



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held in Council Chamber,
Council Offices, Stornoway on Tuesday, 29 April
2025 at 2.00pm.

PRESENT

Mr Donald F Crichton (Chair)	Mr Kenneth Macleod
Mr Norrie Macdonald (Vice-Chair)	Mr Donald Macsween
Mr Paul Steele	Mr Iain M Macaulay
Mr Mustapha Hocine	Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE
Mr Uisdean Robertson	Mr Gordon Murray
Mr Kenny M Macleod	Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Robert Mackenzie	Dr Frances Murray
Mr Angus Morrison	
Mr Norman Macdonald	

APOLOGIES

Mr Iain A MacNeil	Mr Calum Maclean
Mr Rae Mackenzie	Mr John Norman Macleod

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Kenneth J Maclean	Mr Paul Finnegan
Mr Iain M Macleod	Mr Ranald Fraser

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Malcolm Burr	Mrs Anne Macdonald
Mrs Anne Murray	Mrs Katie Macaskill
Mr John Cunningham	Mr Sandy Gomez
Ms Christina Morrison	Mrs Shona Hadwen
Mr James Mackinnon	Mrs Fiona Maciver
Mr Murdo Mackay	Mrs Mairi Maciver
Mr Tim Langley	

Prayer

The Meeting was preceded in prayer by Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE

MINUTES

Tribute: Mr Iain
Watson

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee paid tribute to Mr Iain Watson, Housing Manager who had retired after 39 years service. The Chair wished Mr Watson a long and happy retirement.

Minute of Meeting 1
of 4 February 2025

The Minute of the Meeting of 4 February 2025 was **approved**.

Minute of Meeting 2
of 25 February
2025

The Minute of the Meeting of 25 February 2025 was **approved**.

Declaration of 3
Interest

Mr Iain M Macleod wished to record, in respect of items 6 and 7, that he was a Comhairle representative on the Tighean Innse Gall Board. Mr Macleod did not consider this to be an interest that needed to be declared in terms of the code of conduct.

Mr Kenny M Macleod wished to record, in respect of items 6 and 7, that he was a Comhairle representative on the Tighean Innse Gall Board. Mr Macleod did not consider this to be an interest that needed to be declared in terms of the code of conduct.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Service Plans and Operational Risk Registers	4	<p>With reference to item 5 of the Minute of Meeting of 23 April 2024, the Chief Executive submitted a Report seeking approval of the Comhairle's Service Business Plans and Operational Risk Registers 2025/26.</p> <p>The Comhairle approved the five-year Operational Plan and associated Service Business Plans (SBPs) 2022-2027 in February 2022 that were prepared in accordance with the Corporate Strategy 2022-2027. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) approved a new SBP report format in October 2022 that was designed to provide Members with a more comprehensive and informed picture of each service, including the funding and staffing resources identified to implement each SBP.</p> <p>The Report stated that from 2024/25, all SBPs are presented to the April Series of Meetings for approval to ensure all sections of the SBPs are as up to date as possible.</p> <p>It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle approve the Service Business Plans and Operational Risk Registers 2025/26 appended to the Report.</p>
Business Continuity Plans	5	<p>With reference to item 6 of the Minute of Meeting of 23 April 2024, the Chief Executive submitted a Report to update elected Members on the status of Business Continuity Plans across the Comhairle.</p> <p>The Report stated that risks that resulted in a disruption to the service, required continuity strategies in place to allow service delivery to continue with minimum disruption. Services had been asked to prepare a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) for their most critical activities, therefore in the event of an incident that causes disruption, the BCP can be picked up and immediately actioned.</p> <p>It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle note the Report.</p>
<h2>HOUSING</h2> <p>Mr Iain M Macleod wished to record, in respect of the following two items, that he was a Comhairle representative on the Tighean Innse Gall Board. Mr Macleod did not consider this to be an interest that needed to be declared in terms of the code of conduct.</p> <p>Mr Kenny M Macleod wished to record, in respect of the following two items, that he was a Comhairle representative on the Tighean Innse Gall Board. Mr Macleod did not consider this to be an interest that needed to be declared in terms of the code of conduct.</p>		
Refurbishment of Vacant Properties in Winfield Way, Balivanich	6	<p>With reference to item 13 of the minute of the meeting of 24 September 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report providing an update on the Winfield Way Housing Project, Balivanich, and seeking approval of next steps.</p> <p>The Winfield Way Housing Project originally 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. This had now been increased to six properties, which were a mix of 2- and 3-bedroom houses.</p> <p>The Report stated that grant funding of £1.3m towards the project had been secured from the Scottish Government's More Homes Division. This would support redevelopment of the six properties to a walk-in, mid-market rental standard. Initial estimates indicated that there may be a need for the Comhairle to identify funding of c£200k to complete the financial package. This would become clearer on return of</p>

