



## COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held in Council Chamber,  
Council Offices, Stornoway on Wednesday, 24  
September 2024 at 2.00pm.

### PRESENT

Mr Donald F Crichton (Chair)	Mr Kenneth Macleod
Mr Norman Macdonald (Vice-Chair)	Mr Donald Macsween
Mr Iain A MacNeil	Mr John A Maciver
Mr Paul Steele	Mr Iain M Macaulay
Mr Uisdean Robertson	Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE
Mr Kenny M Macleod	Mr Gordon Murray
Mr Robert Mackenzie	Mr Rae Mackenzie
Mr Angus Morrison	Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Norman Misty Macdonald	Dr Frances Murray
Mr John Norman Macleod	

### APOLOGIES

Mr Mustapha Hocine

### MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Kenneth J Maclean	Mr Ranald Fraser
Mr Iain M Macleod	Mr Calum Maclean
Mr Paul Finnegan	Mr Malcolm K Macdonald

### OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Malcolm Burr	Ms Alison MacCorquodale
Mrs Anne Murray	Mrs Anne MacDonald
Mrs Mairi Maciver	Ms Caitriona MacCuish
Ms Angela Smith	Ms Christina Morrison
Mr Colin G Morrison	Mr Domhnall MacDonald
Ms Lorraine Graham	Mrs Isabel MacLachlan
Mr Iain Kennedy	Mr Nial Houston
Ms Mira Byrne	Mrs Hannah Morrison
Mrs Kathlene Morrison	Mr Sandy Gomez
Mr Finlay Martin	Mrs Fiona Maciver
Mrs Shona Hadwen	

### Prayer

The Meeting was preceded in prayer by Mr Gordon Murray.

### MINUTES

Minute of Meeting of 18 June 2024 1

The Minute of the Meeting of 18 June 2024 was **approved**.

Declaration of Interest of 2

Mr Duncan MacInnes, MBE, Mr Norman Macdonald and Mr Angus McCormack declared an interest in Item 9, all being members of the Local Action Group.

**HERITAGE**

Outer Hebrides Heritage Opportunities 3

This Report was withdrawn and will be considered at a future meeting.

Tasglann na Eilean Forward Plan and Policies 4

With reference to item 12 of the Minute of the Meeting of 27 September 2017, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report seeking approval of a Forward Plan and suite of policies to guide the delivery and strategic objectives of Tasglann nan Eilean (the archive service) over the next four years.

The Report stated that Tasglann nan Eilean is the archive service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and sits alongside Museum nan Eilean and the Archaeology Service as part of the Heritage Service.

A Forward Plan and associated policies guiding the direction and operation of the service were approved in September 2017, shortly after the opening of the new purpose-built archive facility at Lews Castle. The Forward Plan was due to be reviewed in 2020 but, due to changes in staffing of the Heritage Service, as well as the disruption of the pandemic, it has only now been possible to update it.

The 2024-28 Tasglann nan Eilean Forward Plan was included as Appendix 1 to the Report and proved an overview of the service remit, vision, mission, key achievements, and feedback from an independent survey of service users/non-users. It set the strategic aims and objectives for the next four years. The policies associated with the operation of the archives service have been updated in line with current sector standards and best practice and were included as Appendices 2-6.

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle approves:**

- (1) The Tasglann nan Eilean Forward Plan 2024-28 at Appendix 1, and**
- (2) The updated policy documents for the Comhairle’s Archive Service and Appendices 2-6**

**CROFTING**

Crofting Law Reform Proposals 2024: Consultation 5

The Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report seeking homologation of the Comhairle’s response to the Scottish Government consultation on crofting law reform proposals 2024, which closed on 2 September 2024.

The Report stated that on 6 June 2024, Scottish Government opened a consultation seeking views on proposals for changes and simplifications to crofting law. These included entry to crofting, crofting communities, use of common grazings, strengthening residency and land use, and enhanced Crofting Commission powers.

The Comhairle’s response to the consultation was appended to the Report. The proposed response had been circulated to the Primary Industries Member Officer Working Group (PI MOWG) in advance for finalising and approval, prior to its formal submission by 2 September 2024. It was proposed that the Comhairle’s response be homologated, given that the consultation closing date preceded the current committee series.

