the CMT, particularly in light of the important reports later on the agenda that would place further demands on the Council. In response, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager explained that there had been a number of challenges in terms of how to integrate the strategic approach to climate change, energy and resilience across the Council and structure it in a sustainable way. However, the need for

urgency was acknowledged, and Members were assured that the matter remained a priority of the Council;

- the Chair highlighted that the Committee's remit was to provide advice, guidance and critical challenge on the Council's climate and ecological agenda, oversee the Net Zero Strategy, Programme and Action Plan, and scrutinise and monitor the climate impact of Council policies. Given that the end of the current Council term was approaching, with only two further meetings of the Committee remaining, it was suggested that it was reasonable for the Committee to seek assurance that the strategic direction agreed by the Council in March 2026 was being converted into visible, coordinated and measurable activity across the organisation. The Chair therefore proposed three recommendations, as follows, in addition to the recommendation in the report:

ii. agree to recommend to the Council that, across the next two scheduled meetings of the Climate Change Committee, the senior officer leads for the Council's Place, People and Corporate service clusters be invited to present their respective plans for contributing to the Council's Net Zero targets and addressing the climate and ecological emergencies. These presentations should set out:
   a. the actions, programmes and measurable outcomes being delivered or planned within each cluster;
   b. how climate mitigation, adaptation, energy, ecological and community-resilience considerations are being integrated into service, financial, workforce, asset and investment planning;
   c. the cluster's arrangements for engaging with the Climate Change and Energy Team and the relevant Net Zero thematic groups;
   d. opportunities to secure external investment, generate savings and reinvest benefits in further delivery, including estate retrofit, fleet transition and other spend-to-save projects;
   e. how the cluster's plans contribute to tackling fuel poverty, inequalities and the differing needs of Highland's rural, island and vulnerable communities;
   f. the principal gaps, barriers and resource or specialist-support requirements affecting delivery; and
   g. the arrangements for performance monitoring and future reporting to the Climate Change Committee;

iii. agree to recommend to the Council that the presentations include updates on the following areas of particular interest to the Committee:
   a. the continuation and further development of collaboration between Housing and Property and the Climate Change and Energy Team, including opportunities arising from energy savings, identified underspends, external funding and further investment in housing and property projects;
   b. opportunities to attract external investment and accelerate energy-efficiency and low-carbon retrofit across the Council's existing school and wider operational estate, alongside delivery of new facilities through the Highland Investment Plan;
   c. the funding and delivery plan for the Council's fleet transition;
   d. progress on sustainable food and school-meal activity previously requested by the Committee;
   e. progress arising from Education's commitment to engage with the Scottish Youth Parliament following its presentation to the Committee; and

f. the Council-wide response to increasing climate risks, including coastal change, flooding, extreme weather and wildfire; and

iv. agree to recommend to the Council that, following consideration of the three cluster presentations, officers bring a consolidated report to the Committee identifying shared priorities, gaps in delivery, opportunities for greater integration and any matters requiring recommendation to Full Council or another strategic committee.

Further discussion took place, during which Members supported the proposed additional recommendations, commenting that it would be helpful to understand the overall picture of the work being undertaken across the Council to address climate change. Assurance having been sought that resourcing was sufficient to deliver the Council's strategic approach and meet the obligations set out in the national Climate Change Plan, it was explained that resourcing was under consideration and would form part of the report to the CMT.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **NOTED** progress of the Net Zero Programme as outlined in the report and Appendix 1 of the report;

* ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that, across the next two scheduled meetings of the Climate Change Committee, the senior officer leads for the Council's Place, People and Corporate service clusters be invited to present their respective plans for contributing to the Council's Net Zero targets and addressing the climate and ecological emergencies. These presentations should set out:

   a. the actions, programmes and measurable outcomes being delivered or planned within each cluster;
   b. how climate mitigation, adaptation, energy, ecological and community-resilience considerations are being integrated into service, financial, workforce, asset and investment planning;
   c. the cluster's arrangements for engaging with the Climate Change and Energy Team and the relevant Net Zero thematic groups;
   d. opportunities to secure external investment, generate savings and reinvest benefits in further delivery, including estate retrofit, fleet transition and other spend-to-save projects;
   e. how the cluster's plans contribute to tackling fuel poverty, inequalities and the differing needs of Highland's rural, island and vulnerable communities;
   f. the principal gaps, barriers and resource or specialist-support requirements affecting delivery; and
   g. the arrangements for performance monitoring and future reporting to the Climate Change Committee;

* iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the presentations include updates on the following areas of particular interest to the Committee:

   a. the continuation and further development of collaboration between Housing and Property and the Climate Change and Energy Team, including opportunities arising from energy savings, identified underspends, external funding and further investment in housing and property projects;
   b. opportunities to attract external investment and accelerate energy-efficiency and low-carbon retrofit across the Council's existing school and wider operational estate, alongside delivery of new facilities through the Highland Investment Plan;

c. the funding and delivery plan for the Council's fleet transition;
d. progress on sustainable food and school-meal activity previously requested by the Committee;
e. progress arising from Education's commitment to engage with the Scottish Youth Parliament following its presentation to the Committee; and
f. the Council-wide response to increasing climate risks, including coastal change, flooding, extreme weather and wildfire; and

* iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that, following consideration of the three cluster presentations, officers bring a consolidated report to the Committee identifying shared priorities, gaps in delivery, opportunities for greater integration and any matters requiring recommendation to Full Council or another strategic committee.

ii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Waste
Cunntas às Ùr Buidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Sgudal

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was suggested that displaying graphics on bins showing the composition of the waste being collected would be an effective way of promoting recycling. In response, the Principal Waste Management Officer confirmed that consideration could be given to promoting recycling messages through social media;
- further information was sought, and provided, in relation to waste audits in schools;
- £120k to provide enhanced recycling infrastructure across the school estate was a relatively modest sum in the context of the Council's overall budget but could have a significant impact. Providing recycling infrastructure in schools would help to foster good recycling habits among young people, and it was suggested that the matter merited further consideration as part of the budget-setting process for the following year;
- the work being undertaken to reduce food waste in schools was commended. It was added that it would be helpful to gather evidence on which menu options generated the greatest volume of food waste and that school catering staff would be a valuable source of information in that regard;
- in relation to the rollout of twin-stream recycling, it was highlighted that the labels indicating what should be placed in each bin had, in many cases, worn off, and it was suggested that consideration be given to re-labelling the bins. It was further suggested that consideration be given to including a supplementary message advising that recyclable waste should be clean and placed in bins loose rather than bagged;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that there was currently no Council service for the recycling of crisp packets. It was added that new regulations were due to come into force in 2027 requiring local authorities to collect soft plastics and film, although implementation had been delayed in England. Officers would continue to monitor the situation;
- congratulations were extended to the Waste Services Team on receiving the Gold Award in the Waste and Recycling category at the 2026 APSE Scotland Striving for Excellence Awards;

- appreciation was expressed to the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations for attending a recent meeting of Hilton, Milton and Castle Heather Community Council to speak about the work of the Waste Service;
- information was sought, and provided, on the procedure to be followed and the responsibilities of the Waste Service where signage and cones were left on a pavement by a Council service or contractor following completion of works;
- the range of organisations involved in recycling and reuse, including ILM Highland, Inverness Tool Library and New Start Highland, was commended. It was fantastic to see the projects that had been funded through the Highland Reuse and Repair Fund, and it was hoped that more funding would be allocated in next year's budget to support further rounds of the Fund; and
- further to earlier comments, it was highlighted that the provision of recycling infrastructure in schools had been one of the key requests made by the Highland Youth Parliament when representatives had attended the Committee earlier in the year, and it was queried whether any discussions had taken place with the Youth Parliament on the matter. In response, it was explained that the focus so far had been on the waste audits and work associated with the Food in Schools project, but that there was potential to hold discussions with, and seek input from, the Youth Parliament. Members further suggested that the matter be raised with the Council's Property and Education Services as an investment in the school estate. The Chair added that the Youth Parliament had had four asks of the Council, which the Council had agreed to progress, and emphasised the need for ongoing discussion, involving youth representatives, across Council services.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Waste Thematic Group.

iii. Net Zero Thematic Group Update – Planning, Land Use and Environment Cunntas às Ùr Buidheann Chuspaireil Neoni Luim – Dealbhachadh, Cleachdadh Fearainn agus Àrainneachd

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

In introducing the report, the Strategic Lead – Environment, Development and Transport Planning drew attention to the letter at Appendix 2, from the Leader and Convener of the Council to the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs, highlighting increasing concerns regarding climate risk in Highland. It was explained that, since the publication of the agenda and papers, a response had been received acknowledging the impacts of climate change in Highland, outlining the funding currently available and indicating a willingness to meet and discuss further ideas. It was confirmed that the response could be circulated to Members for comment following the meeting.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the detailed report, and the good news within it, including the increased capacity within the Ecology Planning Team and the anticipated continuation of Nature Restoration Fund funding, was welcomed;
- Members commended the letter at Appendix 2 of the report, which conveyed Highland's vulnerability to climate risk and the particular circumstances facing the Council, and looked forward to receiving the response;

- it was helpful to see the wide range of projects that had been supported through the Nature Restoration Fund;
- in response to a question regarding how communities could become involved in the development of the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP), it was confirmed that a Call for Ideas was currently underway, inviting views on land use and development preferences, including the protection of land. The Call for Ideas was open until 18 September 2026, although it was possible that the deadline might be extended due to anticipated delays in receiving feedback from the Scottish Government on the Gate Check process. Further discussion took place, during which Members referred to instances where communities had believed an area of land to be amenity land when, in planning terms, it had been identified for development, and it was queried how the HLDP process could be used to address such situations. In response, it was explained that communities could submit either place-based or policy-based proposals through the Call for Ideas exercise. Information was also sought, and provided, on the approach being taken to development that would require access to a car, during which it was explained that it was necessary to take a pragmatic and proportionate approach in an area such as Highland, which had a sizeable rural community and areas of depopulation that were fragile; and
- thanks were expressed for the Members' workshop which had provided an opportunity for Members to contribute to the draft Greenspace Biodiversity Management Strategy.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of actions by the Planning, Land Use and Environment Thematic Group.

1. Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026-2040
Plana Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde na h-Alba 2026–2040

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was queried whether, in future, the Carbon Dioxide equivalent impact of some of the Council's major challenges or projects could be quantified to enable a more targeted approach to decision-making. In response, it was explained that life-cycle carbon assessments were being undertaken for seven Highland Investment Plan projects as a first step towards viewing carbon as a commodity against a project. The intention was that, once a baseline had been established, the approach would be rolled out to other projects;
- the greater emphasis being placed on the adaptation and resilience aspect of climate change was welcomed;
- simple measures, such as more frequent clearing of drains and gullies, could make a significant difference in the event of flooding, helping to prevent costly damage to roads and pavements, and the importance of cross-service working was emphasised. It was added that staffing resources to undertake activities such as clearing drains had reduced over the years, and it was necessary to find ways to fund frontline resources to enable issues arising within communities to be addressed promptly;
- alignment between the national Climate Change Plan and the Council's priorities was key. However, as indicated in the report, a number of concerns and

uncertainties remained in that regard, particularly in relation to funding and long-term implementation. The ability to deliver on aspirations was questioned, and it was suggested that both national government and the Council needed to do more to deliver a transition that enabled communities to thrive, remain sustainable and be resilient to risks such as flooding and wildfires;

- attention was drawn to section 3.1 of the report, which stated that the publication of Scotland's Climate Change Plan reinforced the conclusions reached by the Council in March 2026 that the scale, complexity and crosscutting nature of climate change, energy transition and community resilience now required a more coordinated corporate approach to delivery. It was suggested that this indicated the Council had not achieved as much progress as it might have to date, despite the efforts of the Climate Change and Energy Team, and it was questioned whether climate change had been taken seriously enough. Reference was also made to the National Emergency Briefing documentary film, which it was recommended be promoted to Members, officers and the public. One of the key messages highlighted in the film was that, should the Gulf Stream stop within the next 50 years, it was likely that Scotland would be frozen for nine months of the year, which would have severe consequences for agriculture, whisky production and engineering linked to port infrastructure. In responding to the points raised, the Climate Change and Energy Team Manager explained that the Council was recognised externally as being one of the most advanced local authorities in terms of its thinking and the processes being put in place. However, funding was not at the level required to deliver the Council's aspirations, and this was an issue at a national level. Highland was a major contributor to UK energy security, and additional support was required, together with long-term funding strategies rather than the current annual funding arrangements;
- reference was made to the Isle of Raasay's participation in the Carbon Neutral Islands Project and the associated Community Action Plan, and it was suggested that it was necessary to consider how similar action plans could be rolled out across Highland;
- the Chair draw attention to section 7 of the report, which stated that the Council's call for long-term and predictable funding was only partially reflected in the Climate Change Plan in that, while the Plan provided additional information on investment requirements, costs and benefits, it did not introduce significant new funding commitments for local government. It was emphasised that the Council was a key delivery partner in meeting both local and national Net Zero targets and therefore required the necessary capacity and resources to fulfil that role. The Climate Change Plan was sadly lacking in detail on what support might be available and, as indicated in the report, uncertainty remained regarding delivery capacity, resourcing and the practical implementation of actions at local level. The Chair therefore proposed the following additional recommendation which, following further discussion regarding how this and the earlier additional recommendations would align with the Council's budget setting process, was accepted by the Committee:-

iv. agree to recommend to the Council that, in light of the implications of Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 and building on the Council's Net Zero Strategy and programme-led approach to climate change, energy and community resilience, a report be brought to Full Council no later than December 2026 setting out:
   a. how the national Climate Change Plan aligns with the Council's Net zero target and programme;

b. any additional actions, responsibilities or delivery pressures arising for the Council;
c. the implications for the capacity and resourcing of the Climate Change and Energy Team and other relevant Council services;
d. the external funding, invest-to-save, income-generation and other sustainable funding opportunities available to support delivery; and
e. any staffing, financial, governance or organisational proposals requiring Council approval, in sufficient time to inform the Council's budget and workforce planning for 2027/28.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the publication of Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026-2040;
ii. **NOTED** the implications of the Climate Change Plan for the Council;
iii. **NOTED** that the final Climate Change Plan reinforced the strategic direction approved by the Council in March 2026 and supported the Council's ongoing programme of work to strengthen coordination of climate mitigation, adaptation, energy transition and community resilience across Council services; and

* iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that, in light of the implications of Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 and building on the Council's Net Zero Strategy and programme-led approach to climate change, energy and community resilience, a report be brought to Full Council no later than December 2026 setting out:
   a. how the national Climate Change Plan aligns with the Council's Net zero target and programme;
   b. any additional actions, responsibilities or delivery pressures arising for the Council;
   c. the implications for the capacity and resourcing of the Climate Change and Energy Team and other relevant Council services;
   d. the external funding, invest-to-save, income-generation and other sustainable funding opportunities available to support delivery; and
   e. any staffing, financial, governance or organisational proposals requiring Council approval, in sufficient time to inform the Council's budget and workforce planning for 2027/28.

2. Fourth Climate Change Risk Assessment – Independent Assessment Ceathramh Measadh Cunnairt Atharrachadh na Gnàth-shìde – Measadh Neo-eisimeileach

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members raised concern regarding the increasing frequency of wildfires and, with reference to a recent article in The Lancet, emphasised the significant public health risks arising from the inhalation of smoke generated by such incidents. It was suggested that every effort should be made to prevent wildfires from occurring in Scotland and to raise awareness of the associated health risks;
- support was expressed for the earlier suggestion of screening the National Emergency Briefing on the climate and nature crises in the UK for Elected Members and officers;

- challenges relating to food and energy insecurity were highlighted, with particular emphasis on the impact these issues had on farmers;
- the pragmatic nature of the Independent Assessment was welcomed;
- reference was made to the links between climate resilience, land use and food security. Concern was expressed regarding the precarious nature of food supply chains, with reference to recent disruption to food supplies in Skye, and it was suggested that consideration be given to opportunities to increase local food production, including through crofting and increased access to land for allotments, thereby supporting both food security and community resilience; and
- the Chair outlined warnings of increasingly extreme climate-related crises, including food shortages, rising food costs, water shortages and wildfires, and, further to earlier comments regarding the National Emergency Briefing, proposed an additional recommendation, namely that the Committee agree to recommend to the Council that screenings of the National Emergency Briefing on climate and nature in the UK be organised for staff and Elected Members to inform the continued development of the Council-wide Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan and resilience activities across Council services.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the findings of the Technical Report and A Well-Adapted UK summarised in the report and the associated appendices;
ii. **NOTED** the implications of these reports for the Council's climate adaptation and resilience activities;
* iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the findings of the Technical Report and A Well-Adapted UK be used to inform the continued development of the Council-wide Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan and related adaptation activity, where relevant and appropriate; and
* iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that screenings of the National Emergency Briefing on climate and nature in the UK be organised for staff and Elected Members to inform the continued development of the Council-wide Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan and resilience activities across Council services.

3. Highland Adapts Update and Funding Request
Cunntas às Ùr agus Iarrtas Maoineachaidh Co-cheangailte ris A' Ghàidhealtachd a' Freagarrachadh

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

In presenting the report, the Net Zero Programme Manager highlighted that, since publication of the report, Highlands and Islands Enterprise had confirmed a contribution of £20,000 to the Highland Adapts Partnership. Approval of the Council's proposed contribution of £15,000 would result in the Partnership being fully funded for 2026/27.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress made by the Highland Adapts Partnership since the previous report to Members in May 2025 and the planned priorities for 2026/27;

ii. **NOTED** the increased focus on climate adaptation, resilience and preparedness within national policy, including Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 and Scotland's National Adaptation Plan 2024-2029 (SNAP3);

iii. **NOTED** the contribution of Highland Adapts to the delivery of the Council's strategic approach to Climate Change, Energy and Community Resilience; and

* iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval of £15,000 of funding towards the Highland Adapts Partnership for 2026/27 to support continued delivery of regional climate adaptation and resilience activity across Highland.

4. Performance Monitoring Report Q1 2026/27
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R1 2026/27

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

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the service performance information.

The meeting concluded at 3.55 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 13 August 2026 at 9.30 am.

Present:

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

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Christie
Mr J Finlayson (remote)
Ms C Gillies (remote)
Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Ms E Knox (remote)
Mr R MacKintosh (remote)
Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Mr J Murray
Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mrs T Robertson (remote)

In attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer – Operations and Maintenance
Mr I Braker, Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead - Finance
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Mr B Cameron, Strategic Lead – Housing and Customer Services
Ms J Ross, Service Lead – Housing Policy and Customer Services
Mr P Tomalin, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Mr A Puls, Environment Manager
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Ms P Sheldon, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Mr B Cumming, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Mr O Jenkins-Boobyer, Nature Conservation Officer
Ms H Jones, HR Business Partner
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Superintendent D Ross, Divisional Commander, Police Scotland

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Business

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 5: Mr A Christie and Mr D Millar
Item 8: Mr A Christie

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

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Communities and Place Committee.

4. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha

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

5. Police Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Poileis

Transparency Statements: The following Members declared a connection to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:

Mr A Christie, as Chief Executive of the Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau
Mr D Millar, as a family member was a serving Police Officer outwith Highland

There had been circulated Report No CP/15/26 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the improvements in shoplifting and housebreaking rates were acknowledged, and it was queried how the housebreaking detection rate of 1 in 3, which was considered to be effective, was being achieved. However, other Members commented that an increase in shoplifting had been reported to the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee, and it was queried whether differences in performance could be attributed to varying levels of police resources across different areas. In response, Members were informed that Police officers were working closely with local businesses, while also maintaining a high-visibility presence and targeting offenders. Engagement was also taking place with offenders to identify the underlying causes of offending behaviour, and individuals were being signposted to partner agencies for support with the aim of breaking the cycle of repeat offending. Whilst some areas were experiencing increases in offending, the overall picture showed a reduction, and the focus on shoplifting would continue. In relation to housebreaking, positive progress had been made in relation to forensic recovery and prosecution, and it was explained that individual offenders often targeted multiple properties;

- information was sought on the reasons for the increase in the number of cases relating to the cruel and unnatural treatment of children in 2025/26 compared to the three preceding years. In response, Members were informed that the increase was not thematic and was attributable to the recording of cases of online crime. Work was ongoing in schools, as well as with parents, to raise awareness of the dangers associated with online activity, and the situation would continue to be monitored over the next 6 months;
- whilst the Policing for Our Communities programme was welcomed, it was questioned whether police resourcing was sufficient to deliver it. In response, Members were informed that the Chief Constable was committed to ensuring that frontline resources were deployed to frontline duties as intended. The Divisional Commander provided an overview of the Policing for Our Communities model, which was intended to create additional capacity for community engagement by managing lower-level criminality more effectively, alongside a dedicated team to respond to urgent calls. The model had been implemented in Inverness as the first phase of delivery, and a bespoke briefing could be provided, or an update would be included in the next Police Performance Report;
- it was queried whether Driver Engagement North events would be held in rural areas as well as urban areas. In response, the Divisional Commander highlighted the significant amount of work being undertaken by the Roads Policing Unit, including investigating where and why accidents happened and delivering road safety education to young people and tourists. In relation to tourists in particular, officers were engaging with drivers at key locations such as Urquhart Castle and Culloden Moor to reinforce the driving standards expected in the UK. Work was also underway with organisations such as SSE and UHI to extend the reach of road safety messaging to a wider audience. Members requested that Skye also be prioritised for driver engagement activity due to the significant number of motorhomes visiting the island. The Divisional Commander confirmed that this would be fed back to the Roads Policing Unit;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the provision of a portal for members of the public to upload dashcam footage of dangerous drivers was being progressed as a priority. However, there were challenges in terms of the administration involved;
- Members referred to Community Council meetings being a forum for the public to raise concerns. However, Police representatives could not always attend these meetings, and it was queried how contact could be made with relevant officers when feedback was required on incidents. In response, it was explained that designated points of contact would be provided for all areas as part of the Policing

for Our Communities Programme. However, until the model had been fully rolled out, Members were welcome to contact the Divisional Commander directly;

- it was queried whether Police officers could engage with car rental firms regarding the provision of introductory information for drivers from outwith the area to ensure they were prepared for driving on rural Highland roads;
- concern was expressed regarding the increase in domestic crime, and it was queried what factors were contributing to the increase, including whether it was attributable to crimes against women or offences affecting older adults, such as financial manipulation. The increase in sexual crime was also an area of concern. In response, it was confirmed that Police Scotland had a strong approach to tackling violence against women and girls, and it was hoped that the increase in domestic and sexual crime was attributable to increased confidence in reporting. It was explained that confidence in reporting was influenced not only by policing but by a victim-focused, whole system approach. It was further explained that the figure in the report encompassed all domestic crime types but that it could be broken down into different categories;
- in relation to shoplifting, information was sought on the motivation behind the theft, including whether stolen goods were being re-sold to fund alcohol or drugs dependency, or whether items such as food and baby formula were being targeted. The Divisional Commander confirmed that further detail could be provided. However, anecdotal evidence suggested that high value goods were being stolen for re-sale;
- hate crime was often triggered by national events, and information was sought, and provided, on how such incidents were monitored to establish when resources might need to be deployed;
- the increasing complexity of scams was highlighted, and an update was sought on how the national task force that had been established was addressing the issue;
- the incursion of serious and organised crime from across the UK was a worrying trend, and it was queried whether there was sufficient support in place, in terms of staffing and resources, to address it;
- the rollout of Body Worn Video and the provision of taser training were welcomed, as were the establishment of the National Retail Crime Task Force and the work being undertaken at a national level to tackle fraud. However, there were areas, such as the sale of energy drinks to children, where restrictions were voluntary, and it was queried whether legislation should be introduced in that regard. In response, it was explained that the latter was a matter for Trading Standards rather than the Police;
- with reference to the increase in bail offences, it was questioned whether Police Scotland was being adequately supported by the criminal justice system;
- Members praised the effectiveness of the Rider Refinement programme. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the programme would be rolled out nationally, with advertising taking place online and within the motorcycle community; and
- in relation to motorcycle safety, reference was made to the effective use of undercover Police motorcycles in Northumberland, and it was queried whether such vehicles were available in Highland. In response, it was explained that the preferred tactic in Highland was to utilise high-visibility motorcycles and engage with riders to reduce negative behaviour.

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

6. **Revenue Budget Final Outturn 2025/26 and Q1 Monitoring to 31 May 2026/27**
Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2025/26 agus Sgrùdadh R1 gu 31 Cèitean 2026/27

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

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the current financial position for the Quarter 4 Outturn 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
ii. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for the period ending 31 May 2026/27 as set out in the report and Appendices 3 and 4 of the report;
iii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
iv. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery.

7. **Capital Monitoring Report – Final Outturn 2025/26 and Q1 Monitoring to 31 May 2026/27**
Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach Buidseat Calpa 2025/26 agus Sgrùdadh R1 gu 31 Cèitean 2026/27

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed regarding delays in the delivery of play equipment, and it was queried whether this should be reflected in the accounting as the budget showed an underspend when that was not the case. It was further queried whether the delays were attributable to a specific supplier or were an industry-wide issue;
- in response to a question regarding the landfill ban, which had originally been due to come into effect in March 2025, it was explained that the implementation date had been extended to December 2027 following a derogation by SEPA. However, no update had been received on whether there would be a further extension;
- concern having been expressed regarding the significant amount of outstanding snagging works at Portree Burial Ground, the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to provide Mr D Millar with further information directly;
- reference was made to the variance in the Vehicle & Plant Purchases budget in both 2025/26 and 2026/27, and information was sought, and provided, on the availability of equipment such as gully emptying machines;
- the provision of a Waste Transfer Station in Fort William was welcomed, and it was suggested that it would be helpful to receive information on the associated cost savings; and
- it was queried whether budget underspends, which the report indicated would be reprofiled, could be directed towards public conveniences and street cleaning, both of which were key issues for constituents.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the outturn for the year 2025/26 as set out in the report at Appendix 1;
ii. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for the year 2026/27 as set out in the report and Appendix 2 of the report; and
iii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed.

