

The Highland Council
No. 5 2026/2027

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 17 September 2026 at 9.35am.

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 (Remote)
Dr C Birt
Mr B Boyd (Remote)
Mr R Bremner
Mr I Brown (Remote)
Mr J Bruce
Mr M Cameron (Remote)
Mr S Cameron
Mrs I Campbell
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair
Mr A Christie
Mrs M Cockburn (Remote)
Mr S Coghill
Ms T Collier (Remote)
Ms H Crawford (Remote)
Mr R Cross
Ms L Dundas
Mr J Edmondson
Mr J Finlayson
Mr D Fraser
Mr L Fraser
Mr R Gale
Mr C Gillies
Mr K Gowans
Mr J Grafton
Mr A Graham
Mr M Green
Mr D Gregg
Dr M Gregson
Mr R Gunn
Mrs J Hendry
Ms M Hutchison (Remote)

Mrs B Jarvie (Remote)
Ms L Johnston
Mr R Jones
Mr S Kennedy (Remote)
Ms E Knox
Ms L Kraft (Remote)
Mr B Lobban
Mr P Logue (Remote)
Ms M MacCallum (Remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (Remote)
Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr A MacKintosh
Mr R MacKintosh
Mrs A MacLean
Ms K MacLean
Mr T MacLennan
Mr D Macpherson
Mr D McDonald
Mrs J McEwan (Remote)
Mr D Millar
Mr H Morrison (Remote)
Mr J Murray
Ms L Niven (Remote)
Mr P Oldham
Mrs M Paterson
Mr M Prosser (Remote)
Ms C Ramsay
Mrs M Reid
Mr M Reiss
Mrs T Robertson
Mr K Rosie
Mrs M Ross
Mrs L Saggars
Mr R Stewart (Remote)
Ms K Willis (Remote)

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 A Jarvie, Mr S Mackie and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Council **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 21 (Motion 1) – Ms C Ramsay

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

Item 5 – Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg

Item 6 – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg, Mr J Edmondson and Mrs M Ross

Item 7 – Mr D Gregg

Item 11 – Mr A Christie, Mr D Gregg and Mr J Edmondson

3. Vote of No Confidence Bhòt Cion-earbsa

A debate took place concerning a Vote of No Confidence in five Members, namely Dr Birt, Mr Grafton, Mr Kennedy, Mr Macpherson and Mr Stewart, regarding a decision taken by them at the Licensing Committee on 23 June 2026 as five of six Members who had decided not to suspend a taxi operator's licence held by a Mr David Brown, a convicted rapist.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- this vote had not been taken forward to punish those involved but there had been a catastrophic error of judgement, bringing shame on Highland Council, to leave Mr Brown with a Taxi Operator's licence whilst he served a prison sentence for the rape of a young woman. Consequently, many had lost faith that these Members could fulfil their duties. There needed to be accountability;
- when using a taxi there was an expectation that this was a safe choice;
- public safety appeared to have been of secondary importance when making this decision. The young woman should have been protected and the Highland Council could not again fail members of its community;
- Members had a duty to protect those who were vulnerable and to stand up for those who could not speak for themselves;
- gender based violence had no place in Highland;
- Elected Members had received licensing training and it was therefore difficult to understand why the Members in question had taken the view that Mr Brown was a fit and proper person;

- whilst everyone could make mistakes and Members might disagree with each other at times, the decision taken at the Licensing Committee was legally, morally and ethically wrong and was indefensible;
- Mr Mackay, who had since resigned as an Elected Member, and Mr Stewart had not conducted interviews. Others had in an attempt to justify their stance. This had meant the story had remained in the media, no doubt causing further distress to the young woman involved;
- officers had repeated their advice that Members had to satisfy themselves that Mr Brown was a fit and proper person and the view of Police Scotland was clear;
- sadly, this was not an isolated incident with reference made to other questionable decisions of the Licensing Committee;
- two of the Members involved were Group Leaders;
- it was the responsibility of remaining Members to rebuild public confidence and trust. Confidence was hard earned but easily lost and it was hoped this vote would go some way to help restore this;
- with local government elections due in May 2027, some potential candidates might now be discouraged from putting themselves forward because of the negative press;
- despite all the decisions taken over that last five years, this decision would be what this Highland Council's term would be remembered for;
- some decisions were simply wrong and the licensing decision on this matter was one of them;
- Members had a moral duty with this vote and political solidarity should play no part;
- the Licensing Committee decision had had a detrimental effect on the wider taxi businesses in Highland and yet, given its geographical nature, there was a reliance on them;
- with no recording of that part of the Licensing Committee, the fact the Taxi Operator's Licence had consequently been surrendered and the majority of Members were not present at the Licensing meeting, Members were not privy to all the advice, information and facts that had been discussed;
- the review of licensing, as proposed in the Motion to be discussed later in the meeting, was welcomed;
- some Members would be hesitant to vote against a Vote in No Confidence;
- it was contended that bringing forward a Vote of No Confidence had been a knee jerk reaction;
- the mechanism to review this decision was to have it referred to Highland Council, as the Chief officer – Legal and Corporate Governance had done in terms of Standing Order 16. However, the report had been disclosed to the press, a blatant breach of confidentiality in terms of paragraph 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973;
- some viewed the Vote of No Confidence as inappropriate and the proper mechanism would have been to report concerns to the Standards Commission;
- press reports had been misleading and biased and, it was contended, there were misrepresentations; and
- reference was made to the circumstances and reasons leading to the decision taken. Members sometimes had to take difficult and unpopular decisions. The Licensing Committee vote was legal and competent.

