www.hie.co.uk

BOARD MINUTE

28 APRIL 2026

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

HIE
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

BOARD MEETING
COINNEAMH BÙIRD

MINUTE OF THE HIE BOARD MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 28 APRIL 2026, STARTING AT 14:00 IN LERWICK TOWN HALL

PRESENT (LERWICK)	Angus Campbell *(Chair)* Freda Newton *(Deputy Chair)* Stuart Black *(Chief Executive)* Allan Clow Simon Cotton Ailsa Raeburn Calum Ross David Wilson
PRESENT (ONLINE)	Keith Nicolson

IN ATTENDANCE (LERWICK)

Mary Bowman	Shadow Board Member
Sandra Dunbar	Director of Corporate Services
Rachel Hunter	Director of Enterprise and Community Support (from item 1.5)
Martin Johnson	Director of Strategy and Regional Economy
Karen Moncrieff	Director of Human Resources
David Oxley	Director of Strategic Projects
Joanna Peteranna	Director of Area Operations
Katrina Wiseman	Area Manager, Orkney and Shetland
Colin Cook	Director of Economic Development, Scottish Government
Andrew Carton	Team Leader (HIE), Enterprise Agency Sponsorship, Scottish Government
Francesco Bertoldi	Team Leader, National Islands Plan, Scottish Government, item 3.1

IN ATTENDANCE (ONLINE)

Chris Roberts	Head of Communications
Audrey MacIver	Area Manager, Inner Moray Firth, item 2.1
[Name removed for data protection]	Senior Development Manager, Inner Moray Firth, item 2.1
[Name removed for data protection]	Diligence Quality Manager, item 2.1
[Name removed for data protection]	Senior Innovation Manager, item 2.1
David Howie	Head of Strategic Projects, item 3.3
Elaine Hanton	Head of Energy Transition and Net Zero / Cairngorm Project Lead, items 3.4, 3.5
Peter Dennis	Project Manager, Cairngorm, item 3.4
[Name removed for data protection]	Senior Development Manager, Tourism, item 4.1
Lorna Gregson-MacLeod	Head of Planning and Partnerships, item 4.2
[Name removed for data protection]	Senior Analyst, item 4.2

[Name removed for data protection]	Management Accountant, item 4.3

1	STANDING ITEMS CUSPAIREAN COTHROMACH

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including the Scottish Government Director and Team Leader. Apologies had been received from Melanie Collett and Anna Salgado. Keith Nicolson had advised that he would need to leave the meeting for a short period at 3.00pm.

1.2 Declarations of interest

Mary Bowman declared an interest in the offshore wind sector, which was referenced in item 1.5, Chair and Chief Executive's update. The relevant item had been redacted from the paper shared with Ms Bowman and it was agreed that she would leave the meeting if there was discussion on this matter.

Allan Clow declared an interest in item 2.1, *[part of sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].* It was agreed that he would leave the meeting when this item was discussed.

David Wilson declared a related party interest in item 3.1, Wave Energy Scotland, and would leave the meeting when this item was discussed.

David Oxley declared an interest in item 3.1 as a director of Wave Energy Scotland and would leave the meeting when this item was discussed.

The following transparency statements were noted:

Item	Board member / HIE employee	Transparency statement
1.3; 2.1	Allan Clow	Independent member of the Court of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)
	Calum Ross	HIE-appointed member of the Court of UHI
1.3; 1.4.2; 3.5; 4.6	David Wilson	Related party interest in Wave Energy Scotland
	David Oxley	Board member, Wave Energy Scotland
2.2	Ailsa Raeburn	Previous contact with a company involved in potential sale of land at Inverness Campus

1.3 Draft minute of the Board meeting held on 24 February 2026

The minute was approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

1.4 Matters arising from the minute and action grid

1.4.1 Note of meeting of the Chair and Chief Executive, 4 March 2026

The Board noted decisions taken by the Chair and Chief Executive under delegated authority in relation to Sutherland Spaceport and Cairngorm.

1.4.2 Note of decision by the Chair and Chief Executive, 16 March 2026

[Sentences removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].

1.5 Chair and Chief Executive's update

The Board noted significant activities and issues that were currently being dealt with by HIE employees and were not covered elsewhere on the agenda. There was discussion on the following items:

- **Legal matters**

All current legal matters would be covered under specific agenda items.

- **Offshore wind: OWIP**

Mary Bowman left the meeting.

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

- **Machrihanish**

Mary Bowman rejoined the meeting.