8. Highland Local Child Poverty Action Report 2025/26
Aithisg Gnìomh Bochdainn Chloinne Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd 2025/26

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item as Chief Executive of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and the significant amount of work taking place to tackle child poverty. Reference was made to the calls to action in the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission's final report, and Members looked forward to further information being provided on possible ways forward;
- more than one in five children was living in poverty, which, in 2026, was considered to be a source of shame for society. Whilst much in the report was to be commended, such as the provision of Money Counts training, it was very similar to the 2024/25 report, and it was suggested that significant change was required. It was commented that, whilst the report outlined the work being undertaken by the Council, NHS Highland and other partners to tackle child poverty, it did not include the contribution of groups such as Addictions Counselling Inverness, the Pultneytown People's Project and Citizens Advice Bureaux. It was suggested that future reports should be broadened to include the contribution of third sector groups throughout Highland. Employability and a whole-family approach were key to addressing poverty, and it was necessary to draw in schools and all organisations with links to families and children. It was further suggested that it was necessary to explore new ways of tackling poverty, and the calls to action set out by the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission provided an opportunity to change the direction of the Council. In response, the Chief Officer – Housing and Communities concurred regarding the significant contribution being made by social enterprise, voluntary, community and third sector groups, alongside public sector organisations. It was explained that the purpose of the report was not to capture all that activity, but to report against the previously agreed action plan (2023-2026). However, the points raised regarding the need to broaden the report and adopt a different approach in future were acknowledged. Responding to the calls to action set out by the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission was a critical area of work, and the Members' seminar scheduled to take place at the end of the August, together with the work being undertaken by partnership groups, would inform the way forward. The proposed actions for 2026/27 would inevitably change based on the work taking place, and it was anticipated that next year's report would reflect the broader approach requested;

- Addictions Counselling Inverness had been in operation for 40 years, and it was emphasised that some societal problems were so deeply entrenched that short-term strategies were unlikely to have a significant impact. Instead, it was suggested that long-term funding was required;
- the Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) had previously indicated that it had considered withdrawing from the CPP, and it was hoped that closer collaboration with, and greater support for, third sector organisations would be achieved in future;
- in response to a question regarding the development of flexible models of childcare in rural areas, it was confirmed that funding had been secured through the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund and that opportunities to expand the Ardnamurchan "Work and Play Club" were being explored. Further reports would be brought forward in that regard;
- section 6.1 of the report indicated that a core priority within the Council's Programme was to tackle child poverty and promote access to welfare support and, in light of the further statements set out in section 8.1 of the report, it was questioned whether this was happening or whether it remained an aspiration. It was also queried how many steps had been taken to tackle child poverty since the introduction of the UK Child Poverty Act 2010;
- reference was made to discussions at the meeting of the Full Council in June 2026, during which concerns had been raised regarding the lack of funding for youth hubs and clubs across Highland, and a request had been made for urgent action to release funds to enable summer programmes to proceed in full. Members had warned of the financial pressures these organisations were facing, to the extent some were at risk of closure, and had emphasised the stress being experienced by youth workers, whose role was central to tackling the day-to-day effects of child poverty. Members had subsequently written to officers seeking intervention. However, a response had not yet been received. It was therefore queried what action had been taken to release funds under the management of the Council to youth hubs and clubs. Furthermore, in light of the concerns that had been raised, the statement in section 6.4 of the report that work to tackle and mitigate child poverty was embedded within business-as-usual activity across partnership organisations and the third and community sectors was questioned. In response, it was explained that officers were working with HTSI to administer funding that had been allocated to support the delivery of the Child Poverty Plan, particularly focusing on strengthening the role of the third sector. The framework to allocate this funding had been developed based on the priorities in the 2026-29 Plan and, in June 2026, £90k had been allocated to 11 third sector organisations; and
- it was highlighted that the report contained only one reference to activity in Inverness, and it was suggested that it would be helpful, in future reports, to provide more information on specific projects and where they were being delivered, particularly in Inverness given its population and levels of poverty. In response, it was confirmed that there was a significant of work sitting behind the report, and that a breakdown of the activity taking place across Highland could be provided. The Chair requested that this be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the actions carried out in 2025/26 as set out in Section 2 of the Highland Child Poverty Action Report in Appendix 2 of the report;
ii. **AGREED** the actions for delivery in 2026/27 as set out in Section 3 of the Action Report in Appendix 2 of the report;

iii. **AGREED** to delegate funding authority for the Adopt and Adapt programme to the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, in consultation with the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee, in line with section 10 in the report; and
iv. **AGREED** that a breakdown of the activity taking place across Highland to address child poverty be circulated to Committee Members.

9. Private Water Suppy Duties - Fees Review

Cìsean Solar Uisge Prìobhaideach – Ath-sgrùdadh Chìsean

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

The Committee **APPROVED**:-

i. the revised fee structure for Regulated supplies (commercial and larger domestic supplies) - the initial Risk Assessment fee changes from a one-off charge of £97 to a charge of £97 for the first hour and £50 for each additional hour; and
ii. the revised fee structure for Regulated supplies (commercial and larger domestic supplies) - a new fee for the 5 yearly Risk Assessment Review of £75 for the first hour and £50 per additional hour.

10. Abandoned and Nuisance Vehicles Update

Cunntas às Ùr air Carbadan Trèigte is Draghail

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- abandoned vehicles were causing concern across a number of wards, and it was welcomed that the issue was being taken seriously and that measures were being put in place to try to improve the situation;
- in response to a question, it was explained that contracts were in place for uplifting vehicles for destruction, which allowed vandalised cars or those without number plates, for example, to be dealt with effectively. More challenging were vehicles that were in a reasonable condition and therefore not fit for destruction, as the Council did not currently have a contract in place for uplifting vehicles for storage. As indicated in the report, this was being actively pursued, and potential sites for a vehicle storage compound were being explored. It was hoped that the position would be clearer within the next couple of months;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that responsibility for dealing with vehicles abandoned on trunk roads rested with the Council, and an update was provided regarding the car currently abandoned at Gollanfield on the A96;
- some Members commented that it was not clear who should be contacted regarding abandoned or nuisance vehicles, and it was suggested that it would be helpful to provide a roadmap setting out the appropriate Council service or partner agency to contact in different circumstances. The Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services confirmed this could be taken forward;
- enforcement appeared to be challenging, and anything that could be done to strengthen and improve enforcement would be welcomed by Members and constituents;

- Members emphasised the need for constructive contact to be made with owners where cars appeared to have been abandoned but were in a reasonable condition. The Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services confirmed that this was key to finding out the individual circumstances;
- a request was made for a local briefing on how it was intended to deal with abandoned vehicles in Ward 10. The Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services confirmed that this could be arranged;
- with reference to the proposed enforcement approach at section 7 of the Policy, Members expressed the view that the terms “robust” and “effective” should be added to the list of characteristics;
- abandoned vehicles were a blight on housing estates and public car parks and were often in a poor condition and potentially dangerous to children. Whilst the proposed Policy on Abandoned Vehicles was welcomed, it was considered that it was not sufficiently robust, and reference was made to discussions at the Council’s Redesign Board during which it had been suggested that a zero-tolerance pilot project be implemented in the Inverness Central and Ness-side wards due to the significant number of abandoned vehicles in those areas. Attention was drawn to section 5 of the proposed Policy, which stated that one of the factors to be considered in determining whether a vehicle was abandoned was that the vehicle had remained stationary for a significant period. It was suggested that it was necessary to be more specific, with the onus placed on the owner to demonstrate why a vehicle should not be considered abandoned, and it was proposed that the reference to “a significant period” be amended to “six weeks from the first report of the vehicle being abandoned”. Further discussion took place, during which other Members expressed support for a more robust approach. In responding to the points raised, the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services expressed reservations, from an operational perspective, regarding the imposition of a specific timescale due to the wide range of individual and, in some cases, complex circumstances encountered by officers when assessing whether a vehicle was abandoned, examples of which were provided. It was suggested that the aforementioned contract for vehicle uplift and storage would place the Council in a better position to deal with vehicles where there was uncertainty as to whether they were abandoned. In addition, the proposed joint enforcement work with the DVLA together with the potential devolved powers outlined in the report would help to address Members’ concerns. At the conclusion of the discussion, and in light of Members’ calls for a specific timescale and the ongoing work regarding the possibility of a vehicle uplift and storage contract, it was proposed that consideration of the Policy be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee to allow officers to examine the advantages and disadvantages of the specific timescale suggested.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the update from Environmental Health on abandoned vehicles including the data from 2025/26;
ii. **AGREED** that consideration of the Policy on Abandoned Vehicles be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee to allow officers to examine the advantages and disadvantages of the six-week timescale proposed during discussion;
iii. **NOTED** the proposed improvements being considered to address abandoned vehicles by Environmental Health;
iv. **NOTED** the role of the Council and wider partners in addressing nuisance vehicles and proposed improvements;

v. **AGREED** that a roadmap be developed setting out the appropriate Council service or partner agency to contact in different circumstances; and
vi. **AGREED** that a local briefing on abandoned vehicles be arranged in Ward 10.

11. Draft Greenspace Biodiversity Management Strategy 2026-2030
Dreachd Ro-innleachd Stiùiridh Bith-iomadachd Àite-uaine 2026–2030

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the comprehensive report;
- it was highlighted that the Inverness Courier was currently running a campaign inviting members of the public to identify examples of overgrown land, and it was suggested that, to increase public understanding, it would be helpful to publish a map showing areas that were not being routinely cultivated for biodiversity reasons;
- several Members emphasised the need for a greater level of public education and information on biodiversity. Particular reference was made to the need for signage in areas where biodiversity management was taking place, and it was suggested that consideration be given to promotional events;
- the importance of wildflowers and grasses along roadside verges for insect life was emphasised and, in light of Plantlife's "No Mow May" campaign, it was questioned why section 6.3 of the Strategy referred to the cutting of roadside verges commencing in May rather than later in the year. In response, it was clarified that the reference in the Strategy related to the current verge maintenance manual, under which verges were cut in May for safety reasons, and not to designated special verges recognised for having higher biodiversity value;
- it was impressive that natural capital supported approximately 54,000 jobs and contributed around £8 billion annually to the Highlands and Islands economy;
- the Strategy referred to the possibility of establishing a Council-run plant nursery. However, given that High Life Highland already operated a plant nursery at Inverness Botanic Gardens, it was queried why greater use could not be made of that facility rather than replicating it. In response, it was confirmed that officers were exploring opportunities to work collaboratively with the nursery at the Botanic Gardens, and that the potential Council-run nursery would build on existing provision and enable plants to grown locally rather than sourcing seeds from elsewhere in Scotland;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of matters, including whether any measures within the Strategy could be supported through planning conditions and whether officers were liaising with the Planning team in that regard; whether there were any opportunities to transport grass cuttings to local composting schemes; the plans for Tain Links, including how decisions on biodiversity management were made and how it could be ensured that the area was providing maximum benefit for all users; and whether there had been ongoing discussions with landowners and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service regarding biodiversity management following the Dava wildfire, which had been accelerated by verges not having been cut;
- Members commended NatureScot's natural capital tool, which should be useful to planners going forward;
- the Strategy indicated that deadwood should be preserved where possible. However, it was highlighted that deadwood could act as a fuel source in the event

of a fire, and it was suggested that a balance needed to be struck between biodiversity and safety, particularly in light of the number of Battery Energy Storage System planning applications being submitted;
- in response to questions regarding composting, it was explained that insufficient mass of green waste was generated within Highland to support local composting. Trial shredding of woody waste to be sent for composting was taking place. However, it was clarified that this was being undertaken to improve efficiency of haulage;
- reference was made to instances of trees being vandalised in orchards, and it was suggested that the provision of signage might help to minimise vandalism;
- the importance of burial grounds, not only as green spaces but also as places of remembrance, was emphasised, and it was highlighted that sensitivity in relation to burial grounds should be reflected in the Strategy;
- the Strategy referred to the Chapel Yard and Old High cemeteries in Inverness, and it was highlighted that these cemeteries, together with Blackfriars Cemetery, were the subject of a report to the City of Inverness Area Committee on 17 August 2026 proposing a feasibility study to identify regeneration opportunities and develop a longer-term vision for their future use; and
- concern was expressed regarding amenity in urban areas and the potential conflict between the Strategy and agreements between the Council and housing developers on the maintenance of open spaces within housing estates. The need for caution and meaningful public consultation was emphasised, as there was a risk that the Strategy could be perceived as an excuse for the Council not to cut grass.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the content of the draft Greenspace Biodiversity Management Strategy 2026-2030; and
ii. **APPROVED** the draft Greenspace Biodiversity Management Strategy 2026-2030 for a 6-week public consultation.

12. Growing Our Future – Community Food Growing Annual Update
A’ Fàs ar n-Àm ri Teachd – Cunntas Bliadhnail mu Fhàs Biadh Coimhearsnachd

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was highlighted that the Knocknagael Green Hub had received funding from the Inverness Common Good Fund, not the Highland Council as indicated in the report;
- in response to a question regarding how demand for allotments was assessed in areas where there was no allotment provision, it was explained that the Council maintained a register of interest and that individuals could register through the Council’s website;
- it was queried how many new allotments or community food growing projects had been established in the lifetime of the Growing Our Future Action Plan. The Senior Community Development Manager undertook to revert to Mr C Ballance in that regard;

- reference was made to the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan and a proposal to remove a well-established allotment in Beauly and relocate it to a site on the edge of town which was considered to be unsuitable. It was hoped that those leading on the Highland Local Development Plan could be encouraged to be more supportive of allotments and the Growing Our Future Strategy. In response, the Senior Community Development Manager confirmed that the Planning service was supportive of, and involved in, work relating to allotments, and suggested that the case referred to was a matter for the local planning officer;
- in response to a question, it was explained that both the Council and NHS Highland were required to prepare a Good Food Nation Plan, and that collaborative work was taking place to ensure that the two plans aligned;
- Nairn was home to a significant proportion of the allotments in Highland, and there was outstanding demand for a further 20 plots. However, the report indicated that allotment demand across Highland remained below the statutory threshold requiring additional provision. Information having been sought on the statutory provision for Highland and whether this was broken down by ward, the Senior Community Development Manager clarified that there was no statutory requirement for a specific level of provision. Rather, the Council was required to ensure its waiting list did not exceed 50% of the total number of allotment plots. At present, the figure was 34%;
- many parts of Highland did not have access to allotments, and it was important that this was addressed; and
- reference was made to an area of Council land in Ward 7 that would potentially be ideal for allotments, and it was confirmed that Cai MacIver, Community Development Manager, would be the appropriate officer to contact in that regard.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress made to implement the Growing Our Future Strategy and deliver the Community Food Growing Action Plan; and
ii. **AGREED** the annual allotment reports for 2024 and 2025, as detailed at section 6.3 and Appendices 2 and 3 of the report.

13. Fleet Operations Update
Cunntas às Ùr air Obrachaidhean Cabhlaich

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

Members expressed appreciation to the Chief Officer – Facilities and Fleet Management and his team for averting a public inquiry, highlighting the significant progress that had been made following a challenging start to the year.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the outcome of the Fleet Compliance audit submitted to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner in May 2026;
ii. the decision letter following the Preliminary Hearing in January 2026;
iii. Fleet Operations performance against key compliance indicators for May 2026 and June 2026; and
iv. the position in relation to next steps and ongoing governance of Fleet compliance.

14. **Customer Services Update**
Cunntas às Ùr air Seirbheisean Luchd-cleachdaidh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the My Council Project was commended for its focus on the customer experience;
- the improvements that had been made, including the reduction in call answering times and compliance with PCI standards, which it was considered would increase customer confidence in phone payments, were welcomed; and
- putting the customer at the centre applied to all services, and thanks were expressed to the team for continuing to streamline and improve customer services.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the work and performance of the customer service network; and
ii. the improvement work completed and planned.

15. **Bereavement Services Update**
Cunntas às Ùr air Seirbheisean Caoidh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concerns were raised regarding the poor condition of the road leading to Balintore Cemetery as well as the deteriorating state of the wall at the graveyard adjacent to the Tarbat Discovery Centre. The Bereavement Services Manager undertook to investigate what could be done in relation to the road leading to Balintore Cemetery, and confirmed that the issue with the wall had already been brought to his attention and that he would arrange a meeting with the local team;
- it was queried, on behalf of Cash for Kids in Highland, how the organisation could put themselves forward for funding from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Metal Recycling Scheme. In response, it was explained that, as indicated in the report, officers were currently exploring how the scheme could be extended to other local bereavement-related charities, and a report would be brought to a future meeting;
- reference was made to a damaged headstone of historic significance at Glendale Burial Ground, and it was queried whether there were any potential sources of funding to support community-led reinstatement. The Bereavement Services Manager undertook to liaise with the memorial safety team to establish whether Glendale Burial Ground had been inspected. It was explained that a small amount of funding was available for repairs. However, such funding was intended to support works required for health and safety purposes;
- in response to a question, the Bereavement Services Manager undertook to revert to Mr D Millar regarding the possibility of local volunteers helping to maintain Portree Old Cemetery;

- an update on progress was sought, and provided, in relation to Skeabost Cemetery and Dunvegan Cemetery, and it was confirmed that these matters would be reported to the next meeting of the Skye and Raasay Committee;
- Members reiterated concerns raised earlier regarding the outstanding snagging works at Portree Cemetery. The Bereavement Services Manager confirmed that officers had been in contact with the contractor and undertook to provide a further update to Mr D Millar within the next few weeks;
- questions were raised regarding the graffiti on the historical gates at Nairn Cemetery, as well as the overgrown ivy around the headstones at Auldearn Cemetery, which was eroding the inscriptions on older gravestones. The Bereavement Services Manager undertook to liaise with the local team in that regard and revert to Mrs B Jarvie; and
- in response to a question regarding the possibility of securing funding to upgrade Chapel Yard cemetery in Inverness to a recreational space, the Bereavement Services Manager explained that a report would be considered by the City of Inverness Area Committee on 17 August 2026 proposing a feasibility study on the future use of Chapel Yard, Old High and Blackfriars cemeteries in the city centre. Subject to approval of the feasibility study, an options appraisal would be presented to a future meeting.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the progress update on the ongoing memorial safety programme;
ii. the progress of the cremator replacement project at Inverness Crematorium;
iii. the progress of current projects within the burial ground extension programme; and
iv. the update on the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management metal recycling scheme.

16. Performance Reporting for Quarter 1 2026/27
Aithris Coileanaidh airson Ràith 1 2026/27

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the increase in household waste recycling from 36% in 2024 to 45.1% in 2026, which demonstrated the positive impact of the new waste and recycling arrangements, was commended;
- Members requested that consideration be given to phased, enhanced relabelling of household recycling bins to improve public understanding and reduce contamination, particularly of the green bin for metal and plastic. It was also suggested that the public be encouraged not to bag waste before placing it in recycling bins, and that “loose, clean and dry” would be a useful message. Officers undertook to investigate the possibility of relabelling recycling bins, possibly during the Christmas period when this could be tied into other labelling activity; and
- with reference to the draft framework to support community volunteering, it was highlighted that volunteers, particularly those teaching English as a foreign language, had previously been able to claim expenses from High Life Highland but were no longer able to do so following the transfer of Youth Work and Adult Learning back to the Council. It was queried whether proposals would be brought forward to reimburse volunteers for expenses. In response, it was explained that

the original primary purpose of the volunteering framework was to support groups in their volunteering activities, including through the provision of equipment and advice on insurance. No commitment regarding expenses could be given at the time of the meeting. However, the matter would be considered as part of the overall volunteering framework which would be brought back to Members for consideration.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the service performance information.

The meeting concluded at 12.50 pm.

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 17 August 2026 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Mr C Ballance	Dr M Gregson
Mr B Boyd (am only)	Mrs J Hendry
Mr I Brown	Ms E Knox (remote)
Mr M Cameron	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr A Christie	Mr A MacKintosh
Ms H Crawford	Ms K MacLean (remote)
Mr D Fraser	Mr D Macpherson
Mr K Gowans	Mr D MacDonald
Mr A Graham (except item 1-3)	Mrs M Reid
Mr D Gregg	Mrs T Robertson

Non-Members also present:
Mr M Green

In attendance:
Mr D Haas, Senior Community Development Manager (Inverness and South)
Mr S Grant, Roads Operation Manager
Mr G Ralph, Repairs Manager, Asset Strategy
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr M Greig, Community Development Manager
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:
Chief Superintendent C Still, Police Scotland

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

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, Mr Brown referred to the MBE awarded to Mr Roddy Wood in the King's Birthday Honours for services to youth, veterans and communities in the Highlands.

Also, he informed Members of the intention to hold three online Inverness Common Good Fund Strategy Development workshops provisionally set for 7, 14 and 18 September.

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

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

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

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

Item 7 – Mr M Cameron and Mr D Macpherson
Item 9 and 11 - Mr A Christie

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of this Committee.

4. Police Scotland – Area Performance Report
Poileas Alba – Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/32/26 by the Area Commander (Inverness Area Command).

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the hard work and support of Police Scotland's Community Beats team in the City was recognised and, in particular, their collaboration with the housing team;
- some people still did not realise that they could report incidents online to the Police and there should be a communication exercise to get this message across. It was recognised that the Police 101 telephone number could be a challenge for some people to use and efforts had been made to communicate various ways to contact the Police. On the Police Scotland website, under Highlands and Islands, there was a new e-mail address for the Police community team which could be used for reporting non urgent matters;
- reference was made to an abandoned motor vehicle on the A96, which was receiving a lot of complaints from the public and required to be moved. It was taxed and had an MOT so, consequently, was a Police matter. An undertaking was given to investigate this matter;
- in relation to the increase in road traffic offences, it was good to see the Police Scotland's additional work in targeting this area, which had resulted in more convictions. A request was made for a detailed breakdown of road traffic offences. In particular, thanks were extended to officers focusing on speeding traffic on the B9006;
- assurance was sought that Police Scotland were adequately resourcing the Police service in Highland. They were providing a valuable service to the community and had to implement national initiatives and deal with more incursions of organised crime from out with the area. Inverness was the headquarters not just for local policing but for a number of national divisions and all these resources could be called upon in response to critical incidents;

- particular concern was the rise in assaults on Police officers and emergency response officers from other public sector partners. Members were informed that officers undertook two days of operational safety training a year. There was a rise in individuals who were willing to use violence not just against Police officers but also those working in other occupations e.g. NHS and Retail. People going to work deserved to be safe and should not be the victim of assault or abuse and there was a need for a better understanding why this was happening;
- with three murders in Inverness area in 2026, it was a stark reality of how society was changing in this area;
- a focus on prevention of shoplifting was seeing improvements;
- there had been a continued reduction in missing persons cases and this had been due to much more proactive work with care providers, assessment of risk, and proactive work by the Police missing persons co-ordinator;
- a year-to-date variation in the detection rate for crimes was requested for the next report. Further clarification would be provided on the drink/drug detection rate;
- reference was made to the City of Inverness retailer initiative being launched by Police Scotland. Retail Crime taskforce issued bulletins to their members highlighting ongoing trends and individuals who were active. This information was imperative in preventing and taking action against perpetrators of retail crime. Also, it would be highlighted to the Police interventions and preventions team the importance of interacting with rural retailers with support to prevent retail crime;
- Police monthly briefings to Members were acknowledged and provided very valuable information and all Members were encouraged to attend them. Also, attendance by the Police at Community Council meetings was encouraged and officers did attend when there were specific concerns to be addressed. The Inverness Community Council Forum had served well as an opportunity for the Police to attend these meetings;
- in relation to recent wildfires in Highland, this had significant resource demands not just for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service but also for the Police and it was queried if the Police could expect extra finance from the Scottish Government to cover these additional costs;
- it was confirmed that the Police interventions and preventions team did support retailers in the design of their premises to prevent shoplifting; and
- guidance was to be updated for community speed watch in Scotland and it was requested that this be shared as a number of rural communities would be keen to be involved in this initiative.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2026 – 31 March 2026;
ii. the change in format necessitated by a reduction in back-office capacity to prepare additional area committee reports; and
iii. the following information sought by Members:-
    - a detailed breakdown of road traffic offences;
    - a year to date variation in the detection rate for crimes; and
    - clarification on the drink/drug detection rate.

5. Winter Service Plan 2026-27
Plana Seirbheis a' Gheamhraidh 2026-27

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/33/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the work the winter maintenance team carried out was recognised and much appreciated by Members and communities. In terms of complaints received, the public needed to understand that it was the same team gritting roads and filling grit bins, so they could not be everywhere at once. Therefore the public were asked to be patient and support the team;
- a view was expressed that while it was appreciated that patience was essential with winter maintenance, patience wore thin when, for example, care at home staff could not attend homes due to roads not been gritted. There were times that the Council had not acted quickly enough to address gritting concerns. Further, it was suggested that there be a report on the funding criteria for winter maintenance to determine whether the service was adequately funded;
- the winter maintenance route maps detailed in the report required updating to reflect road closures and new roads around housing developments. In particular, it was requested that the Map be altered to include Macdiarmid's Road, Ardersier which was part of the school route and also to reflect the bus routes in Lochardil, Crown, Hilton, Milton and Drakies that had changed since the Map was last updated. Route maps were currently under review which would include cross boundary working and a review of optimisation of routes;
- in relation to grit bins, the policy was to prioritise bins where there was a gradient, and there was also a need to look at prioritising paths which were used extensively. If too many bins were issued the team would not be able to get round them all to fill them in winter conditions. When there were prolonged periods of snow/ice then the team did try to be innovative in ways to provide grit to communities;
- in relation to the gully emptying machine, this was effective to prevent the build up of water, which would freeze in winter conditions. A second gully emptying machine was due to be in service soon and would provide additional resource for more frequent emptying of gulleys;
- the A831 to Cannich was a priority route but the adjacent road to Tomich was not, albeit on a school route. An undertaking was given to look at this as part of the review of routes;
- the lease of snowploughs by the Council made good economic sense, given that these vehicles would only be used for a few months over the winter period. However, there was a risk if the company went out of business or the gritters had not been repaired in time when they were needed. It was queried what risk assessment for leasing gritters had been carried out. These companies were recognised companies used by other Councils and Bear Scotland and they would require to provide replacement vehicles should a gritter break down. There would also be a plan in place to cover a company going out of business;
- Local Members and Community Councils should be informed when roads in new housing developments were adopted as house builders would remove their grit bins when roads were adopted. This would be discussed with the Roads management team and the sooner roads were adopted the sooner the Council

could provide winter maintenance for the road. Further, providing plastic scoops in grit bins would be considered;

- the Council collaborated with farmers and contractors in relation to the gritting of roads. Bear Scotland were contracted by the Scottish Government and had their own road network to provide winter maintenance but the Roads team were open to collaborating with them on winter maintenance service provision;
- it was suggested that additional operators be trained so there was more of them having category 2 licences to drive a gritter when needed;
- performance statistics on the winter maintenance plan would be made available in a future report;
- as winter approached there was a concern that pavement surfaces, such as in Carse Road, King Street, Grant Street and parts of Crown area, needed to improve as they could be quite hazardous, particularly for elderly people. Members were informed that there was a programme of footpath maintenance;
- a pipe leading from a drain in the High Street, Ardersier needed fixed with the repair long overdue. A permanent solution to this issue was being looked into;
- regular communication with the public in winter conditions was highlighted and that there should be more collaboration with the NHS and the Highland Senior Citizens Network Group on how we could all look after each other better in winter conditions. There was a programme of communication with communities by the Corporate Communications team. Also, through the Council's Emergency Planning team, it would be ensured that support was available to build up communities own resilience in winter conditions. and
- overgrown hedges/trees blocking drains was highlighted and the Roads team would check what could be done to encourage landowners/home owners to maintain hedges etc.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27, subject to the points to be addressed raised at the meeting.

6. Housing Performance Report 1 April 2026-30 June 2026
Plana Seirbheis a' Gheamhraidh 2026-27

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/34/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In relation to the capital programme, it was explained that some of the capital outputs have been wrongly reported and updated figures would be circulated after the meeting. Attention was drawn to some of the specific amendments in section 8 of the report.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- while acknowledging that traffic issues on the A96 could have impacted the emergency repairs figures for Culloden and Ardersier, concern was expressed that the average re-let time for Culloden and Ardersier was 13 days longer than the overall average. It was explained this could be the result of one or a small number of properties taking a significant amount of time to re-let, thus affecting the average figures. In this regard, it was requested that consideration be given to the compilation and presentation of housing performance statistics to provide a more accurate overall performance view, and to minimise the impact of

outliers on average figures. It would be helpful if a housing performance dashboard with close to real-time figures was available for Members;
- it was requested that in future a Housing Officer be present in person to speak to the report; and
- it was queried whether the 696 properties in Inverness West included recently completed mid-market rent properties. This would be clarified outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026-30 June 2026 and ***AGREED:***

i. the updated report be circulated to the Committee;
ii. the Housing service be asked to investigate whether performance information could be presented to provide a more accurate overall picture of the current situation;
iii. information be provided to Members outwith the meeting on whether the performance report figures included the mid-market rent properties in Inverness West, and
iv. the Housing service be asked to ensure an officer was present in person for future meetings.