Following debate, a vote was taken and there were **56** votes for the Vote of No Confidence, **6** votes against the Vote of No Confidence and **5** Abstentions with votes being cast as follows:-

For the Vote of No Confidence

Mrs S Atkin, Mr M Baird, Mr C Ballance, Mr A Baxter, Mr Bill Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mr M Cameron, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs T Collier, Ms L Dundas, Mr J Edmondson, Mr J Finlayson, Mr D Fraser, Mr L Fraser, Mr R Gale, Ms C Gillies, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr M Green, Mr D Gregg, Dr M Gregson, Mr R Gunn, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Johnston, Mr R Jones, Ms E Knox, Ms L Kraft, Mr B Lobban, Mr P Logue, Ms M MacCallum, Mr G MacKenzie, Mrs I MacKenzie, Mr A MacKintosh, Mr R MacKintosh, Ms K MacLean, Mr T MacLennan, Mrs J McEwan, Mr D Millar, Mr H Morrison, Mr J Murray, Ms L Niven, Mr P Oldham, Mrs M Paterson, Ms C Ramsay, Mr M Prosser, Mrs M Reid, Mr M Reiss, Mrs T Robertson, Mr K Rosie, Mrs M Ross, Ms K Willis

Against the Vote of No Confidence

Dr C Birt, Mr J Grafton, Mr S Kennedy, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs L Saggars, Mr R Stewart

Abstentions

Mr J Bruce, Mr S Cameron, Mr S Coghill, Mr R Cross, Mr D McDonald

Decision

The Vote of No Confidence was carried.

4. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaìdh

Members **NOTED** that the recess powers granted at the meeting on 25 June 2026 did not require to be used in relation to the full Council.

The following item was taken at 12.45pm.

5. Presentation – Director of Public Health – Annual Report Taisbeanadh - Stiùiriche Slàinte Phoblaich – Aithisg Bhliadhnail

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**

Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland

There had been circulated Report No HC/24/26 by the Deputy Director of Public Health and Health Policy, NHS Highland which was supported by a presentation. A copy of the Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025 was available at the link below:

[Director of Public Health annual report | NHS Highland](#)

Decision

The Council **NOTED** the Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025.

6. Poverty & Equality Commission - Next Steps
Coimisean Bochdainn & Co-ionannachd – Ath Cheumannan

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

Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland

Mr J Edmondson – as Chair of Easter Ross Transport Forum

Mrs M Ross – as a Director of a Third Sector organisation involved in addressing poverty and inequality

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

During discussion, Members made the following main points:-

- the continued support of the Council to the work of the Poverty & Equality Commission was acknowledged as was the need for collaborative work with partners and community groups to tackle poverty and inequality;
- there were areas of work already underway to address recommendations of the Commission, but it was recognised there was more to be done and this would happen under the guidance of the Commission;
- it was a privilege to be part of the work of the Commission and thanks were extended to all those involved in their work;
- the challenges facing different communities were recognised. Of particular note was the development of a Highland Third Sector strategy and operating framework which was needed to build better relationships and improve how we work together and create stronger leadership and accountability between public bodies and the Third Sector. However, the biggest risk to this initiative was that organisations continued to work in isolation with limited engagement and commitment to the process;
- the work of the Commission had been invaluable in providing a robust, evidence based set of recommendations. Of particular note was the voice of lived experience which put people at the centre of the approach to reduce poverty and improve life chances across Highland;
- it was hoped that there would be further recurring money in the Council's next budget to address poverty in communities. While the initial areas of action was a good start, it did not address several areas such as child poverty and therefore wider interventions were required such as opening Schools in evenings to provide meals, provide activities and learning opportunities;
- the support that could be offered to groups to provide free meals to children in poverty during school holiday periods should be considered;
- the need for increased social housing for rent was highlighted as was the challenges people faced with the cost of fuel and energy. In this respect, the Council's Fuel Poverty Working Group would meet soon to discuss what positive actions could be taken to help people;
- this report and the Commission's strategy should be integrated in the Council's other policies to address poverty and inequality;

- the fairer funding principles should be part of the Council's actions to tackle poverty and inequality. It was advised that the fairer funding commitment would be part of the consideration with partners on this work going forward;
- it was queried how the community led Highland Health and Social Care Working Group would be involved in discussions. It was advised that there had been discussion at the Third Sector Reference group as to third sector groups being represented in this work going forward;
- in terms of the mobile community services, this was being developed and consideration was being given to what other services could be included and Third Sector opportunities would be considered;
- it was important that that empty homes in our communities were brought back into use;
- it was questioned how older people would be represented in shaping future actions, such as with fuel poverty, access to transport, provision of housing and digital exclusion;
- along with supporting people experiencing poverty, there was a need for practical ways to help people build confidence, skills and opportunities to provide a route into employment and examples were provided of groups providing such a service;
- input from young people throughout the process was important;
- the need to maintain, build and grow public services to help those with less means to help themselves was highlighted, as was addressing fuel poverty by providing energy efficient housing. Also, the need to make public assets affordable to communities was emphasised;
- there was a need to move from strategy to taking actions and delivering outcomes. Future reports on this matter should focus on outcomes and delivery milestones so that it could be monitored whether actions were making the most of the work of the Commission and was making a difference to people in our communities. An undertaking was given to include measurements of success and outcomes in future reports;
- in relation to fuel poverty, when heating systems were replaced and tenants were likely to face larger electricity bills than before, insulation and solar panels should also be included to reduce energy bills;
- work was being undertaken in relation to data sharing with partners such as the NHS;
- the need to ensure people received all the benefits they were entitled to was emphasised. In-work poverty was at a record high and people were finding it very difficult to make ends meet;
- in terms of equality, there was a need to speak to ethnic minorities about what the Council could do to support them. In this respect, work was being taken forward with some third sector partners around community cohesion;
- opening Council buildings for community use would create opportunities, support community groups, bringing people together and allow local groups to provide activities and services that improved lives;
- using Schools as community hubs would be a positive step forward, particularly for children who, for various reasons, did not attend school. Also, the assets of the community should be looked at to provide services/activities; and
- information would be provided on the current level of financial support from the Council to the Highland Third Sector Interface and its delivery agents. Also, it was queried if the current level of funding support would ensure the sustainability of Highland third sector support infrastructure.

Decision

Thereafter, the Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the strands of work already underway that would support delivery of the Commission's Calls to Action and that progress against these would continue to report to the relevant strategic committee;
- ii. **NOTED** the strands of work that required further exploration to consider potential implementation approaches, including the work planned with partners to consider the findings from the Commission; and
- iii. **AGREED** the initial areas for action, and associated spend, detailed at section 8 of the report.