tender prices and there were a range of options that could be explored given that c£40k per annum rental income was anticipated on completion.

The redevelopment of the properties would make essential mid-market rental 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.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) note the progress of the Winfield Way Housing Project, including the securing of £1.3m Scottish Government funding; and**
- (2) delegate to the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration, in consultation with the Chief Officer, Finance and Chief Officer, Law and Governance, to finalise the funding package and management arrangements for the Winfield Way properties.**

Housing Funding 7
Agreement: Fuel
Poverty

With reference to item 15 of the Minute of Meeting of 23 April 2024, the Chief Planning Officer submitted a Report seeking approval of the proposed Funding Agreement with The Energy Advisory Service (TEAS) for 2025/26.

The Comhairle has historically provided grant funding to a number of partner agencies to support the delivery of the Local Housing Strategy (LHS). Following the decision taken in 2023 by Western Isles Foyer to cease operating, there was now only one Housing related Funding Agreement in place with a partner agency. This is with TEAS, which is delivered by Tighean Innse Gall.

TEAS provides a wide range of energy efficiency and fuel poverty advice, assisting individual households and community groups.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle approve the continuation of Housing Grant Funding for The Energy Advisory Service in 2025/26 to the sum of £39,000.

ENERGY

Reform of OFGEM: 8
Call for Evidence

The Chief Planning Officer submitted a Report seeking the homologation of a response submitted to the UK Government's Call for Evidence on the reform of OFGEM.

The Report stated that the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets, (OFGEM) was established almost a quarter of a century ago as the independent regulator for gas and electricity markets in the UK. The remit of the regulator has expanded over time to encompass broader aims such as supporting government to meet its Net Zero targets. In recent years the energy sector has faced huge challenges with record prices and volatility driven by conflict in Eastern Europe, the collapse of several energy suppliers and the unsatisfactory situation around forced installation of pre-payment meters.

The Report further stated that the challenge for the Government was to see an energy market with healthy sustainable competition, where effective regulation supports economic growth and delivers better outcomes for consumers. Restoring the reputation of the energy markets is a critical part of this. The proposed review of OFGEM which forms the subject of this Call for Evidence, will seek to ensure that OFGEM is an effective regulator for the transition to Net Zero and that OFGEM has the remit and capability to help drive the required innovation and investments while effectively protecting consumers and businesses.

The Call for Evidence closed on 28 February 2025 and a response was submitted between Committee series'. The response was attached at Appendix 1 to the Report for consideration and homologation by the Committee and Comhairle.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle homologate the response submitted to the UK Government's Call for Evidence regarding the Reform of OFGEM.

Scottish
Government
Community
Benefits
Consultation

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The Chief Planning Officer submitted a Report seeking homologation of a response submitted to the Scottish Government's Consultation on "Community Benefits from Net Zero Developments".

The Report stated that a Scottish Government consultation on 'Community Benefits from Net Zero Energy Developments' closed on 11 April 2025. A draft response was considered and endorsed by the Energy Member Officer Working Group on 27 March 2025. By the time the Committee meets, the response will already have been submitted, and homologation of that response is now sought.