Demolition of two large buildings had been completed, reducing HIE's annual rates and maintenance costs *[part of sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs]. [Sentences removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].*

- **Arnish**

The Director of Area Operations reported on positive progress with several projects at Arnish, Stornoway.

Work on the access road upgrade was ahead of schedule. Head lease negotiations involving HIE, Stornoway Trust and Stornoway Port Authority were close to completion.

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

- **Science Skills Academy (SSA)**

HIE staff were continuing to pursue leads to maintain funding in the 2026/27 academic year for the Science Skills Academy, which delivers science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) learning experiences to school pupils in the Highlands and Islands.

[Sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity]. [Sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].

In response to a question, the Director of Strategy and Regional Economy advised that the annual cost of the SSA in its current form was approximately £500k.

- **Scottish Government / policy update**

HIE staff were continuing to take part in meetings with the Scottish Government and partner agencies concerning post-school education reform and were pressing for funding and decision making to be devolved to regional level.

- **HIE 60th anniversary**

The winners and runners-up in a competition to design a 60th anniversary tartan for HIE had been announced in March. The winning design was now being used on marketing materials.

- **Organisational development**

The Director of Human Resources reported that a Digital Economy team leader had been appointed following a restructure of the Innovation and Technology team. Strong fields of applicants had been attracted to current vacancies including a Senior Development Manager post in Benbecula and a Development Manager in Orkney and Shetland.

The latest quarterly meeting of the HIE Staff Forum had taken place on 12 March and had included input to the agenda of the next HIE Staff Conference, due to take place in September.

- **Programme updates**

Rachel Hunter joined the meeting.

The Chief Executive and the Director of Enterprise and Community Support updated the Board on the delivery of several programmes. The Scottish Government's Islands Business Resilience Fund had concluded, having awarded funding of almost £4.4m in total and supporting 444 applicants. Evaluation was underway. The new HIE Impact Women programme had attracted more than 80 applications for 30 places and would host its first residential session on 4 and 5 May.

The Green Grant Fund had been paused for new applications but anticipated spend in 2026/27 was currently £1.2m. Projects in the pipeline showed an indicative grant request of £1.6m in 2026/27 and 2027/28.

HIE's £2m Innovation programme, launched in 2022, had completed at the end of March 2026, having delivered 870 interventions and approved over £1.5m in research and development grants. Evaluation was now underway and Leadership Team had approved due diligence to proceed on a new three-year programme, which would be presented to the Board at a future date.

- **Chair and Chief Executive**

The Chair and the Chief Executive had held a very worthwhile series of meetings in London over two days in February with MPs and business contacts. Engagement activity was currently relatively quiet and would pick up after the Scottish Parliament election on 7 May.

2 DECISIONS
CO-DHÙNAIDHEAN

2.1 *[Item removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].*

Allan Clow left the meeting.

2.2 Sale of land at Inverness Campus

Allan Clow rejoined the meeting.
Greg Youngson joined the meeting.

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].

Keith Nicolson left the meeting.

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affair].

Greg Youngson left the meeting.

3 UPDATES
CUNNTASAN AS ÙR

3.1 National Islands Plan

Francesco Bertoldi joined the meeting.

The Scottish Government Islands Team Leader delivered a presentation on the new National Islands Plan, covering the process that had been implemented to create the new plan and highlighting its strategic objectives and commitments.

Consultation during 2023 had been delivered through an online portal that attracted responses from 39 organisations and 167 individuals, while 231 participants had taken part in 16 workshops (13 in-person and three online). Key findings were that the previous plan had made limited progress and a new plan was required and should be delivered with improved communication to heighten awareness.

A subsequent period of engagement had included communities, local authorities, deliver partners and policy teams across the Scottish Government. The new plan had an overarching theme of population retention and attraction. The number of strategic objectives had been condensed from 13 to seven and commitments were reduced from 134 to 100. Fourteen of the commitments included HIE as a delivery partner, including key issues such as housing, childcare, tourism, aquaculture and Gaelic hubs. Coordination would be delivered through the Government's Islands team.

Implementation was underway on several commitments, including, among others, an island scholarship pilot, an increased rural and islands housing fund, childcare provision and community planning support. In response to a question on why ferries did not feature more prominently, the Islands Team Leader explained that future provision was covered by the Islands Connectivity Plan and care had been taken not to duplicate anything that had been announced previously.

The Chair and Board members expressed a strong desire to see the new plan being more effective than its predecessor in finding solutions to well known and long standing problems, as well as influencing national policies on a range of vital issues for islands, including housing, transport and childcare. There was frustration that 'island proofing' had not been put into practice and the new Islands Plan would need concerted action across government rather than a piecemeal approach.