7. Model of Integration Phase 2 Review Update Cunntas air Ath-sgrùdadh Ìre 2 a' Mhodail Amalachaidh

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/26/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Leader of the Council highlighted the opportunity presented by public sector reform to transform the delivery of public services and support long-term economic prosperity. Representations had been made to the Scottish Government on opportunities to bring public organisations together under local authority leadership, reducing bureaucracy while improving efficiency, expertise and outcomes through greater scale and collaboration. While recognising that transformational change would be challenging, if it was effectively led and delivered through inclusive engagement, it could bring significant benefits to Highland communities. Attention was drawn to recent Audit Scotland reports, including the 2025 Best Value Report, which had expressed confidence in the Council's transformational approach to service improvement and financial management. A number of major Council initiatives were highlighted, including the Highland Investment Plan, as examples of the Council's ability to deliver innovation and investment, and it was important that any reform did not undermine the Council's capacity to deliver such programmes. Further discussion would be welcomed around strengthening local governance while maintaining strong economic partnership working arrangements.

The Leader of the Opposition welcomed the opportunity to engage with the Scottish Government and highlight examples of good practice in Highland, while also raising concerns regarding the proposed timescales for reform and the implications of proposals for fewer, larger local authorities. He emphasised the need to recognise Highland's unique geography in any future arrangements and advocated greater localism through enhanced powers and budget responsibilities for local communities and area committees. He suggested that the Governance Review Working Group begin considering future committee structures. Significant concerns were expressed about proposals to reduce the number of NHS boards, questioning whether larger regional structures would adequately meet the healthcare needs of Highland residents. He highlighted Highland Council's unique role in employing nurses through its health visiting service and called for reform discussions to be undertaken

collaboratively and inclusively, with a strong focus on securing the best outcomes for Highland communities.

Other Members commented as follows:-

- the importance of finding appropriate solutions was emphasised;
- Highland should shape its own future and develop local solutions rather than having structures imposed from elsewhere, with the Highland Investment Plan cited as an example of successful local leadership and collaboration;
- it was concerning that the geographically diverse Highlands could become part of a larger NHS structure, and lose the valuable ability for decisions to be made by people with a strong understanding of Highland's communities, geography and service delivery challenges;
- in relation to the proposal to potentially transfer Adult Social Care (ASC) to the NHS to improve outcomes, it was pointed out that ASC was already delivered by the NHS in Highland and had some of the highest levels of delayed discharge. In this respect it was emphasised that organisational structures alone did not solve complex service delivery issues such as workforce shortages, demographic pressures, increasing demand, and financial constraints;
- support was voiced for the proposed October engagement events on the Models of Integration review, despite the review having been paused. Attention was drawn to the need for quality services, stability and support for staff and service users;
- concern was expressed at the major changes to NHS structures that were being considered at a national level while the Council had paused work on the Models of Integration review due to uncertainty over future government direction;
- lessons should be learned from previous public service reforms and centralisation programmes, including from Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Services, and it was questioned whether further restructuring would improve services for Highland communities. Clear evidence of the benefits, costs and impacts of any proposed NHS reforms, particularly in relation to accessibility of services in remote and rural areas was vital, and the need to focus reform on the needs of residents rather than the preservation of existing structures, including the Highland Council, was emphasised;
- the ability of the SNP Government to work collaboratively was queried;
- the report should be considered within the wider context of the public sector reform announcement, for local authorities and health boards. While the need for strategic efficiency and the elimination of duplication was acknowledged, it was important to protect local accountability, knowledge, and the ability of local communities to influence the services they relied on. It was queried which principle and structures the Council leaders and officers would be aiming to protect within much larger organisations;
- attention was drawn to recent evidence presented to the Scottish Government's Healthcare and Sports Committee on the care sector, as well as concern within that sector about the implications of reform, while noting that COSLA had indicated that social care should remain rooted in local democracy, with councils as equal partners in shaping future arrangements. It was queried to what extent Highland voices would be actively represented and whether the Highland Community Health and Social Care Working Group would be involved. With reference to the ageing population, the value of the third sector and wider community was emphasised, in addition to Members, and the future participation of all was urged;

- attention was drawn to the ‘Looking Beyond Party Politics: What Should Health & Care Look Like in Scotland in 2035’ report recently released by Enlighten, which provided an exceptional depth of political, clinical and practical experience in health and social care, and could help to shape a blueprint for future service delivery structure, including strategic regional leadership combined with genuine localism in the delivery of health and social care. It was suggested the authors of the report could be invited to engage with the Council and contribute to the discussion as the Council developed its response to the Scottish Government;
- officers were thanked for their work on the comprehensive report, and on the Model of Integration review which was now being paused;
- the potential amalgamation of Scottish Health Boards into two was potentially disastrous, and the implications of this on Highland patients were highlighted;
- discussion was required on the future role and structure of area committees, including budget allocation processes. It was hoped the unique geography and needs of the Highlands would be taken properly into consideration, and that some future headquarters or administrative centres would be based in the Highlands;
- clarity was required on how economic savings from amalgamating health boards would arise, and attention was drawn to the value of the third sector and voluntary organisations. It was hoped the Working Group’s report would be considered by the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee alongside the Director of Public Health’s report;
- the need to reduce duplication, to share data to improve efficiency of public services, to work in partnership with other public agencies, and to minimise ill health through preventative work was emphasised;
- attention was also drawn to the concerning level of delayed discharge from hospital in Highland and the need to address Adult Social Care (ASC) challenges. The value of the Highland Investment Plan was recognised and could be a model for something similarly positive for ASC. The Model of Integration consultation was important, despite the tight timescale, to avoid creating fear in communities and to assist in ensuring services continued to be delivered. Attention was drawn to the national and international shortage of some medical professionals, which impacted the delivery of primary care in Highland;
- reference was made to the previous two-tier local authority district and regional structure, which might work again in modern times, and to the benefits of locality budgeting and decision-making;
- the extent to which the Scottish Government had, or intended, to work with local authorities on the reform plans was queried, and further attention was drawn to the important role area committees should play in the future structure of local government;
- reference was made to the impact an Integration Joint Board versus a Lead Agency model would have on services for young people, and concern was expressed at the proposed east-west Health Board split, with particular reference to the location of teaching hospitals, which had a critical role in delivering NHS services and attracting clinical staff;
- the importance of being fully inclusive when consulting was emphasised;
- with reference to political differences of opinion, particularly with regard to centralisation versus localism considerations, the importance of working together in a cross-party manner for the benefit of the Highlands was emphasised;
- attention was drawn to the problems that had been experienced as a result of the creation of Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services;