7. Short Term Let Control Area – Post Consultation Update
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine – Cunntas às Ùr às Dèidh Co-chomhairleachaidh

Mr M Cameron and Mr D Macpherson made Transparency Statements in respect of this item as Mr Cameron was named on an existing short term let license in the rural Inverness area and Mr Macpherson had a close family member who owned a short term let. However, having applied the objective test, they reviewed their position in relation to the item and any personal connection, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/35/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in terms of the practical effects of a Short Term Let Control (STLC) Area, it did not retrospectively change planning status. Therefore, if you were an existing operator and you did not need planning permission, the introduction of a control area would not change this. If a STLC area was introduced a future change of use would require planning permission. Information on the separate Licensing regime was also provided;
- it was queried what the additional costs in administrative expenses was expected, both for the Council and owners of Short Term Lets (STL). A detailed resourcing analysis had not yet been undertaken as not all Local Committees had yet considered whether to recommend a STLC area. The resourcing information would be submitted to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee who would have the final decision to submit a STLC area to Scottish Ministers. For operators who were thinking of operating a STL in future, they would have to apply for planning permission and pay a one off planning application fee for a change in use. Also, licensing would require to be renewed every 3 years and there would be a charge for this;

- in relation to what measurable outcomes were anticipated e.g. affordability of homes, more accommodation for rent, it was clarified that the proposal's intention was to manage change of use by planning scrutiny and, as could be seen from Badenoch and Strathspey who had already introduced a STLC area, changes of use were being managed and there was not the same proportion of new build house completions or house sales subsequently becoming STLs;
- it was queried how the proposal fitted in with the Council's empty homes work to address housing pressures. It was advised that the planning system did encourage the bringing back empty homes into positive use;
- it was queried if potential displacement had been considered to other Wards not under a STLC designation but this was not known at this stage;
- it was suggested that it should be monitored if a STLC area had improved housing provision. In this respect, an additional recommendation was proposed as follows:-" Agree to recommend to Economy and Infrastructure Committee that, should a Short Term Let Control Area be designated, a review report subject to resources be presented to the CIA Members within two years of implementation, setting out planning application outcomes, appeal outcomes, evidence of any displacement effects, measurable housing impacts, and the extent to which the Control Area has met its stated objectives should any decision to submit a proposal for designation to Scottish Ministers";
- in relation to the impact assessment contained in the report, it was suggested that an STLC area would bring greater benefit for elderly and disabled people with stability to live in an area that was not surrounded by STLs. Also, there would be a positive long term benefit for residents if they lived in an area where STLs did not outnumber them. An undertaking was giving to consider this for the report to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- a view was expressed that the STLC area should progress to the next stage, noting comments in the consultation such as too many properties being converted into STLs, rising house prices linked to STLs and the need for planning controls due to bad experiences with STLs;
- in relation to the Inverness-shire rural part of the consultation, concern was expressed regarding the low response rate to it. The response rate for the wider consultation was 608 responses and this was a good response rate;
- a view was expressed that there was limited evidence of success from the STLC area in Badenoch and Strathspey. Also, while there were benefits of a STLC area, there was no economic impact assessment of an STLC area on tourism and rural economy. However, a STLC area was a planning designation and there was no requirement to do one in terms of the regulations;
- information was provided in relation to existing new build properties that were changed to STLs within rural Inverness-shire and the certificate of lawful use process for planning purposes;
- the drift towards new build houses being bought and turned into STLs was not a healthy situation. There was a housing demand and the desire to have a thriving tourist sector and allowing the free housing market to resolve the problem was not supported. Therefore, management of the process was necessary and a STLC area would introduce planning management and scrutiny where it was actually needed;
- a Members workshop would be held to discuss relevant planning policy and how it was used within the planning application process; and
- the key point was the availability of residential housing and it was clear from responses to the survey that the majority were in favour of a STLC area.

Thereafter, Mr I Brown, seconded by Mr A Christie, **MOVED** that the recommendations in the report be approved.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mrs I MacKenzie, seconded by Ms H Crawford, moved the following addition:-

(v) Agree to recommend to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee that, should a Short Term Let Control Area be designated, a review report, subject to resources, be presented to the City of Inverness Area Committee Members within two years of implementation, setting out planning application outcomes, appeal outcomes, evidence of any displacement effects, measurable housing impacts and the extent to which the Control Area had met its stated objectives, should any decision to submit a proposal for designation to Scottish Ministers.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 12 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 9 votes, with no 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, Mrs J Hendry, Ms E Knox, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr A MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mrs M Reid.

For the Amendment:
Mr A Christie, Ms H Crawford, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr D Macpherson, Mr D McDonald, Mrs T Robertson, Mr A Graham.

Decision

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the consultation feedback and the potential implications that a Short Term Let (STL) Control Area would have on communities within the City of Inverness as set out in Appendix 3 and summarised in Section 8, and 10 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the consultation feedback and the potential implications that a STL Control Area will have on communities within rural Inverness-shire as set out in Appendix 4 and summarised in Section 9 and 10 of the report;
iii. **AGREED** to recommend to Economy and Infrastructure Committee that the proposed City of Inverness Short Term Let Control Area be progressed, should any decision to submit a proposal for designation to Scottish Ministers be taken; and
iv. **AGREED** to recommend to Economy and Infrastructure Committee that rural Inverness-shire be included within the proposed Highland Rural Short Term Let Control Area, should any decision to submit a proposal for designation to Scottish Ministers be taken.

8. Community Regeneration Fund: Allocation Update and Governance
Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd: Cunntas air Riarachadh is Stiùireadh

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/36/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the Community Regeneration Fund allocation for City of Inverness Area for 2026/27; and
ii. **AGREED** to utilise the existing delegated powers granted to Inverness Common Good Fund Sub Committee (ICGFSC) for the sifting of Expressions of Interest and assessment of applications and to make recommendations to City of Inverness Area Committee on final funding awards.

9. Inverness Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

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.

a. Financial Monitoring Q4 2025/26 and Q1 Financial Monitoring 2026/27
Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail - Cairteal 4 2025/26 agus Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail Cairteal 1 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/37/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, in terms of section 7.5 of the report;
- in terms of section 5.3.1 of the report, the Town House New Tenants income should read £0.067m; and
- reference was made to publicity surrounding the Inverness International Blues Festival which suggested the event had incurred losses of £200k to £300k. It was asked where this would be reflected and clarification was sought on the position regarding the reported deficit. In response, it was confirmed that the Inverness International Blues Festival had been delivered within the budget allocated for Events and Festivals and within the budget forecast for the event. Further detailed reports on the festival would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee. It was incorrect to suggest that the festival had resulted in a loss to the Inverness Common Good Fund.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the outturn financial monitoring report as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report for the year ended 31 March 2026;
ii. **NOTED** the financial monitoring report to 31 May 2026 as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report;
iii. **AGREED** the allocation of a maximum of £0.015m towards an updated business case for the Victorian Market, as outlined in section 9 of the report; and

iv. **AGREED** the proposals for progressing a Strategy and Financial Strategy for the Inverness Common Good Fund.

b. Inverness Common Good Fund – Victorian Market Financial Monitoring 2026/27 Quarter 1
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis – Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail na Margaidh Bhictòrianaich 2026/27 Ràith 1

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/38/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the increased transparency provided by the report was welcomed. However it was questioned whether the costs associated with the provision of the city centre public toilets should be attributed to the Victorian Market;
- forthcoming workshops were welcomed, particularly the opportunity to examine profitability in more detail;
- in terms of table 5.5 within the report, attention had been drawn to the service charge and maintenance costs and it was expressed that this did not represent great value for money. Further information was sought, and provided, in this regard; and
- in response to a question regarding the deficit forecast of £184k, it was hoped that this would reduce further in next year's budget.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the new report format set out within Appendix 1 of the report;
ii. the spend breakdown set out within Appendix 1 of the report; and
iii. the intention to develop this new report format for the Victorian Market through 2026/27 as detailed at section 8 of the report.

c. Inverness Common Good Fund – Inverness Town House Financial Monitoring 2026/27 Quarter 1
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis – Sgrùdadh Ionmhasail Taigh Baile Inbhir Nis 2026/27 Ràith 1

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/39/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- Members welcomed the transparency of the report and hoped that this would continue to develop;
- clarification was sought, and provided, in terms of the anticipated rent income;
- research into other civic town halls in Scotland showed that there was a reliance on local authority subsidies and/or government grant funding to operate, with some having merged functions with museums or cultural centres. Initiatives at the Inverness Town House, such as the introduction of the in-house bar, development of additional civic event space and greater capacity in the main hall offered an ongoing saving and there was considerable scope to develop commercial opportunities further;

- Members clarified that the catering provided at the Town House was for civic receptions and commercial bookings, rather than for the provision of meals to Councillors. However, Members of this Committee were invited to attend appropriate Civic events; and
- it was asked whether it would be possible to carry out a commercial viability study similar to that carried out for the Victorian Market, and a response was provided.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the new report format set out within Appendix 1 of the report;
ii. **NOTED** the spend breakdown set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
iii. **NOTED** the changes to the budget lines in Section 6.1 of the report which would be shown within the Revenue Monitoring Statement; and
iv. **NOTED** the intention to develop this new report format for the Town House through 2026/27 as detailed at section 8.1 of the report.

d. Inverness Common Good Fund Sub Committee Annual Report 2025/2026
Aithisg Bhliadhnail Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis 2025/2026

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/40/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the work of the ICGFSC as detailed within the report.

e. Grants Over £10,000 Report
Aithisg Thabhartasan Thar £10,000

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/41/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee:

i. **AGREED** to determine the applications for funding detailed in Appendices 2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and 9 of the report as follows:-

a) Isobel Fraser Home – **APPROVED £15,800** from the Poverty and Inequality Budget for a Garden Room;
b) Inverness Foodstuff – **APPROVED £11,850** from the Poverty and Inequality Budget for the Sanctuary Project;
c) St Columba Church of Scotland, Inverness – **APPROVED £15,800** from the Poverty and Inequality Budget for St Columba Community Rooms for South Inverness;
d) 3rd Inverness (Crown) Scout Group – **APPROVED £10,073** from the Poverty and Inequality Budget towards the refurbishment of the Scout Hall;
e) New Start Highland – **APPROVED £30,000** from Winter Payments Budget with the proviso that any shortfall could be drawn from the Poverty and Inequality Budget for the New Start Highland Foodbank;
f) Inverness BID – **APPROVED £10,005** from the City Destinations Projects Budget for Inverness City Partnership (In Action) Street Scene (Autumn 2026 and Spring 2027);
g) Inverness BID:-

i. **DECLINED** the request in respect of Activity 1: Northern Meeting Park WC Eight-Week Pilot, as per section 5.4 of the report;
ii. **DEFERRED** the request in respect of Activity 2: Public Safety and Defibrillator Provision, as per section 5.4 of the report; and
iii. **APPROVED £1,600** in respect of Activity 3: Public Noticeboards and Civic Information;

h) Inverness Fringe Festival – **AGREED** that:-
i. 90% of the agreed funding be released; and
ii. the condition that the project receive the Creative Scotland funding that had been applied for be removed.

ii. **NOTED** the detailed budget breakdown for the Inverness Fringe Festival;
iii. **AGREED** the recommendation in section 5.5 of the report; and
iv. **AGREED** to close the Poverty and Inequality Grants along with the Other Grants budget for further applications for the remainder of financial year 26/27.

10. Inverness Floral Clock Update
Cunntas às Ùr air Cloc Flùranach Inbhir Nis

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/42/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

In discussion, it was proposed that Members agree to procure and install the replacement clock mechanism using Community Regeneration Funding of £35,000 previously agreed for this purpose. In addition, the ICGF Sub Committee be asked to consider all the options set out in the report and bring recommendations with full annual costings back to the Committee to allow Members to make an informed decision.

An alternative view was expressed that Members agree Option 1 to have no clock installed and to cease planting on Castle Hill with current plant spaces being grassed over. This would provide for an affordable and practical way forward, protect the public purse, complement the large-scale investment in the Inverness Castle Experience and avoid creating a long-term financial commitment for the future.

Further comments included that the cost of the feasibility study be provided, the need for the ICGF Sub Committee to consider issues around the land ownership and that the Council owned the land at Castle Hill and already paid for the floral displays in this location.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress to date; and
ii. **NOTED** the options presented and **AGREED** to;-
(a) procure and install the replacement clock mechanism using Community Regeneration Funding of £35,000 previously agreed for this purpose;
(b) the ICGF Sub Committee be asked to consider all the presentational options for the Clock set out in the report and bring recommendations with full annual costings back to the Committee to allow Members to make an informed decision.

11. Burial Grounds – Commutation Fund
Cladhan – Maoin Co-iomlaid

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/43/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- further clarification was sought, and provided, that a report to the Communities and Place Committee on 13 August 2026 had provided an update on the burial ground extension programme and officers could provide specific details if required;
- an explanation was sought, and provided, on the rationale for gates being unlocked overnight at some cemeteries in response to concerns around issues of poor behaviour and risk of wildfires;
- in terms of the Inverness City Centre Burial Ground Feasibility Study, further clarity was provided on how green space in burial grounds could be utilised and enhanced and that the findings of the Study and recommended options would be presented to a future Committee for consideration; and
- the Burials Team were commended on the excellent work carried out at cemeteries in the area and on that to be undertaken, specific reference being made Tomnahurich Cemetery which was located on a key gateway to the City.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the current position of the Inverness Burial Ground Commutation Fund;
ii. **APPROVED** a feasibility study for works to the Inverness City Centre Burial Ground's in partnership with Inverness City Heritage Trust at a cost of up to £20,000; and
iii. **APPROVED** works to repair and improve the fence at Tomnahurich Cemetery at a cost of up to £50,000.

12. Membership of Committees

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr M Cameron and Mr A MacKintosh to the Events and Festivals Working Group

13. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes were circulated:-

i. **NOTED** City of Inverness Area Committee held on 18 May 2026;
ii. **APPROVED** Inverness Common Good Fund Grants Sub-Committee held on 3 August 2026; and
iii. **APPROVED** Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 30 June 2026 and 6 August 2026.

14. Inverness Local Holidays 2027/2028

2027
Friday 1 January (New Year's Day)
Monday 4 January (2nd January Holiday)
Monday 1 February
Monday 1 March
Monday 29 March (Easter Monday)
Monday 3 May (May Day Holiday)
Monday 5 July
Monday 4 October
Monday 1 November
Monday 27 December (Christmas Holiday)
Tuesday 28 December (Boxing Day Holiday)

2028
Monday 3 January (New Year's Day Holiday)
Tuesday 4 January (2nd January Holiday)
Monday 7 February
Monday 6 March
Monday 17 April (Easter Monday)
Monday 1 May (May Day Holiday)
Monday 3 July
Monday 2 October
Monday 6 November
Monday 25 December (Christmas Day)
Tuesday 26 December (Boxing Day)

The Committee **AGREED** the above dates as Local Holidays for the City of Inverness for years 2027 and 2028.

The meeting concluded at 3.15 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of the meeting of the **Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 19 August 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:
Mr M Baird
Dr C Birt
Mrs M Cockburn
Mr R Cross
Mr D Fraser
Mr R Gale
Ms C Gillies
Mr J Grafton (remote)
Mr R Gunn (remote)
Ms L Johnston
Mrs I Mackenzie
Mrs K MacLean
Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Mr P Oldham (sub for Ms Kraft)
Ms C Ramsay
Mrs M Reid

Non-Members present:
Mrs T Collier (remote)
Ms L Dundas (remote)
Mr J Edmondson
Mr J Finlayson (remote)
Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mrs J McEwan (remote)
Mr J Murray (remote)
Mrs T Robertson
Mrs M Ross

NHS Highland representatives:
Ms L Bussell, Director of Nursing
Ms J Davies, Director of Public Health (remote)
Ms R MacDonald, Interim Deputy Director of Adult Social Care (remote)

Third sector representatives in attendance:
Dr G Rodger, Inspiring Young Voices
Ms K Wilczynska, Connecting Carers

Also in attendance:
Ms L McBain, outgoing Youth Convener
Ms E Primrose, incoming Youth Convener

Participating Officials:
Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Ms F Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer, Health and Social Care
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer, Integrated People Services
Mr I Kyle, Lead Officer Strategy, Performance and Quality Assurance
Mr J Libby, Transition Head of Children & Justice
Ms D Sutherland, Strategic Lead Corp. Audit & Performance
Mr P Adlinton, Commissioning and Contracts Manager
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mr D Fraser in the Chair

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

   Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms Kraft, Mr A Jarvie, and Mrs B Jarvie.

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

   Item 7 – Mrs M Ross and Dr G Rodger

3. **Recess Powers**
   Cumhachdan Fosaidh

   The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been required to be exercised in relation to the business of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee.

4. **Service Achievements**
   Coileanaidhean Seirbheis

   The Committee **NOTED** updates on the following:

   - Comraich From Home Café – Celebrating Community, Culture and Collaboration;
   - Publication of Angus the Bear's First Day at School; and
   - First 'Home, Heart and Hoolie' event hailed a success for Highland young people and families.

5. **Strategic Commissioning Annual Report and Update in Relation to Domestic Abuse-Refuge Services**
   Aithisg Bhliadhnail Coimiseanachaidh Ro-innleachdail agus Cunntas às Ùr a Thaobh Seirbheisean Tèarmainn airson Droch Dhìol Teaghlachail

   There was circulated Report No HCW/15/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

   During discussion, the following issues were raised:

   - the Refuge and MARAC reviews were welcomed and appreciation expressed that continued funding had been agreed to enable the reviews to be completed in detail and without being rushed to meet artificial deadlines;
   - in light of the Scottish Government's policy to enable victims of domestic abuse to remain safely in their own homes, assurance was sought and provided that the review was taking into consideration how this could impact future demand for refuge accommodation and other implications for the future model in Highland. Given the pressures in the MARAC system highlighted in the report, assurance was also sought and provided that the Council had assessed current risks to victims and their children and taken appropriate action rather than awaiting the outcome of the reviews. It was queried how many of the 37 contracts detailed in the report had reliable outcome measures and that

evidence be presented that demonstrated that the new monitoring framework was improving outcomes rather than simply improving the collecting of information;
- it was queried how the Council would ensure that the future commissioning model would capture the experiences and improve outcomes of children, families and domestic abuse survivors rather than primarily measuring contractual performance. In response, the intended process was summarised, including how lived experience would be taken into consideration. Examples of this could be provided outwith the meeting;
- it was queried whether the main focus of the reviews was to save money, and it was emphasised that this was not the case. The purpose of the reviews were to ensure future services were fit for purpose and would achieve improved outcomes;
- the future of funding for Home-Start was queried;
- the review teams were commended for ensuring outcomes for individuals were the main focus;
- it was queried whether the MARAC review was partly the result of an increase in transferrals to MARAC, and information was sought and provided on those involved with the review, with reference to the attendees listed in paragraph 12.1 of the report; and
- attention was drawn to the disadvantages, as well as the advantages, of the Scottish Government policy to facilitate victims of domestic abuse remaining safely in their homes, for example that an abuser would know their location. It was clarified that individual circumstances would be taken into consideration and that safety was paramount.

Thereafter, the Committee:

i. **NOTED** the annual report by the Strategic Commissioning Group;
ii. **AGREED** the continued development of commissioning strategies for legacy contracts, with a focus on achieving best value and service alignment; and
iii. **NOTED** the Highland Commissioning and Contracts Team’s transition to a stand-alone independent structure within the People Cluster and **AGREED** to endorse the continuation of the “aligned” arrangement with the shared service for knowledge exchange and good practice.

6. The Promise Update
Cunntas air Gealladh

There was circulated Report No HCW/016/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the Council’s commitment to The Promise and its role as a corporate parent was appreciated;
- with regard to paragraph 3.2 of the report, which stated that there was a risk that proceeding before core delivery issues were addressed could create expectations that could not be met, information was sought on the nature of, and solution to, filling those gaps;

- with reference to the £3.5m investment to develop two new Children's Houses, to reinstate two existing Children's Houses, and to increase short-break capacity at The Orchard (in paragraph 8.2 of the report), it was queried what the timescales for this were, and whether this might reduce the Council's requirement for Out of Authority placements. Information was provided on some of the unavoidable reasons for using Out of Authority placements, such as secure or specialist provision that was not available in Highland, and some of the challenges around the procurement and staffing of Children's Houses, as well as funding that had been earmarked for this;
- attention was drawn to the value of kinship care for children, and to the significant number of older adults who often undertook this. Information was provided on the definitions of informal versus formal kinship care and eligibility for kinship care payments, and it was emphasised that the provision of kinship care should not cause carers to fall into poverty;
- paragraph 11.1 of the report outlined positive progress against the five pillars, and information was sought and provided on evidence that the progress was improving outcomes for care-experienced children and young people, rather than simply showing that the necessary activities had taken place;
- concern was expressed at how ongoing care would be managed at the Orchard during the planned refurbishment, and clarification was provided that discussions were ongoing at present on whether the least disruption would be to work around the residents in situ, or to move them to temporary alternative accommodation;
- it was clarified that there was no fixed definition of a short-term break, with solutions being tailored to an individual family's needs. A report on this was anticipated in November 2026;
- the Chief Officer, Health and Social Care, pointed out that while The Promise was originally developed for care-experienced children and young people, its ethos was being expanded to cover all children, including those on the cusp of being taken into care;
- the positive impact of Gaelic on all children including the rights of Gaelic-speaking children and young people and their families, as detailed in paragraph 3.5 of the report, was welcomed;
- paragraph 6.1 of the report referred to contributions being obtained from more than 8,000 children and young people towards local priorities, and assurance was sought and provided that input from Youth Highland, as part of the report for the Highland Poverty and Equality Commission, had been included. Members reiterated the need to ensure the Voice was included along with more technical feedback; and
- the importance of long term funding for third sector organisations to allow them to plan and deliver services related to The Promise was queried, with this being actively worked on to ensure enduring relationships.

Thereafter, the Committee:

i. **NOTED** progress made in delivering The Promise across the five pillars;
ii. **NOTED** the continued commitment of Highland Council and its partners to delivering the ambitions of The Promise and preparing for implementation of forthcoming legislative requirements;
iii. **NOTED** the ongoing workforce, placement sufficiency and financial challenges; and

iv. **AGREED** the priority improvement actions identified for 2026/2027 set out in section 11 of the report.

7. Update on the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme and Children and Young People's Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund
Cunntas air Prògram Soirbheis an Teaghlaich Iomlain agus Maoin Coimhearsnachd Slàinte Inntinn is Soirbheis Chloinne agus Dhaoine Òga

Declarations of Interest: the undernoted Members declared an interest in Item 7 and left the chamber during consideration of the item:

- **Cllr M Ross, as a Director of the Seaboard Memorial Hall Ltd, a recipient of funding from Element 1 of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund; and**
- **Dr G Rodger, as a Committee Highland Third Sector Interface representative and an employee of Inspiring Young Voices, which received funding from two of the funds being considered.**

There was circulated Report No HCW/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the Chair indicated that the proposed Members' seminar was likely to be on 13 October 2026 but would be confirmed in due course. He proposed a sixth recommendation, the full details of which was set out below, and highlighted the forthcoming audit of the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme (WFWP);
- the reach of the WFWP was welcomed, as was the transformational nature of the projects. Of significant importance was that the families in receipt of the services were experiencing improved outcomes, and information was sought on how the Council intended to capture evidence of improved trajectories and how to replicate their success;
- information was sought on whether the approaches funded so far were sustainable if Scottish Government funding was reduced, how that sustainability had been planned, that weaknesses or gaps had been identified, and how responsibility for delivering outcomes remained clear to all partners;
- given the recent public concern about the proportion of the fund being spent on operational costs, roughly 33%, the ongoing operational cost versus expenditure on direct benefit to families was queried;
- attention was drawn to the Council's role as corporate parents, which required the input of trained professionals, supported by a wide range of volunteers, and numerous youth clubs, many of which faced funding challenges and possible closure. The Council had been warned in June about this funding crisis and the possible loss of support workers, the competition between some groups for funding, and the need for established projects to reinvent themselves as transformational in order to qualify for funding. While the need for transformation was laudable, it was important not to undermine established groups and projects. The detrimental impact on statutory service provision by the failure to fund established third sector groups providing much needed services, such as youth support work, was highlighted and a plea made for the continued funding of the youth hubs and clubs;

- attention was drawn to other sources of funding that were directed through the Community Planning Partnership, and to the Members' seminar which would address many of the points raised and provide further information;
- noting that paragraph 6.2 of the report stated that accountability for the programme sat within partnership structures rather than with an individual agency, it was queried who would bear responsibility if the programme failed to deliver the intended outcomes;
- it was queried whether the Council would publish a clear assessment of the cost of administering the programme, including staffing, against the direct benefits delivered to families, with evidence of the outcomes achieved. Assurance was required that the priority was delivering and embedding the programme;
- reference was made to Scottish Government guidance which had been clear that the WFWP had not been intended to replace existing services, and it was suggested that this was what had happened to Home-Start, as outlined in the report at paragraph 8.3. This would be further investigated outwith the meeting and information provided to the Committee. It was also queried how Home-Start would be funded after March 2027, with attention being drawn to the concerns the possible lack of future funding was causing Home-Start staff;
- three concerns were raised in relation to the WFWP, namely its impact on established services, its governance arrangements, and the allocation of the funding. It was felt that there had been duplication of the work of some existing organisations, and that the emphasis was too much on creating new transformational approaches rather than strengthening existing provision, with particular reference in this respect to the youth work sector. There were repeated references in the report to the Integrated Children Services Planning Board and the Change for Leadership group, but the transparency of these groups' operation and decision-making was queried, with Members and third sector representatives unable to attend some meetings, and minutes and agendas being challenging to source. Attention was drawn to the importance of adequate challenge and oversight, the need to avoid silo working, and the need for stakeholders to understand the systems and processes that were in place. A governance overhaul was suggested. A further concern related to financial accountability and reference was made to the headline figures detailed in the report, which included around 27% of the funding being spent on operational costs. It was queried whether this was the most effective use of the funding and whether a greater proportion should be reaching the families. With regard to the current arrangements to deliver transformational change, it was suggested there could be a better approach that gave greater responsibility to collaborative and cooperative work with local stakeholders and existing service providers. Ambition for the programme should be matched by transparency, accountability and meaningful engagement; and
- it was requested that locality coordinators take a proactive approach in their respective areas.

Officers responded that many of the themes raised would be considered at the seminar, and suggested that specific examples of duplication be provided outwith the meeting for consideration. The Chair acknowledged the challenging allegations that had been made and requested that Members provide evidence outwith the meeting to facilitate appropriate investigation, the results of which would be provided to Members.

Thereafter, the Committee:

i. **NOTED** the substantial progress being delivered through the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme and the Children and Young People's Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund;
ii. **NOTED** that both programmes were partnership programmes governed through Highland Community Planning Partnership and Integrated Children's Services Planning arrangements rather than through a single agency;
iii. **NOTED** the continued focus on transformational change and prevention, consistent with Scottish Government expectations that Whole Family Wellbeing Programme funding should be used to develop, test and embed new models of support rather than replace existing funding streams;
iv. **AGREED** to support the Community Planning Partnership undertaking a review of governance, accountability and delivery arrangements as the Programme moved into its next phase, with recommendations subsequently reported through appropriate partnership and Council governance structures; and
v. **AGREED** a Members' seminar be arranged to consider the next phase of the Programme with any recommended revisions being considered by the Community Planning Partnership, with a further report to come to this Committee;
vi. the Committee welcomed the next iteration of these funds and supported the proposed focus on the national poverty agenda and the Population Health Framework and **AGREED** that the Chair write to the Minister seeking early clarification on the future scope, priorities, and targeting of the fund to assist planning and delivery; and
vii. **NOTED** that the outcome of the review of the compliance of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund with the Scottish Government guidance would be reported to Members.

8. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Q1 2026/27 Monitoring and 2025/26 Final Out-turn
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach – Sgrùdadh R1 2026/27 agus Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach 2025/26

There was circulated Report No HCW/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- information was sought and provided on the management of the £3.5m funding for shifting the balance of care, and on how the figures were presented in the report. Assurance sought that the savings and spending pressures detailed in the budget were manageable;
- a request was made for a separate report on the costs of Out of Authority care, and the predicted costs of delivering that care in Highland, and the Chair confirmed that a report covering this was due to be presented in November 2026. The inclusion of related educational costs would also be helpful, as would discussion on the involvement of the Education Committee with this. A summary of the types of Out of Authority accommodation that was being used was sought and provided, and could be further discussed outwith the meeting;

- the need to provide assurance to the public that the budget pressures around Adult Social Care (ASC) would not impact Care at Home services was emphasised. It was queried what was being done to manage the pressures and at what point the predicted overspend might become a risk to frontline services The needs of older people were highlighted, while recognising that many of the significant challenges were being tackled at a national level. It was queried whether there was more scope to work in partnership, or to develop a shared dashboard, between the key stakeholders, such as the Council, NHS Highland and the third sector. With regard to the current review of the model of integration between the Council and NHS Highland, the impact of any change on older people should be taken into consideration. The Chair reminded Members that the bi-annual ASC report would be presented in November 2026, and drew attention to excellent partnership work that was being piloted in Ardnamurchan. Attention was drawn to plans being worked on to hold a seminar or conference for older people, which was likely to be in November 2026; and
- assurance was sought and provided that although some vacancies were having a positive impact on the budget, this was not being used as a budget management tool. Information was sought and provided on the reasons for the overall downward trend in the overspend.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:

i. the 2025/2026 final end of year out-turn (Appendix 1a and 1b);
ii. and **AGREED** the forecast financial position for 2026/2027 as set out in the report and Appendix 2a, 2b & 3 to the report;
iii. the explanations provided for material variances and actions taken and proposed;
iv. the update provided regarding savings delivery (Appendix 4); and
v. the numbers of children accommodated by the Council and the nature of those placements in terms of the delivery of the recovery plan (Appendix 5).

