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.