

BOARD MINUTE

1 JULY 2025

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

APPROVED



BOARD MEETING
COINNEAMH BÙIRD

**MINUTE OF THE HIE BOARD MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 1 JULY 2025, STARTING AT 09:45
IN AN LÒCHRAN, INVERNESS CAMPUS**

PRESENT (INVERNESS) Alistair Dodds (*Chair*)
Angus Campbell (*Deputy Chair*)
Stuart Black (*Chief Executive*)
Melanie Collett
Allan Clow
Freda Newton
Calum Ross
Anna Salgado
David Wilson

PRESENT (ONLINE) Keith Nicholson
Ailsa Raeburn (items 1.1 – 3.3)

IN ATTENDANCE (INVERNESS)

Mary Bowman	Shadow Board member
Sandra Dunbar	Director of Corporate Services
Rachel Hunter	Director of Enterprise and Community Support
Martin Johnson	Director of Strategy and Regional Economy
Karen Moncrieff	Director of Human Resources
David Oxley	Director of Strategic Projects (items 3.3 – 5.3)
Chris Roberts	Head of Communications
Jessie Laurie	Head of Enterprise Sponsorship, Scottish Government
Anne-Marie Martin	Deputy Director, Regional Economic Development, Scottish Government
Elain MacRae	Head of Energy, items 2.1, 3.1
James Gibbs	Director of Freeport Delivery, item 2.1
Marie Mackintosh	Subsidy Control Manager, item 2.1
Charlie Lawrence	Head of Property and Infrastructure, items 1.1 – 1.6, 3.2
Gregor Irwin	Director General, Economy, Scottish Government, item 3.3
Anna Miller	Head of Tourism, Food and Drink, item 3.4
[Name removed due to Data Protection]	Senior Policy Manager, item 3.5
Elaine Hanton	Cairngorm Project Lead, item 3.6
Peter Dennis	Project Manager, item 3.6
[Name removed due to Data Protection]	Business Improvement Manager, items 4.5, 4.6
[Name removed due to Data Protection]	Senior Project Manager, item 5.1

IN ATTENDANCE (ONLINE)

David Oxley	Director of Strategic Projects (items 1.1 – 2.1)
Iain Bolland	Diligence Quality Manager, item 2.1
Kathleen Stewart	Area Team Leader, Innse Gall, item 3.2

1 **STANDING ITEMS**

CUSPAIREAN COTHROMACH

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Board member Simon Cotton and Director of Area Operations Joanna Peteranna.

1.2 Declarations of interest

Shadow Board member Mary Bowman declared an interest in items 2.1 and 3.1 due to her involvement with Highland Deephaven Ltd and would leave the meeting when these items were discussed.

The following transparency statements were given:

Item	Board member	Transparency statement
3.5	Allan Clow	Married to a non-executive director of Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd
3.5	Angus Campbell	Chair of The Ferries Community Board, Clyde and Hebrides
3.5	Keith Nicholson	CMAL is a business client

1.3 Draft minute of the Board meeting held on 29 April 2025

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

1.4 Draft minute of the Board meeting held on 26 May 2025

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

1.5 Draft minute of the Board meeting held on 20 June 2025

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

1.6 Matters arising from the minutes and action grid

29 April:

[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].

Charlie Lawrence left the meeting.

26 May:

The Director of Corporate Services reported that she and the Director of Enterprise and Community Support liaise with partner agencies to explore benchmarking and sharing good practice in pursuing best value and efficient, effective service delivery. Discussions will continue.

[Sentences removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity]. The Director of Corporate Services explained that the Chair of the HIE pension trustees is fully independent, while the trustees themselves are current or former HIE employees who are members of the scheme.

20 June:

There were no matters arising.

1.7 Chair and Chief Executive's update

The Board noted a summary of 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**

The Director of Corporate Services informed the Board in confidence that HIE had been approached by Global Energy Group (GEG) regarding its intention to sell part of the Group to Mitsui. HIE's legal agreement with GEG meant that the agency's consent was required for this to proceed and due diligence was under way, including sanctions checks. The Board confirmed that they were content for this matter to be decided by the Chair and the Chief Executive under delegated authority.

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

- **Growth deals: project delivery**

The Director of Strategic Projects updated the Board on progress with several Growth Deal projects across the region: Manufacturing Innovation Centre Moray (MICM); Calanais Visitor Centre; Rothesay Pavilion, and Orkney Research and Innovation Centre (ORIC).

Orkney Islands Council had rejected HIE's planning application for phase two of ORIC on design grounds, including the scale of the proposed building. HIE would now consider its options, including the potential to appeal the decision, which planners had recommended for approval, or to revisit the design. *[Sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].*

In response to a question, the Director confirmed that the original list of Islands Growth Deal projects had changed and an update would be circulated to the Board.