9. Health and Social Care Workforce Planning Annual Progress Report
Aithisg Adhartais Bhliadhnail Planadh Feachd-obrach Slàinte is Cùraim Shòisealta

There was circulated Report No HCW/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, Members welcomed the positive progress detailed in the report to improve service delivery and career pathways, and to develop training programmes for a variety of professions. It was queried what targets were in place to ensure these improvements resulted in a genuinely sustainable workforce. Information was sought and provided on the number of trainees who were retained in Highland, succession planning, with significant numbers of staff nearing retirement age, workforce sustainability as a corporate risk, and the contingency plans that were in place for a situation in which recruitment pressures impacted service delivery. Attention was drawn to the value of school fairs in attracting young people into careers they might not have otherwise been aware of, and to the impact a small number of staff on long term sick leave could have on the overall absence management statistics.

Thereafter, the Committee:

i. **NOTED** the Health and Social Care workforce planning progress report and updated action plan;
ii. **NOTED** the positive outcomes from the report, including:
   a. redesign of the Service Structure to improve service delivery and create career pathways.;
   b. continued success of trainee programmes for Social Workers (both undergraduate and postgraduate), Health Visitors, and School Nurses, supporting workforce development and succession planning;
   c. the turnover rate of staff had further reduced from 10.5% in 2024/25 to 10.1% in 2025/26;
   d. a new strategic approach to a Service-wide Learning and Development plan; and
iii. **AGREED** the continuing risk highlighted in the report and reflected in the Corporate Risk Register. This related to the high vacancy rate that continued with Children's Services and the impact this was having on service delivery and the wellbeing of the workforce.

10. Delivery Plan Monitoring and Progress Update – Person Centre Solutions Q1 2026/27
Sgrùdadh agus Cunntas Adhartais a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh – Fuasglaidhean Stèidhichte air an Neach R1 2026/27

There was circulated Report No HCW/20/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the benefits of local, family-based care were emphasised and progress with the Children's Houses project was welcomed. Noting that current residential capacity remained at 26 Highland Council beds against a target of 37 by 2029, it was queried and explained how the 37 target had been established; and
- in relation NHS Highland being an outlier in Scotland in terms of the implementation of E-Records, and the inefficiency of 30% of clinical time being spent managing paper records (as detailed at paragraph 7.2 of the report), information was sought and provided on how it would be ensured this would remain a priority.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

i. Delivery Project updates provided in the report;
ii. change of project title from Residential Care to Children's Houses; and
iii. revised format of the report, which included the use of portfolio board project dashboards from the Performance and Risk Management system (PRMS), with accompanying project narrative sections aligned to the content of these.

11. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – Q1 2026/27
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Ràitheil - R1 2026/27

There was circulated Report No HCW/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Third sector representatives queried how the Council ensured the performance measures reflected the real experiences of people and whether Freedom of Information or complaint responses were used. Attention was drawn to the role of the Council's customer and resolution team, and the Chair welcomed the external scrutiny.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

i. performance information for the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing; and
ii. change to Freedom of Information reporting to align with Chief Officer structure.

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The following Minutes were circulated and **NOTED**:-

i. Highland Council / NHS Highland Joint Monitoring Committee held on 12 March 2026; and
ii. Highland Violence Against Women Partnership held on 16 February 2026.

Closing Note

The Chair advised the Committee that Fiona Duncan, the Independent Strategic Advisor for The Promise, would be visiting Highland on 26 August 2026 and her input would be welcomed.

The meeting ended at 12.05pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 19 August 2026 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr M Baird
Mr L Fraser (remote)
Mrs J Hendry (substitute)
Mr A Jarvie
Mr R Jones
Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs A MacLean
Mr D McDonald
Mr P Oldham (substitute)
Ms C Ramsay (substitute, remote)
Mrs T Robertson
Ms M Ross
Mr R Stewart

Non-Members also present:

Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Ms M Reid

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Ms B Martin-Scott, Chief Officer – Education (Primary)
Miss D Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk)
Mr J Thurlbeck, Corporate Audit Manager
Mr J Campbell, Senior Auditor, Internal Audit
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead (Resources)
Mr P Nevin, Strategic Lead (Corporate Support)
Mr J Libby, Transition Head of Children & Justice
Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years
Ms I Ramsay, Emergency Standby Co-ordinator
Ms M MacLeod, Creditors Team Leader
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mrs G MacPherson, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms C Gardiner, Audit Scotland

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

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr C Ballance, Mr A Christie and Mr R Jones.

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

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

Item 4: Ms M Reid

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Audit Committee.

At this juncture, the Chair referred to correspondence received by Committee Members from a member of the public regarding objections they had made to the unaudited accounts for both the Council and the Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board.

Audit Scotland had advised that they were required to consider all objections which met specific statutory criteria, namely that they were submitted by an interested person and related to a potential misstatement in the accounts. They had confirmed that the objection met those criteria and therefore required to be considered as part of their process. They had not yet gathered substantive evidence in relation to the objections and proceedings had not yet commenced. Audit Scotland would report on the objections and its outcomes in their Annual Audit Report for the Council. In the event of any significant matters arising, they would engage with officers and Committee Members as appropriate.

Discussion at this time relating to the public objections would be premature for the reasons set out by Audit Scotland and would be addressed when the Annual Audit Report was considered.

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

Transparency Statement: Ms M Reid made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item on the basis that she was a former Private, Voluntary and Independent sector provider, as a commissioned childminder. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. AC/16/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

The Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk) provided a summary of audit work being undertaken, including that involving Highland and Island Joint Valuation Board, High Life Highland, Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and the handover of the PPP1 schools.

In response to a question regarding the audit of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, it was explained that this was a requirement within the agreement with the Scottish and UK Governments that an annual audit review took place. No specific payment was made for this audit although there was an element for the Council to be recompensed for overheads. The Chief Officer – Corporate Finance suggested that the Council would be looking to see some of its costs associated as the Accountable Body being recovered through retained Non Domestic Rates. As to the question about the risk scoring of audits, it was advised that there were various criteria considered and, while Audit staff were ultimately responsible for the final risk score, it was also confirmed that Services had an opportunity to feed into this process. In addition, it was also explained that the audit of exit packages had arisen from a recommendation to Scottish Councils from an Audit Scotland report.

In further discussion, Members recognised the need for the Audit team to be fully resourced, given the programme of work ahead. In addition, arising from audits to be allocated in the Place Cluster, a frustration was raised in relation to the completion of housing developments as there did not appear to be a "health check" of a handover for their maintenance after the first year, resulting in a disjointed approach as to how this was programmed going ahead.

a) Emergency Social Work Services – People (Substantial Assurance)

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, as to who an absconding client should be reported to and as to the definition of what was meant by the term "absconding";
- although it was suggested that young people should inform staff if they were going to be late, staff should also make efforts to stay in contact with them, via either social media or text;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the whole team had now completed the mandatory training on Information Management and cybersecurity; and
- the above and succession planning were matters important to the Council as a whole, not just this Service.

b) Early Years Service – People (Limited Assurance)

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- there was merit in that the Service had requested the review. Nevertheless, it was concerning that payments, both towards salaries and suppliers, could not correctly be made, not only by the Service but by the Council as a whole;
- nearly £139k in payments might be owed to some parents. However, there were other parents who had underpaid and assurances were sought that management were in a position to address this;
- the external database was being used with no formal contract with the system provider and there was use of spreadsheets. This raised data protection concerns. It was important the Service addressed this, as set out in the Action Plan and by the deadline, and would be tracked by Internal Audit;

- a view was expressed that the language used minimised issues and ownership needed to be taken. Others contended that there was in fact some strong language and emphasised the need for the Service to take action;
- careful monitoring was required to ensure the historic debt was cleared and reports back to Committee was suggested;
- the action points, in terms of training, protocols and checklists, were fundamental to avoid this from happening again and yet it was ranked as Medium. In response, it was explained that it would have been ranked as High if there had been no checks at all taking place;
- in relation to section 1.5 of the Internal Audit Report, it was hoped that a new national management information system would be introduced soon, which would support the administration of the 1,140 hours of funded Early Learning Childcare;
- in response to a question, the Committee was informed that the Service would continue to implement standardised procedures for the management of payments; and
- in response to comments suggesting mismanagement, assurance was given by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk) that this was not the case, and that the Service had responded appropriately to the points raised by the Audit Team.

Thereafter, the Chair requested that an update from the Service be provided to the Committee in six months time, which would include an update on the financial position.

c) Supplier Bank Mandate Fraud – Corporate (Limited Assurance)

During discussion, the sophisticated nature of the fraud was recognised and confirmation was sought, and provided, that support was offered to the staff member who had processed the false invoices. A Fraud Awareness flyer had been produced together with bespoke Fraud Awareness training which would be accessible to all those involved in paying invoices on the Council's Traineasy site.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the Final Reports referred to in Section 5.1 of the report; and
ii. the current work of the Internal Audit Section outlined at sections 6 and 7, and the status of work in progress detailed at Appendix 1 of the report.

5. Internal Audit Action Tracking
Tracadh Ghnìomhan In-sgrùdaidh

There had been circulated Report No. AC/17/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

Some actions had been delayed but for good reason. It was important to set realistic targets at the outset.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED** the action tracking information provided including the revised target dates for the completion of outstanding actions.

6. Accounts Commission Report – Delivering for the Future
Aithisg Coimisean nan Cunntasan – A' Lìbhrigeadh airson an Ama ri Teachd

There had been circulated Report No. AC/18/26 by the Strategic Lead (Audit and Risk).

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the information set out in the Accounts Commission report at Appendix 1 and the supplement of case studies at Appendix 2 of the report;
ii. that Highland Council was regularly referenced throughout the report, and positively so; and
iii. the Commission's expectations of all Councils with regard to their transformation plans as set out in pages 5 and 6 of the report. Importantly, these were in place within Highland, and it was important to ensure that this continued when new projects/programmes were added to transformation plans.

7. Audit Scotland Report – BV4 Thematic: Asset Management and Climate
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Alba – BV4 Cuspaireil: Stiùireadh Ghoireasan agus Gnàth-shìde

The Committee **NOTED** that this item had been deferred to the next meeting of the Audit Committee on 11 November 2026.

The meeting ended at 3.15 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Economy and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 20 August 2026 at 9.30 am.

Present:

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

Non-Members also present:

Mr J Finlayson
Mr D Fraser (Remote)
Mr R Gale (Remote)
Dr M Gregson (Remote)
Mr M Hutchison (Remote)
Mr L Johnston (Remote)
Ms L Kraft (Remote)
Mr B Lobban
Ms K MacLean (Remote)
Mr D McDonald (Remote)
Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr J Murray
Mr P Oldham (Remote)
Mrs M Ross (Remote)

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive – Place
Mr J Welsh, Chief Officer - Enterprise and Investment
Mr P Reid, Chief Officer - Facilities & Fleet Management
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer - Operations and Maintenance
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead- Finance (Place)
Ms J Cromarty, Integrated Transport Manager
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change Manager
Mr T Stott, Development Plans Manager
Ms T Ratnam, Programme Manager
Mr S Farrow, Principal Engineer
Ms E Maciver, Principal Engineer
Ms L Ross, Senior Transport Officer
Ms L Carpenter, Senior 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

   An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce.

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

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

   Items 8, 9 and 10 – Mr J Edmondson, Mr Jones and Mrs Robertson

3. **Recess Powers**
   Cumhachdan Fosaidh

   The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

4. **Good News**
   Naidheachdan Matha

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

   Congratulations
   Congratulations were extended to Ms Kimberly Young, Technician in Caithness and Sutherland Roads, who had recently gained her Degree in Civil Engineering and would progress to Honours study in the forthcoming year. She had started her career in a clerical role before moving to Roads as an Inspector and subsequently a Technician.

   Congratulations were also extended to Mr Ross Miller, Technician, and Mr Colin Campbell, Structural Technician, both in Caithness and Sutherland Roads, who had gained their HNC in Civil Engineering. Mr Miller had started as a trainee in the Technician post, while Mr Campbell had previously worked as a Roads Operative within the Brora squad before moving to the technical side of the Service.

   Mr Calum Seaton had successfully completed his Graduate Apprenticeship, qualifying as a Building Standards Surveyor and achieving an Honours Degree in Construction and the Built Environment from Edinburgh Napier University. He had been the seventh Graduate Apprentice Building Standards Surveyor to achieve this milestone since 2022.

   Summer Placements
   The Project Design Unit had supported several student placements during the summer period. Mr Alexander Feacham had completed a two-week placement as part of his Foundation Apprenticeship at UHI. Ms Lucy Hodgson had undertaken a four-week placement through the schoolwork placement programme and would

return to school to commence her fifth year. Ms Fiona Eades, a student at Edinburgh University, had joined the team for an eight-week placement.

Mr Andrew Mackenzie had worked as a summer student within the Council's Materials Testing Laboratory. He would return to the University of Strathclyde, where he was studying for a BEng(Hons)/MEng in Civil Engineering and would commence his second year of study.

The Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Team had welcomed Mr Harry Streeter-Smith and Ms Molly Jardine, both of whom had completed four-week summer placements.

£2 Bus Cap Fare Pilot
Following the introduction of the £2 Bus Cap Fare Pilot across the Highlands, the Council's in-house bus service had reported significant growth in passenger numbers, with more than 28,000 cash fare passenger journeys recorded by 30 July 2026 and usage more than doubling compared with the same period in 2025.

Navar Bridge
Significant progress had been made on the Navar Bridge replacement project near Bettyhill, Sutherland. A new 66metre long, two lane concrete bridge had been constructed to replace the former narrow steel bridge, with the project nearing completion. The official opening was scheduled for 3 September.

5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the period Q4 2025/26 and Q1 2026/27
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach airson R4 2025/26 agus R1 2026/27

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed that the Climate Change and Energy Team was reported as being in an overspend position despite having secured significant external investment and savings for the Council. It was suggested that the value of external funding attracted by the team should be reflected more clearly in future reporting;
- in relation to the forecast overspend at an early stage of the financial year and the continuation of staffing underspends, questions were raised regarding the extent to which the forecast overspend relied on vacancy management, delayed expenditure or income projections and whether further consideration should be given to projects where anticipated income had not been realised;
- concern was expressed regarding continued staffing underspends and the impact unfilled vacancies could have on service delivery and workforce pressures and information was sought, and provided, on the factors contributing to recruitment and retention difficulties, including pay differentials, housing availability and labour market pressures;

- questions were raised regarding recurring overspends within the winter roads maintenance budget and whether the budget should be reviewed to better reflect actual expenditure;
- information was sought, and provided, on progress with the digitisation of job cards, including the completion of a review of the current process and work underway to identify a suitable IT solution and deliver a pilot;
- information was sought on progress with the rollout of light emitting diode (LED) street lighting and on timescales for replacing missing or damaged road signs. A further update on the LED rollout would be provided outwith the meeting; and
- reference was made to delays in completing roads-related requests submitted by Members and it was indicated that concerns regarding the effectiveness of the Member enquiry portal would be taken forward.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the final budget position for 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;
ii. **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2026/27 as set out in the report and Appendices 3 and 4 of the report;
iii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
iv. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery.

6. Capital Monitoring Report Q1 2026/27
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Calpa R1 2026/27

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

The Committee **APPROVED** the financial position to 30 May 2026 and **NOTED** the estimated year end forecast.

7. Reducing Light Pollution: Draft Good Practice Guidance
A’ Lùghdachadh Truailleadh Solais: Dreachd Stiùireadh Deagh Chleachdaidh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Chair clarified that the report title should read “Dark Skies - Reducing Light Pollution”;
- concern was expressed that the proposed guidance could introduce additional planning requirements where existing statutory powers already existed to address excessive lighting. Questions were raised regarding the evidence for additional controls, potential impacts on public safety and security and the costs that could fall on developers, businesses, sports clubs, community groups and householders;

- support was expressed for the principle of reducing light pollution and protecting dark skies, however concern was expressed that some significant sources of lighting, including major energy infrastructure and aviation lighting on wind turbines, appeared to fall outwith the scope of the proposed guidance;
- reference was made to the potential impact of light-emitting diode (LED) lighting on wildlife and clarification was sought on how such issues would be considered as part of the consultation. It was indicated that nature conservation bodies would be consulted on this matter and that lighting assessments would require consideration of impacts on sensitive habitats and species;
- clarification was sought on how the proposed guidance would apply to outdoor sports facilities and whether provision would be made for circumstances where lighting was required beyond normal operating hours;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the interaction between the proposed guidance and the Council's existing street lighting policy. It was explained that these matters were already addressed through the Council's existing street lighting policy;
- reference was made to the Council Motion regarding aviation lighting on wind turbines and it was indicated that references to Transponder Mandatory Zones could be considered further as part of the consultation document;
- reference was made to lighting associated with Council and other public sector buildings and it was suggested that the public sector should demonstrate good practice in reducing unnecessary light pollution;
- it was indicated that further consideration would be given to identifying designated Dark Sky Areas more clearly within the guidance and to providing additional clarification regarding the meaning of public safety within the document;
- concern was expressed that Members of the public could misunderstand the purpose of the guidance and it was suggested that the consultation material should make clear that the intention was not to remove lighting from buildings, attractions or public spaces where it was required but to encourage appropriate lighting design and reduce unnecessary light pollution;
- reference was made to the reduced light coverage associated with the introduction of LED street lighting and the potential implications for access to community facilities; and
- a request was made for a Members Workshop and a short deferral to allow further discussion of the issues raised prior to proceeding to public consultation.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the positive impacts of reducing light pollution outlined in the report;
ii. **APPROVED** the Guidance within Appendix 2 of the report as a basis for public consultation;
iii. **AGREED** that prior to public consultation, officers add further illustrative material and Gaelic language content to the Guidance to enhance its readability and appearance; and

iv. **NOTED** that there would be a policy on reducing light pollution in the new Highland Local Development Plan which would be subject to future committee approval.

8. **Integrated Transport Team Update**
Cunntas Sgioba na Còmhdhalach Amalaichte

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

Mr J Edmondson - as a member of a local transport forum
Mr R Jones – as Chair of the Badenoch and Strathspey Transport Forum
Mrs T Robertson – as a member of a local transport group

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought on maintenance arrangements for the proposed Rosskeen to Invergordon active travel route and it was explained that active travel route maintenance was being considered through work associated with the Local Transport Strategy;
- concern was expressed regarding the continued number of road deaths and the need for further safety improvements on trunk roads, including A9 junctions;
- clarification was sought on parking arrangements associated with the Cromarty to Nigg Ferry service and it was indicated that further information would be provided outwith the meeting;
- thanks were expressed to the Integrated Transport Team for its engagement with local transport forums and it was requested that the Behaviour Change Officer attend a future Ward meeting. It was confirmed that arrangements could be made;
- information was sought on progress with the Upper Achintore path project and the Blar Mhor and Upper Achintore bus link projects, including funding arrangements and options should the bus link projects not proceed. It was indicated that funding applications had been submitted and that further discussion would take place with the relevant officers outwith the meeting;
- information was sought on the Fort William Mobility Hub feasibility study, proposals for the Neptune's Staircase site at Banavie, ownership and funding arrangements for the site, community consultation requirements and onward active travel connections;
- information was sought on delays to the implementation of safety measures at Sunnyside Railway Bridge and it was indicated that the delay related to an electricity network connection;
- reference was made to expenditure of almost £11m on sustainable travel initiatives compared with the roads capital budget. It was suggested that greater investment should be directed towards roads maintenance and repair;
- information was sought on whether the Visitor Levy could contribute towards sustainable travel initiatives in future years;

- concern was expressed regarding the requirement for driving licences for certain active travel posts, given the nature and purpose of those roles and it was indicated that this would be reviewed; and
- information was sought on the type of evidence communities could provide to support applications for external road safety funding. It was explained that this was being informed through engagement undertaken as part of the Local Transport Strategy, Place Plans and community action plans.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress made by the Integrated Transport Team in delivering active and sustainable transport and road safety initiatives across the Highland area;
ii. **NOTED** the progress made to the 2030 national road casualty reduction targets;
iii. **NOTED** the successful securing of external funding to support low-carbon transport infrastructure and associated programme delivery; and
iv. **AGREED** the continued delivery of active and sustainable transport and road safety initiatives aligned with the Council's strategies and national priorities.

9. Highland Bus Service Improvement Partnership
Com-pàirteachas Leasachaidh Seirbheis nam Busaichean

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

Mr J Edmondson - as a member of a local transport forum
Mr R Jones – as Chair of the Badenoch and Strathspey Transport Forum
Mrs T Robertson – as a member of a local transport group

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/30/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- reference was made to vehicle quality specifications and it was suggested that consideration be given to the use of winter tyres on rural routes and to the potential inclusion of cycle provision on certain services;
- clarification was sought regarding ticketing requirements, with concern expressed that some operators might not currently have the capability to meet the proposed standards;
- concern was expressed regarding the maintenance, responsibility and funding arrangements for bus shelters, observing that shelters were often installed without clear ownership for ongoing upkeep and that further guidance within the policy would be helpful;
- reference was made to the condition, suitability and maintenance of bus shelters, including issues of graffiti, damage and redundancy following route changes. It was suggested that more mobile or easily relocatable shelter designs could be considered, that redundant shelters could be reused in areas of greater need and that provision should be explored for shelters at

exposed locations within Inverness. Support was expressed for continued improvements to bus shelters as an important element of encouraging greater bus use;

- concern was expressed regarding governance arrangements, with reference made to the need for stronger Member oversight. Clarification was sought on the proposed voting structure within the partnership documentation. It was indicated that these matters could be considered further as part of the ongoing process;
- clarification was sought regarding operator licensing arrangements, including whether Highland Council buses, D&E coaches and the Council's HGV fleet operated under separate licences;
- reference was made to the volume of information relating to Lochaber services and it was suggested that further discussion at local area level would be valuable, particularly in relation to bus forums, partnership groups and the consultation process;
- reference was made to service reliability and it was suggested that monitoring reports should include information on cancelled services, given the frequency of complaints regarding buses not operating due to driver shortages; and
- reference was made to the benefits of direct routing, particularly where reoriented routes enabled cross-town journeys without interchange and support was expressed for measures that improved convenience for passengers.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the progress made in developing the Highland Bus Service; Improvement Partnership (BSIP) since the previous report to Committee in February 2023;
ii. **NOTED** the continued progression of the draft Highland BSIP Partnership Plan, Bus Service Improvement Plan and supporting Scheme Area documentation;
iii. **AGREED** that officers proceed to a 12-week consultation on the draft BSIP; and
iv. **NOTED** that a further report was expected to be brought back to Committee following consultation, further legal review and operator engagement before any final decision was taken to make the BSIP or associated Scheme(s).

10. Balnaan Bridge - Options Report
Drochaid Bheul an Àthain – Aithisg Roghainnean

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/31/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there were long-term implications of adopting a "do minimum" approach, with reference made to the risk of managed decline of rural infrastructure and the potential precedent this could set for other communities;
- support was expressed for the amendment proposing Option 2 (overbridging), with reference made to the importance of maintaining rural connectivity,

supporting agriculture, preserving access for local residents and maintaining rural road links across Highland;

- concern was expressed regarding the current bridge prioritisation methodology, with reference made to the position of Balnaan Bridge at number 118 on the priority list. It was suggested that traffic volumes and diversion lengths did not adequately reflect the importance of rural bridges to the communities they served;
- reference was made to recent decisions affecting other bridges in Badenoch and Strathspey, including structures placed into managed decline and concern was expressed that multiple bridge restrictions or closures within the same area could have a cumulative impact on rural communities;
- concerns were raised regarding the use of Council Reserves to fund bridge works, with Members highlighting the need for appropriate financial assessment, the potential precedent this could create and the importance of adhering to the Council's established financial strategy;
- there was a need for a consistent approach to bridge failures across Highland, with Members observing that a number of higher priority bridges remained open and required significant investment. Future decisions should be informed by full financial and operational information;
- concern was expressed regarding the wider funding context for roads and bridge infrastructure, including the adequacy of Scottish Government funding arrangements and the challenges associated with maintaining Highland's extensive road network;
- attention was drawn to potential external funding sources and questions were raised regarding whether national funding support could be sought to assist with future bridge investment;
- reference was made to the importance of transparency and it was suggested that the bridge priority list should be publicly available to assist communities in understanding how priorities had been determined;
- concern was expressed regarding the impact of the bridge closure on local agriculture and rural businesses, including the additional mileage and operational costs arising from the loss of the crossing;
- support was expressed for ensuring that rural communities across Highland were treated equitably and that consideration should be given to supporting bridge reinvestment where closures significantly affected local communities;
- financial clarification was provided but, should the Committee agree one of the other two options, a detailed financial assessment would be provided to the full Council.

Mr K Gowans, seconded by Mr I Brown, **MOVED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr R Jones seconded by Mr M Green **MOVED** that Option 2 - the bridge overlay - was adopted as the preferred option, with the objective of reopening Balnaan Bridge to traffic.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 5 votes, and the **AMENDMENT** received 9 votes, with no abstentions and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr I Brown, Mr A Christie, Mr J Edmondson, Mr K Gowans, Mrs T Robertson.

For the Amendment:
Mr S Coghill, Ms L Dundas, Ms C Gillies, Mr M Green, Mr R Jones, Mr D Macpherson, H Morrison, Mr R Stewart, Ms K Willis.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the available options for Balnaan Bridge; and
* ii. **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to the Council that adoption of Option 2, the bridge overlay, as the preferred option, with the objective of reopening Balnaan Bridge to traffic.

11. Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey 2025/26
Suirbhidh Staid Cumail Suas Rathaidean na h-Alba 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/32/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Highland's position of 28th out of 32 local authorities was highlighted, with Members remarking that road condition had worsened since 2022 despite a slight improvement in the most recent year. The need for increased investment to improve outcomes was emphaised;
- the scale and nature of the Highland road network were recognised, with Members observing the particular challenges posed by long rural routes and roads not built to modern engineering standards, especially in areas such as Skye and the impact this had on maintenance demands and survey results;
- questions were raised regarding the scope of the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey (SRMCS), with Members seeking clarification on whether the survey reflected public facing maintenance issues such as potholes, lining, ditching, drainage and surface dressing or whether it was limited to engineering-based measurements;
- operational challenges in delivering road maintenance were discussed, including procurement constraints, resource limitations and the need to ensure equity of maintenance activity across Highland's wards;
- attention was drawn to the impact of increased traffic volumes in areas such as Skye, with Members observing that higher usage could offset the benefits of recent resurfacing works and place additional pressure on maintenance budgets;
- questions were raised regarding how SRMCS results could be used to support bids for additional funding, including representations to the Scottish and UK Governments to address the needs of rural road networks;
- reference was made to the national funding formula, with Members highlighting that current allocations were based on usage rather than network length and suggesting that a revised weighting could better support rural authorities with extensive road networks; and
- it was vital representations continued to be made through CoSLA and other national forums regarding funding arrangements for Highland's road network.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the results of the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2025/26 and the Highland Councils ranking had remained at 28th position amongst Scottish Local Authorities, with a road condition index (RCI) of 38.9% which represented the percentage of the road network needs maintenance treatment; and
ii. that the 2025/26 results were already published on the refreshed version of the Council's website, as agreed at the 4 May 2023 Economy & Infrastructure Committee.

12. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring and Progress Update Q1 2026/27
Sgrùdadh Buidseit agus Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh R1 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/33/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- questions were raised regarding the repowering pilot, with Members seeking clarification on how repowering turbines approaching end-of-life could be made financially viable for communities;
- clarification was also sought regarding community involvement in the repowering pilot, with reference made to groups such as Highland People's Power and questions raised about future engagement once governance arrangements for the Highland Clean Energy Investment Fund were established;
- a technical point was raised regarding the description of zero-emission Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs), observing that tyre and road wear still produce particulate emissions and suggesting that the terminology should refer to carbon emissions rather than zero emissions; and
- there were opportunities for district heating in Invergordon and the potential heat sources from local industrial activity was highlighted. It was confirmed that opportunities to develop heat networks were being explored.