Members asked about linkages with other bodies, including the Scottish Funding Council and the Government's recently-announced housing agency, and were assured that work was ongoing to embed island-specific delivery into their plans. There was agreement that community development officers, funded by the Scottish Government, played a crucial role in supporting island community groups and delivered a high return on a relatively small investment.

Keith Nicolson rejoined the meeting.

The Chief Executive observed that islands that had been most successful in achieving population growth tended to have two factors in common – fixed links and community ownership of land and other assets. Central government leadership was essential to improving island housing and transport, which were fundamental to the central aim of retaining and attracting young people.

The Board thanked Mr Bertoldi for his presentation and participation in discussion regarding the Islands Plan.

Francesco Bertoldi left the meeting.

3.2 Public service reform

The Director of Economic Development, Scottish Government, provided a verbal update on public service reform in Scotland, noting that each of the main political parties had declared an intention to pursue reform following the national election on 7 May.

The reform agenda was concentrated on actions to reduce spend, deliver greater efficiency and improve outcomes across government and the public sector. These included workforce reduction targets, regionalisation, digital transformation and shared services. Other areas of focus included improvements to data sharing and system integration across organisations, as well as increasing the adoption and use of artificial intelligence.

In discussion, the Board expressed support for greater regionalisation and local decision-making leading to improved outcomes. Members highlighted HIE's track record in pursuing best value, citing the organisation's achievement of efficiency savings year-on-year and its lead role on enabling data sharing within the Business Support Partnership. It was noted that HIE's FTE staffing complement had been reduced by 11% over the past five years, and that 94% of customer transactions were now processed digitally.

The Board suggested that opportunities to locate Government employees in rural and island areas should be explored when appropriate in order to better understand issues affecting communities and businesses in these areas. It was also noted that the CivTech programme could offer a model for government, public bodies and others in the private and third sectors jointly to explore opportunities for public service reform.

In response to questions, the Director assured the Board that reform measures would apply to the Scottish Government as well as public bodies such as HIE and acknowledged that enterprise agencies had already taken significant steps to achieve savings in recent years. The Chief Executive offered HIE's support to advise and support Government reform, citing the agency's recent success in delivering millions of pounds of funding through initiatives such as the Offshore Wind Investment Programme and Islands Business Resilience fund with no additional resource.

Summing up, the Chair reaffirmed HIE's commitment to continue to review its operations to pursue greater efficiency and stronger outcomes for the organisation and the region. The Board thanked the Director of Economic Development, Scottish Government, for his update and participation in a valuable discussion.

3.3 Space

David Howie joined the meeting.

The Head of Strategic Projects provided an overview of current activity across the regional space sector.

Europe's first orbital launch could take place this summer from SaxaVord Spaceport in Shetland where German company RFA was currently assembling a vehicle on site. The other contender was Andøya in Norway. *[Sentences removed due to commercial sensitivity].*

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

David Howie left the meeting.

4.1 Mountain resort policy

Note: this item was taken out of sequence to provide context for item 3.4, which followed.

[Name removed for data protection] joined the meeting

The Senior Development Manager, Tourism, presented a paper seeking the Board's approval of a new policy to guide HIE support to the Highlands and Islands mountain resorts sector, *[part of sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].*

The policy had been drafted to ensure a consistent and effective approach for HIE staff to engage with and support mountain resorts, *[part of sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].*

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].

In response to questions, the Senior Development Manager assured the Board that HIE assessed displacement rigorously when appraising support, noting that each of the resorts had a distinctive character and served different segments of the visitor and sport and leisure markets. HIE area teams maintained regular contact with all four resorts in the region. Scotland's fifth mountain resort, Glenshee, was outwith the Highlands and Islands but HIE had an arrangement with Scottish Enterprise to ensure awareness of relevant opportunities. HIE also planned to work more closely in future with VisitScotland in regard to mountain resorts.

The policy was approved.

[Name redacted for data protection] left the meeting.

3.4 Cairngorm

Elaine Hanton, [Name redacted for data protection] and Peter Dennis joined the meeting.

The Cairngorm Project Lead and the Project Manager provided an update on matters relating to Cairngorm.

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].

The Cairngorm Advisory Group of stakeholders had held a positive meeting in April and agreed to review terms of reference. Overall, the number and impact of risks were reducing, although the ability to accurately predict year-end outcome would continue to be challenging due to the business's dependence on weather conditions, particularly for snowsports.

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

Allan Clow and Colin Cook left the meeting.

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].

The Board thanked the Cairngorm team for their update.

[Name redacted for data protection] and Peter Dennis left the meeting.