- attention was also drawn to Ballot Box Scotland's report, New Municipalism, which explored an alternative Local Government structure, and to the complexity of any considerations about a future NHS structure for Scotland;
- Members were urged to participate in the work of the Area Committee Working Group;
- with regard to the planning application process, the importance of local knowledge and decision-making was highlighted;
- it was suggested the current SNP government had centralisation as an aim, and attention was drawn to the significant budget gap that it was trying to resolve. Future solutions for Highland should involve cross-party involvement with democratic control over the needs of the Highlands at its centre; and
- the drawbacks of centralised health services for residents in remote and rural areas such as the far north of Scotland were highlighted, and the importance of maintaining links between local services and senior management, and of local decision-making, was emphasised. Efficiency should not be a reason for reducing accessibility to vital services.

Decision

Thereafter, the Council:-

- NOTED** the potentially significant implications of the Programme For Government proposals for local government, delivery of health and social care and wider public services reform;
- NOTED** the engagement that had taken place with the First Minister;
- AGREED** that direct engagement and communication continue with the Scottish Government and officials;
- AGREED** that a further report updating Members be considered at December Council on 10 December 2026;
- NOTED** the outcome of the MOI Review Phase 2 options appraisal as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report;
- AGREED** the MOI Review be paused, pending greater clarity about the Scottish Government's plans for health and social care integration; and
- AGREED** to engage with stakeholders, incorporating consultation on the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan and existing Community Planning partnership events.

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

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

9. Public Transport Proposal Moladh Còmhhdhail Phoblaich

There had been circulated to Members only Confidential Report No. HC/27/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

The Council returned to public proceedings for the following items.

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

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

During discussion, support was expressed for the City of Culture 2029 Bid. Reference was made to the positive experiences of visitors to the Highlands, including the Inverness Castle Experience and the area's cultural attractions, and to the potential economic and cultural benefits that a successful bid could bring to the area.

Decision

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

11. Annual Corporate Performance Report 2025/26 Aithisg Choileanaidh Chorporra Bhliadhnail 2025/26

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**

Mr D Gregg – as an employee of NHS Highland

**Mr J Edmondson – as an unpaid Director of a Community Interest Company
which provided infrastructure for rural broadband**

There had been circulated Report No. HC/29/26 by the Chief Executive.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- reference was made to the delivery of Council and affordable housing, improvements in the time taken to re-let properties and complete medical adaptations and reduced processing times for routine planning applications;
- the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Team was welcomed, particularly in relation to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction processing times. The financial support secured for families and households through welfare services and Citizens Advice Bureau was also commended, as was the performance in relation to apprenticeships, traineeships and paid placements and progress with digital transformation;

- the support provided to serving and former Armed Forces personnel in relation to housing and welfare was welcomed. However, concern was expressed regarding the increase in sickness absence and the importance of continued scrutiny and measures to support staff wellbeing;
- concern was expressed regarding the increase in the proportion of performance indicators rated red, with reference to educational attainment, the time taken to determine major planning applications and the condition of the road network. Roads were essential infrastructure for rural communities and sufficient investment was required to prevent further deterioration;
- while the delivery of new Council housing was welcomed, it was emphasised that positive performance in some areas should not detract from the need to address areas where performance had deteriorated;
- progress in relation to kinship care and the increase in foster carer approvals was welcomed, particularly in terms of enabling children and young people to remain closer to home. The importance of continuing to reduce out of area placements and meet the requirements of The Promise was emphasised;
- improving trends in primary school literacy and numeracy attainment were welcomed and recognition was given to the work undertaken by school staff. It was recognised that improvements in educational attainment would take time to become evident. Reference was also made to the number of children receiving care out with Highland and to additional accommodation being developed;
- although the reported level of superfast broadband connectivity was welcomed, concern was expressed that the overall figure did not reflect the position facing some businesses and residents in rural areas. Greater consideration of the detail behind connectivity figures and continued improvement in rural provision were sought;
- opportunities for greater collaboration with third sector organisations in supporting young people were highlighted. In relation to planning performance, it was also emphasised that delays could arise from incomplete or poor quality applications and were not necessarily attributable to the planning process itself;
- concern was expressed regarding school leaver complementary tariff scores for the highest, middle and lowest attaining groups, all of which had deteriorated compared with the previous year. It was highlighted that the lowest attaining and middle groups had moved from amber to red and that closer monitoring and a more responsive approach were required. In this regard, it was proposed that a special meeting of the Education Committee be held to consider the education performance statistics and trends, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings and the Programme for Government and how these matters could be taken forward in Highland;
- reference was made to more recent education data, including improvements in primary literacy and numeracy and secondary attainment. It was highlighted that further information on secondary attainment would be reported to the Education Committee and that a range of measures were already being progressed to support improvement. It was confirmed that, rather than holding a special meeting, a report addressing the matters raised would be brought to the next meeting of the Education Committee, which was accepted;
- the performance in relation to Modern Apprenticeships was welcomed and it was suggested that consideration be given to increasing opportunities further. Concern was also expressed regarding the number of children accommodated out with Highland, whether sufficient local facilities were being developed for children with complex needs, the level of resources available to support people into employment and the proportion of older people receiving personal care at home;

