



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held in Council Chamber,
Council Offices, Stornoway on Tuesday, 17 June
2025 at 2.00pm.

PRESENT

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

APOLOGIES

Mr John Norman Macleod	Mr Iain M Macaulay
------------------------	--------------------

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Malcolm Burr	Mrs Mairi Maciver
Mrs Anne Murray	Mrs Katie Macaskill
Mr John Cunningham	Ms Christina Morrison
Mr Sandy Gomez	Mr James Mackinnon
Mr Tim Langley	Mrs Hannah Morrison
Mr Murdo Mackay	Mrs Shona Hadwen
Mrs Anne Macdonald	Mrs Fiona Maciver
Mr Norman Maclean	Ms Alison MacCorquodale
Ms Lorraine Graham	Ms Mira Byrne
Ms Angela C Smith	Mr Colin G Morrison
Mr Domhnall Macdonald	Ms Kareen MacRury
Mr Derek Mackay	

Prayer

The Meeting was preceded in prayer by Mr John A Maciver.

MINUTES

Minute of Meeting of 4 February 2025 1

The Minute of the Meeting of 29 April 2025 was **approved**.

Declaration of Interest of 2

Mr Duncan MacInnes wished to record, in respect of item 9, that he was a member of the Outer Hebrides Local Action Group (LAG). Mr MacInnes did not consider this to be an interest that needed to be declared in terms of the code of conduct.

PRESENTATION

MG Alba – Lèirsinn
Strategy Update

3

With reference to item 3 of the minute of the meeting of 2 February 2022, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report which asked members to consider a presentation from MG ALBA on the implementation of its “Lèirsinn: A Route Map for Gaelic Media” plan, and to consider proposals to agree a strategy for the Stornoway “Media Village”.

The Report stated that in 2022, MG ALBA published “Lèirsinn: A Route Map for Gaelic Media”, which outlined a future where Gaelic media is at the heart of Gaelic communities. Lèirsinn sets out how Gaelic media can connect with all audience segments and be a catalyst for growth in language, communities and economies.

Stornoway’s “Media Village” comprises a range of properties owned and leased by the Comhairle at Seaforth Road, Stornoway. The activity and tenants on site make a significant cultural and economic contribution to the Outer Hebrides. There is evidence of under-utilisation of the space across the Media Village, and it was proposed that the Comhairle liaise with MG ALBA, Stòrlann and other tenants to agree a future strategy that ensures the facilities are optimised and positioned to meet growth opportunities and aspirations for the Gaelic language and creative industries sector.

Lorna Macaulay, Director of Development and Partnerships, MG ALBA delivered a presentation on the implementation of Lèirsinn, and outlined opportunities for future partnership working between MG ALBA and the Comhairle. Donald Campbell, Chief Executive of MG ALBA answered members questions .

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle note the presentation from MG Alba on the implementation of its Lèirsinn strategy, and notes proposals to develop a strategy for Stornoway’s ‘Media Village’.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Economic &
Community
Regeneration:
Outcome Delivery
Report

4

With reference to item 4 of the minute of the meeting of 26 November 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic & Community Regeneration submitted a Report to present the end of year progress update on the 2024/25 Strategic Priorities for the Economic & Community Regeneration Service.

The Report stated that there were two key areas of strategic risk identified in relation to the work of the service, one with a High rating and one with a Medium rating. These were reduced to Medium and Low respectively after risk actions have been implemented. Strategic risk is monitored on Interplan and reported externally via the Comhairle’s website.

The Report further stated that the Business Plan is aligned to three strategic priorities, and the Service contributes to the fulfilment of ten strategic outcomes. Progress on the outcome delivery plans was detailed in the main body of the report.

The Report concluded that the Economic and Community Regeneration Service had maintained good controls on business planning and governance during 2024/25. In addition to its core functions and responsibilities, key tasks included working to review, update and implement the Comhairle’s Corporate Strategies and political priorities while delivering a strong set of services on behalf of the community across a broad service portfolio and seeking to take best advantage of new and emerging economic opportunities.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle notes the end of year progress of the 2024/25 Outcome Delivery Plan for the Economic & Community Regeneration Service.

PLANNING

Development Plan Scheme 2025 5

The Chief Planning Officer submitted a Report which sought approval of the 2025 Development Plan Scheme and draft Participation Statement.

The Report stated that it is a statutory requirement of Planning Authorities to prepare and publish a Development Plan Scheme (DPS) and to review and update it annually.

The Report further stated that 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 includes a draft Participation Statement, which sets out how the Planning Authority will engage with the public and other stakeholders in relation to the Development Plan. There is a statutory requirement to publicly consult on the draft Participation Statement aspect of the DPS regarding engagement for the new LDP.