- **Space**

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

- **Wave Energy Scotland (WES)**

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

- **HIE property strategy**

A productive Board sub-group session had been held on 17 June focusing on HIE's property strategy. The Chair thanked the Board members who had taken part. A meeting note would be circulated shortly and a follow-up session was being planned.

- **Fair Isle Bird Observatory**

The Chair was pleased to note that Fair Isle Bird Observatory had reopened and that arrangements for a new ferry were progressing. Both had vital roles to play in strengthening sustainability on the island.

- **Women's entrepreneurship**

The Director of Enterprise and Community support provided an update on support for women's entrepreneurship, including partnership with Scottish Enterprise which had enabled HIE to secure places for Highlands and Islands participants in its Pathways to Scale programme. HIE was now developing a

regional programme for women entrepreneurs who were at an earlier stage in their business life cycle, which was planned to launch during the current financial year.

The Board noted that HIE's Northern Innovation Hub IMPACT30 programme for young entrepreneurs, part of the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, had succeeded in attracting a high proportion of female participants but was set to close after the current year. The Director acknowledged the success of IMPACT30 and provided assurance that women's entrepreneurship was a priority in HIE's operating plan and would remain an area of focus.

- **Innovation**

It was noted that HIE's current innovation programme had met its targets but may be extended beyond the planned end date of 31 October.

HIE had convened a meeting between UHI and the region's local authorities to focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, a central goal of the HIREP strategy. Plans were under way to prepare a regional innovation action plan with Innovate UK.

A National Innovation Summit was set to take place on 25 September as the centrepiece of Scotland's Innovation Week. HIE was represented on the summit working group and there would be a strong focus on space, marine energy and life sciences, all transformational sectors in the region.

- **Policy update / Scottish Government**

The Director of Strategy and Regional Economy confirmed that HIE expected to receive its annual letter of guidance from the Scottish Government very soon.

HIE had received a draft of the Rural Delivery Plan that the Scottish Government planned to publish in October and would be providing comments.

The UK Government had published a multiyear spending review, outlining plans to support long-term regional growth across the country. HIE was also reviewing the new UK Industrial Strategy and would provide Board members with a briefing note.

- **HIE 60th anniversary**

A small internal group, chaired by the Chief Executive, was developing a programme of activities to mark HIE's sixtieth anniversary. Board members would be invited to the key event, a one-day conference on 7 November.

- **Organisational development**

The Director of Human Resources reported that Gavin Mackenzie had been appointed as HIE's nominee to the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Board. Within HIE, action had been taken to strengthen the Property and Infrastructure team and the secondment of a member of WES staff to the Cairngorm team had been extended.

Options for HIE's upcoming pay award were currently being modelled and a report would be given to the Remuneration Committee, which was meeting on 21 July.

- **Chair and Chief Executive engagement**

The most recent meeting of the Convention of the Highlands and Islands had strongly featured research on regional transformational opportunities, commissioned by HIE and HIREP, as well as a session focusing on the importance of skills, led by Frank Mitchell, Chair of Skills Development Scotland.

HIE had hosted a visit to the region by Chris Stark, Head of the UK Mission for Clean Power and colleagues from the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero.

The Chair and Chief Executive had held their quarterly meeting with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), when the agenda included governance, skills and budget which were common themes across the universities sector. HIE was encouraged by reports of an increase in the volume of student applications to UHI.

Around 180 HIE employees had taken part in an online round table session with the Chair and the Chief Executive, following up on requests for regular engagement opportunities that had been made at the annual staff conference. Feedback had been very positive.

The Chair and Chief Executive had met senior representatives of Great British Energy including the Chair, Juergen Maier, when discussion had included a potential partnership agreement between the two organisations.

The Chair had spoken at the Workforce North conference that Skills Development Scotland had held in Inverness. A key theme had been the role of skills in realising the benefits of regional transformational opportunities.

It was confirmed that Angus Campbell would serve as HIE's Interim Chair until a new incumbent takes on the role, planned for 1 October.

2 DECISIONS **CO-DHÙNAIDHEAN**

The following item was taken out of sequence to provide context for item 2.1.

3.1 Offshore wind investment projects

Mary Bowman left the meeting.

Elain MacRae joined the meeting.

The Head of Energy provided an overview of the offshore wind sector in Scotland, which presented the biggest economic opportunity for the Highlands and Islands in generations. Investment in UK offshore wind was expected to overtake oil and gas by 2030, contributing half of the country's annual power supply.

Using additional Scottish Government funding from the Offshore Wind Investment Programme, HIE was making significant investments in large-scale infrastructure projects that would be needed to increase offshore wind related activity and be transformational for the region. Recent research commissioned by HIE and HIREP showed that the sector represented around 40% of the potential £100bn investment value of more than 250 regional transformational opportunities over the next 15 years. HIE would play a key role in realising the benefits this investment could generate and effective partnership working would be critical to success.