- reference was made to recent investment in school infrastructure and the anticipated benefits of improved learning environments for pupil attainment;
- improvements in recycling, reductions in street lighting energy consumption and the performance of medical adaptations were welcomed. However, clarification was sought as to whether the target for completing medical adaptations took account of individual circumstances, particularly where delays could affect discharge from hospital. It was confirmed that the relationship between the timescales for medical adaptations and the associated outcomes would be kept under review;
- significant concern was expressed regarding the proportion of people receiving care at home and the potential consequences for people remaining in hospital or at home without the care required. Clarification was also sought regarding why the data reported for this indicator related to an earlier period, with further information on the specific figure queried to be provided;
- concern was expressed regarding the absence of an up to date measure of the energy efficiency of Council housing while the new national standard was awaited. In view of the investment being made in energy efficiency measures, it was suggested that information should continue to be made available on the Council's current position;
- the increase in household recycling following changes to waste collection arrangements was welcomed, as were improvements in street cleanliness. It was emphasised that smaller, locally visible services remained important to communities;
- positive performance in areas including apprenticeships, housing and homelessness was welcomed, together with progress towards reducing placements out with Highland for children and young people in care. However, concern was expressed regarding recruitment and retention within education, including the use of successive short-term contracts, the reduction in Gaelic learner education beyond Secondary 2 (S2) and the condition and maintenance of some school buildings;
- while the improvement in household recycling performance was recognised, it was considered that further progress was required. Clarification was sought on the recycling target for the current year and how this was expected to increase in future, and the importance of communication in supporting increased recycling was emphasised. It was confirmed that further information on the immediate target would be provided and that the Waste Strategy would set out future targets and associated actions;
- a discrepancy was highlighted between the statement at section 6.3 of the report that Council carbon emissions had reduced and the performance data in the table at Section 4.7 of Appendix 1, which indicated an increase of 1,664 tonnes. It was subsequently clarified that as reported in the Table at Section 4.7 of Appendix 1, emissions had increased from 33,229 tonnes CO₂e in 2023/24 to 34,893 tonnes CO₂e in 2024/25. However, the indicator has continued to achieve green, on-target status for the third consecutive year;
- further information was sought on progress with the £8m identified for investment in renewables, anticipated income from Council sites associated with Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SEN) infrastructure and plans to expand solar (pv) installations to generate additional income;

- the work undertaken in terms of welfare and financial inclusion was welcomed, particularly the financial support secured for Highland households. It was suggested that information on benefit entitlement should be made more readily accessible to Council staff and that case studies could assist in raising awareness of available support;
- concern was expressed regarding progress towards the Council's housing aspirations and clarification was sought on performance against the ambition to deliver 24,000 homes over 10 years. Reference was made to reports from smaller developers of delays in progressing developments through the planning process and the potential implications for their workforce. The importance of identifying and addressing barriers to housing delivery, including those affecting smaller builders, was emphasised;
- the importance of suicide prevention in Highland was emphasised, and clarification was sought on the work being undertaken with partners, including whether approaches aimed at achieving zero suicides had been considered; and
- it was observed that the annual report provided a high-level overview of Council performance and that more detailed scrutiny of individual indicators took place through the relevant Strategic Committees. It was also highlighted that measures had already been introduced in a number of areas in response to identified performance issues.

Decision

Thereafter, the Council:-

- i. **NOTED** the report which outlined the performance for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026;
- ii. **NOTED** that any data not yet available, including the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) would be reported to Members through the Quarterly Performance Reports to the relevant Strategic Committees once published;
- iii. **NOTED** the reference table at Appendix 2 (to the report) - Delivery Plan Projects and Programmes that linked to Performance Plan Commitments; and
- iv. **AGREED** that a report be brought to the next meeting of the Education Committee to consider the education performance statistics and trends, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings and the Programme for Government and how these matters could be taken forward in Highland.

12. Annual Review of Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings Ath-sgrùdadh Bliadhnail de Ghnàth-riaghailtean a' Buntainn ri Stiùireadh Choinneamhan

There had been circulated Report No. HC/30/26 by the Chief Officer – Legal and Corporate Governance.

Members were advised that the current process for Notices of Motions and Amendments to them were not always operating as effectively as intended, with some competent Motions and Amendments being excluded on procedural grounds. Members were advised that a proposed revision to the process would be presented to the next meeting on 29 October 2026 for consideration.

A further revision was proposed to Standing Order 6.1 to reflect that the quorum for meetings of the Joint North/South Planning Applications Committee should be one half of the total membership.

Decision

Thereafter, the Council:-

- i. **APPROVED** the revised wording of Standing Orders Relating to the Conduct of Meetings as set out in Appendix 1 to the report subject to Standing Order 6.1 being amended by inserting the words “*(including joint meetings)*” after “*Planning Applications Committee*”; and
- ii. **AGREED** a process review for Notices of Motion and Amendments would be brought to the next meeting on 29 October 2026.

13. Membership of the Council Ballrachd na Comhairle

The Council **NOTED** that Mr Willie MacKay had resigned as a Highland Council Member with effect from 4 July 2026 and a By-election for Ward 3 (Wick and East Caithness) would be held on 1 October 2026.

The political make-up of the Council was now as follows:-

SNP – 18 / Highland Independent – 18 / Scottish Liberal Democrats – 15 / Highland Alliance – 8 / Scottish Conservative and Unionist – 6 / Scottish Green Party – 3 / Labour – 2 / Non-Aligned – 3 / Vacant – 1.

The formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees remained unchanged – 5 / 5 / 4 / 2 / 2.

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

The Council **AGREED** the appointments to Committees as tabled.

15. Appointments to Companies Cur an Dreuchd gu Companaidhean

a. Highland Opportunity (Investments) Limited Cothrom dhan Ghàidhealtachd (Tasgaidhean) Earranta

Following the resignation of Mr T MacLennan and Mrs M Reid, the Council **AGREED** to appoint Mr M Cameron and Mr J Murray as Directors of Highland Opportunity (Investments) Limited.

b. High Life Highland High Life na Gàidhealtachd

The Council was advised that recommendations had been received from the High Life Highland Nominations Committee in relation to the position of Independent Directors as follows:-

- Ms V Graham
- Ms D Steel

The Council **AGREED** these recommendations as detailed.

16. **Timetable of Meetings** **Clàr-ama Choinneamhan**

The Council **AGREED** that:

- a Special meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee be held on Monday 15 March 2027; and
- an additional meeting of the Highland Licensing Committee be held on Tuesday 24 November 2026.