Key points raised in the Comhairle's draft consultation response relate to the definition of community and the importance of local authorities being recognised as representative of their communities. It suggested the need to differentiate between host communities, directly impacted by deployments, and the wider community across a local authority area, both of which should receive some level of community benefit from renewable deployments.

The consultation argued that community benefit needed to be considered at a strategic in addition to local level, and that the Local Authority should be central to decision making and governance of strategic-level community benefit, in close consultation with community interests.

The Report further stated that the Comhairle's response proposed that Scottish Government guidance on level of community increases to at least £7.5k per MW, be applicable to offshore and onshore wind, and to move from a voluntary to a mandatory commitment. It also suggests that community benefit expectations from Scottish Government be strengthened to encompass profit share mechanisms, and options for community shared ownership.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle homologate the response to the Scottish Government's "Community Benefits from Net Zero Energy Developments' Consultation.

Outer Hebrides
Energy Hub
(Islands Growth
Deal)

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The Chief Planning Officer submitted a Report seeking approval of proposed changes to the Outer Hebrides Energy Hub project within the Islands Growth Deal (IGD).

The Report stated that the Outer Hebrides Energy Hub builds on the Comhairle's vision for high value, local Hydrogen production which first found expression in the Creed Park Hydrogen Fuelling Station (2007). Since then, the award-winning Outer Hebrides Local Energy Hub project which created a circular economy from anaerobic digestion of fish waste through electrolysis into Hydrogen for Comhairle fleet and Oxygen for new smolt production and field leading work on Hydrogen at Lews Castle College have kept the Outer Hebrides in the vanguard of Hydrogen

The Report further stated that the original IGD proposal was heavily reliant on SGN's conversion of their 1,700 consumer Stornoway Town Centre gas network from Propane to Hydrogen. However, a key UK Government decision on whether Hydrogen should be permitted for heat in homes has been delayed until late 2026 and this has introduced an added element of risk to the original Energy Hub proposal.

In order to de-risk the Energy Hub project and focus it more tightly with a more manageable match-funding package, the Net Zero Technology Centre (NZTC) has been commissioned to develop a revised Outline Business Case for the project based on local demand, deliverable with or without SGN involvement but with capability to ramp up quickly should the SGN conversion be authorised.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle approve the revised scope of the Outer Hebrides Energy Hub, as outlined in the Report.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Scottish
Authorities'
Economic
Development
Indicators
Framework Report
2023-2024

Local

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With reference to item 23 of the Minute of Meeting of 23 April 2024, the Chief Officer Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report to update members following publication of the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Indicators Framework Report 2023-2024.

The Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development group (SLAED) is the network of economic development services across all 32 Scottish Local Authorities. SLAED works with the Scottish Government Improvement Service and Local Authorities to develop an annual Economic Development Indicators Framework which provides evidence of the contribution that local authorities make to Scotland's economy through their economic development activities and provides a basis for collating consistent data.

The Report stated that the SLAED Economic Development Indicators Framework provides an overview of performance across Local Authorities and a set of measurable benchmarks which can be used to better understand impact, allocation of resources and identify potential areas for improvement.

The Comhairle's 2023-24 Return identified several indicators where the Eilean Siar area appears to have been performing relatively well against the national average, for example:

- [OP5] 'Percentage of Marketable Employment Land' (100%);
- [OC5] 'Business Survival Rate (3-Year)' – 2020-2023 - (61.5%);
- [OC8] 'Town Vacancy Rate' (3.3%);
- [WE3] 'Percentage Participation in Education, Employment & Training by 16–19-year olds' (96.8%);
- [WE5] 'Percentage of Good or Very Good Life Satisfaction' (89.6%).

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle note the Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development Indicators Framework 2023-24 Report.

Outer Economic 2025-35	Hebrides Strategy	12	With reference to item 9 of the Minute of Meeting of 4 February 2025 the Chief Officer Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report seeking approval of the Outer Hebrides Economic Strategy 2025-2035.
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The Report stated that in February 2025 the Comhairle was asked to approve a draft Outer Hebrides Economic Strategy 2025-35. Following this, external consultation had taken place on the strategy, and this has been considered and reflected as felt to be appropriate in the final version, for which approval was sought.