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle agrees:**

- (1) to homologate its response to the Scottish Government Consultation, as appended to the Report; and**

**(2) write to Scottish Government to support the Comhairle consultation response and to seek clarification on the issues raised in respect of the new Bill.**

**HOUSING**

Homelessness Annual Report – 2023-24	6	<p>The Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report proving an update of housing options and homelessness issues covering the year 2023/24.</p> <p>The Report stated that the Comhairle has a statutory duty towards homeless persons and those threatened with homelessness in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 Part II as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003.</p> <p>The Report further stated that in the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024, a total of 150 households made a homelessness application to the Comhairle. A further three households were assisted under the housing options approach. Of these, one household went on to make a homeless presentation.</p> <p>Of all homeless applications made to the Comhairle in 2023-2024, 126 were made to the Stornoway office (six of which were from Harris), with a further 21 applications from Uist and three from Barra. The Comhairle accepted a duty to permanently accommodate 123 households in this period and discharge its duty to 77 households by providing them with permanent accommodation.</p>
--------------------------------------	---	--

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle note the Report.**

Annual Assurance Statement 2024	7	<p>The Chief Planning Officer submitted a Report seeking approval of an Annual Assurance Statement in respect of landlord services provided by the Comhairle for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator.</p> <p>The Report stated that social landlords must submit an Annual Assurance Statement (“the Statement” to the Scottish Housing Regulator by 31 October. The Statement provides assurance that the Comhairle complies with the relevant requirements of Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework.</p> <p>The Report further stated that where a landlord does not fully comply, it should set out in the Statement how and when it will make the necessary improvements to ensure compliance.</p> <p>The Comhairle’s Annual Assurance Statement had been drafted and was at Appendix 1 for consideration.</p>
---------------------------------	---	---

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle approve the Annual Assurance Statement at Appendix 1 for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator by 31 October 2024.**

**PLANNING**

Development Plan Scheme 2024 Update Participation Statement	8	<p>With reference to item 3 of the Minute of the Meeting of 18 June 2024, the Chief Planning Officer submitted a Report to update Members on the consultation of the draft Participation Statement of the 2024 Development Plan Scheme and to seek approval of the Participation Statement.</p> <p>The Report stated that it was a statutory requirement for Planning Authorities to prepare, consult on and publish the Participation Statement which forms part of the Development Plan Scheme (DPS) and to review and update it annually.</p>
---	---	--

The DPS is a document that sets out the Comhairle’s proposed programme and processes for preparing and reviewing its Development Plan including Local Development Plans (LDPs), and other associated and supporting documents. The DPS included a Participation Statement, which set out how the planning authority would engage with the public and other stakeholders in relation to the Development. There is a statutory requirement to publicly consult on the Participation Statement aspect of the DPS and the report provided an update on this.

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:**

- (1) Approve the Participation Statement as detailed in the Appendix: and**
- (2) Authorise the Chief Planning Officer to publish the Development Plan Scheme incorporating the Participation Statement.**

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Community Led 9  
Local Development  
Programme 2024-  
25

With reference to item 5 of the Minute of the Meeting of 18 June 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report to provide the Comhairle with an update on the 2024-25 Scottish Government Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Programme.

The Report stated that for 2024-25, the Outer Hebrides’ Local Action Group (LAG) had been allocated an initial budget of £219,078 to administer. £120,545 of the allocation was revenue and £98,523 capital funding. Additional Funding may once again become available through future tranches; however, the LAG had been given to understand that the recently announced spending freeze on all non-essential Scottish Government spending was likely to affect at least some of the additional funds earmarked for CLLD.

The Report further stated that earlier this year the Outer Hebrides CLLD LAG drew up their Community Led Vision (CLV; proposed programme for 2024-25, which received SG approval in June 2024. The overarching ambition for 2024-25 was to increase collaboration and community empowerment. This would be achieved via four project strands: community engagement, grant scheme(s), the Youth LAG (YLAG) and strategy development.