The Report concluded that subject to Comhairle approval, the DPS would be published, copies sent to Scottish Ministers, and through the anticipated programme of work and engagement the CPS and embedded Participation Statement would be consulted on and adapted as appropriate.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) approve the Outer Hebrides Development Plan Scheme 2025 as detailed in the Appendix to the Report; and**
- (2) authorise the Chief Planning Officer to publish the Development Plan Scheme 2025, and draft Participation Statement for public consultation.**

HOUSING

Local Housing Strategy Update 6

The Chief Planning Officer submitted a Report which gave a final position on the achievements and challenges of Local Housing Strategy 2017-2022 (LHS17-22) and to give an update on preparation of the next iteration of the Local Housing Strategy which covers the period 2025—2030.

The Report stated that there is a statutory requirement for each local authority to prepare a Local Housing Strategy (LHS) approximately every five years. The LHS 17-22 was approved in March 2018. Work had commenced on the Strategic Outcomes in the Action Plan immediately thereafter, though some were impacted by factors such as budgetary and other constraint such as the Covid-19 Pandemic. An overview of the Outcomes was given at the Housing Seminar on 1 May 2024, and they were further outlined in Appendix 1.

The Report further stated that the Local Housing Strategy 2025-2030 (LHS 25-30) would be available by September 2025 for general consultation and submission to Scottish Government for the peer review process.

The Report concluded that it was anticipated that LHS 25-30 would be submitted to Scottish Government in the latter half of 2025.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle note the achievements and challenges of Local Housing Strategy 2017-2022 and progress towards preparation of Local Housing Strategy 2025-2030.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Business Gateway 7
Services:
Performance
Update 2024-25

With reference to item 22 of the minute of the meeting of 23 April 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic & community Regeneration submitted a Report to update the Comhairle on the performance of Business Gateway services in 2025-25.

The Report stated that the Business Gateway service has been operational for 16 years and is delivered nationally by Local Authorities on behalf of the Scottish Government. The Outer Hebrides Business Gateway (OHBG) also delivers a range of Comhairle and externally funded packages of support to local business across the Outer Hebrides.

The Report further stated that it is 16 years since Business Gateway was introduced in the Highlands & Islands by the Scottish Government. In that time, across the Outer Hebrides: 810 business start-ups have been supported; 779 business skills workshops/webinars were delivered; 1395 jobs were created or safeguarded; and approximately £5.9m in loan or grant funding was awarded to support business start-up and growth.

All Outer Hebrides Business Gateway performance targets were exceeded in 2024-25. Business growth was particularly encouraging and would not have been possible without the Comhairle's support and continued financial investment. Satisfaction results continue to be positive and encouraging.

The Report concluded that the economic challenges experienced over the past four years (Brexit, COVID 19, increased energy and other prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, trade tariffs), along with longer term demographic concerns (falling birth rate, increased ageing population) resulting in labour market shortages, will undoubtedly have far-reaching impacts and consequences in the years to come.

The Comhairle's Economic Development service (incorporating Business Gateway) will continue to play an important role in assisting and supporting the islands' economic recovery by supporting the local business community to survive, grown and prosper in the near future and beyond.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle agrees to note the range and scale of support delivered successfully to Outer Hebrides businesses by Business Gateway during 2024-25.

Scottish 8
Government –
Cruise Ship Levy
Consultation

With reference to item 10 of the minute of meeting of 24 September 2024 the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report seeking homologation of the Comhairle's response to a Scottish Government consultation on the potential introduction of a local authority cruise ship levy in Scotland.

The Report provided a summary of the Comhairle's response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on a potential local authority Cruise Ship Levy in Scotland which closed on 30 May 2025. Due to the closing date for the consultation, the proposed response had been shared at a Members Seminar. The consultation sought views on giving local authorities powers to introduce a levy on cruise ships that visit their area. It also sought views on a "point of entry levy". The Scottish Government had begun discussions on potential tourist taxes or visitor levies back in 2018/19 and carried out a formal consultation in 2019. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, along with Orkney and Shetland Islands councils, submitted a joint response to that consultation expressing a clear preference for a landing levy approach that could be paid by visitors at points on entry, ports and airports. This view has been reiterated in the response to the cruise ship levy consultation.

The Report concluded stating that the Comhairle had provided input into Scottish Government proposals on the introduction of a levy on Cruise Ships. However, the

question on a possible “point of entry levy” had resurfaced an option previously preferred by island local authorities. Initial investigations into an Outer Hebrides Visitor Levy point to marginal benefits couple with risk to our visitor economy. It was therefore felt to be advisable to monitor implementation and roll-out of the Visitor Levy in other local authority areas, and to pause any further development until the outcome of the Scottish Government cruise ship levy in relation to the point of entry option. This would enable the Comhairle to weigh up the costs, benefits and risks of all levy powers it may receive in future prior to coming to any decisions.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle agrees to:

- (1) homologate the response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on the potential introduction of a local authority cruise ship levy in Scotland; and**
- (2) pause the further development of an Outer Hebrides Visitor Levy Scheme until all tourism levy options for local authorities can be assessed.**

Community-Led
Local Development
Programme 2024-
25

9

With reference to item 9 of the minute of meeting of 24 September 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report which provided the Comhairle with a review of 2024-25 Scottish Government Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Programme and an update on the 2025-26 CLLD Programme.

