The Highland Council
Appeals and Disputes Committee

Minute of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee's Appeals and Disputes Committee** held in Council Headquarters, Inverness on **Thursday, 3 September, 2026 at 10.00 am.**

PRESENT

Mrs J Hendry	Mr P Oldham
Mr D McDonald	Ms C Ramsay
Mr G MacKenzie	Mrs M Reid

Officials in Attendance:-
Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer Operations and Maintenance (Management Side)
Ms A Macrae, HR Attendance Support Officer (Management Side)
The Appellant
Ms J Sikkema, HR Manager (Adviser to the Committee)
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services (Clerk to the Committee)
Mrs G MacPherson, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services

BUSINESS

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Gale, Mr B Lobban, Mrs I MacKenzie and Mr H Morrison.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were none.

3. Exclusion of the Public

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

4. Appeal Against Dismissal

There had been circulated a written statement of case prepared by the Management side, a written statement of case prepared by the Appellant side and a copy of the appeals hearing procedure.

The Chair welcomed both parties and referred to the procedure for the Appeal Hearing.

In accordance with the appeals procedure, the Management side presented their case to the Committee which was followed by questioning by the Appellant and

the Committee. The Management Side also called a witness who was questioned by them, the Appellant and the Committee.

Thereafter, the Appellant presented their case which was followed by questioning by the Management side and the Committee.

After the Management Side, and the Appellant had summed up their respective cases, both parties withdrew to allow the Committee to deliberate in private.

The Committee **AGREED** following careful consideration of the grounds of appeal and all the evidence presented at the Committee, that the grounds of the appeal had not been substantiated and the appeal be not upheld.

The meeting ended at 11.55 a.m.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Central Safety Committee** held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Monday, 21 September 2026 at 2.00pm.**

Present:

Employer's Representatives:
Mr A Christie (remote)
Mr R Gale
Mr K Gowans (remote)
Mr P Oldham

Staff Side Representatives:
Mr D Griffiths, GMB
Ms C Goddard, UNISON
Ms G Warburton, LNCT (remote)

In attendance:
Ms R Fry, Chief Officer HR & Communications
Mr D Cowie (**DC**), Service Lead, Safety Health Emergency Planning
Mr T Murdison (**TM**), Service Lead, Corporate Property Management
Mr D Martin, Education & Learning, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms M Montaner, Health & Social Care, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator (remote)
Ms D Sutherland, Corporate Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator
Mr I Braker, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy & Operations
Mrs D Ferguson , Ross, Skye & Lochaber Area (remote)
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Area
Mr P Tomalin, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross area (remote)
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service
Mr C Ross, Committee Officer, Corporate Service (remote)

Item No.	Subject/Decision	Action
1.	**Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair** Members were advised that, in terms of the remit of the Committee, following an election of councillors, and annually thereafter, the Committee shall appoint from amongst their members a Chair and Vice Chair. If the Chair appointed be one of the Employer's representatives, the Vice-Chair shall be one of the Staff Side representatives and vice versa. Having been duly nominated and seconded, Mr P Oldham was appointed Chair. Thereafter, having been duly nominated and seconded, Ms G Warburton was appointed Vice Chair.	
2.	**Apologies for Absence** An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs M Reid from the Employer's Side.	

3.	**Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement** There were none.	
4.	**Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing initiative and activities** There was circulated Report No. CSC/9/26 by the Chief Officer HR & Communications. It was highlighted that in this quarter, there had been contact with the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) in relation to unpaid invoices. HSE charges a fee for interventions which is payable by the relevant service area and will contact the Safety Health Emergency Planning (SHEP) team if these are not settled timeously. HSE will escalate this if not paid. In this quarter, there had been an increase in the number of accidents reported from 133 in 2025/2026 to 153 in 2026/2027 but a decrease in the most serious accidents which are RIDDOR reportable which has significantly dropped from 11 in 2025/2026 to 4 in 2026/2027. This was likely to be partly due to better safety management but also education of officers to reduce RIDDOR reports that were going in to HSE that did not meet the threshold. In terms of the types of incidents being reported, slips, trips and falls remained as the number one cause of accidents. Also, allergens and allergic reactions predominately in schools and canteens was the second highest cause of incidents. Officers were working to manage allergens in Schools and there was training on this. Reference was made to Benedict's law which was a national framework in England and Wales that establishes mandatory school allergy safety requirements, including a legal requirement for all Schools to have EpiPens. It was likely that this law would be introduced in Scotland in future. Currently, in Scotland EpiPens could only be obtained through prescription by a Doctor. It was noted that there would be a roll out of flu vaccinations for Council employees, Joint Valuation Board and High Life Highland staff before the coming winter flu season. It was advised that Elected Members would also be included in the flu vaccination roll out. The number of attendees at some of the Occupational Health Safety and Wellbeing (OHSW) team training has been delivering were low and this was disappointing. The reasons for the low attendance would be reviewed. Some courses were under review as to whether they could be merged if they covered similar subjects. The Committee **NOTED** the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.	

