



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

BUDGET AND STRATEGY BOARD

Minute of Meeting held in Council Chamber / MS Teams, Council Offices, Stornoway on Friday, 6 June 2025 at 10.30am.

PRESENT

Mr Paul F Steele (Chair)
Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE
Mr Iain A MacNeil
Mr Kenneth Macleod
Dr. Frances Murray

Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Mustapha Hocine (Substitute Member)
Mr Robert Mackenzie (Substitute Member)

APOLOGIES

Mr Uisdean Robertson
Mr Paul Finnegan
Mr Angus Morrison
Mr Iain M Macaulay

Mr Donald Crichton
Mr Norrie Macdonald
Mr Calum Maclean

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Malcolm Burr
Mr Norman Macdonald
Mr Derek Mackay
Mr Sandy Gomez

Mr Calum Mackenzie
Mr Donald A Macleod
Ms Norma Skinner
Mr Donald A Macleod

Minute of Meeting of 23 January 2025

1 The Minute of Meeting of 23 January 2025 was **approved**.

Accounts Commission Briefing Local Government Budgets 2025/26

2 The Chief Executive circulated the Accounts Commission Briefing on Local Government Budgets 2025/26 for the Board's information.

It was agreed to note the Accounts Commission Briefing.

Corporate Strategy 2024-2027: Delivery of Key Strategic Outcomes

3 The Chief Executive submitted a Report in relation to the delivery of the key strategic outcomes within the Corporate Strategy 2024-2027 and the measures required to progress these within the current term of the Comhairle. The Report identified a number of key strategic outcomes which could be advanced for delivery of the Corporate Strategy within this term of the Comhairle. They each reflected at least one of the four Strategic Priorities set out within the Corporate Strategy and were both consistent with and complementary to these Strategic Priorities.

The Board made the following comments in respect of the strategic outcomes:

Western Isles Renewable Energy Dividend

- The Comhairle should explore options for discounted local electricity from renewable developments.
- Continue to engage with developers to seek investment and legacy benefits in local infrastructure which would be impacted by major developments.

- Continue to lobby UK and Scottish Governments on statutory requirements for developers to provide community benefit. It was noted that Scandinavian countries required agreements to be in place prior to the commencement of any development. Renewable energy developments in the Western Isles would contribute towards national priorities in relation to Net Zero.
- It was noted that Comhairle had not received any of the revenue from ScotWind Leasing Rounds, despite this being a recommendation of the Smith Commission.

Housing: Opportunities and Innovation

- Investigate options to reduce fuel poverty across the islands.

Gàidhlig

- The growth in the number of pupils currently in Primary Gaelic Medium Education will increase the future demand for a Gaelic Secondary School.
- Explore options for the training GME Teachers locally.

Family Friendly Support

- Significant demand for Early Years Services and childcare. These services are challenging to deliver on a breakeven basis.
- Explore opportunities for funding these services with energy developers.
- Explore opportunities to develop services with local partners.

Connectivity Enhancement

- Develop prioritised projects which could be delivered as funding becomes available.

Climate Resilient Infrastructure

- Will be considered at future meetings of the Board.
- Future Strategy and decisions will have to reflect climate resilient infrastructure. This could have significant financial implications.

It was agreed to consider the strategic priorities at future meetings of the Board.

Medium-Term
Financial Plan

4

It was agreed to adjourn this item and consider it at a reconvened meeting of the Board.

Performance
Project
Transformation
Plan

5

The Chief Executive submitted a Report providing a progress update for the Performance Transformation Project. The Report stated that the key areas being taken forward were analysis of what performance was reported and how it was reported; and what processes with services could be made more efficient. The project team were currently working to conclude analysis on both services, to amend reported KPIs as required, and to prioritise identified efficiency gains.

It was agreed that Members would submit comments to the Chief Officer, Human Resources and Performance.

Non-Domestic
Rates – Empty
Property Relief
Budget Savings

6

The Chief Financial Officer submitted a report seeking approval for amendments to the Non-Domestic Rates Relief Policy, regarding empty properties. The Report stated that the estimated costs of the Scheme in 2025/26 were £112k and the Budget included a saving of £40k, which was dependent on Members agreeing a revision to the policy. The £40k represents a part-year reduction in reliefs, in acknowledgement that any revision will take time to implement. The Report detailed the property categories currently in receipt of relief, and Members were invited to take a view on which, if any, of these should continue.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle approve:

- (1) the removal of Empty Property Relief except for properties subject to a winding-up order under the Insolvency Act or where properties are the subject of a liquidation.
- (2) that the exemption for the first 6 months that an industrial property is empty be retained at 50%, and that the 10% discount thereafter be removed.
- (3) that the relief for other properties, not covered by the listed categories, be set at 50% for the first 6 months, and that the 10% discount thereafter be removed; and
- (4) that the Policy revision be effective from 1 September 2025.

Housing
Investment
Borrowing Request

7

The Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report to consider a request made by Tighean Innse Gall (TIG) for the Comhairle to use its borrowing powers to enable TIG to access funding for its housing development programme. The Report gave background information, provided details of TIG's housing development programme, and set out the risks and potential mitigation.

It was agreed to note that:

- (1) a request has been received from Tighean Innse Gall (TIG) requesting access to loan funding from the Comhairle to progress a number of strategic housing developments;
- (2) discussions are ongoing with TIG regarding the exploration of other potential sources of funding, legal issues including subsidy control, assessment of TIG's organisational capacity to deliver a project or projects at this scale and conditions around disposal of properties; and,
- (3) a Special Meeting of Policy and Resources Committee and the Comhairle will be arranged once the Comhairle has obtained relevant financial and legal advice and the discussions with TIG have concluded, to allow assessment by the Comhairle of the request.

The Board adjourned and reconvened at 4.00pm on Monday 9 June 2025 when the following members were found to the present:

Present	Mr Paul F Steele (Chair) Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE Mr Iain A MacNeil Ms Susan Thomson Mr Kenneth Macleod Mr Donald Crichton Dr. Frances Murray Mr Angus McCormack Mr Mustapha Hocine (Substitute Member) Mr Robert Mackenzie (Substitute Member)
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Apologies	Mr Uisdean Robertson Mr Paul Finnegan Mr Ranald Fraser Mr Angus Morrison Mr Iain M Macaulay Mr Calum Maclean Mr Norrie Macdonald
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Officers in attendance	Mr Malcolm Burr Mr Norman Macdonald Mr Sandy Gomez Mr Calum Mackenzie Mr Derek Mackay
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Corporate Strategy 2024-2027:
Delivery of Key Strategic Outcomes

3

The Chief Officer, Assets and Infrastructure, addressed the Board in respect of the Climate Resilient Infrastructure strategic priority and gave a presentation in respect of climate change.

It was agreed to note the update.

Medium-Term Financial Plan

4

The Chief Financial Officer submitted a Report detailing the Comhairle's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the five-year period from 2025/26 to 2029/30 which provides a forecast outlook, aids robust and sustainable planning, seeks to protect the financial health of the Council, considers the appropriate level of reserves that the Council holds to mitigate current and longer-term risks and ensure sustainable services, and that financial resilience can be achieved.. The Report stated that the Plan would be subject to annual review and revision and would be responsive to changing national factors, local priorities and conditions, take account of emerging pressures, risks and opportunities to the Comhairle's financial position.

The Leader indicated that he would meet with Elected Members to discuss the MTFP and budget setting.

It was agreed to:

- (1) recommend approval of the Medium-Term Financial Plan; and**
- (2) consider proposals for community consultation as part of the budget setting process.**