3.5 Wave Energy Scotland

David Wilson and David Oxley left the meeting.

The Head of Energy Transition and Net Zero updated the Board on the latest position regarding HIE subsidiary Wave Energy Scotland (WES).

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].

[Paragraph removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].

The Board welcomed the progress that had been made, noting that the situation remained challenging and that further updates would be provided.

4 RESOURCES AND GOVERNANCE
GOIREASAN IS RIAGHLACHAS

4.2 End of year draft performance update

Lorna Gregson-MacLeod and [Name redacted for data protection] joined the meeting.
David Wilson and David Oxley rejoined the meeting.

The Head of Planning and Partnerships updated the Board on HIE's performance against targets for 2025/26, noting that a full end-year report would be delivered at a special meeting in May.

Total investment approved had been £81.4m, which included £38.3m to support Offshore Wind Investment Programme (OWIP) projects. This compared with a figure of £78.5m in 2024/25 and the number of third-party projects awarded financial assistance had more than doubled from 538 to 1,263. HIE's largest own-hand investment had been £4.1m for the construction of small business units in Golspie.

HIE continued to deliver clearly against the four key outcomes in its five-year strategy and the agency's performance was very positive, with 21 of a total 24 targets having been met. Additional investment that HIE had secured from OWIP had resulted in the energy sector receiving the highest value of funding as well as supporting transport, and technology and advanced engineering. Food and drink and tourism had also received a high proportion of funding.

When OWIP projects were excluded, approved third-party investment was distributed relatively evenly across the region and there was higher per-capita investment evident in several island and rural areas, consistent with HIE's place-based approach. Further analysis of investment in inclusive growth focus areas would be undertaken for the full end-year review, however it appeared that a combination of targeted investment and increasing confidence had contributed to this outcome.

The Board thanked the Planning and Partnerships team for the update and looked forward to receiving the detailed end-year review.

Lorna Gregson-MacLeod and [Name redacted for data protection] left the meeting.

4.3 2025/26 draft outturn statement

[Name redacted for data protection] joined the meeting.

The Management Accountant presented HIE's initial draft outturn statement for financial year 2025/26, noting that final outturn would be subject to a variety of factors, many of which were outwith HIE's control.

This showed that HIE's total expenditure at the year-end was £104.9m (capital £68m, revenue £37m) against an opening core budget allocation of £53.3m from the Scottish Government. The difference between the draft outturn and the opening budget reflected substantial extra investment that HIE had secured for the region during the year through several additional programmes including the Offshore Wind Investment Programme and Islands Business Resilience Fund.

The statement highlighted an authorised capital overspend of £1.6m, while revenue was underspent by £700k. Given the significant budget changes and uncertainty that had arisen during the year, the Board agreed this was a very positive outcome.

The Board observed that the additional programmes had been administered without any increase to HIE's staffing resource. The Chief Executive and the HR Director confirmed this and explained that the extra workload had been managed through flexible arrangements, with existing employees taking on additional hours or implementing time off in lieu to maintain work-life balance. Members expressed thanks to the employees concerned.

Noting that the final outturn would not be known until completion of external audit and signing of the HIE annual report and accounts, scheduled for 8 October 2026, the Board welcomed the draft outturn and thanked the Finance team and all HIE employees for a strong performance throughout the year.

[Name redacted for data protection] left the meeting.

4.4 Corporate risk register

The latest version of HIE's corporate risk register was welcomed, noting that some wording had been refreshed and the only risk to have increased concerned global events affecting the Highlands and Islands. In response, HIE was gathering intelligence and maintaining close contact with both the UK and Scottish Governments.

4.5 Risk and Assurance Committee terms of reference

The Board approved revised terms of reference for the Risk and Assurance Committee, which the Committee had considered at its most recent meeting. The changes were relatively minor and reflected the outcomes of an effectiveness review and benchmarking against public sector standards.

4.6 Draft minute of the Risk and Assurance Committee, 17 March 2026

The Board noted the draft minute, which will be submitted for approval to the next meeting of the Risk and Assurance Committee on 2 June.

5 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION
CUSPAIREAN AIRSON FIOSRACHADH

5.1 Scottish Government Infrastructure Strategy consultation

The Board welcomed HIE's submission to this consultation, commenting that it was a strong response.

5.2 Any other business

There was no other business.

5.5 Forthcoming meeting dates

The following meeting dates were noted:

26 May	Extra Board meeting: End-year reporting and best value
02 June	Risk and Assurance Committee

02 June	Board sub-group on community-led development

Chris Roberts
Head of Communications

28 April 2026