Consultation was done via the Comhairle's dedicated consultation webpage, a press release directing the public to the consultation page, and emails to key stakeholders requesting feedback. A total of 11 consultation responses were received and these had been considered in finalisation of the document.

The strategy set out a vision for 2035 of an Outer Hebrides which is thriving, prosperous and sustainable. It proposed what success against this vision would look like over the next decade and suggested two overarching measurements of progress relating to population and productivity. Activity was focused against 3 key themes: (1) Key Sectors, (2) People and Community, and (3) Infrastructure, with priority areas and actions identified within these themes. The final version of the Outer Hebrides Economic Strategy 2025-2035 was at Appendix 1 for approval.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle approve the Outer Hebrides Economic Strategy 2025-2035 at Appendix 1.

Town Legacy Fund	Centre	13	The Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report seeking approval of the allocation of the balance within the Town Centre Legacy Fund, and the utilisation of the capital income from the sale of 49-51 Cromwell Street.
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The Town Centre Legacy Fund was established in 2012 to reinvest rental income from two properties purchased through the Scottish Government's Town Centre Regeneration Fund, back into Stornoway Town Centre. A Scheme of Administration was agreed by the Comhairle in June 2014, to cover utilisation of the fund between 2014-2017.

The Report further stated that 49-51 Cromwell Street was disposed of during 24/25, generating a capital receipt of £453k for the Comhairle. The Report proposed that £230k of the capital receipt be utilised toward the Medical Adaptation Budget within the 2023-28 Capital Programme. Due to level of demand for major and minor adaptations it is projected that the £2m allocation within the current Capital Programme will be fully committed before the end of the current Capital Programme, leaving the Comhairle at risk of breaching its Statutory Duty. This contribution will go some way towards reducing this risk.

The current revenue balance within the Town Centre Legacy Fund stands at £101,231. It was agreed in 2021/22 that £45k would be ring-fenced towards the Comhairle's Town Centre Painting Scheme. This was not drawn down as the core budget for the scheme continued to 2024/25 but has now been taken as a budget saving. As there would no longer be any income to the Town Centre Legacy Fund, and as the Scheme of Administration is now out of date, the Report sought agreement on proposals to utilise the balance over the next three financial years.

It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle:

- (1) agree that £230k of the capital receipt from the sale of 49-51 Cromwell Street be used to supplement the Medical Adaptations budget within the 2023-28 Capital Programme;

- (2) **note that the remainder will be retained within the capital programme for spend in line with Comhairle priorities; and**
- (3) **agree the proposals for utilising the revenue balance within the Town Centre Legacy Fund.**

It was agreed that the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 of Schedule 7A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 namely, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (other than the Comhairle) would be disclosed.

Lews Castle Lease	14*	The Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report providing an update on lease arrangements for Lews Castle. The Report stated that in October 2016 a lease for Lews Castle was signed between Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, NA Lews Castle Limited and Natural Assets Investments Limited, although the date of entry was 14 July 2016. The Report indicated that the break point for the lease is 14 July 2026 which presents an opportunity for the Comhairle to renegotiate the lease with a view to maximising the Comhairle's financial return from the Castle operation.
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It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) **notes that a break point in the lease between Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and NA Lews Castle Limited occurs on 14 July 2026;**
- (2) **notes that the annual rental income received provides an opportunity for the Comhairle to consider termination of the lease or attempt re-negotiation of its terms, provided that 12 months' notice is given;**
- (3) **notes that such notice would require to be given no later than 14 July 2025; and**
- (4) **authorises the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Sustainable Development Committee, the Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer to commence discussions with Together Travel on potential renegotiation of the terms of the lease in the terms set out in paragraphs 2.5, 7.1 and 7.2 of the Report.**

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Reports Outstanding	15	The Chief Executive submitted a Report detailing the Reports Outstanding arising from the decisions of the Committee.
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It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle note the Report.