Both LAG and YLAG have agreed an indicative programme of activities for the year and have started implementing these.

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle agrees to:**

- (1) note the progress of the Scottish Government Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Programme 2024-25; and**
- (2) support increased collaboration between the Outer Hebrides Local Action Group (LAG) and the Comhairle, where reasonable.**

Visitor Levy 10  
(Scotland) Act 2024  
Update

With reference to item 18 of the Minute of the Meeting of 23 April 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report to update Members on the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024.

The Report stated that through the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act the Scottish Government had committed to creating a discretionary power for local authorities to apply a levy on overnight visitor stays. The funds generated were to be invested in local tourism related infrastructure and services. The Bill received Royal Assent and became an Act on 5 July 2024 and it was expected to receive its Commencement Orders from the Scottish

Parliament following their summer recess (likely to be September 2024) and this is when Local Authorities could officially start consulting and enacting the levy procedures.

The Report further stated that Local Authorities were awaiting publication of the official Visitor Levy Guidance – due in September 2024 – to ensure that they progress appropriately and within legislation, whilst gathering and submitting the required information to compile a local levy scheme proposal. This would be required to be consulted upon prior to the final local decision being announced, and then if approved, the levy could commence 18 months following this date to allow for implementation and preparation time.

The Scottish Government are currently consulting on a Cruise Levy. Proposals were still being developed and the use of the cruise ship levy revenue is still to be confirmed. With the increase in the volume of cruise traffic to the Outer Hebrides, it would be prudent for the Comhairle to be involved in these discussions.

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle agrees to:**

- (1) continue to develop proposals, engage with stakeholders and undertake a consultation to develop a detailed outline of an Outer Hebrides Visitor Levy Scheme to be presented to members for final review and a decision to enact it;**
- (2) respond to national consultations and develop proposals on a proposed Cruise Levy if it was to be implemented in the Outer Hebrides, through a unified collaborative approach with local stakeholders and the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership; and**
- (3) invite representatives from Stornoway Port Authority to a future meeting of the Committee.**

International  
Territorial Levels:  
Consultation  
Response

11

The Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report seeking approval of the Comhairle response to a Scottish Government consultation on the International Territorial Levels (ITLs) used to produce regional statistics in the UK, and the proposed approach to a concurrent consultation on Small Area Statistics Geographies.

The Report stated that ITL boundaries are geographic boundaries used in the production of statistics in the UK and were created following the UK's withdrawal from the EU in 2020. They currently align with the previous Noemenclature des Unites territoriales statistiques (NUTS) boundaries. ITLs are designed to "balance current administrative boundaries with sensible community geographies to that statisticians can provide evidence that informs public policy and serves the public good".

ITLs are used for a range of statistics including mid-year population estimates and some agricultural statistics. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) also uses ITL geography when producing UK wide statistics on policy areas reserved to the UK Government. This facilitates comparisons between regions within the UK. The ONS had been reviewing these boundaries and the Scottish Government is consulting on proposed change with a closing date for responses of 1 October 2024. The proposed changes could have implications for the Outer Hebrides and therefore a Comhairle response was proposed and detailed at Appendix 1.

The Report also stated that a parallel consultation was taking place on the revision of small area statistics geographies: data zones and intermediate zones. The potential implications of this require to be spatially examined and are currently being reviewed by the Comhairle's Development Plan team. It is proposed that officers will provide

feedback should any of the proposals, once mapped, be significantly incompatible with existing community geographies.

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:**

**(1) agrees the response to the Scottish Government consultation on International Territorial Levels at Appendix 1; and,**

**(2) agrees the approach to providing feedback to the Scottish Government consultation on small area statistics geographies**

Net Zero: Place 12  
Based Co-  
ordination  
Programme

With reference to item 10 of the Minute of the Meeting of 23 April 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report seeking endorsement to develop a Place-Based Net Zero Co-ordination Programme.

The Report stated that an Energy Developments Update to the Comhairle in April 2024 summarised the significant pipeline of renewable energy developments proposed for the islands in future years, and the challenges and opportunities this could pose for the islands and for the Comhairle.