The Committee **NOTED** the project/programme updates provided in the report.

13. Performance Monitoring Report Q1 2026/27
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh R1 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No. ECI/34/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, reference was made to the Freedom of Information (FOI) performance figures and concern was expressed regarding the proportion of requests closed within statutory timescales. Clarification was sought on the reasons for the service's performance, noting the relevance of FOI response times to public scrutiny and the Committee's oversight responsibilities. It was indicated that the information requested would be provided outwith the meeting and circulated to all Members.

The Committee **NOTED** the service performance information and **AGREED** that information relating to FOI response times, in the context of public scrutiny and the Committee's oversight responsibilities, be circulated to all Members.

14. Appointment to the Flow Country Partnership
Cur an Dreuchd gu Com-pàirteachas nam Flobhachan

The Peatlands Partnership was formed at the end of 2006 following the completion of the EU LIFE funded Peatlands Project and aimed to develop and build on that project. The Partnership changed its name in 2021 to the Flow Country Partnership to emphasise the wider links in the landscape and its focus on the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms Leslie-Anne Niven as a Trustee of the Flow Country Partnership.

15. Membership of the Harbours Management Board
Ballrachd Bòrd Stiùiridh nan Calachan

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr Russel Jones to replace Mr Willie MacKay as a member of the Harbours Management Board.

16. Membership of the City Region Deal Monitoring Group
Ballrachd Buidheann-sgrùdaidh a' Chùmhnaint Baile Roinne

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr Duncan McDonald to replace Mr Ruraidh Stewart as a member of the City Region Deal Monitoring Group.

17. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

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

i. North PAC – 11 March 2026;
ii. North PAC– 23 April 2026;
iii. South PAC – 13 May 2026;
iv. South PAC – 17 June 2026;

and, **APPROVED**:-

v. City Region Deal Monitoring Group held on 28 April 2026;
vi. Community Regeneration Fund Strategic Subgroup held on 2 June 2026; and
vii. Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Monitoring Group held on the 5 June 2026.

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

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

19. Awards of Contract for Passenger and School Transport Services: Lochaber & Caithness
Toirt Seachad Chùmhnantan airson Seirbheisean Còmhdhalach Luchd-siubhail is Sgoile: Loch Abar & Gallaibh

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

Mr J Edmondson - as a member of a local transport forum
Mr R Jones – as Chair of the Badenoch and Strathspey Transport Forum
Mrs T Robertson – as a member of a local transport group

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. ECI/35/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee **APPROVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 12:30 pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on 24 August 2026 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mr J McLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Mr G MacKenzie, Senior Maintenance Officer
Mr B Cumming, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Mr I Moncreiff, Roads Operations Manager
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector D McAlpine, Police Scotland

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

An Apology was intimated on behalf of Mr S Kennedy.

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

There were no Declarations of Interests/Transparency Statements.

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee.

4. Police – Area Performance Summary
Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No DSA/13/26 by the North Area Commander.

Chief Inspector D. McAlpine provided an introduction, summarising the key areas of the report, including Road Safety and Road Crime, Anti-Social Behaviour, Acquisitive Crime, Protecting Vulnerable People, and Drug Supply Offenses.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- it was highlighted that fraud had become more sophisticated with personal information gathered from social media being used to make scams more believable;
- it was queried why there were no longer annual consultations with Members and Community Councils on policing priorities. The Chief Inspector undertook to get back the Chair with the reasons for this;
- concern was expressed about the number of shoplifting incidents and the possibility that this could increase during the winter. This had a detrimental impact on small businesses;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that there had been some incidents involving shoplifting gangs but these were uncommon and the majority of shoplifting incidents were perpetrated by individuals;
- thanks were extended to officers for carrying out their duties in a caring way;
- it was queried whether there were sufficient staffing levels in the area and, in response, it was clarified that there were fewer staff due to budget constraints but constant work was being done to ensure that there were enough staff available to deal with the volume of calls;
- the importance of providing Community Councils with accurate and up to date information on policing, was emphasised as this could affect public confidence in the Police.
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that figures from Covid were still included within five-year averages which could cause these figures to show reductions in certain types of crime due to Covid lockdowns;
- it was queried whether the closure of local bank branches had resulted in an increase in fraud or had made it more difficult for police to liaise with banks;
- information was sought, and provided, on the time taken to respond to, and investigate shoplifting incidents; the improved missing persons protocols for looked-after young people; speeding and drug driving offenses; the reporting of rape and domestic abuse offenses and the support provided to victims; which organisations attended Workshops to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP) and ACT Early meetings; and anti-social behaviour and the work of the Harm Prevention Officer;
- the monitoring of speeding in Conon Bridge had been well received by the public;
- it was highlighted that there had been a significant increase in certain types of crime and it was queried whether anything could be done by communities and Members to help mitigate this;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that there had been two reported incidents of Hate Aggravated Conduct in Dingwall and Seaforth in the previous year and four incidents in the current year; and
- the importance of reporting incidents to the Police was highlighted as, even when incidents were posted on social media, the Police may not be aware of them.

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

5. Bereavement Services – Project Updates
Seirbheisean Luchd-Caoidh – Cunntasan às Ùr air Pròiseactan

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that lairs in all three of the open cemeteries in the Ward could be pre-sold as they all had over 10 years of capacity remaining. The pre-sale of lairs was only stopped when cemeteries had less than 10 years capacity or less than 15 lairs remaining;
- it was queried whether information on the capacity of Urquhart and Urray cemeteries could be included in the next report as many Dingwall and Seaforth residents chose to be buried in those cemeteries. In response, it was confirmed that this information could be included in future reports. It was also clarified that there was currently over 26 years of capacity at Urquhart cemetery and over 10 years of capacity at Urray cemetery. It was further clarified that cemetery capacities were reported to all Area Committees as well as the Communities and Place Committee;
- in response to a query about the capital budget, it was confirmed that details of spending against this budget had been included in a report to the most recent Communities and Place Committee and the Bereavement Services Project Manager undertook to get back to Cllr MacLean with more detailed information;
- information was sought, and provided, on the waiting times at the Inverness Crematorium, the effects that the crematorium renovations were having on this and the possibility of building a new crematorium in Lochaber;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that previously lairs had been sold in perpetuity although regulations had recently changed to mean that they were now sold for 25 years at a time meaning that unused lairs were returned to the Council; and
- in response to a request, the Bereavement Services Project Manager undertook to get back to Cllr Paterson with information regarding whether burials could still take place in St Clements Churchyard where lairs were already owned.

The Committee **NOTED** the current capacities the burial ground in the Dingwall and Seaforth area.

6. Housing Repairs and Capital Report – 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026
Aithisg Chàraidhean is Calpa Taigheadais – 1 Gearran 2026 gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the improving performance in non-emergency repairs was welcomed and positive feedback had been received from tenants on the quickness of repairs and helpfulness of staff. Information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for this improvement;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that more information on Environmental Capital Projects would be available in the following weeks. The Senior Maintenance Officer undertook to keep Members updated on the termination dates of these projects as soon as they were available;
- it was queried whether the improvement in re-letting times was due to Officers being able to access properties earlier. In response, it was confirmed that while it was not always possible to gain access to properties before they were void, the Housing Repairs team worked hard to gain access to properties and make repairs as soon as possible after they were vacated;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that there were no significant waiting times for Aids and Adaptations assessments or works and, where larger jobs such as the installation of wet rooms had delays, this was usually due to pricing or contactor availability;
- it was requested that there be no reprofiling of the Environmental Capital Projects budgets as there were a large number of projects that local communities were keen to see taken forward such as fixing paths and replacing or repainting handrails; and
- information was sought, and provided, on garages, including the possibility of demolishing garages to create parking spaces, garage repairs and how unused garages were dealt with.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026.

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

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- there had been a full discussion on the subject of abandoned vehicles at the previous Communities and Place Committee and Members had requested for a further report on the matter come to the Committee meeting in November;
- it was queried what the process was for vehicles that were reported as abandoned but were not, later claimed or removed. In response, the importance of improving the website to help members of the public to understand what constituted an abandoned vehicle and how this should be reported, was emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, on the process of making members of the public who reported an abandoned vehicle aware of what happened to that vehicle; the challenges associated with dealing with abandoned or

nuisance caravans; issues concerning dog control; and the potential effects of the Environmental Health Operational Plan being renewed every three years rather than annually;
- disappointment was expressed that it had taken three years to remove an abandoned vehicle from the Cromartie car park in Dingwall;
- attention was drawn to a car park in Dingwall where several abandoned caravans were taking up parking spaces. In response to a request, the Senior Environmental Health Officer undertook to organise a site visit for Members to better understand the difficulties in dealing with this issue;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the report due to come to Communities and Place Committee in November would explore the possibility for provision of a storage area for nominally abandoned vehicles;
- in response to a request, the Senior Environmental Health Officer undertook to provide Members with an update on antisocial behaviour and abandoned vehicles in Bridge View and Sellar Place in Conon Bridge, prior to the next meeting of the Community Council. An offer of a Members' site visit covering these areas was extended;
- it was suggested that there should be and opportunity for people to purchase a permit to allowing for caravans, trailers and other vehicles to be parked in Council car parks;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that time spent by Environmental Health Officers on planning and licensing applications was tracked;
- in response to a question concerning the decrease in numbers of Fish and Shellfish Export Health Certificates, it was confirmed that there was a large amount of paperwork involved and that this could be done externally by approved vets; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that National Assistance Funerals were a function performed by the Environmental Health team although this was not publicised.

The Committee is invited to **NOTED**:-

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

8. Winter Service Plan for 2026/27
Plana Seirbheis a' Gheamhraidh airson 2026/27

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

During discussion, information was sought and provided on the new arrangements for the provision of dedicated gritters

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27.

9. Dingwall Common Good Fund – Final Outturn 2025/26 and Q1 2026/27 Monitoring Report to 31 May 2026
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Pheofharain – Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach 2025/26 agus Aithisg Sgrùdaidh R1 2026/27 gu 31 Cèitean 2026

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

Having scrutinised the reports, the Committee **NOTED** the position of Dingwall Common Good Fund as shown in the 2025/26 Quarter 4 and 2026/27 Quarter 1 (from 1 April to 31 May 2026 only) monitoring statements.

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

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications hade been approved since its last meeting.

i. James Support Group - Supporting the costs of advertising the monthly support group meetings in Dingwall - £500.00
ii. Dingwall Youth Forum - Improving the space for Young People in Dingwall Town Hall - £999.00
iii. Dingwall Community Council - Dingwall in Bloom - Floral Plantings around Dingwall - £1,000.00
iv. Maryburgh Community Council - Maryburgh in Bloom - £450.00

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 25 May 2026 which were approved by the Council on 25 June 2026.

The meeting ended at 1pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held in the Council Chamber, The Court House, High Street, Nairn on Monday 24 August 2026 at 10.00 am.

Present:
Mr L Fraser
Mr M Green
Mr P Oldham

In attendance:
Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Mr S Grant, Roads Operation Manager
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Officer
Mr L Marachi, Housing Investment Officer
Ms J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager
Ms K Arnott, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms L Stubbs, Station Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Ms K Stevenson, Group Commander, Highland Centre, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr M Green in the Chair

Business

1. **Apologies for Absence**
Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs B Jarvie.

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

There were no Declaration of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. **Recess Powers**

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on the 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Nairnshire Committee.

4. **Good News**
Naidheachdan Matha

Nairn Highland Games took place on Saturday 15 August 2026 and proved a huge success. Attendance figures would be made available in October, but it was expected to surpass the 16,000 attendees in 2025. Members acknowledged the Games Committee and Highland Council working in collaboration.

A special tribute was given to the charities and volunteers who gave up their day to make the Games a success. Car parking was managed at Viewfield by the Games Committee volunteer stewards and welfare provision was positive, there being only one lost child during the games who was identified and swiftly reunited with their family by Mikeysline and the Stewards.

Green Hive dealt with the waste and recycling and were praised for their outstanding effort. They ran a children's competition during the games to encourage children to pick up discarded plastic bottles during the day, with 12 sets of children taking part. Also, the 12 volunteers who worked alongside the Highland Council waste team clearing the field on Sunday were commended. Green Hive's waste statistics showed they collected 951.5 kgs of waste on the day.

Whilst the success of the Games was acknowledged, disappointment was expressed about social media claims suggesting the games would incur charges and risk financial loss. The Games had broken even, as indicated by the press, and there would be no need for future charges.

5. Fire Performance Report - Annual Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Smàlaidh – Aithisg Bhliadhnail

There had been circulated Report No NC/14/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Members commended the local Fire and Rescue service for their response to the recent wildfires, including the involvement of the Nairn crew in tackling the Dava Moor fires. Recognition was also given to the strong support shown by local communities throughout the incident.

Questions were raised as to whether the fire service should be given more powers around the sale of portable BBQs to try and curtail fires with education provided early in the year on the risks of such items.

Members welcomed the comprehensive report provided by the Fire Service and acknowledged its proactive approach to fire prevention, together with its commitment to tackling the underlying causes of fire incidents.

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

6. Nairn Common Good Fund - Invitation to Pay Parking Scheme
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – Sgeama Parcaidh Cuireadh gus Pàigheadh

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

Members commented that almost £10,000 had been generated through motorhome parking. However, it was recognised that the current legislation was insufficient to address issues such as inappropriate or obstructive parking. Members further acknowledged a slight decrease in general income, alongside an increase in camper van income, which could be affected by any future changes to the £10 scheme.

It was recognised that another Area Committee was considering the impact of removing the scheme, as motorhome sites often benefitted from the £10 contributions. Members considered the loss of this income could have significant financial implications, particularly for areas that were heavily reliant on the revenue generated. Members were informed that a Motion relating to the £10 scheme would be submitted to the Full Council in September, which would be monitored closely.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** that £5,874.60 costs incurred by the Council's Parking Enforcement Team for financial year 2024/25 to operate the Invitation to Pay Parking Scheme at the Nairn Common Good sites was charged against the Nairn Common Good Fund; and
ii. **AGREED** that £5,659.50 costs incurred by the Council's Parking Enforcement Team for financial year 2025/26 to operate the Invitation to Pay Parking Scheme at the Nairn Common Good sites was charged against the Nairn Common Good Fund.

7. Winter Service Plan 2026/27
Plana Seirbheis a' Gheamhraidh 2025/26

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

Members welcomed the new arrangements highlighting that the appropriate number of vehicles were now available to support service delivery. Discussion took place regarding the Community Self-Help Scheme, which provided communities with snow shovels, gloves and personal protective equipment (PPE) to assist with clearing cul-de-sacs and other local areas during periods of snowfall. The scheme was commended and it was suggested that examples of good practice within local communities could encourage wider participation across the area.

Members emphasised the importance of public awareness and readiness during severe winter weather, including ensuring access to appropriate equipment, monitoring weather forecasts and, where possible, considering the use of public transport rather than private vehicles. Members were made aware that public transport routes would continue to be prioritised during winter maintenance operations.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27.

8. Nairn Common Good Fund Update – Quarter 4 2025/26 and Quarter 1 2026/27 Financial Monitoring
Ùrachadh air Maoin Mhath Choitcheann Inbhir Narann – Sgrùdadh Ionmhais Ràithe 4 2024/25 agus Ràithe 1 2025/26

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

Members again discussed the success of the Nairn Games acknowledging the large crowds and the capacity for growth. The professional manner and security in which the Games were run was highlighted, with gratitude expressed to the team for all the efforts in making it a success. The importance of fundraising efforts was discussed as well as the collaboration with all parties involved.

An update on the Links Toilet Project was provided, recognising the extensive work done by various team members and project architects. It was acknowledged that the project had made significant milestones but the need for external fundraising efforts to secure a sufficient budget was required. A request for £200k as an initial capital build contribution from the Common Good Fund to strengthen applications for external funding was sought.

Questions were raised regarding the responsibility of the Project Board in identifying external sources of funding and concerns regarding the costs of option 3 were expressed. It was briefly suggested the project be paused to consider the potential impact on the Common Good Fund as well as considering the costs of running the toilets once it was built. Further clarification was provided. Questions were raised around the use of the £200k funding and clarification was provided. The importance of effective consultation was highlighted, however, despite the work completed by the Project Board, Members considered the potential to revisit option 2 if funding was not secured. Reassurance was given that the Project Board included representatives from the Council and included significant community involvement. However, concern was expressed about the substantial sum from the Common Good Fund and the potential overdevelopment of the project. It was explained that the use of the old toilet block as a commercial letting opportunity to fund the revenue running costs of the new toilet block was being progressed. Assurances were requested, and provided, that the £200k was the maximum contribution by the Common Good Fund. There was a range of funding options available, including Highland Council’s Regeneration funding and the Scottish Government’s Changing Places Toilet Scotland Fund. It was agreed to amend the allocation of funds from the Common Good Fund to reflect up to £200k.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the near final outturn of the Nairn Common Good Fund (NCGF) for 2025/26;
ii. **NOTED** the position of the (NCGF) as shown in the Quarter 1 Revenue Monitoring Statement against the Budget for 2026/27;
iii. **NOTED** the progress of the Links Toilet Project Board; and
iv. ***AGREED*** *to allocate* ***up to*** *£200k from NCGF Cash reserves towards the capital funding required to deliver the Links Toilets Project.*

9. Housing Repairs and Capital Report – 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026
Aithisg Chàraidhean Taigheadais agus Calpa – 1 Giblean 2026 gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

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

Members commended the Housing Service on the effective management of voids and emergency repairs, acknowledging that their performance was above the Highland average. However, it was requested that future reports include comparisons with previous years to provide a clearer trend of performance.

Assurances were sought regarding the resetting of gas and electric meters in void properties. Members acknowledged the challenges associated with meter suppliers and existing debt issues, but assurance was provided that the situation had improved. Issues relating to meters could cause delays, particularly where replacement meters were required, but Members were assured that the team had consistently addressed such issues within the required timescales. Member were offered further information on the specific challenges associated with gas and electricity meters.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026.

10. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund payment that had been approved since the previous meeting of this Committee:-

Applicant	**Project**	**WDF Award**
THC Property	Nairn War Memorial Maintenance	£4,250.00
Rosebank Primary	Playground Improvements Art Boards	£900.00
Inverness Rowing Club and Scottish Rowing	Home Internal Beach Springs Championships	£1,000.00

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

NOTED the Minutes of the Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 25 May 2026 which were approved by the Council on 25 June 2026.

The meeting concluded at 11.00am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 26 August 2026 at 9.35 am.

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

Religious Representatives (non-voting):
Mr G Barnie
Ms S Lamont
Mr J Maxwell

Youth Convener (non-voting):
Ms E Primrose

Non-Members also present:
Ms L Dundas (remote)
Mr A Graham
Dr M Gregson
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)
Mr P Oldham (remote)

In attendance:
Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Ms K MacPherson, Chief Officer – Secondary Education
Ms B Martin-Scott, Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead – Resources
Mr D Martin, Strategic Lead – Operations
Mr R Campbell, Strategic Lead - Investment Strategy
Ms K Clark, Area Quality Improvement Manager
Ms I Sinclair, Area Quality Improvement Manager
Ms H Flavell, Head Teacher, Thurso High School (remote)
Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years
Ms A Anthoney, Senior Youth Development Officer
Ms G Rodger, Chief Officer, Inspiring Young Voices (Third Sector)
Ms M Chemonges, Highland Parent Council Partnership
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:
Ms R Holt, Chief Executive, Eden Court

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

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair welcomed Kirsty MacPherson, Chief Officer – Secondary Education, George Barnie, religious representative, and Eilidh Primrose, Highland Youth Convener, to their first meeting of the Committee.

He also paid tribute to Bernedette Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist, who was leaving the Council after 34 years of dedicated service in different roles. He thanked Bernadette for her contribution and wished her well for the future.

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Gregg, Ms L Kraft and Mr K Rosie.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 9: Mr D Macpherson

Mr D Macpherson also made a general transparency statement on the basis that a close family member was employed by the Council as a Primary School Teacher. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Education Committee.

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

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

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

5. Statutory Consultation Exercise – Knockbreck Primary School (Skye): Request to Proceed to Consultation on Permanent Closure

There had been circulated Report No EDU/23/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair, speaking as a Local Member, commented that the community engagement undertaken to date had indicated a consensus in support of the proposals, and that the new school building in Dunvegan would provide a bright future for children living within the current Knockbreck and Dunvegan catchment areas.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation, in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, on a proposal to discontinue education provision at Knockbreck Primary School (Skye) and re-assign the catchment area to Dunvegan Primary School, on the basis of the Proposal Paper attached as Appendix 2 of the report.

6. Education and Learning Improvement Plan 2025–2028 - Update
Plana Leasachaidh Foghlaim agus Ionnsachaidh 2025–2028 – Cunntas às Ùr

There had been circulated Report No EDU/24/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, the Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years drew attention to a number of typographical and formatting errors, highlighting that several references to 2025 should have referred to 2026 and that two sections had been numbered 8.2. She apologised for these oversights.

In addition to the report, Ms I Sinclair and Ms K Clark, Area Quality Insurance Managers, and Ms H Flavell, Head Teacher, Thurso High School, gave a presentation summarising the work being undertaken to support schools to improve outcomes for children and young people, including professional learning, self-evaluation and quality assurance visits. Information was also provided on the work undertaken to improve attainment at Thurso High School, including promoting inclusion and a sense of belonging, and a focus on literacy and numeracy.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the report and the enlightening and encouraging presentation;
- congratulations were extended to Thurso High School on its significant improvements in attainment, which Members wished to see replicated across all Highland schools;
- with reference to the initial analysis of attainment at section 8 of the report, attainment overall appeared to be very good. Members commended the improvements that had been made, particularly in S6, and looked forward to comparing Highland's attainment data with both the virtual comparator and national results when the full report was presented to the November Committee;
- further information was sought, and provided, on the culture of self-improvement being created and the role of Pedagogy Teachers;
- the new Data Dashboard was welcomed. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the dashboard was not yet fully operational and accessible to all

schools. However, information had been shared with Head Teachers and it would be launched as soon as possible;

- reference was made to the approach being taken by Invergordon Academy in investing Pupil Equity Funding in Inclusion Support Workers, as outlined in the report, and it was queried whether, if the model proved successful, it would be shared more widely or whether it was specific to Invergordon Academy;
- Members emphasised the valuable contribution of Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) to the education system and the importance of the review of Pupil Support roles. In response, the Assistant Chief Executive – People outlined the approach being taken to PSA development, which included the establishment of a Lead PSA role to provide both career progression opportunities and greater support and leadership to PSA teams across all Highland schools;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that, going forward, all schools would be expected to undertake the survey referred to in section 7.1 of the report every two years or in advance of a quality improvement visit;
- with reference to section 8.1 of the report, it was suggested that an increase from 72.8% to 74.3% should not be described as “significant”, and the need for care in the terminology used was emphasised;
- whilst the improvements that had been achieved were welcomed, they would be less meaningful if national performance had improved by a greater margin, and the need for caution was emphasised;
- the report indicated that there had been a slight decrease in S5 Higher attainment. It was therefore queried whether this might suggest that S6 results in the following year would be lower than those achieved this year, and it was suggested that more could be done in terms of modelling to track and forecast attainment as cohorts progressed through school;
- there was some positive news in the report, and tribute was paid to pupils, as well as officers, school staff and teachers, for their hard work. However, attainment in Highland remained a concern, particularly the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children. Education was one of the most powerful tools for lifting people out of poverty, and failure to address educational disadvantage could have long-term consequences. The reference in the Improvement Plan to the Poverty and Equality Commission was welcomed. However, the Chairs of the Commission had made it clear that a plan alone was not sufficient;
- the impact of disruption and conflict in classrooms on learning and teaching was emphasised, and the commitment to review relationships and behaviour approaches by June 2027 was welcomed. However, a policy was only as good as the results it could deliver, and it was suggested that it was necessary to identify Key Performance Indicators to measure improvements in behaviour and demonstrate that less learning time was being lost to disruption in classrooms. In response, it was explained that HGIOS (How Good Is Our School?) 4, the national framework for school self-evaluation and improvement, contained a suite of quality indicators. The current school inspection format focused on two quality indicators, namely 2.3 Learning, Teaching and Assessment, and 3.1 Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion. It was confirmed that behaviour was a key component of 2.3 Learning, Teaching and Assessment, and that there was a focus on learning provision and how to best meet the needs of all children and young people. Children were considered as individuals, and targeted behavioural support was in place in some schools in addition to the universal support package. It was further explained that HGIOS 4 was currently under review by Education Scotland. Whilst the revised framework remained under development, a draft had been shared with officers and Head Teachers, and it was anticipated that the number of quality

indicators would be greatly reduced. A further update was expected within the next four to five weeks;

- the report indicated that the school attendance rate was approximately 90%. The Council had a responsibility to educate all children in Highland, and it was queried what action was being taken to support those who were not attending school and who were therefore more likely to experience poorer life outcomes. It was suggested that those who were not attending school were being let down, and one Member reiterated concerns raised at previous meetings of the Council and other committees regarding the lack of funding for youth hubs and clubs across Highland, which was placing many of these organisations at risk. The need to address the issue was emphasised, and it was questioned whether the Council was prepared to accept responsibility. The Chair acknowledged the point raised but explained that it was necessary to consider what fell within the remit of the Education Committee and Service. In relation to attendance, the Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years outlined the work being undertaken, including implementing the refreshed Attendance Policy; the provision of support by the Educational Psychology team for children experiencing emotionally based school avoidance; the wider rollout of Family Support Workers, funded through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, to support children, young people and families where attendance was problematic; and a "learning without boundaries" initiative;
- being in school was not necessarily right for every child and young person, and the importance of alternative approaches to learning was emphasised. Information was sought, and provided, on the opportunities available for outdoor education and the Council's approach to risk, which it was explained focused on sensible risk management rather than risk avoidance;
- in response to a question regarding the actions being taken to accelerate progress among the most disadvantaged S4 pupils, it was explained that Pupil Equity Funding could be targeted towards specific interventions to support these learners. Members were also reminded that the current attainment picture was partial, and that published data on vocational qualifications was still awaited;
- there was a significant amount of transformation taking place in the early years sector, and the reference to 3-18 settings was welcomed, as were the references to health and wellbeing;
- it was queried what percentage of Head Teachers were participating in further professional learning and leadership training, and information was sought, and provided, on the support provided to Acting Head Teachers; and
- reference having been made to the success of foundation apprenticeship provision in Aberdeenshire and Glasgow, it was explained that there was a strong apprenticeship programme in Highland. A key aspect of the My Highland Future portfolio was vocational learning, including foundation, graduate and modern apprenticeships, focusing on specific sectors where there were gaps. It was confirmed that data on apprenticeship results would be provided in the report to the November Committee.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the content of the report and progress made;
ii. **AGREED** the draft Education and Learning Report for 2025/26 and refreshed Plan for session 2026/27 (Appendix 1 of the report);
iii. **NOTED** the summary of senior phase attainment, and that an in-depth analysis of the senior phase attainment for 2026 would be brought to Committee in November 2026; and

iv. **NOTED** the next steps set out in section 9 of the report.