5.	**Update on Occupational Health Services** There was circulated Report No. CSC/10/26 by the Chief Officer HR & Communications which provided an update on the Occupational Health (OH) service which includes the health surveillance (HS) and physiotherapy services contract for the period Q1 2026/27. It was highlighted that health surveillance provision was being looked at. It should be identified through risk assessment where health surveillance is required. Work was being undertaken in the Education Service with regards to metal working/wood working machines in terms of training and occupational health provision. The number of did not attend (DNA) occupational health appointments had reduced in this quarter. However, the number of DNAs was still too high and the OHSW team continued to work with Services to reduce the number of wasted appointments to an absolute minimum. The drug and alcohol policy was to support employees and an example of the successful use of the policy was highlighted. The Committee **NOTED**:- i the updated position in reference to the OH contract; and ii. the usage of the OH service for the period Q1 2026/27.	
6.	**Update on Employee Assistance Programme** There was circulated Report No. CSC/11/26 by the Chief Officer HR & Communications which provided an update on the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for quarter 1, 2026/27. It was highlighted that the usage of the EAP was up significantly for the last quarter with 202 interactions compared to the previous quarter which had 128 interactions. It was good that there were more referrals coming from HR and Managers. The OHSW teams were working with Attendance Officers to engage with employees, so that HR and Managers could contact the EAP service on an employee's behalf. The use of video consultations had also increased. In relation to support for employees over weekends, it was advised that the EAP service provided 24/7 support. The Committee **NOTED**: i the updated position in reference to the usage of the Employee Assistance Programme; and ii the usage of the Employee Assistance Programme for the period quarter 1, 1 April to 30 June, 2026.	

7.	**Property Related Health and Safety Issues** There was circulated Report No. CSC/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on significant property-related health and safety concerns, any emerging future risks and new policy and procedures introduced. It was highlighted that Rosebank Primary School toilet block had been returned to service over the school summer holiday period. Further, Inverness Sports Centre & Aquadrome, investigations into the structural integrity of the flume tower and the health suite were due to be completed by the end of June 2026. Unfortunately, due to the complexity of the structural issues the investigation works have had to be extended and the report from the structural engineer was still awaited. In relation to Golspie High School, there had been some concerns regarding the external fixings securing the rain screen to the main building. Investigation work on this would be held over the October school holiday. An undertaking was given to liaise with the Corporate Communications team to inform local Members when there was potential disruption to schools as a result of any works/investigations on school buildings. Further updates were provided in relation to Arach Children's Home and Dunvegan Primary School. It was queried if there were any regular checks on attachments to buildings, such as signage to check for deterioration, which potentially could come off buildings. It was advised that there were various approaches to this e.g. visual inspections across the estate and with new builds a structural engineer would assess a building and the wind loading the building was likely to be subjected too and an inspection programme would be introduced. The Committee **NOTED** the property related risks arising and overall progress being made regarding improving and maintaining statutory compliance across the built estate.	**TM**
8.	**Minutes of Last Meeting** There had been circulated for confirmation, Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 15 June 2026 the terms of which were **APPROVED**.	
9.	**Matters Arising from the Minutes** i Terberg bin lift, Refuse Collection Vehicle broken spring incident – it was advised that repairs had been undertaken on the vehicles and a training programme had been introduced for employees on the safe operation of the equipment. However, since that fix, there had been a	