The Report stated that in 2025-25, Scottish Government (SG) allocated £12.2m to support CLLD across Scotland, of which an initial allocation of £219,077 was made available to the Outer Hebrides’ Local Action Group (LAG) to administer - £120,554 of which was revenue and £98,522 capital. At the end of November 2024, the LAG received a further £137,172 of revenue in addition to £49,725 (revenue) ringfenced for Youth LAG (YLAG) activity, bringing the total annual budget to £405,975. The Comhairle acts as Accountable Body (AB) to SG and the CLLD Coordinator implements the CLLD Programme – which the LAG sets out in its Community Led Vision (CLV).

The 2024-25 Outer Hebrides CLLD LAG delivered four distinct project strands: Community Engagement; Grant Scheme(s); Strategy Development; and continued support for the Outer Hebrides YLAG. A fifth budget-line – Admin & Animation – covered the necessary support in administering and animating the project strands. The 2024-25 Programme was delivered successfully and has been fully wound-up.

The Report further stated that in April 2025, the Outer Hebrides LAG received confirmation of an initial allocation for 2025-26 of £225,139 of which £100,000 is revenue and £125,139 of capital funding. Additional funding may once again become available in the future through further tranches, and it is expected to be exclusively capital. The LAG has agreed its planned programme for 2025-26, with the latest CLV submitted to SG in May and activity anticipated to commence imminently.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle agrees to:

- (1) note the success of the Scottish Government Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Programme 2024-25; and**
- (2) continue its function as Accountable Body for the Outer Hebrides Local Action Group (LAG) for the CLLD Programme 2025-26.**

Spaceport 1 Project Update 10 With reference to item 14 of the minute of meeting of 24 September 2024, the Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report to update members on progress in relation to the Spaceport 1 enabling infrastructure construction, overview the project priorities for the coming period, and to seek agreement as to the Comhairle's representation on the Scolpaig Farm Habitat and Amenity Management Plan Steering Group.

The Report stated that since September 2024, significant progress had been made in relation to enabling infrastructure phase of the Spaceport 1 project. The planning permission granted in July 2023 is subject to ongoing compliance with thirty-five legally enforceable conditions. Condition twenty-three, which must be discharged prior to use of Spaceport 1, pertains to the development of a Habitat and Amenity Management Plan and the establishment of an associated Steering Group.

Scolpaig Farm represents a locally important resource for its ecological value, agricultural use, public access/recreation and cultural heritage and it is acknowledged that the Comhairle's ownership of the Farm presents an opportunity to develop a tangible community asset.

The Report went into detail on progress of the enabling infrastructure project and gave further information on Condition 23 – provision is made for the enhancement of biodiversity and the appropriate management (including recreational and public access) of the land at Scolpaig Farm.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) note the update on the construction of the enabling infrastructure as outlined at paragraphs 6.1 – 6.5 of the Report:**
- (2) note the priorities for the coming period as outlined at paragraphs 8.1 – 8.5 of the Report; and**
- (3) agree that the elected Members of Uibhist a Tuath be the Comhairle representatives on the Habitat Amenity Management Plan Steering Group.**

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Reports Outstanding 11 The Chief Executive submitted a Report detailing the Reports Outstanding arising from the decisions of the Committee.

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

PRIVATE ITEM

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 12* The Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration submitted a Report in relation to the future lease arrangements of 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. The Report provided members with three options to consider in terms of renegotiating the lease.

Cllr Gordon Murray, seconded by Cllr Rae Mackenzie, moved the following amendment:

“that the Comhairle agrees to authorise the Chief Executive to terminate the current lease between Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and NA Lews Castle Limited and invite tenders for the lease of Lews Castle, the renowned day-visitor destination, upscale events venue which offers exceptional accommodation and that the Chief Executive prepare a further Report, following a procurement process on a new lease between Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and an operator, which will ensure that all elected members and employees of the Comhairle should achieve best value for money and avoid legal challenge to the Comhairle”.

Mr Donald Crichton, seconded by Mr Angus McCormack, moved the recommendation in the Report, “that the Comhairle agrees to renegotiate its lease with the operator of Lews Castle on the basis of the operator paying a fixed annual rent in line with an independent rental valuation”; with an additional recommendation “that a rent review be carried out every three years”.

Members went into formal debate.

Members then proceeded to vote on the matter.

The vote was taken by roll call as follows:

MOTION

Mr Donald Crichton
Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Iain Archie MacNeil
Mr Paul Steele
Mr Uisdean Robertson
Mr Ian M Macleod
Mr Robert Mackenzie
Mr Angus Morrison
Mr Norman Misty MacDonald
Mr Kenneth Macleod
Mr Donald MacSween
Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE
Ms Frances Murray

AMENDMENT

Mr Gordon Murray
Mr Rae Mackenzie
Mr John A Maciver

The Motion, having received the majority of the votes cast, became the finding of the Meeting.