7. Inverness Catchment Review Update
Cunntas às Ùr air Ath-sgrùdadh Sgìre-sgoile Inbhir Nis

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- with reference to section 6.2 of the report, which outlined a number of criteria to be considered as part of the review of Inverness Royal Academy and Millburn Academy Associated School Groups (ASGs), it was requested that an additional criterion be included, namely, "attending the closest school to where the child lived", as that was not always the case at present. As an alternative, the Chair suggested "attending the closest school to where the child lived, taking into account parental choice";
- with reference to recommendation iv. within the report, which did not specify a date for the proposed report to the Committee, concern was expressed that the matter could be delayed beyond the Local Government Elections. It was therefore suggested that a report be presented to the Committee on 17 February 2027, and this was accepted by the Chair;
- Inverness Royal Academy and Millburn Academy could both be at capacity within the next few years, and the report had not taken account of the proposed Masterplan Consent Area at Essich Road. Concern was therefore expressed that the proposed review could result in the need for further reviews of ASGs, particularly Culloden Academy;
- information was sought, and provided, in relation to school placing requests, during which it was confirmed that data on placing requests was held on SEEMiS and that officers had a good understanding of where any pressure points were. Members added that movement from one school to another could be indicative of an issue at a particular school, and it was therefore necessary to identify such instances and address any underlying concerns;
- it was suggested that, following completion of the review of catchment areas in Inverness, it would be worthwhile to undertake similar reviews across Highland, particularly in light of the construction of a number of new schools in remote and rural communities, to establish whether existing catchment arrangements remained suitable. The Chair and other Members concurred; and
- it was requested that the next report to the Committee provide greater clarity on the implications for Inverness High School which, unlike other secondary schools in Inverness, had significant available capacity. However, it was highlighted that, should this capacity be utilised, there would be significant staffing implications. The Chair highlighted that the matter could be discussed at the next Members' Seminar.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the current school roll forecast position across Inverness Associated School Groups;
ii. **NOTED** concerns that had been raised regarding catchment arrangements within parts of Inverness;

iii. **AGREED** that officers undertake further detailed analysis of primary and secondary catchment arrangements within Inverness Royal Academy and Millburn Academy Associated School Groups, subject to the inclusion of an additional criterion, namely, “attending the closest school to where the child lived, taking into account parental choice.”;
iv. **AGREED** that the findings of the review be reported back to a further Members’ Seminar before bringing a report to the Committee on 17 February 2027 setting out options, implications and recommendations arising from the review.

8. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report Final Outturn 2025/26 & Quarter 1 2026/27 Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach 2025/26 & Ràith 1 2026/27

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the report stated that there would be a need to adjust spending on Additional Support for Learning staffing to bring it back into line with the approved budget, and it was queried how further staffing savings could be achieved without reducing frontline support for pupils. Concern was also expressed regarding the use of vacancy management to deliver savings, as it was important to ensure that posts were filled when needed. In response, it was explained that the vacancy management target was not intended to prevent the active recruitment of staff. Rather, it was designed to ensure that the underspends that naturally occurred in a service with a significant workforce could be used to deliver savings without directly impacting service delivery. It was further explained that vacancies arising from staff absence created significant pressures due to the need to employ supply staff. Work was therefore being undertaken to support staff to remain healthy at work and, where they were absent, to facilitate their return as soon as possible, when they were ready to do so, helping to manage staffing costs;
- disappointment was expressed regarding the reference in the report to the use of reserves, and the apparent inability of services to remain within the budget agreed by the Council, given that there was already an overspend only a few months after the budget had been set. It was suggested that the matter merited further discussion by the Full Council. In response, it was confirmed that changes would need to be made to remain within the agreed budget, and the importance of implementing any such changes in a sensitive and child-centred manner, with a clear understanding of their impacts, was emphasised. It was further clarified that the reserves referred to in the report had previously been set aside to enable the service to manage transformation over a period of time. An assurance was provided that the reserves were being utilised for their intended purpose, not to manage the budget overspend;
- it was highlighted that the overspend was minor relative to the size of the overall budget and was therefore not a cause for significant concern;
- with reference to section 8.2.1 of the report, information was requested on the reasons behind secondary schools operating above their Devolved School Management (DSM) entitlement in relation to management structures;
- in response to a query regarding whether school staffing numbers were realistic given the need to provide cover for staff absences and training, it was explained that DSM budgets could be utilised by Head Teachers to manage staff absences

and, in cases where these budgets were insufficient, there was a central contingency budget which could be used. In relation to Drummond School in particular, it was explained that significant additional resource had been provided to support the improvement plan that had been put in place following the school inspection and in recognition of the challenging environment. As had previously been reported, there had been a deliberate budget overspend in relation to Drummond School, which would be managed within the scope of the wider Additional Support Needs budget; and

- information was sought, and provided, on the challenges associated with the forthcoming reduction in class contact time for teachers, during which it was explained that recruitment challenges were anticipated, particularly in smaller rural schools where only part-time posts would be required, which could result in a need to recruit peripatetic teachers to cover several schools.

The Committee:-

i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the 2025/2026 final end of year outturn (Appendix 1 & 1a of the report);
ii. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for the year 2026/2027 as set out in the report and Appendix 2 & 2a of the report;
iii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
iv. **NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery.

9. Eden Court Update
Cunntas às Ùr air Cùirt an Easbaig

Transparency Statement: Mr D Macpherson declared a connection to this item as a Friend of Eden Court. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/27/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In addition to the report, the Chief Executive of Eden Court gave a presentation highlighting Eden Court's 50th anniversary celebrations and outlining its Creative Engagement Strategy, which included work in schools and with teachers; Higher Dance and Drama Qualifications; the BFI (British Film Institute) Film Academy; classes for young people, including an expansion of Gaelic provision; the recently concluded Future Studio project; and an upcoming project working on employability skills with young refugees and asylum seekers.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- congratulations were extended to Eden Court for its work with young people, particularly those facing challenges;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the film "People's Emergency Briefing" had previously been shown at Eden Court and that the possibility of screening it again, together with opportunities to increase Elected Member engagement, could be explored;
- it was suggested that more communication surrounding Eden Court's activities and achievements was needed in areas outwith Inverness;

- the significant amount of grant funding secured by Eden Court was commended;
- interest was expressed in the possibility of intergenerational classes, particularly for the LGBTQ+ community as a need had been identified in this area;
- the achievements of Eden Court over the past 50 years were commended, as was its contribution to the Highland economy. Praise was also extended to the Chief Executive for her achievements since taking on the role;
- it was highlighted that the creative arts formed part of the Inverness-Highland UK City of Culture bid, and Eden Court's contribution in this area was commended;
- in response to a question, it was explained that, while there was a need to invest in Eden Court and capital projects were being considered, expansion of the Empire Theatre was not currently a priority given the costs and level of disruption involved;
- the forthcoming Basic Income for Artists Workshop was welcomed;
- the work being undertaken in schools and with teachers to build capacity for creative arts education, the reintroduction of National 5 qualifications in dance and drama, and the BFI Film Academy were commended, and the positive impact of drama on the mental health of young people was highlighted; and
- the CashBack for Communities Next Generation Creatives programme was welcomed, with particular reference to its delivery in Alness and Invergordon; and in response to a request, it was confirmed that a geographical breakdown of participation and further evidence of long-term educational and employment outcomes could be provided in future reports.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report at Appendix 1 of the covering report.

10. Delivery Plan Monitoring and Progress Update - Person Centred Solutions Q1 2026/27
Cunntas às Ùr air a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh: Cùram-roinne Fhuasglaidhean Stèidhichte air an Neach – Cunntasan às Ùr air Tràth-ionnsachadh is Cùram-chloinne agus Seirbheisean Measaidh Niùro-leasachaidh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/28/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) project, which had been welcomed by families, businesses and communities across Highland, was commended;
- concern was expressed that section 5.5 of the report appeared to be attributing the difficulty of extra pressures and costs to parental expectations and, in response to a request, it was confirmed that the key risks could be updated to include national and community expectations, the need for equity and the diversity of need, as well as parental expectations;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the proposed eight pilot unregulated activity-based childcare sites, during which it was clarified that, although these sites would not be registered with the Care Inspectorate as regulated services, there would be safeguards in place and all staff would have appropriate child-protection training;
- it was highlighted that many families struggled to access affordable childcare during school holidays and it was suggested that, in line with the calls to action of the Poverty and Equality Commission, the Council should seek to provide year-round childcare to support these families and help address poverty and

depopulation. In response, it was clarified that early learning was a statutory provision for which the Council received funding, whereas the delivery of childcare was not a statutory responsibility. It was explained that, whilst childcare provision could operate as a business model in other parts of Scotland, this was often not viable in remote and rural areas of Highland, which was why innovative approaches were being explored. Whilst not a statutory responsibility, childcare provision was regarded as a shared responsibility with communities and was vital to ensuring that Highland communities remained active and vibrant places in which to live, work and raise families; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Ardnamurchan pilot project would continue into the following year and the outcomes would be reported to the Committee on completion of the pilot.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the Delivery Project updates provided in the report;
ii. **NOTED** the revised format of the report, which included the use of portfolio board project dashboards from the Performance and Risk Management System (PRMS), with accompanying project narrative sections aligned to the content of these; and
iii. **AGREED** that the key risks in section 5.5 of the report be updated to include national and community expectations, the need for equity and the diversity of need, as well as parental expectations.

11. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – Q1 2026/27
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanadh Ràitheil – R1 2026/27

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed regarding the 52% Freedom of Information (FOI) request compliance rate and the failure to comply with statutory requirements, and an explanation of the reasons for this was requested. In response it was explained that many of the FOI requests dealt with by the Education Service were complex in nature and that a new member of staff with responsibility for overseeing FOI requests had been appointed, which was helping to improve performance;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that, where possible, people were directed to publicly available information, and that information from previous FOI responses was retained to assist in responding to similar requests as efficiently as possible. Members emphasised that making as much information as possible publicly available could also help to reduce the number of complaints received, as it appeared that, in some instances, submitting a complaint was the first course of action when information was not readily available. It was further suggested that education for members of the public on FOI requests and complaints procedures may be needed; and
- Members were encouraged to use the Members' Enquiry System for any questions they may have as they would receive a response within five days, whereas responses to FOI requests could take considerably longer due to how they were processed.

The Committee **NOTED** the performance information for the Education Service.

12. Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers
Geàrr-chunntas dhen Chomataidh Bharganachaidh Ionadail do Thidsearan

The Committee **NOTED** the draft Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers on 9 June 2026.

The meeting concluded at 12.05 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Gaelic Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 26 August 2026 at 2pm.

Present:

Mr R Bremner (remote)
Mr I Brown
Mr S Cameron (remote)
Mrs I Campbell (remote)
Ms C Gillies
Dr M Gregson
Mr P Logue
Ms K MacLean
Mr D Millar

Non-Member also present:
Ms L Johnston
Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Ross (remote)
Mr R Stewart

In attendance:
Ms B Martin-Scott, Chief Officer (Primary)
Ms L Walker, Gaelic Development Manager
Ms M A MacLeod Mitchell, Gaelic Development Officer
Ms E Rodgers, Gaelic Policy Officer
Mr R MacKay, Development Officer, Education and Learning
Ms C Dallas, Education Support Officer (Early Years)
Mr K MacKenzie, Corporate Comms and Engagement Officer
Miss J Maclennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Mr C Ross, Committee Officer

M MacLeod
Dr G Munro, Principal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig
Dr M MacLeod, Vice Principal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

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

Mr D Millar in the Chair

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr J Grafton, Mr A MacKintosh and Mrs M Paterson.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Recess Powers

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted at the meeting on 25 June 2026 did not require to be used in relation to the Gaelic Committee.

4. Good News

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

40 Years of Gaelic Medium Education (GME)
The video shown to Members showed the variety of events that had taken place from a Football Festival ran by Alba FA to family ceilidhs held in Portree and Staffin. In Inverness, a ceilidh was held in Cultarlann to celebrate the development pf GME from the early days in Bun-Sgoil a' Mheadhain to where it was now in Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis where former and current pupils, parents and teachers were invited to celebrate the 40-year milestone.

Blas
The Blas Festival was due to start on 4 September where a wide variety of Gaelic cultural and musical events were held across Highland. It brought top class musicians direct to village halls and centres to local communities.

Qualifications Scotland Results
There had been an increase in the number of pupils that passed both Gàidhlig Fluent and Gaelic Learner exams. There had been an increase of 21 pupils successfully passing those exams.

FilmG Awards
The successful Highland winners at the Glasgow FilmG Awards held in June were congratulated. There were winners across all three age categories, highlighting the growing interest and skills level of our Gaelic speakers.

Primary One Pupils
There had been an increase in numbers of Primary One pupils starting school in GME across Highland. Dingwall Primary had the highest ever intake with 17 pupils this year.

5. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig – Memorandum of Understanding

There had been circulated Report No. G/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People. This was accompanied by a presentation from Dr Munro and Dr MacLeod, which highlighted Sabhal Mòr Ostaig as a leading organisation in Gaelic learning, research and culture. It focused on the organisation's unique education provision and the efforts made to engage communities with Gaelic. The importance of continued collaboration between the Council and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig was made clear.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the presentation and report were welcomed;
- Members highlighted the importance of continued collaboration between the Council and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to help advance Gaelic education;
- Members were encouraged to visit Sabhal Mòr Ostaig campus to further appreciate the work carried out by the organisation;
- it was queried if there were any collaborative solutions to the lack of Gaelic teachers in Highland schools. It was understood that Gaelic officers were researching the viability of a part-time Professional Graduate or Postgraduate Diploma in Education teaching qualification which could help address the issue sustainably; and
- reference was made to the importance of instilling confidence in Gaelic learners to aid the growth of Gaelic outside of the educational setting and in everyday life in communities and professional settings.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the impact of SMO and associated activities in supporting Gaelic language, culture and economic development;
ii. **AGREED** opportunities for continued collaboration; and
iii. **AGREED** the draft revised Memorandum of Understanding.

6. Seachdain na Gàidhlig – Corporate Communications and Engagement

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members encouraged the Corporate Communications team to further emphasise the presence of Seachdain na Gàidhlig advertising within the Council Headquarters building;
- the success of the programme was praised;
- information regarding what aspect of the programme could be developed and improved for 2027 was sought, however it was advised that the Gaelic Development or Gaelic Education team would be best suited to provide an answer;
- Members expressed support for the proposal of including Gaelic translations on service-related materials, such bus tickets and receipts. Introducing the public to Gaelic through innovative and subtle methods such as this was praised. However, concern was raised that services had been prioritising cost over the promotion of Gaelic when such proposals had been made;
- Members discussed the benefits of expanding Gaelic learning opportunities to all communities by grounding the Gaelic education in local contexts, for example through the use of local place-names as a starting point for learning; and
- the benefits of Gaelic immersion courses were referenced and in response to a question it was confirmed that there was a number of immersion courses available.

The Committee is invited to **NOTED**:-

i. the report;
ii. the activity in support of Seachdain na Gàidhlig 2026; and
iii. the successful efforts to increase the number of Gaelic-related projects promoted through press releases and social media in 2025-26.

7. Gaelic Education Update

There had been circulated Report No. G/13/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People. This was accompanied by a presentation from Ms Dallas, Education Support Officer, which highlighted the excellent HMIe Inspection of Mallaig Gaelic Nursery. The Nursery had been graded as “Very Good” across the Quality Indicators, a rare occurrence. This reflected the efforts of staff, the quality of provision, the community and cultural links and the commitment to the Gaelic Language.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members congratulated Mallaig Nursery on the glowing Inspection report, setting a new benchmark for others;
- some Mallaig Nursery parents were Gaelic learners and this enhanced the links with the community;
- there were 1,900 Gaelic learner pupils in Highland secondary school out of 3,200 for the whole of Scotland. It would be useful for Highland to compare itself with the other local authorities. Overall, this was a tribute to the success of introducing Gaelic in Highland;
- the overall trend was that the number of Gaelic learners increased and it was hoped this would continue; and
- Members were delighted that GME was also starting at Lochaline Primary and it was important to continue looking at new areas where Gaelic could be introduced.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. positive outcome of the HMIe inspection of Mallaig Sgoil-àraich, recognising the strengths identified and the contribution of the setting to Gaelic Medium Early Learning and Childcare provision within Highland;
ii. progress of Highland Council's current performance in relation to L2 and L3 language learning, including progress against national expectations and the ongoing work to support language learning across schools; and
iii. continued growth in Gaelic Education across Highland and the importance of sustaining capacity to meet future demand.

8. Gaelic Language Plan Progress Update

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

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the hard work of the team implementing the Gaelic Language Plan was acknowledged;
- information was sought, and provided, as to the reasons why Culloden Academy no longer offered Gaelic Learner education to pupils wishing to continue with the language and how this was to be addressed; and
- with many place names across Highland originating from Gaelic, a new Gaelic Place Names course, developed in association with Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba, was being developed for employees and Members. This was warmly welcomed as it would raise awareness and understanding across Council services and with some Members indicating their willingness to participate.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the PRMS progress report.

9. Gaelic Specific Grant 2026/27

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

Having recognised the positive report, the Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. 3 projects and outcomes outlined in the Gaelic Specific Grant bid;
ii. programme of work that the grant would help to support and that these were adjusted as the full amount was not secured; and
iii. maintained level of £940,000 in the Gaelic grant offered by Scottish Government.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm.

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Geàrr-chunntas coinneamh **Comataidh na Gàidhlig** a chumadh ann an Seòmar na Comhairle, Prìomh Oifis na Comhairle, Rathad Ghlinn Urchadain, Inbhir Nis air Diciadain 26 Lùnastal 2026 aig 2f.

An làthair:

Mgr R Bremner (air astar)
Mgr I MacIlleDhuinn
Mgr S Camshron (air astar)
A' Bh-uas I Chaimbeul (air astar)
A' Bh-uas C NicIllÌosa
Dr M Gregson
Mgr P Logue
A' Bh-uas C NicIlleathain
Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir

Neo-Bhuill cuideachd an làthair:

A' Bh-uas L Sheonstanach
Mgr D Mac a' Phearsain
A' Bh-uas M Ros (air astar)
Mgr R Stiùbhart

A' frithealadh na coinneimh:

A' bh-uas B Martin-Scott, Àrd-Oifigear (Bun-sgoil)
A' Bh-uas L Walker, Manaidsear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig
A' Bh-uas M A NicLeòid Mitchell, Oifigear Leasachaidh Gàidhlig
A' Bh-uas E Rodgers, Oifigear Poileasaidh Gàidhlig
Mgr R MacAoidh, Oifigear Leasachaidh, Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh
A' Bh-uas C Dallas, Oifigear Taic Foghlaim (Tràth-bhliadhnaichean)
Mgr K MacCoinnich, Oifigear Conaltraidh Chorporra is Com-pàirteachaidh
A' Bh-uas S NicIllinnein, Manaidsear Cho-Sheirbheisean Deamocratach
Mgr C Ros, Oifigear Comataidh

Cuideachd a' frithealadh na coinneimh:

Dr G Rothach, Prionnsapal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig
Dr M NicLeòid, Iar-Phrionnsapal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

Tha rionnag air iomall na duilleige a' comharrachadh moladh a thèid chun na Comhairle. Tha co-dhùnaidhean gun chomharra fo ùghdarras na Comataidh.

Mgr D Mac a' Mhuilleir anns a' Chathair

Gnothach

1. Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Thugadh leisgeul seachad às leth Mhgr I Grafton, Mhgr A Mhic an Tòisich agus na M-uas M NicPheadrais.

2. Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd

Cha robh Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt no Aithrisean Follaiseachd ann.

3. Cumhachdan Fosaidh

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** nach fheumadh na cumhachdan fosaidh a chaidh a bhuileachadh aig a' choinneimh air 25 Ògmhios 2026 a bhith air an cleachdadh a thaobh Comataidh na Gàidhlig.

4. Naidheachdan Matha

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do na Naidheachdan Matha a leanas:-

40 Bliadhna de dh'Fhoghlam tron Ghàidhlig (FtG)
Bha bhidio a chaidh a shealltainn do Bhuill a' toirt am follais gun deach measgachadh de thachartasan a chumail, bho Fhèis Ball-coise a bha air a cur air dòigh le Alba FA gu cèilidhean teaghlaich a chaidh a chumail ann am Port Rìgh agus Stafainn. Ann an Inbhir Nis, chaidh cèilidh a chumail sa Chultarlann gus leasachadh FtG a chomharrachadh, bho na bliadhnaichean tràtha ann am Bun-Sgoil a' Mheadhain gu Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis an-diugh. Bha cuireadh aig seann sgoilearan, sgoilearan a th' ann an-dràsta, pàrantan is tidsearan, tighinn còmhla gus an 40 bliadhna a chomharrachadh.

Blas
Bhiodh Fèis Bhlas a' tòiseachadh air 4 Sultain agus bhiodh measgachadh farsaing de thachartasan a' comharrachadh cultar is ceòl Gàidhlig air an cumail air feadh na Gàidhealtachd. Bha an fhèis a' toirt sàr luchd-ciùil dìreach gu tallaichean baile is coimhearsnachdan ionadail.

Toraidhean Teisteanasan na h-Alba
Bha an àireamh de sgoilearan a bha air an dà chuid deuchainnean Gàidhlig Fhileantach agus Gàidhlig Luchd-ionnsachaidh a phasaigeadh air àrdachadh. Bha àrdachadh de 21 sgoilearan air a bhith san àireimh a bha a' pasaigeadh nan deuchainnean seo.

Duaisean FilmG
Chaidh meal an naidheachd a chur air luchd-buannachaidh bhon Ghàidhealtachd a bha air soirbheachadh aig Duaisean FilmG a chaidh a chumail ann an Glaschu san Ògmhios. Bha luchd-buannachaidh ann thairis air na trì earrannan aoise, a' sealltainn gu bheil ùidh agus sgilean a' fàs am measg an luchd-labhairt Ghàidhlig againn.

Sgoilearan Clas 1
Bha an àireamh de sgoilearan Clas 1 a bha a' tòiseachadh san sgoil ann am FtG air feadh na Gàidhealtachd air àrdachadh. Bha an àireamh a b' àirde riamh aig Bun-Sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain le 17 sgoilearan am-bliadhna.

5. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig – Meòrachan Tuigse

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/11/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine. Bha taisbeanadh ann cuideachd bhon Dr Rothach agus bhon Dr NicLeòid, a' sealltainn mar a bha Sabhal Mòr Ostaig air thoiseach a thaobh ionnsachadh, rannsachadh is cultar na Gàidhlig. Bha an taisbeanadh a' coimhead gu sònraichte air solar foghlaim agus air oidhirpean gus ceangal a thogail eadar coimhearsnachdan agus a' Ghàidhlig. Bha cho cudromach 's a bha co-obrachadh leantainneach eadar a' Chomhairle agus Sabhal Mòr Ostaig air a dhaingneachadh.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:

- chaidh fàilte a chur air an taisbeanadh agus air an aithisg;
- chuir Buill an cèill cho cudromach 's a bha co-obrachadh leantainneach eadar a' Chomhairle agus Sabhal Mòr Ostaig airson cuideachadh gus foghlam Gàidhlig a chur air adhart;
- bha Buill air am brosnachadh gus tadhal air campas Shabhal Mòr Ostaig gus obair na colaiste fhaicinn dhaib' fhèin;
- chaidh faighneachd co-dhiù a bha fuasglaidhean co-obrachail sam bith ann a thaobh cion thidsearan Gàidhlig ann an sgoiltean na Gàidhealtachd. Bhathar a' tuigsinn gun robh oifigearan Gàidhlig a' rannsachadh co-dhiù a bhiodh e ion-obrachail teisteanas teagaisg Dioplòma ann am Foghlam do Cheumnaichean Proifeiseanta no Iar-cheumnaichean a chur air dòigh air stèidh phàirt-ùine airson cuideachadh gus dèiligeadh ris a' chùis ann an dòigh sheasmhach; agus
- chaidh iomradh a thoirt air cho cudromach 's a bha e misneachd a thogail am measg luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig gus an deigheadh fàs sa Ghàidhlig a chuideachadh taobh a-muigh suidheachadh foghlaim, ann am beatha làitheil ann an coimhearsnachdan, agus ann an suidheachaidhean proifeiseanta.

Às dèidh sin:-

i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** dhan bhuaidh a tha aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig agus a ghnìomhan co-cheangailte a thaobh a bhith a' cur taic ri cànan is cultar na Gàidhlig agus leasachadh eaconamach;
ii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh cothroman airson co-obrachadh leantainneach; agus
iii. **DH'AONTAICH** a' Chomataidh am Meòrachan Tuigse ùraichte.

6. Seachdain na Gàidhlig – Conaltradh Corporra agus Com-pàirteachadh

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/12/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:

- thug Buill brosnachadh do Sgioba a' Chonaltraidh Chorporra tuilleadh sanasachd a dhèanamh air Seachdain na Gàidhlig taobh a-staigh Prìomh-Oifis na Comhairle;
- chaidh soirbheachas a' phrògraim a mholadh;
- chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh a thaobh dè an taobh dhen phrògram a dh'fhaodadh a bhith air a leasachadh airson 2027, agus chaidh moladh gum biodh Sgioba na Gàidhlig no Sgioba an Fhoghlaim san t-suidheachadh a b' fheàrr airson freagairt a thoirt seachad;
- chuir Buill an cèill taic airson a bhith a' gabhail a-steach Gàidhlig air stuthan a' buntainn ri seirbheisean, a leithid tiogaidean is cuidhteasan bus. Chaidh moladh a dhèanamh air dòighean innleachdach is sèimh a leithid seo gus a' Ghàidhlig a nochdadh dhan phoball. Ach, chaidh dragh a thogail gun robh seirbheisean air a bhith a' toirt prìomhachas do chosgais thairis air a bhith a' brosnachadh na Gàidhlig nuair a bhathar a' dèanamh mholaidhean a leithid seo;
- bheachdaich Buill air na buannachdan a bha an lùib a bhith a' leudachadh chothroman ionnsachaidh sa Ghàidhlig do choimhearsnachdan uile tro bhith a' stèidheachadh an fhoghlaim Ghàidhlig ann an co-theacsaichean ionadail, mar

eisimpleir, tro bhith a' cleachdadh ainmean-àite ionadail mar thoiseach-tòiseachaidh airson ionnsachadh; agus
- chaidh iomradh a thoirt air na buannachdan a bha an lùib chùrsaichean bogaidh Gàidhlig agus mar fhreagairt do cheist, chaidh dearbhadh gun robh grunn chùrsaichean bogaidh rim faotainn.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

i. dhan aithisg;
ii. do na chaidh a dhèanamh gus taic a chur ri Seachdain na Gàidhlig 2026; agus
iii. do na h-oidhirpean soirbheachail a chaidh a dhèanamh gus àrdachadh a thoirt air an àireimh de phròiseactan a bha air an cur air adhart tro fhiosan naidheachd agus na meadhanan sòisealta ann an 2025–26.

7. Cunntas air Foghlam Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/13/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine. Bha taisbeanadh ann bhon Bh-uas Dallas, Oifigear Taic Foghlaim, a sheall gun robh sàr sgrùdadh air a bhith aig Sgoil-Àraich Mhalaig bho Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlaim. Bha an sgoil-àraich air ìre 'Fìor Mhath' a chosnadh thar nan Taisbeanairean Càileachd, agus b' ann ainneamh a bha a leithid air a bhuileachadh. Bha seo a' sealltainn oidhirpean an luchd-obrach, càileachd an t-solair, ceanglaichean coimhearsnachd is cultarach agus dealas a thaobh na Gàidhlig.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:

- chuir Buill meal an naidheachd air Sgoil-Àraich Mhalaig às dèidh dhaibh aithisg sgrùdaidh fìor mhath fhaotainn, agus sin a' stèidheachadh slat-tomhais ùr do chàch;
- bha cuid de phàrantan Sgoil-Àraich Mhalaig ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig agus bha seo a' neartachadh cheanglaichean leis a' choimhearsnachd;
- bha 1,900 sgoilearan ag ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig ann an àrd-sgoiltean na Gàidhealtachd a-mach à 3,200 ann an Alba gu lèir. Bhiodh e feumail do Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd coimeas a dhèanamh eadar i fhèin agus ùghdarrasan ionadail eile. Uile gu lèir, bha seo na theisteanas air cho soirbheachail 's a bha a' Ghàidhlig air a bhith sa Ghàidhealtachd;
- bha am pàtran iomlan a' sealltainn gun robh an àireamh de luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig air àrdachadh agus bhathar an dòchas gun leanadh seo; agus
- bha Buill fìor thoilichte gun robh FtG cuideachd a' tòiseachadh ann am Bun-Sgoil Loch Àlainn agus bha e cudromach leantainn air adhart a' coimhead air sgìrean ùra far am faodadh a' Ghàidhlig a bhith air a toirt a-steach.