HIE had hosted several visits to the region by the UK Government's Clean Power 2030 team and by publicly owned energy company Great British Energy, with which it expected to sign a partnership agreement shortly.

The Board discussed the unprecedented scale of the offshore wind opportunity as well as the challenges that will need to be overcome to fully realise its potential, not least the requirement to improve grid access and connectivity. The importance of community benefits was underlined and plans to clean and upgrade the national grid would require planning approval in multiple locations.

In response to a question, the Director of Strategic Projects reported that governance arrangements were being put in place to enable information sharing between the Offshore Wind Investment Programme Board and partners including HIE, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish National Investment Bank.

Gregor Irwin joined the meeting.

Proposals for zonal pricing were a cause for concern among project developers in Scotland, although these appeared to be led by a single energy provider. It was also noted that, while there were currently fewer live projects in Argyll than in other areas, that situation was expected to change. Lastly, new research into the potential use of timber in floating wind production was highlighted, noting that this may present an opportunity for the forestry sector.

The Chair expressed HIE's continuing dissatisfaction with the Accountable Officer (AO) template process, whereby certain HIE approvals over £1m also required signoff from the Scottish Government. *[Sentences 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].

The Board thanked the Head of Energy for the update.

Elain MacRae left the meeting.

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

3 **UPDATES** **CUNNTASAN AS ÙR**

3.2 Arnish industrial estate

Mary Bowman rejoined the meeting.

Charlie Lawrence and Kathleen Stewart joined the meeting.

The Area Team Leader, Innse Gall, introduced an update on HIE's proposed approach to a programme of developments at Arnish Industrial Estate, Stornoway, to capitalise on the offshore wind market opportunity, including:

[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, 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, and due to commercial sensitivity].

Charlie Lawrence and Kathleen Stewart left the meeting.

3.3 Programme for Government

Gregor Irwin joined the meeting.

The Chair formally welcomed the Scottish Government Director General, Economy and invited him to address the Board.

The Director began by thanking the Chair for his service, which was appreciated by colleagues across government. The quality of the Board was a central factor in the success of any organisation and it was hoped that the current Chair recruitment exercise would result in another strong appointment.

Mr Irwin focused on actions being planned and taken to deliver the Programme for Government, including the importance of HIE's role. Fiscal challenges had never been greater and the most recent spending review had been particularly challenging. Cash budgets were under pressure across the public sector in Scotland, adding to the urgency of the reform agenda. There was also a growing need for government and public bodies to work together as efficiently and effectively as possible. The scale of opportunity across the Highlands and Islands was recognised however, with transformational projects set to benefit the national economy significantly.

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

The Chief Executive highlighted HIE's success in digitising services, including the MyHIE customer portal, and progress in delivering Best Value. He noted the importance of ensuring that the reform agenda was implemented within government departments as well as agencies and that transparency on Best Value was needed at all levels.

Members stressed the importance of partnership working, including engagement with the UK Government to secure regional benefits from initiatives including Great British Energy and the National Wealth Fund. The Chair returned to a view he had often expressed, that the Scottish Government could seek to make better use of HIE and other agencies' extensive knowledge and networks when implementing new initiatives rather than setting up further teams that could not have the same level of experience. The Techscaler initiative was cited as an example of a project that would have benefited greatly from the enterprise agencies' ideas and experience.

David Oxley rejoined the meeting.

The Chair thanked the Director, Economy, for attending the Board and encouraged him and his colleagues to engage in person with HIE and visit the region more frequently. HIE shared the government's emphasis on delivery and achieving progress through partnership and always welcomed opportunities for open discussion.

Gregor Irwin and Anne-Marie Martin left the meeting.

Ailsa Raeburn left the meeting.

3.4 Tourism, food and drink

Anna Miller joined the meeting.

The Head of Tourism, Food and Drink delivered a presentation and comprehensive report describing the economic and wider impacts of these sectors, which account for 67,000 jobs across the region, and outlining HIE's supporting role, including shaping and influencing strategy. The report also set out the agency's future priorities to 2028 against HIE's strategic themes of people, place, planet and prosperity.

In essence, HIE aimed to harness the potential of tourism, food and drink in the Highlands and Islands to drive sustainable economic growth, create jobs, and enhance the quality of life for local communities. The agency focused on supporting businesses and communities, developing infrastructure and fostering innovation to create a resilient and thriving economy. Delivery was underpinned by the need to transition to net zero and to ensure that the benefits of tourism, food and drink were maximised for the region's communities and residents. Through strategic investments and working in partnership, HIE sought not only

to boost economic development but also to preserve the region's tourism, food and drink assets and natural resources for future generations.