17. **Deeds Executed** **Sgrìobhainnean Lagha a Bhuilicheadh**

The Council **NOTED** that a list of deeds and other documents executed on behalf of the Council since the meeting held on 25 June 2025.

18. **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 25 June 2026 and the Special meetings held on 4 and 25 August 2026 as contained in the Volume which had been circulated separately – which were **APPROVED**.

19. **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 (assessments relating to starred items were available in Booklet A) as appropriate, the following Minutes of Meetings of Committees as contained in Volume which had been circulated separately.

The Minutes, having been moved and seconded were, except as undernoted, **APPROVED** - matters arising having been dealt with as follows:-

Climate Change Committee 12 August 2026

Starred Items 5i - Net Zero Programme; 6 - Scotland's Climate Change Plan 2026-2040; and 7 - Fourth Climate Change Risk Assessment – Independent Assessment

It was proposed that starred items 5i, 6 and 7 in the Climate Change Committee Minutes be referred back to the Committee where a report could be produced and scrutinised in the proper manner. This was accepted by the Chair of the Climate Change Committee.

The Council **AGREED** that starred items 5i, 6 and 7 in the Climate Change Committee Minutes be referred back to the Committee where a report could be produced and scrutinised in the proper manner.

Starred Item 8 – Highland Adapts Update and Funding Request

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

Economy and Infrastructure Committee 20 August 2026

Starred Item 10ii – Balnaan Bridge - Options Report

It had been agreed that adoption of Option 2, the bridge overlay, as the preferred option, with the objective of reopening Balnaan Bridge to traffic.

In this respect, Members highlighted the significance of Balnaan Bridge to the local community and referred to the impact that the closure had had on residents, businesses and agricultural users. Reference was made to the importance of the crossing in providing access to Grantown-on-Spey and the additional travel distances resulting from the closure. The importance of maintaining infrastructure within rural communities was emphasised and concerns were raised regarding the impact that permanent closure could have on local agriculture, rural businesses and rural communities. Attention was drawn to the effect of the closure on farming operations and the viability of agricultural tenancies.

Funding arrangements were discussed, including a proposal that the works be funded from the Economy and Infrastructure Emergency Repair Fund as set out within the Highland Investment Plan. Reference was made to the estimated cost of the bridge overlay proposal and the need for a procurement exercise to establish the cost of available solutions. Wider pressures on roads and bridge budgets and the challenges associated with maintaining infrastructure across the Highland area were highlighted. Clarification was also provided regarding the availability of funding within the Emergency Repair Fund and the provision made across two financial years.

Thereafter, the Council **AGREED** the adoption of Option 2, the bridge overlay, as the preferred option, with the objective of reopening Balnaan Bridge to traffic, with the works funded from the Economy and Infrastructure Emergency Repair Fund as set out within the Highland Investment Plan.

Minutes not included in the Volume

- i. Community Planning Board – 12 June 2026 – **NOTED**
- ii. Recruitment Panel – 22 June 2026 and 2 September 2026 – **NOTED**;
- iii. Governance Review Steering Group – 17 August 2026 – **APPROVED**; and
- iv. Redesign Board – 27 August 2026 – **APPROVED**.

20. Question Time

Àm Ceiste

The following Questions had been received by the Chief Officer - Legal and Corporate Governance:-

(i) Mr A Graham

To the Leader of the Council

Will the Council end the confusing plethora of contact phone numbers and introduce a single Highland Council contact number?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried whether it was easy and straightforward for Highland residents to contact the Highland Council?

In response, it was highlighted that residents had been able to contact the Highland Council, however the Leader indicated that he was willing to engage in discussion on where improvements could be made.

(ii) Mr R Stewart

To the Leader of the Council

The EHRC's new guidance states that Scottish law requires separate toilet facilities for boys and girls. The School Premises Regulations also require, in schools not exclusively for girls, that no more than one third of the sanitary appliances provided for boys are WCs, with the remainder being urinals. Can the Leader confirm how many Highland schools currently fail to meet these requirements.

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, it was queried what legal advice the Leader had received when responding to Question 8 on 27 March 2025?

In response, the Leader stated that a response would be circulated to the Council.

(iii) Mr M Reiss

To the Leader of the Council

Will you give a simple and cast-iron assurance that the funds identified to be spent on new schools and other projects within the Highland Investment Plan will not be diverted to any other purpose(s)?

The response had been circulated.

In terms of a supplementary question, the Leader's response to the initial question was in clear and concise plain English, would he commit to maintaining this standard when responding to future questions?

In response the Leader was content to discuss the matter further and emphasised that the intent of the Highland Investment Plan had been to deliver for communities and that focus would not change.

(iv) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Leader of the Council

In light of the Scottish Government's commitment to 'Fairer Funding' principles for the third sector, could the Leader of the Council outline how the Highland Council was embedding these specific mechanisms, namely multi-year funding streams, inflation-adjusted uplifts, timely payments, and the Real Living Wage, directly into its strategic partnership and funding allocations with the Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) to protect our region's vital community groups from financial instability?

The response had been circulated.

There was no supplementary question.

**21. Notices of Motion
Brathan Glusaid**

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

(i) Cairngorm Wildfire

Declaration of Interest: Ms C Ramsay made a Declaration of Interest as an employee of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, she left the meeting for this item.

Highland Council recognises the exceptional efforts of everyone involved on the ground during the recent Cairngorm wildfire and acknowledges the serious threat it posed to communities, property, the environment and potentially human life. Council notes the significant concerns raised regarding preparedness, escalation, command and control, communications, coordination, resource availability and welfare provision. It also recognises that a change in weather or wind direction could have had even more catastrophic consequences. Council affirms that Highland communities must have confidence that future major wildfires will be met with clear leadership, effective communication and appropriate resources. This Council therefore calls on the Council Leader and Chief Executive to seek the agreement of, and funding from, the Scottish Government for a genuinely independent review of this incident and also to assess whether the existing command structure is appropriate for major landscape-scale wildfires. The findings, together with a clear action plan identifying responsibilities and timescales should be reported to Highland Council no later than March 2027.