THUG a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

i. do thoradh deimhinnteach sgrùdadh Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlaim air Sgoil-Àraich Mhalaig, ag aithneachadh nan neartan a chaidh a chomharrachadh agus na tha an suidheachadh a' cur ri solar Tràth-ionnsachaidh is Cùraim-chloinne Foghlaim Ghàidhlig air Ghàidhealtachd;
ii. do dh'adhartas na Comhairle aig an ìre seo a thaobh ionnsachadh cànain C2 agus C3, a' toirt a-steach adhartais mu choinneimh na thathas a' sùileachadh gu

nàiseanta agus na h-obrach leantainnich airson taic a chur ri ionnsachadh chànanan air feadh sgoiltean: agus

iii. dhan fhàs leantainneach ann am Foghlam Gàidhlig air feadh na Gàidhealtachd agus cho cudromach 's a tha a bhith a' gleidheadh comas-gabhail mu choinneimh iarrtais san àm ri teachd.

8. Aithisg Adhartais Plana na Gàidhlig

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/14/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Rè na deasbaireachd, chaidh na puingean a leanas a thogail:

- chaidh aithne a thoirt do dh'obair dhìcheallach na sgioba a bha a' buileachadh Plana na Gàidhlig;
- chaidh fiosrachadh a shireadh, agus a thoirt seachad, a thaobh carson nach robh Acadamaidh Chùil Lodair a' tabhann foghlam luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig tuilleadh do sgoilearan a bha airson leantainn air adhart leis a' chànan agus mar a dheigheadh dèiligeadh ris a seo; agus
- seach gun robh mòran ainmean-àite air feadh na Gàidhealtachd air tighinn bhon Ghàidhlig, bhathar a' cur air dòigh cùrsa ùr ainmean-àite Gàidhlig ann an co-bhann le Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba, agus bhiodh seo ri fhaotainn do luchd-obrach is do Bhuill. Chaidh fàilte chridheil a chur air a seo seach gun togadh e mothachadh is tuigse thar seirbheisean na Comhairle agus le cuid de Bhuill a' nochdadh gum biodh iad deònach pàirt a ghabhail.

i. **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR** do shusbaint na h-aithisge adhartais PRMS seo.

9. Tabhartas Sònraichte na Gàidhlig 2026/27

Chuartaicheadh Aithisg Àir. G/15/26 leis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigear – Daoine.

Às dèidh aithne a thoirt dhan aithisg dheimhinntich, **THUG** a' Chomataidh **FA-NEAR**:-

i. do na trì pròiseactan agus do na toraidhean a tha air am mìneachadh ann an tairgse Tabhartas Sònraichte na Gàidhlig;

ii. dhan phrògram obrach dham bi an tabhartas a' toirt taic agus gu bheil iad seo air an atharrachadh seach nach deach an t-sùim iomlan fhaotainn; agus

iii. gu bheil an tabhartas de £940,000 a tha air a thabhann le Riaghaltas na h-Alba air a chumail aig an aon ìre ris a' bhliadhna roimhe.

Chrìochnaich a' choinneamh aig 4.00f.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday, 27 August 2026 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mr M Baird
Mr R Bremner
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair
Mr J Edmonston (sub for Mr Christie)
Mr R Gale (sub for Mr Logue)
Mr K Gowans
Mr A Jarvie
Mr S Kennedy (remote)
Mr G Mackenzie
Mr S Mackie (remote)
Mr T MacLennan
Mr J Murray (sub for Mr Lobban)
Mr P Oldham
Mr M Prosser (remote)
Ms M Reid
Mr M Reiss
Mr R Stewart

Non-Members present:

Mrs T Collier (remote)
Ms C Gillies
Mr J Finlayson (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)
Mr D Macpherson
Mr D Millar (remote)
Mrs T Robertson

Officials in Attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Mr S Fraser, Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer – HR and Communications
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer - Corporate Finance
Mr D Scott, Chief Officer - Business Solutions
Mr G Munro, Revenues Manager
Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in Attendance:

Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, Highlife Highland

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

Mr P Oldham in the Chair

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie, Mr B Lobban Mr P Logue, and Mr Bruce.

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

Item 11 – Mr R Stewart (transparency statement).

3. **Recess Powers**
   Cumhachdan Fosaidh

   The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Corporate Resources Committee.

4. **Good News**
   Naidheachdan Matha

   The Committee **NOTED** the following good news:

   - Communications Officer Sylvia Tarrant and Senior Licensing Officer Michael Elsey had been successful in gaining their Level 3 City & Guilds Award in Leadership and Management;
   - Health and Safety Advisor Fiona Borwick in the SHEP team had passed her National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) diploma. Fiona had been supported to take the qualification while gaining experience in the team, making this a great example of 'growing our own' talent; and
   - Emergency Planning Officer Hannah Cameron-Ross had passed the Certificate of the Business Continuity Institute (CBCI) with merit, improving resilience in the team.

5. **Appointments to Sub-Committees, Working Groups, etc**
   Cur an Dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidhean, Buidhnean-obrach is eile

   The Committee **AGREED**:-

   i. Mr B Lobban replace Mr S Kennedy on the Non Domestic Rates Appeal Committee;
   ii. Mr B Lobban replace Mr S Kennedy on the Employment Release Sub-Committee; and
   iii. that the following Members be appointed to the Community Asset Transfer Review Panel which would be chaired by the Chair of Corporate Resources Committee:

      Mr M Baird, Mr A Christie, Mr K Gowans, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr T MacLennan, Mr P Oldham, Mr M Prosser, Mrs M Reid and Mr M Reiss.

6. **Corporate Revenue and Capital Monitoring Report**
   Aithisg Teachd-a-steach Corporra agus Sgrùdadh

   a. **Corporate Revenue Monitoring Out-turn for 2025/26 and Quarter 1 for 2026/27**
      Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach Corporra – Fìor shuidheachadh airson 2025/26 agus Ràith 1 airson 2026/27

      There had been circulated Report No RES/30/26 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

The Chair explained that the Inverness Castle Experience aspect of the report would be considered separately, after the remainder of the report, as detailed below.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the challenging budget situation and significant overspends were impacting all Council services, with Adult Social Care being a particular challenge;
- concern was expressed at the poor state of much of the school estate across Highland. The Highland Investment Plan (HIP) was welcomed but a similar level of investment was required to repair and maintain school buildings to ensure all children had positive experiences throughout their school journey. In response, reference was made to the ongoing long-term school estate essential maintenance and repairs programme, and to the HIP;
- assurance was sought and provided that vacancies were not being deliberately held and used to fill budget gaps, and attention was drawn to natural turnover and recruitment challenges for certain roles. The impact of significant numbers of vacancies on service delivery and on working conditions for existing staff covering for vacancies was highlighted;
- an explanation was sought and provided on a communication that had been issued to service managers reminding them of the importance of the proper management of budgets. Assurance was provided that it had not contained any instruction to use holding of vacancies as a means of controlling the budget;
- a brief summary was sought and provided of the Council's position in relation to loan charges from capital investments;
- with reference to two buildings in Caithness which were Council-owned but leased to community groups, it was queried whether the Council's policy was to give responsibility for the maintenance of such older buildings to the leaseholder, rather than retaining responsibility for the building. This query would be passed to officers in Housing and Property and the answer provided outwith the meeting. It was also suggested that the maintenance of specific buildings could be considered at Area level;
- there was an expectation that there would be an appropriate level of operational scrutiny to ensure budget lines were being responsibly controlled and any overspend risks flagged as early as possible to facilitate the consideration of mitigating action; and
- concern was expressed at the plans to address budget issues over the remainder of the financial year, when it was important to understand the reasons for any developing budget issues. Income and savings targets needed to be realistic to help safeguard the Council's reserves.

Following this, the Chief Executive of High Life Highland gave a presentation on The Inverness Castle Experience (TICE), which included the history of the project, the first six months of operation, the strategic plan, actions to date, the five-year growth and cost projections, and the ongoing strategy, governance and operational risks.

During discussion on TICE, the following issues were raised:-

- a further report on TICE was due to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee on 19 November 2026;
- with regard to the visitor numbers being lower than predicted, it was queried and explained how they had been estimated, this having mainly been the outcome of the TICE Delivery Group which included a wide range of stakeholders and industry experts. Attention was drawn to the skilled staff who were employed at TICE, who were thanked for their work;
- the use of appropriate marketing expertise was suggested for future, and current work being undertaken with industry experts and with the Council's in-house team was queried and explained;
- it was suggested that, especially for local people, it might be worth lowering the price to attract higher numbers of visitors, and some modelling around this should be undertaken. It could be that a lower entry fee would bring more visitors who might spend more on retail and catering, which had proven to be the case at the Storr visitor centre on Skye. Benchmarking against other attractions was suggested, although it was also important to consider their differences, especially not to compare visitor numbers for a free attraction, or an attraction such as the Storr, which already had a significant number of visitors, with visitor numbers for Inverness Castle, which had no history as an attraction to drawn on. One drawback of lowering prices could be to devalue the experience;
- lessons could be learnt from feedback on Tripadvisor and Google reviews;
- it was likely to be 2029/30 before a break-even position was anticipated, and it was concerning that the Council was having to provide unexpected financial assistance from its reserves at a time when Council budgets and reserves were already stretched. An early resolution was urged;
- the mitigating decisions and fast action that had been taken in light of the lower than expected performance was welcomed; and
- TICE remained an exciting project and asset for the Highlands, which would succeed with the appropriate marketing, online and physical, and a robust recovery plan that was closely monitored.

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

i. out-turn position for 2025/26 based on draft unaudited accounts, as set out in the report;
ii. forecast financial position for 2026/27 as set out in the report and appendices;
iii. explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed in response to the overspends forecast, including the more rigorous approach to cost reduction and non-essential spending; and
iv. consolidated assessment of savings delivery forecasts.

b. Corporate Capital Monitoring - Out-turn for 2025/26 and Quarter 1 for 2026/27
Sgrùdadh Calpa Corporra – Fìor Shuidheachadh airson 2025/26 agus Ràith 1 airson 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No RES/31/26 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- with reference to the reported underspend for 2025-26, and projected underspend for 2026-27, it was queried whether the Council had adequate resources to deliver on its capital programme and, if not, what could be done to address the situation. Attention was drawn to the need to balance ongoing project review while minimising delays and slippage, and to balance the use of in-house and external resources;
- information was sought and provided on how efficiently the Council could source cost predictions or changes to manage their impact on projects; and
- the scope and flexibility of heating and ventilation systems in new buildings, including schools, were queried and this information would be provided to Mr Reiss outwith the meeting.

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

i. near final outturn for the 2025/26 financial year and the funding profile;
ii. net spend for Q1 2026/27, the forecast year end outturn and the funding profile; and
iii. review underway in relation to capital project monitoring, governance and delivery arrangements.

7. Corporate Cluster Budget Monitoring Reports - Out-turn for 2025/26 and Quarter 1 for 2026/27
Aithisgean Sgrùdadh Buidseit Buidhne Corporra – fìor shuidheachadh airson 2025/26 agus Ràith 1 airson 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No RES/32/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- an explanation was sought and provided for the licensing staff costs being almost double the budget, while the related income was only 20% higher. Attention was drawn to the challenges around reporting the licensing profile over time, and that further information on this could be provided outwith the meeting to Mr Jarvie;
- clarification was sought on the loss of income in relation to tourism and corporate procurement savings, and attention was drawn to paragraph 6.3 of the report which provided more detail on how Council-wide procurement savings of £0.812m, and tourism-related income of £0.697m had been partly offset by staff underspends. Information was provided on the setting of challenging targets in relation to procurement to help secure best value, noting the dynamic nature of this area, with variable costs, and to the various streams of tourism-related income, with some being significant and others, such as the camper van scheme, being less financially lucrative but provided other benefits such as the promotion of sustainable tourism and the management of waste. Further Unique Visitor Experiences were being considered by the Redesign Board that afternoon; and

- with reference to the success of the Storr project on Skye, attention was drawn to the benefits of the development of a single cost centre model for income generation projects, including giving individual sites autonomy to recruit staff and raise income.

The Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the final budget position for 2025/26 as set out in the report and Appendix 1 to the report;
ii. **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for 2026/27 as set out in the report and Appendix 2 to the report;
iii. **NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
iv. **NOTED** the Corporate Cluster Financial Strategy 26/27 (Appendix 3).

8. Treasury Management
Rianachd Ionmhais

a. Annual Treasury Management Report 2025/26
Aithisg Stiùiridh Bhliadhnail an Ionmhais – 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No RES/33/26 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- with reference to the total overall outstanding debt, and average interest rates, information was sought and provided on progress with repaying legacy PWLB debt, especially those on particularly high interest rates. It was queried what the Council's strategy was for managing the refinancing of the risk as some of these loans reached maturity, and whether a strategy of short-term financing was beneficial or detrimental;
- the reduction of 1% in the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream for the Housing Revenue Account against the budget was encouraging;
- it was queried what the impact might be on the Council's finances if the current 3.75% Bank Rate increased, with reference to the situation in the Middle East;
- it was suggested that if the UK Government wished to encourage new affordable housing being built, the loan penalties for local authorities should be reconsidered; and
- attention was drawn to the £1m loan taken out by the Council in 1990 at an 11% interest rate, with comment also being made noting the high prevailing interest rate at that time.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Annual Treasury Management report for 2025/26.

b. Summary of Transactions for the Quarter to 30 June 2026
Geàrr-chunntas de Ghnothachasan airson na Ràithe gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

There had been circulated Report No RES/34/26 by the Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management - Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026.

9. Annual Report on Citizens Advice Contract
Aithisg Choileanaidh Bhliadhnail Biùro Comhairleachadh a' Phobaill

There had been circulated Report No RES/35/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members welcomed that the financial gains for clients who had accessed support from the Council's Welfare Support Team and Citizens Advice exceeding £30.3 million, which represented a £18.84 return for every £1 invested by the Council in these welfare services. Staff were thanked for their work;
- clarification was sought and provided on the differences between the services provided by the in-house Welfare Support Team and Citizens Advice, and similar external providers. An area breakdown of services provided would be helpful and would be provided, if available, to Members after the meeting; and
- it was disappointing that people were experiencing debt problems that made these services necessary.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. nearly 25,000 residents were supported by the Council's Welfare Support Team and Citizens Advice during 2025/26 with welfare, debt and housing advice services, resulting in more than 133,000 contacts (on average, 5 contacts per client). Assessing the volume of contacts offers valuable insights into workload and service throughout, providing essential context for evaluating the overall effectiveness and quality of the welfare services delivered;
ii. financial gains for clients who accessed support from the Council's Welfare Support Team and Citizens Advice exceeded £30.3 million. This represented a £18.84 return for every £1 invested by the Council in these welfare services;
iii. value for money delivered by these services was highlighted in the Highland Poverty & Equality Commission's final report which was considered at the Highland Council meeting on 25 June 2026:

    "Highland Council's Welfare Support team and Citizens Advice partnership served over 23,000 people in 2024-25. This led to £27.7M of financial gains mostly through benefit payments that had not been claimed or received, and £12.1M in debt management. Few other areas of funding generate a return on investment of 17 times. It is therefore a high priority for further funding". Highland Poverty and Equalities Commission Final Report – page 18 refers.

iv. a total of £10.714m of debt (including £0.583m relating to mortgage/other secured loans) was presented by households who were supported by skilled advisers in these welfare services to prioritise their bills, reduce and manage their debts, and wherever possible to lower the interest charges they were due to pay. Advisers also engaged with multiple creditors to establish amounts due. Where appropriate, skilled advisers put in place debt recovery moratoriums on behalf of their clients. These moratoriums provide a temporary legal six-month protection for debtors and prevent creditors from taking enforcement action, such as arresting bank accounts or wages, while formal debt solutions could be considered for clients, including bankruptcy or a Debt Arrangement Scheme for example;

v. support was provided for 2,076 clients (including social rented, private rented and homeowners) seeking housing-related advice, thus highlighting the demand for consistent accessible support on these critical issues. The advice provided supported the Council's homelessness commitments and helped to support those in need of housing. Housing-related advice supported tenants to maintain their tenancies and for all clients accessing housing advice and support to remain in their homes whether that be social rented, private rented or home ownership;

vi. as included in Highland Council's Revenue Budget 2025/26, dated 6 March 2025, there was an estimated £70 million of unclaimed benefits in the Highland area, including £6.9 million unclaimed pension credits affecting 3,000 people. Following approval by Members when setting the 2025/26 budget (INV/6), the Revenues & Commercialisation section had delivered digital transformation through the implementation of the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT), developed by Policy in Practice. LIFT utilised intelligent data analytics software to help maximise residents' income and reduce their costs. Data analytics analysed, identified, engaged and tracked financially vulnerable households to help maximise income and avoid costs by preventing vulnerability and to quickly identify and obtain insights about households who might need support. This service was being delivered in partnership with Citizens Advice and aimed to improve residents' financial resilience and reduce poverty gaps by using independent data-led evidence; and

vii. as previously reported, and integral to the Council's commitment to reduce poverty and alleviate financial hardships, the Council had also launched a Better Off Calculator on its website at https://www.highland.gov.uk/benefits-money-help/find-benefits-mayentitled. This calculator enabled residents to self-serve to check entitlements that might be available to them, and to understand the impacts of life events, changing working hours, and other circumstances which might impact their income. Since its introduction, the Better Off Calculator had been used by 191 households across Highland. Of these, 160 households (84%) were identified as potentially entitled to additional financial assistance, with a total of £187,566 in potential benefit entitlement. Analysis of the results indicated that 138 households might be missing out on benefits, with an estimated £87,774 in unclaimed entitlement identified to date. This digital solution also provided residents with an option to be supported by skilled advisers within the Welfare Support Team.

10. Standby Policy
Poileasaidh Fuireachais

There had been circulated Report No RES/36/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the findings of The Standby Working Group;
ii. **APPROVED** the revised corporate Standby Policy in line with Option 3 as set out in the report; and
iii. **NOTED** the Standby Guidance document developed to support consistent implementation of the revised policy.

11. Mileage Rate Revision
Ath-sgrùdadh air Reata Astar Mhìltean

Transparency Statement – Mr R Stewart declared a connection to this item as a close family member was employed by the Council however, having applied the objective test, did not feel he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/37/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** that the Council adopt the revised HMRC mileage rate of 55p per mile for the first 10,000 business miles;
ii. **AGREED** that the change be backdated to cover travel relating to 6 April 2026 onwards;
iii. **NOTED** that backdated claims would be calculated and paid by the end of the calendar year;
iv. **AGREED** that any approved change apply equally to both employees and Elected Members in order to maintain consistency across the organisation; and
v. **AGREED** to reinforce the requirements of the Council's Travel and Subsistence Policy and Travel Hierarchy to minimise avoidable travel and reduce reliance on private vehicle use.

12. Pensions Guarantee to SPPA for High Life Highland Instrumental Music Instructors
Barantas Pheinnseanan gu SPPA airson Oidean Innealan-Ciùil High Life na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No RES/38/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

The Chair drew attention to paragraph 6.3 of the report which stated that any guarantee would only be utilised in the event of default, the risk and likelihood of which was assessed as very low.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the contents of the report and the background changes relating to pension arrangements for High Life Highland music instructors; and
ii. **AGREED** that a Letter of Comfort guarantee to the Scottish Teachers Pension Scheme be provided for the reasons and on the basis as set out within the report.

13. Corporate Service – Performance Monitoring Quarter 1 2026/27
Seirbheis Chorporra - Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh Ràithe 1 2026/27

There had been circulated Report No RES/39/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

During discussion, Members queried whether a significant amount of the sickness absence due to stress was the result of unfilled vacancies and additional workload, but it was explained that around two thirds of stress-related absence was non work related. The various approaches to reducing stress and supporting staff mental health were outlined. It was suggested that a small number of long-term IT issues could be impacting the overall statistics

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. performance information for the Corporate Cluster; and
ii. change to Invoice reporting to align with the Corporate Cluster structure.

14. Corporate Systems Update – HR & Payroll Programme
Cunntas air Siostaman Corporra – Prògram Ghoireasan Daonna & Rola Pàighidh

There had been circulated Report No RES/40/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. progress, financial position, and risk management of the HR & Payroll Programme; and
ii. the summary in section 4.5 of the report to support the decision-making process.

15. Delivery Plan – Corporate Solutions and Income Generation Portfolio Update
Plana Lìbhrigidh – Ùrachadh air Pasgan Fuasglaidhean Corporra agus Gineadh Teachd-a-steach

a. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update – Corporate Solutions
Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh – Freagairtean Corporra

There had been circulated Report No RES/41/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. project/programme updates provided in the report; and
ii. revised format of the report, which included the use of Portfolio Board project dashboards from the Performance and Risk Management system (PRMS), with accompanying project narrative sections aligned to the content of these.

b. Delivery Plan Budget Monitoring & Progress Update – Income Generation
Sgrùdadh Buidseit & Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh - Togail Teachd-a-steach

There had been circulated Report No RES/42/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive -Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- attention was drawn to the campervan scheme, which was not achieving its revised income target and, while it had been a worthwhile project to attempt, a more successful scheme to produce income from campervans should be devised. Other Members pointed out the some of the benefits of the scheme were not financial;
- the completion of Phase 2 of the Storr Project on Skye was welcomed and all staff involved were thanked for their efforts in making the project a success. The project demonstrated the value of partnership working and provided a valuable model for future visitor experiences; and
- with reference to some of the challenges in managing campervan behaviour in certain locations, including their knowledge of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, which did not provide land access rights to vehicles, it was suggested that more education and enforcement would be beneficial.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the project/programme updates provided in the report.

16. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

The following Minutes of Meetings were:

i. **APPROVED** – Central Safety Committee held on 15 June 2026;
ii. **APPROVED** – Fuel Poverty Working Group held on 19 June 2026;
iii. **NOTED** – Appeals and Disputes Sub Committee on 29 June 2026; and
iv. **NOTED** – Non-Domestic Rates Appeals Committee held on 10 August 2026.

The meeting ended at 12.25pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in **The Glass Room, Kingussie Courthouse, Kingussie/Remotely** on 31 August 2026 at 10.30am.

Present:
Mr J Bruce
Ms M Cockburn
Mr R Jones
Mr B Lobban

In attendance:
Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer
Mr S Grant, Roads Operations Manager
Ms P Sheldon, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Mr R Murdoch, Environmental Health Officer
Ms A Tanner, Project Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer
Mr C Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:
Inspector C Johnstone, Area Inspector (Badenoch, Strathspey and Nairn)

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

Business

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Chair acknowledged the impact of the recent Cairngorm Wildfire on local communities and expressed sincere thanks to the emergency workers and community volunteers for their contributions to the response.

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee.

4. Police - Area Performance Report
Poileas - Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/13/26 by the Area Commander (South Highland Area Command), Police Scotland.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that there was a concerted effort all year round to tackle drug driving offences. It was highlighted that the statistical increase in these offences was in part due to the increased number of appropriately trained officers and an improvement in the ability to detect drug driving. Although not all police officers were trained in drug testing, the vast majority of road policing officers were and training provision for this continued to increase;
- in response to a request, it was advised that an update on house break-ins in Kingussie and Kincraig would be provided to the Chair;
- concerns were raised regarding anti-social behaviour, and it was requested that there be more patrols dedicated to tackling the issue. In response, the Inspector advised that he would facilitate officers to look at issues of this nature;
- attention was drawn to the success of the Harm Prevention Officer, a post funded by the Highland Drug and Alcohol Partnership. However, the risk of being reliant on one person was highlighted and it was queried whether there was any opportunity for cascading training and information sharing with local teams. In response, it was clarified that the Harm Prevention Officer worked closely with the Preventions and Interventions team and that there was appropriate absence cover available for the Harm Prevention Officer, when needed;
- it was confirmed that there was sufficient resource available to facilitate presentations in schools with officers having dedicated high schools and availability for primary school visits where necessary;
- information was sought on the percentage of 101 calls that came to a complete resolution, and it was advised that this information would be provided in due course;
- it was highlighted that the statistics in the report were too geographically widespread, and failed to provide an accurate picture of the Badenoch and Strathspey area; and
- thanks were extended to all officers for their work during the recent wildfires, and it was confirmed that Police Scotland had been very proud of the evacuations of Glenmore and Nethy Bridge.

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

5. Housing Repairs and Capital Report – 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026
Aithisg Chàraidhean is Calpa Taigheadais – 1 Gearran 2026 gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

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

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- Members passed on thanks for the hard work of the team and highlighted the improved performance;
- updates on the investment in heating upgrades, solar panels and batteries were sought and provided; and
- it was queried whether the reduction in the price of solar panels and changes in legislation would allow further upgrades to properties.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026.

6. Winter Service Plan 2026/27
Plana Seirbheis Gheamhraidh 2026/27

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

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the hiring of gritters for the winter meaning replacement vehicles would be available if needed. It was queried and confirmed that footpath gritters were also hired. Confirmation was provided that hiring of new gritters had been costed and was cost efficient and that the routine servicing of hired gritter vehicles could be carried out by Council employees;
- confirmation was provided that there was a sufficient number of contractors available to help with the winter challenges;
- the need to ensure safe routes to schools for walking and cycling was highlighted;
- it was confirmed that refilling grit bins could create a drain on resources. To limit this, efforts had been made to make the public aware that a small amount of salt could cover a larger area than commonly expected;
- responding to a question, it was explained that the Capital Plan of summer maintenance would be circulated to Members by the end of the week; and
- it was confirmed that there had been a full programme of verge maintenance and grass cutting carried out in the Badenoch and Strathspey area during the summer.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27.

7. Environmental Health – Annual Report & Activity 2025/26
Slainte Àrainneachdail – Aithisg Bhliadhnail & Gnìomhachd 2025/26

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

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- the report was welcomed for its high level of detail and clarity;
- it was questioned whether there was a timeline for new animal health enforcement powers and if there was sufficient resource available to use these powers;
- it was confirmed that there were no businesses that required Fish/Shellfish Export Health Certificates in the Badenoch and Strathspey area; and

- information was sought, and provided, regarding the reporting of abandoned vehicles, and it was highlighted that a report on this had been presented to the Communities and Place Committee.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

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

8. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Application
Measadh air Iarrtas airson Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd

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

During discussion, the importance of sport clubs and facilities to the community was highlighted.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the Community Regeneration Funds currently available in Badenoch and Strathspey;
ii. **AGREED** to approve the application of £27,500 for the Newtonmore Tennis Club.

9. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on Monday 27 April 2026 which were approved by the Council on Thursday 14 May 2026 which were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 11.25am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummuie, Golspie on Monday 31 August 2026 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr H Morrison
Mr R Gale	Mr J Murray
Ms M Hutchison	Ms L A Niven

In attendance:
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Mr M Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Operations)
Mr C Sutherland, Principal Repairs Officer
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr G Somers, Solicitor (Licensing)
Ms L Bradley, AQIM (Portree Plockton Gairloch Ullapool)
Ms C Murray Project Officer (Community Regeneration)
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:
Acting Chief Inspector David McAlpine, Police Scotland

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

Mr R Gale in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

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

Item 11: Mr R Gale

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of this Committee**.**

At this point, the Chair welcomed Mr J Murray, newly elected Member for Ward 4: East Sutherland and Edderton to his first meeting.

Thereafter, Members congratulated Golspie Stafford Football Club on being the first team from Sutherland to win the Highland Amateur Cup.

4. Police – Area Performance Report
Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadas Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No SCC/20/26 by the Area Commander (North Highland Area Command).

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- further clarity was sought and provided on the detection rates in relation to assaults and drug (supply) offences;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the reasons for and work being undertaken in response to the increase in the number of sexual offences and crimes of dishonesty over the five-year period;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that an applicant was to be interviewed for the vacant position at Tongue Police Station and it was hoped an officer would be in post as soon as practicable;
- an explanation was sought and provided in relation to the increase in offences relating to the cruel and unnatural treatment of children; and
- concern at reports of visitors to the area being harassed due to their nationality; the Chief Inspector explained that such incidents would only be recorded and investigated as hate crimes if they were reported to the Police.

