

The Highland Council

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

Present:

Mr M Baird

Dr C Birt

Mrs M Cockburn

Mr R Cross

Mr D Fraser

Mr R Gale

Ms C Gillies

Mr J Grafton (remote)

Mr R Gunn (remote)

Ms L Johnston

Mrs I Mackenzie

Mrs K MacLean

Mr T MacLennan (remote)

Mr P Oldham (sub for Ms Kraft)

Ms C Ramsay

Mrs M Reid

Non-Members present:

Mrs T Collier (remote)

Ms L Dundas (remote)

Mr J Edmondson

Mr J Finlayson (remote)

Ms M Hutchison (remote)

Mrs J McEwan (remote)

Mr J Murray (remote)

Mrs T Robertson

Mrs M Ross

NHS Highland representatives:

Ms L Bussell, Director of Nursing

Ms J Davies, Director of Public Health (remote)

Ms R MacDonald, Interim Deputy Director of Adult Social Care (remote)

Third sector representatives in attendance:

Dr G Rodger, Inspiring Young Voices

Ms K Wilczynska, Connecting Carers

Also in attendance:

Ms L McBain, outgoing Youth Convener

Ms E Primrose, incoming Youth Convener

Participating Officials:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People

Ms F Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer, Health and Social Care

Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer, Integrated People Services

Mr I Kyle, Lead Officer Strategy, Performance and Quality Assurance

Mr J Libby, Transition Head of Children & Justice

Ms D Sutherland, Strategic Lead Corp. Audit & Performance

Mr P Adlinton, Commissioning and Contracts Manager

Mrs L Dunn, Joint Democratic Services Manager

Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mr D Fraser in the Chair

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

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

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

Item 7 – Mrs M Ross and Dr G Rodger

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaìdh

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

4. Service Achievements
Coileanaidhean Seirbheis

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

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

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

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

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

evidence be presented that demonstrated that the new monitoring framework was improving outcomes rather than simply improving the collecting of information;

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

Thereafter, the Committee:

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

6. The Promise Update Cunntas air Gealladh

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

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

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

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

Thereafter, the Committee:

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

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

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

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

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

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

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

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

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

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

Thereafter, the Committee:

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

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

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

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

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

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:

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

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

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

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

Thereafter, the Committee:

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

10. Delivery Plan Monitoring and Progress Update – Person Centre Solutions Q1 2026/27

Sgrùdadh agus Cunntas Adhartais a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh – Fuasglaidhean Stèidhichte air an Neach R1 2026/27

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

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

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

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

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

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

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

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

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

12. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

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

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

Closing Note

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

The meeting ended at 12.05pm.