	further incident where a spring came of the vehicle. A second fix was being worked on with the manufacturers of the equipment. ii It was confirmed that the following action arising from the last meeting had been completed – "a communication would also be issued to Chief Officers on the legal requirement to provide documentation to trade union safety representatives."	
10.	**Minutes: Area Health & Safety Groups; Service Trade Union Health & Safety Liaison Groups** There was circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of:- **Area Health and Safety Groups** i. Ross, Skye and Lochaber – 27 August, 2026. ii. Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey – 2 September, 2026 iii. Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross – 3 September, 2026 **Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Meeting** iv. Corporate – 2 July, 2026 v. Place – 26 August, 2026 vi. Health and Social Care – 31 August, 2026 vii. Education – 31 August, 2026 The Committee **NOTED** the Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups Minutes. Matters arising from the minutes were highlighted as follows:- i. in terms of Ross, Skye and Lochaber, the Charles Kennedy Building and Dingwall Council Offices had reported issues with heating and ventilation systems and these were being worked on. ii. in terms of the Education Service minute, the main points considered at their meeting were highlighted as playground equipment safety, pupil/staff incidents, the progress of work to implement Martyn's law, and monitoring potential legislative changes in relation to; restrain and seclusion in schools and allergen management. Thereafter, it was queried, how a school in Helmsdale can resolve the issue of deer entering the school playground as a result of a broken fence, given that deer carried ticks which could be passed on pupils and staff. Members were advised that the issue should be reported through the Concerto system. iii. Reference was made to a recent TUC Hazards Conference where the main themes were violence and aggression, climate change and the effects of artificial intelligence on health and safety. The Council had a climate change policy and a commitment to net zero and it was queried if climate change and the effect on health and safety was being looked into e.g.	

	refuse crews and bus drivers who were subject to excessive heat in their vehicle cabs; schools which were built to keep heat in, were now not suitable given the emerging climate issues. The Service Lead, Safety Health Emergency Planning advised that he was invited to design meetings on new Council builds and gave input at these meeting to the point raised regarding building resilience and temperature management.	

The meeting concluded at 2.51 pm.

Highland Council
Corporate Resources Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the **Employment Release Sub-Committee** held remotely on Monday 21 September, 2026 at 3.45 p.m.

PRESENT

Mr R Bremner
Mr P Oldham
Mrs M Reid
Mr M Reiss

Officials in attendance

Mr P Nevin, Strategic Lead, Corporate Support
Ms K Smith, Senior HR Officer, Corporate
Ms V Gracie, HR Officer, Corporate
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Mr P Oldham in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie and Mr B Lobban.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statement.

3. Exclusion of the Public

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** that under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the matter for discussion involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 7A of the Act.

4. Application for Flexible Retirement

There had been circulated to Members only:-

i. Application for Flexible Retirement;
ii. a copy of the Employment Release Scheme; and
iii. an explanatory note of the calculations involved in determining the financial implications of applications for employment release.

The Strategic Lead, Corporate Support gave a summary of the application. Following consideration, the Sub-Committee **AGREED** that the undernoted application for Flexible Retirement be granted on the following grounds:

Criteria 2v – other justifiable circumstances which would be in the interests of the service and Criteria 3 - to meet the wishes of the employee provided at least one

other criteria is satisfied.

Pension Scheme Reference No.	**Leaving Date**	**Criteria**
14520	30/08/29	Category 2v and 3 of the Employment Release Scheme

The meeting ended at 3.50 pm

The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum – Elected Members/Staff Side Group

Minutes of Meeting of The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum was held Remotely on **Tuesday 18 August 2026 at 2.30 p.m.**

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr R Bremner
Mr J Finlayson
Mr D Fraser
Mr K Gowans
Mr B Lobban
Mr G Mackenzie
Mr P Oldham

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr J Gibson, UNISON
Mrs C A Stewart, GMB
Ms S Purdie, RCN
Mr M Smith, UNITE/UCATT

In attendance:

Mr D Brown, Chief Executive
Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive, Corporate
Mrs K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive, People
Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive Place
Ms R Fry (**RF**), Chief Officer, HR & Communications, Corporate
Ms L McGunnigle (**LM**), Strategic Lead HR, Corporate
Ms G Warburton, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services
Mr C Ross, Committee Officer, Democratic Services

Mr R Bremner in the Chair

SUBJECT/DECISION **ACTION**

1. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie of the Employer's Side.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were none.

3. Staff Side Items

i. **Model of Integration update**. The Staff Side sought an update on what stage discussions were at on this matter with the NHS and how close were discussions in deciding on what the Model of Integration (MOI) would be.

An update was provided and it was highlighted that the MOI Steering Group had a number of actions that still had to be undertaken, with another meeting likely required to finalise any recommendations that would be submitted to the Council and NHSH Board. Further

consideration on this matter could be affected by Public Sector Reform which was unknown at this stage.