The Energy Update outlined that a Major Developments Forum had been established to ensure co-ordination across the public and private sector. The report also proposed the establishment of a Major Developments Oversight Board within the Comhairle, overseeing the strategic and operational response to developments. The Major Development Form met in September and a meeting of the Major Developments Oversight Board would be convened thereafter.

Across the Highlands and Islands, local authorities are grappling with how to respond to renewable energy developments to achieve the best outcome for their communities across a range of fronts, while also meeting statutory obligations.

The Report further stated that the Comhairle had received support from the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) to consider new ways of working to respond to these challenges and initial propositions have emerged. The intention of the coming period would be to engage major stakeholders on the benefits of taking a place-based approach to forthcoming renewables investment and associated economic development in the islands.

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle endorse the development of a Place Based net Zero Co-ordination Programme.**

Sale and 13  
Refurbishment of  
Vacant Properties  
in Winfield Way,  
Balivanich

With reference to item 17 of the Minute of the Meeting of 23 April 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report seeking approval to investigate proposals to reinstate a number of vacant properties in Winfield Way, Balivanich back into domestic use.

The Report stated that the Winfield Way Housing Plan proposed to redevelop five vacant properties in Benbecula, which are in the ownership of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (the Comhairle) and return them to domestic use. The intention would be for the Comhairle to redevelop the properties and make essential housing available in Uist, supporting the aims of the Comhairle, partners and the Uist Repopulation Zone Action Plan to retain and attract people to live, work and study in Uist.

The Report further stated that two options had been identified to allow finance to be raised and the required refurbishments to be undertaken. The first was to borrow finance from the Comhairle against the properties to bring them up to an acceptable standard and provide much-needed rental accommodation in Uist. The rental income

would then be used to repay the borrowing. The second was to sell two of the units, possibly following some initial development investment (and with appropriate restrictions in place), to provide funds to redevelop a further three units for rent.

In order to ensure the proposal met policy aims and objectives, it was assumed that specific criteria would be placed on any sale or rental of the properties. Specifically, it was envisaged that the criteria would reflect the need for worker accommodation and/or support the “Trial the Isles” programme, which seeks to attract economically active people to Uist.

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:**

- (1) agree to the further development of proposals to allow five vacant properties in Winfield Way, Balivanich, to be returned to domestic use; and**
- (2) note that a further report will be brought to Members seeking approval of the final proposals.**

Spaceport 1 Project Update 14\*

With reference to item 24 of the Minute of the Meeting of 23 April 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report to update Members on progress with the Spaceport 1 project and to overview process and expenditure to facilitate the further development of the project.

The Report stated that the Comhairle had led on the Spaceport 1 project since its inception. Through the provision of modest, generic infrastructure, Spaceport 1 will meet the requirements of a range of commercial operators of suborbital launch vehicles. Planning consent was granted on 26 July 2023.

The Report provided an update on progress since April 2024, as well as an overview of project expenditure to date, detailed anticipated future costs and detailed the proposed funding package to complete this critical phase of the development.

The Report further stated that upon completion of this phase and procurement of a private sector operator, the Comhairle’s role as lead developer would end. It was anticipated however, that the Comhairle would retain an interest in elements such as community benefit, the wider development of Scolpaig Farm and in supporting the operator to ensure that the economic benefits associated with the spaceport were maximised.

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:**

- (1) note the update on progress since April 2024;**
- (2) note the confirmed pre-construction costs in Tables 1 and 2 of the Report, and the overall financial position of the enabling infrastructure phase of the Spaceport 1 project;**
- (3) approve funding of £600k from the Comhairle’s Islands Deal capital match fund to lever in financial support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and secure the £1m allocation from the Islands Growth Deal; and**
- (4) agree to award the construction contract, subject to ongoing discussions with Highlands and Islands Enterprise on their financial contribution to the enabling infrastructure phase of the Spaceport 1 Project.**

**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

Reports Outstanding	15	The Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report detailing those Reports outstanding arising from decisions of the Committee.
---------------------	----	--

**It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle note the Report.**