Signed: Mr R Jones Mr B Lobban

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- the Glenmore wildfire should be a turning point in how Highland prepared for and responded to wildfires with specific calls for proactive action;
- the importance of creating and maintaining fire break infrastructure across large land areas was highlighted with emphasis on establishing landowner responsibility for this;

- philosophies of land management policy could not come at the expense of protecting communities against wildfires;
- the current approach to vegetation and fuel management was questioned and concerns were raised about whether the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had sufficient specialist wildfire expertise, equipment, communications and the resources to deal with major or simultaneous wildfire incidents;
- attention was drawn to the reported shortcomings in arrangements where communication between operational personnel and command structures had been a specific issue;
- the contribution of local volunteers, gamekeepers and estate workers was praised and it was suggested that their efforts should be formally incorporated into future response arrangements;
- concern was again expressed about the inadequate welfare support for personnel during the incident and an overreliance on voluntary community support;
- the need for an independent review of the wildfire response was supported and argued that future incidents were inevitable, and lessons must be acted upon;
- the Glenmore wildfire had damaged an area of significant ecological and environmental importance;
- attention was brought to the fact that a change in wind direction prevented further damage which could have resulted in the destruction of homes and facilities in surrounding areas;
- it was stressed that Members had severe concern that the extent of damage had been exacerbated by deficiencies in operational management structures and the availability of essential resources, including appropriate PPE;
- concern was raised regarding the clarity of communications issued by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Reference was made to information obtained through a Freedom of Information request, which prompted questions about the time taken for active firefighting operations to commence. Members emphasised the importance of providing updates in clear, plain English to ensure the public understood;
- tribute was paid to firefighters, emergency responders and community efforts during the incident;
- specific praise was given to Police Scotland's decision to declare a major incident and execute the evacuation measures;
- Members agreed that the reliance on the local community to provide welfare support was unacceptable and questioned whether sufficient capacity would currently exist to respond to multiple major fires simultaneously;
- it was advised that, should an independent review not be commissioned, the issue could be examined through parliamentary committees;
- it was stated that the scale of the recent wildfire exceeded previous experience;
- Members suggested that it was likely that a similar fire could happen again in the near future;
- it was argued that the recent wildfire demonstrated the impacts of climate change and highlighted the need for preparedness and investigation; and
- consideration was given to how the changes to sustainable agricultural practices particularly, agricultural subsidies and management of rural land areas had impacted the conditions.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

(ii) Support for a Minister for Older People

Council notes Age Scotland's call for the appointment of a dedicated Minister for Older People within the Scottish Government, recognising Scotland's ageing population and the importance of ensuring that the interests and needs of older people are represented across government policy.

Council recognises the increasing pressures on health and social care, rising levels of pensioner poverty, digital exclusion, loneliness, mental health concerns, age discrimination, and the suitability of housing for older people. Council believes that improving access to timely, preventative and person-centred support is essential to enabling people to live well, independently and with dignity as they age.

Council affirms its commitment to supporting people throughout their life course and recognises the need to respond effectively to the opportunities and challenges associated with an ageing population.

Council further notes that the geographical scale of the Highlands, combined with one of the oldest and fastest-ageing populations in Scotland, means these challenges are particularly acute in rural and remote communities. Access to healthcare, social care, housing, transport, digital connectivity and community support are all key factors in maintaining quality of life for older residents.

Council therefore agrees to formally support Age Scotland's call for a dedicated Minister for Older People, recognising that such a role would provide greater strategic leadership and accountability across government in addressing the needs, aspirations and contributions of older people throughout Scotland, and to write to the First Minister, relevant Scottish Ministers and COSLA, highlighting Highland Council's support for this proposal and urging consideration of its implementation during the current parliamentary term.

Calls for a Minister for Older People for Scotland | Age Scotland

Signed: Mrs I MacKenzie Mrs B Jarvie Mr R Stewart

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- the Motion emphasised that it not only supported older people in Highland but also recognised their contribution and support to Highland life. Older people helped to sustain community organisations through volunteering and passed on their knowledge and experience to future generations;
- older people faced challenges which included access to health and social care, transport and digital connectivity, and that loneliness, social isolation and poverty remained significant concerns;
- a dedicated Minister for Older People would not create another layer of government but would help to ensure that ageing was considered across all areas of government policy and that the needs of older people were given the attention they deserved;
- although generally supportive of the principle of a dedicated Minister for Older People, concerns were raised regarding some of the wording used, and the reference to Highland having one of the oldest and fastest ageing populations was

- questioned. It was important to ensure that statements were accurate and Members were encouraged to exercise care in the drafting of future Motions; and
- the Council should commit to supporting people from pre-birth to end of life, rather than solely focusing on older people.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

(iii) Public Safety, Licensing Decision-Making and an Independent Review

Council notes:

1. The significant public interest generated by the Highland Licensing Committee's decision of 23 June 2026 in relation to the taxi operator licences held by David Brown and the subsequent referral of that decision for reconsideration.
2. That discussion arising from the decision has extended beyond the circumstances of a single case and has prompted wider debate regarding public confidence in the Council's licensing processes, particularly in relation to public safety, safeguarding, transparency and the application of the statutory "fit and proper person" test.
3. that licensing is fundamentally a public protection function and that public confidence is strengthened when licensing decisions are seen to place safety, safeguarding and the prevention of harm at their centre
4. That a number of questions have been raised by elected members and members of the public regarding:
 - consistency of decision-making;
 - the weight attached to Police Scotland objections and public protection information;
 - the treatment of offences involving violence against women and girls;
 - the application of the fit and proper person test;
 - the balance between transparency and confidentiality in licensing proceedings;
 - the nature and extent of information available to members in cases involving ongoing criminal proceedings, including sub judice considerations; and
 - wider public confidence in licensing outcomes.
5. That Highland Council has responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and has publicly committed itself to promoting equality, challenging discrimination and advancing the safety and wellbeing of all communities.
6. That understanding how different groups experience licensing services, including women and girls, can help inform effective policy and decision-making.

Council believes:

1. That public confidence is enhanced where licensing decisions are demonstrably fair, transparent, consistent and grounded in public protection.
2. That residents and visitors should be able to use licensed services and premises with confidence that safeguarding considerations are being given appropriate weight.