The MOI Steering Group noted that early engagement suggested an Integration Joint Board was favoured by stakeholders but no decision had been made. Further work required to be undertaken and in particular officers were working with the NHS on communication and engagement with staff and stakeholder groups. An interim report would be submitted to the full Council and the NHSH Board in September providing a summary of the Steering Groups discussions. It was intended that by the end of 2026 a formal recommendation would be made on either an Integration Joint Board or an improved Lead Agency Model with the aim of having the best possible outcome for the users of services. There would be specific meetings for the Staff side on this matter and it was important that all stakeholders had all the information they need and if this was not the case they should let Senior Officers know.

ii. **Recent increase in rates of grievance and disciplinary hearings**. The Staff Side referred to an apparent increase in cases going to investigation and formal processes rather than having more informal early resolution. The length of time this process could take was also highlighted. In response, it was advised that data from 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26, informed that there had been a decline in disciplinary, performance management and other related cases. However, there had been an increase in grievances. Historical cases could be reflected upon to gauge whether the perception of cases increasing is in fact the reality, which it looked like it was in relation to grievances. **LM**

iii. **IVF leave for staff**. The Staff Side felt that staff should be afforded time off for IVF medical appointments as with any other medical appointments such as the right to time off for antenatal care and parental leave. They advised that this was not always the case and it seemed to be down to individual Managers to decide on whether to grant leave or not.

In response, it was confirmed that IVF should be considered as a medical appointment and was covered under the existing special leave policy. If there were specific instances that this was not happening then HR should be informed. A communication that IVF should be treated as any other medical appointment would be issued to Managers. Further, the existing special leave policy would be strengthened to make specific reference to the right to attend medical appointments for IVF and the Staff Side would be consulted on the wording for this. **RF** **LM**

4. VAT on trade union call off fees

The Staff Side advised that as far as they were aware The Highland Council was the only Council in Scotland that charged VAT on the administration fee for Trade Union subscriptions. In response, two opinions from Independent tax advisers had been sought who

confirmed that the administration fee should be subject to VAT. If the Council were not to charge VAT, then this would be contrary to the professional advice given.

Therefore, the Council would continue to charge VAT, but a financial adjustment would be made so there would be no financial impact to trade unions.

5. Staff Awards Update

There was circulated update report on plans for the Highland Council Staff Awards Ceremony, alongside a framework for the awards process. The aim was to ensure a fair, transparent and credible process which suitably recognises and rewards our staff.

The Forum **NOTED** the report.

6. Investors in People update

The Forum were updated on progress relating to Investors in People (IIP) rollout across the Council. Good progress was being made and the survey stage for all Services had now been completed. Survey response rates were provided as were the number of staff involved in the face to face discussion phase. Benchmark scores and where Services had moved into accreditation stage had been listed. In relation to Action plans, the Corporate Service's plan had been submitted to Committee and Place 1 (Housing & Communities, Property & Assets) would be next to be submitted. It was highlighted that Place 1 were one of the top organisations in terms of their overall score and they had been invited to submit an entry to the UK awards which was a great recognition and success story.

In response to a query, Facilities management staff in catering, cleaning in schools had been part of the Place 2 tranche and the overall Service response rate was 47%. This response rate was well above the industry average of 30%. Printed copies of the survey had been made available as well as Programme managers in person visits to schools, depots to encourage and support staff completing the survey.

The Forum **NOTED** the update on Investors in People.

7. HR Statistics

HR statistics in relation to disciplinary/grievance/redeployment/ill health & capability cases and performance management for the period 1 August, 2025 to 31 July 2026 were circulated and **NOTED.**

Arising from the HR statistics, the Staff Side referred to the length of time cases could take, particularly the investigation stage and the stress this had on staff. It was asked if the number of disciplinaries investigated which found no need for further action could be reflected in the statistics. An undertaking was given to explore this with **LM**

feedback provided to the next meeting.

There is a dedicated Officer who works to support disciplinary, grievance investigations and there had been a refresh of the investigating officers training and guidance support which would be launched soon.

In terms of the reasons why investigations could take a long time, in a minority of cases, if there was a Police investigation, this would require to be concluded before the Council would undertake its own investigation.

Continuing, Investors in People would facilitate early resolutions to disciplinary, grievances by building better relationships and better places to work by creating an environment and culture where staff were able to address any concerns early and before they could potentially build into bigger relationship issues. Further, the Partnership working agreement was being reviewed to strengthen relationships between employees and managers, and trade unions and managers before cases get to the investigation stage.

8. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 6 May, 2026, the terms of which were **APPROVED.**

9. Matters Arising from Minutes

i VAT on Administration Fee for Trade Union Subscriptions - a written response would be provided to trade union correspondence on this matter, in addition to feedback provided to the Staff Side. *Completed*

ii HR Statistics - one grievance being supported by the RCN union to be included in the statistics. *Completed*

10. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

There were circulated the following Service Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings, the terms of which were **NOTED**:-

i. Corporate – 2 July, 2026
ii. Education – 1 July, 2026
iii. Health & Social Care – 23 July, 2026
iv Place – 27 May, 2026

The meeting concluded at 3.05 p.m.

The Highland Council
Non-Domestic Rates Appeals Committee

Minute of Meeting of the **Non-Domestic Rates Appeals Committee** held in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Inverness on **Tuesday 1 September, 2026** at 2.00 p.m.

Present:
Mr K Gowans
Mr P Oldham
Mrs M Reid

In Attendance:
Mr J Noone, Legal Manager, Litigation and Advice, Corporate
Mr M Whillans, Solicitor, Litigation and Advice, Corporate
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate
Mr Peter Wilson (Legal Student on Work Experience)

Mr P Oldham in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

There were none.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. Minutes of last meeting

The minute of meeting of the Committee held on 30 April, 2026 was circulated and **APPROVED**.

4. Exclusion of the Public

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

5. Non Domestic Rates Appeal – 14 November, 2025

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. NDR/02/26 by the Legal Manager, Litigation and Advice and re-circulated to Members only the original papers submitted to the Non Domestic Rates Appeal meeting held on 14 November, 2025.

Commentary on the report was provided by the Legal representatives and by way of context the meeting had been convened in relation to a Stage 3 appeal against

Non Domestic Rates charges that was heard by the Committee on 14 November, 2025. The appeal outcome had been sent to both parties to the appeal. Correspondence had been received from the legal representative of the appellant with queries on some of the decisions made by the Committee and alleged inconsistent decisions. The Committee had met on 30 April 2026 to consider the letter from the legal representative of the Appellant and determined that the decisions they made on 14 November 2025 in respect of three of the Suites which were not subject to a Stage 3 appeal were accordingly revoked. The Committee concluded that further determination of the alleged inconsistent decisions was appropriate and this meeting was to review the matter.

The Committee having reviewed all the paperwork and given due regard to the evidence submitted at the original appeal meeting held on 14 November 2025 determined as follows:-

In relation to Suite 15b – the Committee was not satisfied there was sufficient evidence of rateable occupation by the occupier stated by the Appellant and accordingly the Committee upheld its original decision. Unit 7, 8, 18, 22 and 27 decisions were not considered analogous to decisions in relation to Suite 15b and the decision in relation to 15b was therefore not inconsistent with them.

In relation to Suite 27, there was not sufficient evidence that the Suite was being used for the purpose of storage. In this respect, the Committee referred to the Appellant's submission that to market the suite it was dressed with furniture as a showroom. Unit 15b and 22 decisions were not considered analogous to decisions in relation to Suite 27 and the decision in relation to 27 was therefore not inconsistent with them.

The meeting ended at 2.40 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Fuel Poverty Working Group** held in Committee Room 2, Council Headquarters, on 23 September 2026 at 10am.

Present:-

Mr Richard Gale (remote)
Mr Russell Jones (remote)
Mrs Kate MacLean (remote)
Mr Thomas MacLennan (remote)
Mr Paul Oldham
Mr Matthew Prosser (remote)
Mrs M Reid

In attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer, Housing & Communities
Ms I MacMillan, Programme Manager, Climate Change and Energy
Mr G Ralph, Repairs Manager
Mr N Osborne, Climate Change Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms M MacSween, Changeworks

Mr Paul Oldham in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were submitted for Mrs Glynis Campbell-Sinclair.

2. Declarations of Interest / Transparency Statements

There were none.

3. Minutes

There were circulated and **NOTED** the minutes of the Working Group meeting on 19 June 2026, which had been approved by the Corporate Resources Committee on 27 August 2026.

4. Draft Terms of Reference

The Group **APPROVED** the Terms of Reference.

5. Evidence Session

To support the work of the Group, a presentation was given by Council Officers and Changeworks on the current evidence base, including the prevalence, causes, and impacts of fuel poverty in Highland, along with actions being taken to alleviate fuel poverty.