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

5. Area Roads Capital Programme
Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- further clarity was sought and provided on the regular inspection regime of roads conducted by the Service and reasons why the priority of routes could change rapidly, reference being made to the fact the C1140 road had moved from 240th to 2nd on the priority list;
- it would be helpful for Members to be provided with a priority list of schemes for each Ward in Sutherland and information on the number of schemes that the Service would realistically expect to complete on an annual basis; it was confirmed the Roads Operations Manager would be asked to provide this information and attend an area business meeting to provide Members with an update on progress;
- an assurance was sought and provided that a practical approach was taken to the mobilisation and deployment of equipment, so that a number of schemes were carried out in a particular, thereby reducing timescales and costs;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Roads Operations Manager would be asked to provide an update to Members at their next area business meeting on progress with works to a section of pavement on Dornoch Road, Bonar Bridge, in view of concerns around pedestrian safety;

- the challenges that existed in relation to the logistics and higher cost of tarring roads in North and West Sutherland and the need for a balance to be achieved across Sutherland in terms of works carried out; and
- specific concerns in relation to the condition of the road surface at the Kyle of Tongue Bridge.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

i. works completed on the approved prioritised list to date;
ii. additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year; and
iii. works still proposed for the 2026/27 financial year.

6. Winter Service Plan 2026/27
Plana Seirbheis a' Gheamhraidh 2026-27

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that Members would be provided with details of the number of gritters and footpath tractors available in Sutherland for the forthcoming winter season and information on where they would be based in the area; information would also be provided on where footpath tractors had been based and utilised during the previous winter season;
- concern at the reliability of the gritting fleet, there having been a number of breakdowns last winter, and the need to consider how to deal more proactively with this issue; an assurance was provided that there was a rigorous inspection and maintenance regime in place in advance of the winter season and all vehicles met the required standards;
- a point as to whether there was a sufficient number of mechanics to deal with vehicle breakdowns during the winter given that some depots were not fully staffed; it was explained that assurances had been given to officers that a improved fleet service would be in place, however there were ongoing recruitment challenges including competition from the private sector;
- that Members would raise the above issues with fleet management and the position in relation to the reported closure of the Brora deport in respect of which they were not aware a decision had been taken;
- the difficulties associated with the closure of the B9176 Struie Road and access to Aultnamain during the previous winter, this having been raised at full Council with the responsibility being placed on the Area Committee; an assurance was therefore sought that external contractors were ready to be called upon at their earliest possible convenience for this route. It was confirmed Members concerns on this matter would be forwarded to the relevant officers with an instruction to ensure arrangements were in place for the forthcoming winter season;
- an explanation was sought and provided that winter routes classed as other and marked in green on the maps at appendix 2 of the report referred to low priority routes that would only be treated if and when resources permitted, and in respect of which there was no specific commitment to open these routes within any timescale;

- recording the disappointment of the community councils on the North Coast of Sutherland who had made an early request to meet with roads officers to discuss the Winter Service Plan prior to it being considered by the Committee, and requesting that arrangements be made for this meeting to be held going forward;
- an update was sought and provided on the measures that had been put in place for the forthcoming winter season to mitigate against the extreme winter conditions experienced last winter where it appeared the Council had been slow to react; this included redeployment between areas of vehicles and plant and investment in new and more reliable machinery, however a balance had to be achieved in terms of the affordability of investing in additional vehicles and equipment to deal with extreme weather events that may or may not happen;
- it would be helpful for Members to be provided with details of the outcome of the review of route priorities that had been carried out following the previous winter season; and
- in response to a query, an assurance was provided that it was unlikely the Service would deploy inexperienced drivers on gritters and that a response would be provided directly to Mr M Baird in relation to the specific case he had raised.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27.

7. Community Asset Transfer – Former Altnaharra Primary School and Grounds Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd – Seann Sgoil agus Raon-cluiche Allt na h-Eirbhe

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

in discussion, Members expressed their support for the proposal, highlighting the level of funding secured and strong track record of the Altnaharra Community Trust SCIO.

The Committee **AGREED** the Community Asset Transfer request for the property and grounds comprising of the former Altnaharra Primary School and Grounds be sold to Altnaharra Community Trust SCIO at a nominal cost of £1, in line with the conditions set out in 8.2 of the report.

8. Housing Repairs and Capital Report 01 April 2026 to 30 June 2026 Aithisg Chàraidhean Taigheadais agus Calpa – 1 Giblean 2026 gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

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

During discussion, it was confirmed that a review of the condition of garages in the area was ongoing and that a previous report to the Committee had provided information on both the number of garages and garage sites and those in Council tenant and private ownership, details of which could be provided if required.

Thereafter, and in response to a query, and update was sought and provided on staffing within the Sutherland Repairs Delivery Team and on the process for advertising and recruiting apprentices.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026.

9. Short Term Let Control Area – Post Consultation Update
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine – Cunntas às Ùr às Dèidh Co-chomhairleachadh

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

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that existing short-term lets operating would not have their planning requirements altered by the designation of the Short Term Let Control Area;
- concern that only one community councils had responded to the consultation and it was suggested that this was due to the fact other community councils had not met over the period of the six-week consultation period;
- concern that the number of responses to the consultation was not sufficient on which to base a decision and a proposal that the recommendations in the report should not be accepted;
- some community councils had taken the decision not to respond as a body on the basis the consultation had been widely publicised and to allow people within communities to comment on an individual basis; and
- it was considered that a full and detailed consultation had been carried out and widely advertised with the public having the opportunity to respond if they chose to do so and therefore the Committee should make a decision based on the information presented.

Mr J Murray moved not to agree the recommendations detailed in the report but on failing to find a seconder the motion fell.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the consultation feedback and the potential implications that a STL Control Area will have on communities within Sutherland as set out in Appendix 2 and summarised in Sections 8, 9 and 10; and
ii. **AGREED** to recommend to Economy and Infrastructure Committee that Sutherland be included within the proposed Highland Rural Short Term Let Control Area, should any decision to submit a proposal for designation to Scottish Ministers be taken.

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

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

In discussion, officers were thanked for bringing the Ullapool High ASG report to the Committee, and staff and pupils commended on the attainment set out in the report, particular highlights being primary attainment in listening and talking and positive pupil destinations for 16+.

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

11. Community Regeneration Funding Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Aithisg Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd

Mr R Gale made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item on the grounds he had been liaising with the Friends of Clyne War Memorial Association. 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 SCC/27/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members commented that it was important organisations made all efforts to secure match funding prior to applying to the Fund for the full grant amount, particularly in relation to some of the larger applications. It was recognised many communities had multiple projects ongoing and it was not always possible to secure match funding and some smaller organisations may not have the resources to do so.

Thereafter, Members requested that going forward and as part of the application process organisations be asked to provide more clarity on the action being taken to secure match funding.

Following further discussion on the individual projects, the Committee **AGREED** the applications presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

Organisation	Project Title	Grant Approved
Lairg & District Learning Centre	The School House Hub	£ 24,964.70
Kinlochbervie Community Company	Loch Clash - Regeneration of Net Sheds	£ 24,000.00
Melness Church Community Organisation	Improving safety, security, community access and energy efficiency.	£ 26,000.00
Highland Council	Clyne War Memorial Refurbishment	£ 116,400.00

12. Dornoch Common Good Fund – 2025/26 Outturn and Q1 Monitoring Statement to 31 May 2026
Maoin Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich – Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach 2025/26 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh R1 gu 31 Cèitean 2026

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

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 4 Outturn 2025/26 and Quarter 1 (April to May) 2026/27 monitoring statement for the Dornoch Common Good Fund.

13. Membership of Committees
Ballrachd Chomataidhean

The Committee **AGREED** the following appointments:

i. Dornoch BID – Mr J Murray;
ii. Sutherland Local Access Forum – Ms M Hutchison and Ms L Niven;
iii. Sutherland Sports Council – Mr R Gale; and
iv. Trustee of Recreational Ground (The Meadows) in Royal Burgh of Dornoch – Mr J Murray.

14. Ward 1 & 4 Discretionary Fund Approvals 25-26
Aontaidhean Maoin fo Ùghdarras Uàrdan 1 & 4 airson 2025–26

The Committee **NOTED** the following awards:

North, West & Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1st April 2026 – 19th August 2026

Lochinver Rural Training – Green Grow Pallet Project	£961.98
Assynt Food Larder – Continuation of Spring/Summer Provision	£1,501.00
Community Care Assynt – Activity Programme	£1,500
Assynt Development Trust – Culag Park improvements	£900
Lochinver Weed Whackers – Lochinver in Bloom	£1,230
Melness Community Church – Improving Facilities	£1,000
Lairg Community Association – Replacement Door	£948.17

East Sutherland & Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1st April 2026 – 19th August 2026

East Sutherland Angling Club – Brora Harbour	£655.29
Tykes – Young persons driving lessons	£750.00
Golspie Sutherland Football Club – All Weather Training	£972.00

15. Notices of Motion
Brathan Gluasaid

1. Having given due consideration to the Highland Camper Van and Motorhome Scheme since its introduction the Sutherland Area Committee has concluded that the scheme simply does not provide a practical solution to the volume of vehicles who seek to use the designated car parks in Sutherland. The two designated carparks in the County located at Durness and Golspie are both located close to registered camp sites that offer full facilities and comply with all of the safety regulations that are incumbent to commercial sites unlike the Council designated sites.

   That being the case the Sutherland Area Committee seeks to restrict camper vans and mobile homes to daytime parking only with no overnight parking between the hours of 10pm and 8am. In addition, additional signage will be erected to advise camper van and motorhome owners of the locations of regulated sites close by. By imposing this restriction, it also brings Sutherland invitation to pay carparks in line with similar sites in the Highlands such as in Carrbridge.

Signed:	Mr R Gale	Mr M Baird
	Ms M Hutchison	Mr J Murray

At this point, an amendment to the Motion was proposed by Ms L Niven and accepted by the Chair, as follows:

The two designated carparks in the County located at Durness and Golspie are both located close to registered camp sites that offer full facilities and comply with all of the safety regulations that are incumbent to commercial sites unlike the Council designated sites. That being the case the Sutherland Area Committee seeks to restrict camper vans and mobile homes to daytime parking only with no overnight parking between the hours of 10pm and 8am. In addition, additional signage will be erected to advise camper van and motorhome owners of the locations of regulated sites close by. By imposing this restriction, it also brings Sutherland invitation to pay carparks in line with similar sites in the Highlands such as in Carrbridge. The Council also notes that it agreed in December 2025 to undertake a review to produce a revised Parking Strategy across Highland and agrees that this should consider the issues around overnight parking in all Council car parks.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the amended motion was proposed on the basis that the issues around overnight parking had preceded the Highland Camper Van and Motorhome Scheme;
- the end result being sought by all Members was to prevent camper vans and mobile homes from parking overnight at the two designated car parks in Durness and Golspie on the basis they were unsuitable for such use;
- it was important that a wider review around overnight parking was undertaken at all Council car parks and this had been incorporated into to the motion, as amended; and
- it was not within the Committee's remit to enforce the motion, as amended, and therefore it would require to be referred to Council as a starred item.

Decision

*The Committee **AGREED** the Motion, as amended**.**

16. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 1 June 2026, which were approved by the Council on 25 June 2026.

The meeting concluded at 12.35pm.

ADDENDUM: ITEM 15: NOTICES OF MOTION

The decision is not competent as the Financial and Integrated Impact Assessments had not been completed for the amendment in accordance with Standing Order 13.12.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee** (**Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair**) held remotely on **Monday, 31 August 2026 at 9.30 am.**

Present:

Mr J Finlayson
Ms C Gillies
Mr D Millar
Mr R Stewart

Officials in attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive Corporate
Mr M Bailey, Strategic Lead Commercialisation, Corporate
Mr G Smith, Service Lead, Infrastructure, Place Service
Mr A Bone, Acting Roads Operations Manager, Place Service
Mr S Dalgarno, Strategic Lead, Asset & Property Management, Place Service
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Community Regeneration Fund, Place Service
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner, Place Service
Mr G Somers, Solicitor, Corporate Service
Mr J Maclean, Bereavement Services Project Manager, Place Service
Ms R Robertson, Project Co-ordinator, Place Service
Mr S MacPhee, Housing Maintenance Officer, Place Service
Ms S Fraser, Programme Manager, Place Service
Mr I Robertson, Principal Technical Officer, Place Service
Mr C Holmes, Property Manager, Asset Management, Place Service
Ms A Smith, Business Development Lead, Corporate Service
Mr J MacLean, Business Development Lead (The Storr), Corporate Service
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Officer (West & Mid Highland)
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Also in attendance:

Station Commander, S Fraser, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (item 4 only)

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

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

Item 5 – Ms C Gillies (Transparency Statement)
Item 6- Mr J Finlayson (Transparency Statement)
All Items – Mr D Millar declared a Transparency Statement for all items on the agenda as he had two family members who worked for the Council.

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee NOTED that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No SR/17/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Following commentary on the report by the Station Commander, it was advised that Station availability across the area was good and when recruiting there was a focus on ensuring there was cover during the day. Additional options were looked at to improve recruitment such as liaising with Partner agencies to see if there was any interest in joining the Service. There was increased establishment at Broadford and Dunvegan Stations and currently there was focus on recruitment to Portree and Raasay Stations. In particular there was a focus on upskilling staff at the Raasay station. Any Member suggestions to improve recruitment would be welcomed. In this respect, an issue was highlighted that to join the service as a retained firefighter you required to be aged 18 or over, whereas you could join the armed forces at 16 years old. Lowering the age could help recruitment particularly in rural areas. An undertaking was given to find out whether the Service was considering lowering the age for recruitment to the Service. It was advised that fire skills training was offered for young adults.

Continuing, works on the new Uig Fire Station had now been completed and the building had been handed over to the Service by the contractor. Final preparations were being made so that the station should be operational this week. The facilities at the station were fantastic and should future proof the area for a long time. Members were invited to visit the station to see the new facility.

In relation to progress with a new Portree Station, currently there was no further information available on this. As soon as any information became available Members would be informed.

In relation to road traffic collisions, it would always be considered what could be done to lower the risk of collisions happening. The Service did undertake initiatives such as with young drivers to try and improve the message to drive safety.

In relation to wildfires, there had been a low number of incidents recorded in this area and this was down to partnership working and crews working with landowners and prevention work. The Service was looking to increase the community asset register to provide additional capacity to tackle wildfires.

The Committee:-

i NOTED the Area Performance Report; and ii NOTED that information would be provided to Members as to what consideration had been given to lowering the age of recruitment to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

5. Short Term Let Control Area – Post Consultation Update
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine – Cunntas às Ùr às Dèidh Co-chomhairleachaidh

Transparency Statement - Ms C Gillies declared a transparency statement in relation to this item as she was a member of the Scottish Crofters Federation who were one of the respondents to the consultation. However, having applied the objective test she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

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

Following commentary on the report by the Principal Planner, a view was expressed that the recommendation should not be supported. Tourism was the backbone of the economy in this area and the local jobs that tourism supported. It was concerning that with a proposed Visitor Levy, Short Term Let licensing and the proposed Short Term Let Control Area (STLCA) there was a trend of more and more regulation coming in, which could make it harder to operate a tourism business. There had only been 73 resident responses and no Community Councils had responded to the consultation and there was not a clear mandate one way or the other to the proposal for a STLCA, considering it was a major planning regime change. Further it was known that Trade bodies were considering a judicial review of the proposal should it be implemented. Therefore, an amendment was proposed that this proposal is not introduced and it be recommended to the E&I Committee that Skye and Raasay is excluded from the proposed Highland Rural STL Control Area.

In relation to the consultation responses, it was open to everyone to respond and the response rate to the wider consultation had received 608 responses which was a good return. Clarification was also provided on the retrospective aspect of a STLCA; the licensing regime for STLs; and the consultation process. Further, the area linguistics significance proposal to formally protect and support Gaelic was being looked at as the Skye area met the mandatory criteria given the proportion of Gaelic speakers in the area, evidence of significant housing pressure and evidence of significant concentration of STLs in the area.

In relation to whether STLCA could cause house prices to crash, there was no evidence this had happened in Badenoch & Strathspey or elsewhere in Scotland, particularly as it only introduced a requirement for planning permission for future changes of use and did not prohibit the letting of a property for a STL.

In relation to the suggestion for a STLCA being introduced on a trial period, any trial period would require to go through the full regulatory process and likewise to remove a STLCA would require to go through the same process. Any trial period should be long enough to determine any impact.

It was advised that the Skye and Raasay area had the highest number of house completions in the last 5 years that had been transferred into STLs which was more than triple the equivalent rate for the whole of Highland. Further, in relation to family inheritance, while STL licenses were transferrable, planning permission went with the premises.

Thereafter, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr D Millar MOVED the recommendations detailed in the report.

As an AMENDMENT, Mr R Stewart Moved this proposal is not introduced and it be recommended to the E&I Committee that Skye and Raasay is excluded from the proposed Highland Rural STL Control Area.

There was no seconder to the Amendment and therefore the Amendment failed. Therefore, the MOTION as proposed became the finding of the meeting.

Mr R Stewart requested that his dissent to this decision be recorded.

Decision

The Committee:-

i. NOTED the consultation feedback and the potential implications that a STL Control Area will have on communities within Skye and Raasay as set out in Appendix 2 and summarised in Sections 8, 9 and 10; and
ii. AGREED to recommend to E&I Committee that Skye and Raasay be included within the proposed Highland Rural STL Control Area, should any decision to submit a proposal for designation to Scottish Ministers be taken.

6. Community Regeneration Fund – Funding Requests
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd

Transparency Statement – Mr J Finlayson declared a transparency statement on this item as he was a Board Member of the Citizens Advice Bureau, Skye and Lochalsh. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No. SR/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which presented two funding requests to the Isle of Skye and Raasay Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) allocation, for discussion and decision by Members. The report also updated Members on the Isle of Skye and Raasay CRF budget position for 2026/27. Members were supportive of the applications.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

i. NOTED the Community Regeneration Funds currently available in Isle of Skye and Raasay;
ii. AGREED to approve the request of up to £210,672 match funding to the Islands Programme 26/27 application – IP019 – Gaeltec Community Hub Phase 1, Dunvegan Community Trust, and the request of up to £100,000 match funding for works associated with the Tigh Na Sgire Portree Demonstrator Project; and
iii. AGREED the approved CRF grant award, subject to conditions outlined in 7.3 of the report, up to the value of the available area allocation.

7. **Winter Service Plan for 2026/27**
Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh airson 2026/27

There was circulated Report No. SR/20/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which detailed the 2026/27 Winter Service Plan for Isle of Skye and Raasay Area.

In relation to planning for the winter it was advised that all the lorries had been serviced and were ready for operational activities. There was additional staffing in the team this year which would provide additional capacity to clear footpaths, fill grit bins and provide relief for drivers of gritters so that these vehicles could be operational for longer. Therefore, there was confidence that the team were in a good position to deal with winter conditions.

There was a community resilience programme and communities could complete a form to apply for personal protective equipment and Grit/Salt bins.

The contractor for trunk roads should be responsible for winter maintenance of pavements alongside these roads and an undertaking was given to contact Bear Scotland for clarification on their winter maintenance policy, priorities and timescales. This information would be shared with Members.

The Committee APPROVED the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27.

8. **Area Roads Capital Programme Update**
Cunntas às Ùr air Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre

There was circulated Report No. SR/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee with an update on the Area Roads Capital Programme completed, at the time of writing, from the 2026/27 programme and works programmed for the remainder of the financial year.

In discussion, it was highlighted that the Roads team in delivering the capital programme had also been responsive to other works requested by communities which had been much appreciated. It was confirmed that the capital programme had largely been completed subject to a few schemes that were highlighted at the meeting. Work had already started on next year’s Capital Programme and Members would be consulted on this.

Further, the white lining programme had commenced and would be carried out jointly with a sub contractor. A point was made that white lining in Portree required to be undertaken, particularly at the Primary School and this would be prioritised this week as well as Sconser Ferry terminal. In advance of the new link road in Portree opening, the appropriate white lining for the access roads and roundabouts should be completed to ensure drivers were aware of the rights of way. An update was also sought on the proposed new traffic orders in Portree.

It was noted that the surface dressing programme had been cancelled due to a procurement issue of an item of plant and machinery. However, the team were fully prepared for the programme to commence next year.

The Committee NOTED the update report.

9. Housing Repairs and Capital Report
Aithisg Chàraidhean Taigheadais agus Calpa

There was circulated Report No. SR/22/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided information on how the Housing Service performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 June 2026.

Members welcomed the report and it was good news in terms of emergency repairs and non emergency repairs response times which had seen a continued improvement compared to previous quarters. It was queried why the Council's target was so far off the Scottish Housing Network benchmark for emergency repairs. It was advised that as this data was Highland wide information on this was not available at the meeting.

It was queried how many homes in the Council's housing stock on Skye had damp and mould issues, how many of these cases were considered urgent as they were a risk to tenants health, and the average time for getting those repairs fixed. It was advised that damp and mould cases were always treated as high priorities and the process for dealing with this was highlighted.

In relation to Environmental Capital Projects, it was requested that Members be kept updated on the funding available and projects to be prioritised.

The Committee NOTED the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026.

10. Broadford & Dunvegan Primary School Projects – Progress Update
Cunntas às Ùr air Sgoiltean Ùra – Dùn Bheagain agus an t-Àth-Leathann

There was circulated Report No. SR/23/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on progress with the Broadford and Dunvegan Primary School projects.

Members welcomed progress with these projects, which would be of great value to communities. An undertaking was given to provide Members with information on whether the Scottish Government had agreed to provide an extension for the funding of Broadford Primary School given that the School would not be in use until after the deadline for funding. Also, information would be provided as to whether the Broadford project had received an uplift in funding from Scottish Government.

In relation to these two major projects on Skye it was important to progress modern apprenticeship opportunities and that the contractor was engaging with communities to maximise wider community benefits.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. NOTED the progress being made on the Broadford and Dunvegan Primary School projects;
ii. NOTED that Broadford Primary School is now under construction and remains programmed for completion in December 2027;

iii. NOTED that Dunvegan Primary School continues to make positive progress towards financial close in late 2026; and
iv. NOTED the continued management of programme, budget and project risks across both projects.

11. Taigh na Sgire Redevelopment – Project – Progress Update
Cunntas às Ùr air Pròiseact Taisbeanaidh Taigh na Sgìre

There was circulated Report No. SR/24/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the Taigh na Sgìre Redevelopment Project in Portree.

Following commentary on the report by the Strategic Lead, Asset & Property Management, a point was made regarding the gaelic name of the redevelopment, Taigh na Sgire. Historically Taigh was spelt Tigh which was the spelling that had been used before and this was well known in the community and the majority of Members were in favour of retaining the historical spelling.

It was requested that Members have the opportunity to visit the redevelopment to see progress that had been made and an undertaking was given to arrange this. It was hoped that some funding would be set aside to keep the area around the building clean and tidy.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. NOTED the current progress of the Taigh na Sgìre Portree Demonstrator Project;
ii. NOTED the revised project completion date of late 2026;
iii. NOTED the current budget position and actions being taken to manage project costs;
iv. NOTED the community benefits being delivered through the construction contract;
v AGREED that the historical gaelic spelling of the redevelopment be retained – Tigh na Sgire.

12. Portree Link Road – Progress Update
Cunntas as Ùr air Caladh Phort Righ

There was circulated Report No. SR/25/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place, which provided an update of progress on the construction of the Portree Link Road project.

It was noted that good progress was being made on the construction of the Portree link road with anticipated completion in early October, 2026. Clarification was sought on signage as traffic coming from the North should be directed onto the link road and away from the town centre. It was advised that traffic patterns would be monitored. Further, technology was changing and drivers were being led by their Sat Navs. It would be considered what other positive interventions could be made regarding signage in the coming months and also what additional explanatory signage could be used for parking.

Clarification was also sought on whether signage would be installed at the exit to Bayfield car park to encourage traffic to go left towards the link road. It was suggested that brown signs be used for directions to popular tourists locations so as to bypass the google maps preference for going through the town centre.

Further, on the A87 trunk road coming into Portree, it was queried if there was an opportunity to extend the filter lane at the High School to allow easier movement of traffic towards the link road. It was advised that this could be raised with Transport Scotland and their contractor Bear Scotland at one of the regular liaison meetings. In this respect, more information was sought from the Member to see what positive intervention could be made to assist the flow of traffic in this area.

Reference was made to the existing accesses from housing along the route of the new road which should be marked to show right of way before the road was opened.

The Committee NOTED progress on construction of the scheme.

13. Portree Harbour Repairs Update
Cunntas as Ur air Caladh Phort Rìgh

There was circulated Report No. SR/26/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on structural repairs to the Portree Harbour Infrastructure which are taking place in the harbour this year as part of the Capital Programme.

It was highlighted that communication had been key with local people in order to minimise disruption during the works on the harbour. Good progress was being made on the works and phase 2 works would take place over the winter period to minimise disruption with a target completion date of March 2027.

Clarification was sought on proposed traffic orders for the harbour area and the Community Council was keen that new railings at the harbour be installed. An undertaking was given to liaise with Traffic and Parking Services and the Roads team on these points. Clarification was sought on the exact start and end point of Quay Street and Douglas Row at the Harbour.

The Committee NOTED the content of the report.

14. Bereavement Services – Project Updates
Cunntasan as Ur air Proiseact Seirbheisean Luchd-caoidh

There was circulated Report No. SR/27/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update to Members on the work being undertaken on burial ground capacity and new and/or extended burial grounds in the Isle of Skye and Raasay area.

In discussion, it was hoped that a suitable site for Skeabost and Borve burial ground provision could be found soon and the ongoing work to achieve this was noted. Disappointment was expressed that snagging works had still not been completed by the contractor at Portree burial ground. An undertaking was given to ensure the contractor completed these works within the retention period of the contract and an update on progress on these works would be provided to Members.

The lack of maintenance on historic burial grounds was also highlighted and these concerns would be relayed to the Amenities team. Maintenance issues on paths at Broadford and Ashaig burial grounds would be looked at.

The Committee NOTED:-

i. the current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Isle of Skye and Raasay area;
ii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development; and
iii. an undertaking was given to ensure the contractor completed works at Portree burial ground within the retention period of the contract.

15. Parking Income
Cunntas as Ur mu Ionmhas na Pairc Charaichean

With the agreement of the Committee, this item was deferred until the next meeting so that further information could be included in the report to be presented to the Committee.

16. Annual Report on Operational Activities at the Old Man of Storr
Aithisg Bhliadhnail air Gniomhachd Obrachail aig Bodach an Stoir

There was circulated Report No. SR/29/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Corporate.

Following a summary of the report by the Assistant Chief Executive Corporate, Members recognised that the Old Man of Storr site was a massive success story for the area and the Council and everyone involved were thanked for their tremendous efforts. The Storr centre was managing tourism at the site and creating jobs and income generated was reinvested at the site. The funding to build the centre received from a variety of sources was a great success story.

In relation to the future of the site, there were plans for an extension to the car park and a review of a single site future operating model and a proposal for a one cost centre was underway which could help to address future challenges and deliver solutions for the site. The review will consider the service delivery model, therefore related corporate policies such as car parking income are not part of this review. Given the success of the centre, it was felt that there may be a need for additional car parking enforcement staff at the site in future.

The importance of Access Officers engagement with tourists was highlighted and it was queried what scope there was for them to cover other areas. Staff were also thanked for the support they provided to the Mountain Rescue team. It was highlighted that Access Officers at the site through their engagement with tourists had reduced the number of visitors going off the designated path and thereby reducing maintenance costs. In terms of Access Officers covering other areas, this was not within the scope of the review of the future operating model for the centre.

There was a need to be mindful of not becoming a victim of our own success and having to fund other services on Skye on the back of income from the centre. Income generated at the site should be viewed as additional money rather than core funding.

It was queried what consideration could be given to expanding The Storr model to other visitor attractions on Skye. It was advised that opportunities at Neist Point were being explored and there were developments at Coral beach. Opportunities for further developments across Highland were also being explored.

Officers continued to look at what improvements could be made to the site such as with toilet provision. In terms of the car park extension, it would be assumed that an additional full time Parking Enforcement Officer would form part of this proposal.

The Committee:-

i NOTED the achievements delivered at the Old Man of Storr site during the second year of operation and support the continued development of this important initiative for the Skye and Raasay Area.
ii. NOTED the continued development of the site as a sustainable visitor destination supporting local economic, environmental and community benefits.
iii. NOTED that regular update reports will continue to be taken to the Isle of Skye and Raasay Area Committee; and
iv. NOTED that review of a single site future operating model is underway.

17. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

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

Kyleakin Local History Society - Setting up New Society Website - £1,500

18. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and NOTED Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 1 June, 2026 the terms of which were approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 25 June, 2026.

The meeting ended at 12.40 p.m.