3. That where questions have arisen regarding decision-making processes, governance arrangements, organisational culture or the consideration of equality and safeguarding issues, it is beneficial for these matters to be examined independently and objectively.
4. That an independent review would provide an opportunity to identify lessons, share good practice, strengthen public confidence and support elected members in carrying out their licensing responsibilities.

Council therefore agrees:

1. To commission an independent external review of Highland Council licensing.
2. That the review should be led by a suitably qualified individual independent of Highland Council and that, where appropriate, the review will engage with individuals, organisations or professional bodies with relevant expertise in:
 - licensing law;
 - public protection and safeguarding;
 - violence against women and girls;
 - equality and human rights; and
 - governance and ethical decision-making.
3. That the review may wish to consider:
 - the operation of the Highland Licensing Committee;
 - arrangements relating to the appointment of the Chair of Licensing, recognising the Committee's quasi-judicial role;
 - the adequacy of governance, advice and support arrangements available to members in supporting lawful, consistent and evidence-based decision making;
 - consistency in the application of the fit and proper person test;
 - the treatment of Police Scotland objections and public protection evidence;
 - decision-making in cases involving violence, sexual offending, domestic abuse and safeguarding concerns;
 - the extent to which issues relating to women's safety and lived experience are reflected in licensing decision-making;
 - whether there are lessons to be learned regarding equality, unconscious bias, organisational culture or other factors that could potentially influence decision making;
 - the adequacy of member training and support;
 - decision-making culture, governance arrangements and accountability mechanisms; and
 - opportunities to strengthen public confidence, transparency and public understanding of licensing decisions.
4. That the review should, where appropriate, engage with elected members, Council officers, Police Scotland, licensing professionals, equality organisations, women's organisations and other relevant stakeholders.
5. That the Chief Executive is requested to bring forward to the next meeting of the Council detailed proposals for commissioning the review, including proposed governance arrangements, terms of reference, resource implications and estimated costs, for consideration and approval by Council.
6. That subject to approval as described at para 5 above, the Review Chair will be appointed and review initiated by the end of December 2026.

7. That an interim report will be presented to Highland Council by 31 March 2027, setting out progress to date, any emerging themes or findings, and the Review Chair's proposed timetable for completion of the review, including arrangements for the presentation of any final report and recommendations to Council.
8. That the review does not prevent the Council from instigating interim changes to the operation and membership of the Licensing Committee pending the final report and recommendations.
9. To reaffirm Highland Council's commitment to public safety, equality, transparency and continuous improvement in licensing decision-making.

Signed: Mrs J Hendry	Mrs E Knox	Ms L Johnston
Mrs K MacLean	Ms S Atkin	Mrs M Reid
Mrs K Willis		

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- the Highland Licensing Committee decision of 23 June 2026 had resulted in significant public scrutiny of the Council and had raised wider concerns regarding confidence in the Council's licensing system;
- the purpose of the Motion was not to revisit the individual case or assign blame, rather to support learning and improvement through an independent external review of the Council's licensing processes;
- the importance of public safety and safeguarding was stressed, particularly in relation to women and girls, and expressed that an independent review would help demonstrate transparency, rebuild public trust and ensure that the Council's licensing framework continued to operate to the highest possible standards;
- it was highlighted that 52 Members from across the Council had expressed support for an independent external review. The importance of rebuilding public confidence in the licensing process had been echoed, and it was emphasised that an independent examination of these processes was key to achieving this;
- an independent review would either provide reassurance that existing arrangements were robust or identify areas for improvement, and it was considered that the Council had a duty to act where improvements could be made;
- it was suggested that the Motion should also include men and boys, however, as no amendment had been submitted prior to the deadline, the Motion would therefore be considered as presented;
- it was highlighted that many women routinely took personal safety precautions in everyday life and that consideration of concerns raised by women could provide a valuable perspective on personal safety and public protection;
- it was expressed that misogyny and unconscious bias towards women and girls remained present within society. Concerns regarding social media and the impact that inappropriate exposure could have on young people were shared, and it was considered that continued efforts were required to challenge violence against women and girls and protect vulnerable people;
- the licensing and legal officers provided the Committee with professional, balanced and careful advice and worked in a difficult environment dealing with complex legislation and confidential information. It was appropriate to examine broader governance matters, including the appointment, training and development of Members serving on the Committee and their understanding of the legislative framework and decision-making process. The review was an opportunity to strengthen the Committee's operation and restore public confidence in an important public protection function;

- Members felt that the review should not be used as an attempt to rehear a particular licensing case. However, a view was expressed that it should examine factors which might have influenced certain decision making;
- many taxi drivers were equally concerned about the matter; and
- the review would not only provide reassurance regarding the Council's existing licensing processes but would also examine all aspects to ensure that they were consistent, fair and reflective of the standards expected in Highland.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

(iv) Clear Labelling of Halal and Kosher Meat in Highland Schools

The Council notes that halal meat is currently being supplied and served in Highland schools without being clearly identified as such to pupils and parents.

The Council believes that children and parents should have a clear and informed choice about the food they eat, particularly where meat is sourced from animals slaughtered without stunning under a derogation from animal-welfare requirements.

The Council therefore agrees that all halal and kosher meat supplied or served by Highland council must be clearly labelled as such, and that suppliers must clearly declare this information at the point of procurement so the Council can make informed purchasing decisions and provide accurate information to consumers.

By way of context, it is my understanding that we currently serve turkey that HC know is halal but do not label it as such, however we do not know if or what else is halal but not sold to us as such.

Supplier SKU Code	Supplier Description
134717	Salimah Halal Turkey Rasher Topping 1Kg

Signed: Mr R Stewart Mrs I MacKenzie

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- people's right to know what they were eating and to choose what they ate, was highlighted, and the importance of correctly labelling food to allow this, was emphasised;
- people might have a variety of reasons for not wishing to eat Halal meat;
- the need for the Motion was questioned, as it was clear from the impact assessment that suppliers had already confirmed that all their meat had been properly stunned in accordance with UK law; and
- members of the Muslim community had welcomed the Motion as it drew attention of the availability of Halal meat in schools.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

The meeting ended at 6.10pm.