An overview was provided of what is fuel poverty and what makes people vulnerable to fuel poverty. This was supported by workshop-style breakout activities considering various examples of the household finances of people facing or experiencing fuel poverty, and how these could be tackled. The exercise highlighted that level of income along was not the sole determinant of whether people were in fuel poverty. This related to people's circumstances, including employment status, house type, family composition. It was therefore essential that each household's circumstances were considered to determine whether they were in fuel poverty or not.

Further slides addressed some of the key issues and drivers contributing towards fuel poverty as identified in Changeworks 'Perfect Storm' report, including high fuel costs, energy infrastructure, low energy efficiency of homes, higher cost of living, a lack of social housing, and barriers to improving. Further information was provided regarding some of the structural barriers to addressing fuel poverty, including from a Council housing perspective and rurality/cost perspective. A summary was provided of Domestic Energy Efficiency Retrofit programme and the approach being taken along with the issues, funding issues and availability of funding. The presentation would be circulated after the meeting.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- attention was drawn to the challenges around investing to save, and the support and advice that was required to provide advice and support, including to those on higher incomes who may not see themselves as, but were still experiencing, fuel poverty;
- Members queried the statement 'existing energy infrastructure limits the local use of electricity produced locally from renewables', pointing out that the key issue in this regard was that local people were not benefiting from locally produced energy. The concern was more with the energy system rather than the infrastructure;
- the benefits of a smart meter were queried, and attention was drawn to potential differences between peak or off-peak energy prices, and possible behaviour change as a result of the data from the meters. It was questioned whether smart meters would allow energy companies to switch off the supply to households, it was clarified this was not the case and therefore it was suggested this should be publicly clarified to avoid misinformation;
- procurement and funding issues around the installation of household energy efficiency measures were queried and summarised, including the administrative requirements and challenges around the liaison with contractors. The prospect of the local authority being the main contractor and delivering retrofit was proposed as a possible solution;
- the number of Council homes which required upgrading was queried and a domestic and Council house stock overview was provided as part of the presentation;
- information was sought and provided on historical cavity wall installation issues, and a summary was provided of how processes and technology had improved in recent times. Any individual incidences of contractor error should be brought to the attention of officers outwith the meeting;

- in response to concerns raised that some contractors from outwith the region were not appropriately accredited, assurance was provided that all appropriate procurement processes, screening, and standards with regard to contractors were adhered to, with them all requiring to be accredited. Any specific examples of this not being the case should be raised offline;
- it was acknowledged that the current situation with regard to net zero targets was complex and subject to ongoing change. It was suggested that improved efficiency rather than net zero might be a more appropriate target;
- short term, or intermittent, funding, with tight timescales, made it difficult for the Council, and for contractors, to plan, and the Scottish Government should be lobbied to address this;
- consideration should be given to adding accredited contractors for energy efficiency developments to the Trusted Trader scheme which could build confidence amongst the public;
- in terms of upgrading homes to reduce energy costs, private landlords should also be targeted and made aware of the funding schemes available;
- given the scale of retrofit required, it was suggested that the Scottish Government should consider reprioritising funds, with the example of £36m being spent on peatbog restoration on land in private ownership, being one area where funds might be more usefully spent addressing fuel poverty;
- consideration should be given to the disruption some energy efficiency upgrades could cause in homes and that some people, especially elderly residents with no alternative temporary accommodation, might choose to decline to participate as a result. In addition, it was noted that for some people, it was a major undertaking to progress on their own without any guidance. The key role energy efficiency officers could play in alleviating their fears and finding solutions was highlighted, as was the importance of providing case studies to illustrate the longer-term benefits;
- the problems caused by external cladding to improve insulation were highlighted, especially in damp climates;
- clarification was sought and provided on the £200k of funds agreed at Council as part of the response to the Poverty Commission report, which had been allocated to income maximisation and to test a fuel poverty support scheme. How these funds were utilised had yet to be determined but recommendations from this group would be likely to inform the approach;
- improved education was recommended on the use of newly installed heating systems, and on the benefits of ventilation, while noting that it was challenging for people on a tight budget to spend money to heat their home, then lose the heat through open windows; and
- school pupils ,especially at secondary school, should be taught practical skills in relation to energy efficiency for homes, and debt management life skills.

The Group **NOTED** the information provided and the issues raised during discussion.

6. Dates of Meetings

The Group **NOTED** that meetings were scheduled on the following dates:

Thursday, 12 November 2026 at 2pm
Thursday, 21 January 2027 at 2pm

The meeting ended at 1pm, having adjourned for lunch from 12pm to 12.30pm.