

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

Non-Members also present:

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

- 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;
- 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 Supply Duties - Fees Review

Cìsean Solar Uisge Priobhaideach – 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:-

- NOTED** the update from Environmental Health on abandoned vehicles including the data from 2025/26;
- 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;
- NOTED** the proposed improvements being considered to address abandoned vehicles by Environmental Health;
- 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 grow 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 Bliadhnaile 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 Beaully 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:-

- NOTED** the progress made to implement the Growing Our Future Strategy and deliver the Community Food Growing Action Plan; and
- 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**:-

- the outcome of the Fleet Compliance audit submitted to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner in May 2026;
- the decision letter following the Preliminary Hearing in January 2026;
- Fleet Operations performance against key compliance indicators for May 2026 and June 2026; and
- 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.