Tourism and food and drink businesses across the Highlands and Islands were operating in some of the most challenging economic and geo-political times they had ever known and HIE's latest business survey reported a fall in business confidence, with challenges around economic uncertainty, the increased cost of doing business, legislation and regulation, and access to labour all cited as barriers to growth.

It was important for HIE to recognise the scale of these challenges and also to understand the distinct regional opportunities and competitive advantages that exist across the Highlands and Islands and to support the region's businesses and communities to adapt and respond effectively. Tourism and food and drink were designated as regional transformational opportunities in HIE's five-year strategy, recognised for delivering major and cross-cutting impacts across the region that HIE would continue to enhance and develop.

The Board welcomed the update, noting in particular the vital role that tourism and food and drink play in focus areas. It was agreed that HIE had a strong story to tell regarding its support for these sectors and that the Tourism, Food and Drink team would work with colleagues in Communications to promote its role and achievements to industry and the wider public.

Challenges were highlighted, including HIE's desire to ensure that the principles of fair work were understood and embedded across the sectors, which often faced difficulties in attracting and retaining workforce. Another issue was value proposition, with Scotland now seen as an expensive visitor destination in global terms. The Head of Tourism, Food and Drink acknowledged these concerns, which HIE was seeking to address at its own hand and with partners, including through fair work conditionality and supporting businesses that recognised the importance of innovation and investing for future growth.

The Board thanked the Head of Tourism, Food and Drink and her team for an excellent and informative report.

Anna Miller left the meeting.

3.5 Transport

[Name removed due to Data Protection] joined the meeting.

The Senior Policy Manager updated the Board on current transport issues in the region as well as anticipated developments, focusing on how HIE was engaging and seeking to influence positive outcomes. The report covered issues relating to ferries, roads, rail, and aviation and reflected on findings from the recent research into regional transformational opportunities that underlined the need for transport infrastructure improvements to enable benefits realisation.

Looking ahead, it outlined HIE's priorities in relation to transport during 2025/26, including:

- engagement and collaboration with transport stakeholders to ensure that intelligence relating to future growth informs transport planning and strategic decision-making;
- influencing development of Islands Connectivity Plan Community Needs Assessments (CNAs) to ensure future ferries provision meets the needs of industries and communities;
- Working with Transport Scotland and local partners to support the delivery of regional developments which have been committed to and that were part of the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 – including an integrated transport plan for Fort William and development of the Inverness Station Redevelopment Masterplan, and
- Successful delivery of the Islands Business Resilience Fund.

The Board endorsed HIE's approach as described in the update, including noting the role of transport as a key enabler, along with housing and skills, to support delivery of regionally transformational opportunities. It was also important that HIE should continue to advocate for islands, with air connections as well as ferries playing a vital role in regional economic and community development. HIE should also use its influence with Transport Scotland to highlight the needs of rural communities, where car ownership was often a necessity and investment in roads was an urgent priority..

The Board thanked the Senior Policy Manager for a clear and helpful update and gave its support to the priorities outlined in the report.

[Name removed due to Data Protection] left the meeting.

3.6 Cairngorm

Elaine Hanton and Peter Dennis joined the meeting.

The Cairngorm Project Lead and Project Manager updated the HIE Board on the funicular's return to service in June, remaining non-safety critical remediation works to be undertaken, and other matters relating to Cairngorm.

The funicular was running once again, having been shut down for three weeks between 12 May and 2 June for maintenance works and remediation of a number of items that were not safety critical, but could affect structural durability over time. *[Sentences 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, 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, and due to commercial sensitivity].

The new CMSL Chief Executive was now in post and being supported by HIE and colleagues within the operating company. Recruitment for new CMSL Board members was due to start shortly.

[Sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity]. The Board also stressed the need for CMSL to reach a sustainable trading position in the medium term and HIE staff reported this had been discussed positively with the new company Chief Executive.

In noting the comprehensive report and actions being undertaken, it was also agreed that a meeting of the Board sub-group on Cairngorm would be arranged in August, *[part of sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity].*

Elaine Hanton and Peter Dennis left the meeting.

4.1 Performance update

The Director of Strategy and Regional Economy presented an update on HIE's 2025/26 performance, including outturns against primary in-year measures at 18 June.

The report demonstrated a good start to the year for productivity, innovation, green and capital asset targets. There had been progress with jobs, wage levels and employment opportunities in inclusive growth focus areas, although the overall volume of approved and pipeline jobs across the region was currently slightly behind straight line. HIE had supported 130.4 FTE jobs so far this year, with a total potential outturn of 231.1 FTEs and an average wage of £33,805 anticipated.

To date HIE had approved 290 interventions with a total approval value of £40.2m, 279 of which were with third-party clients. These include 87 direct financial interventions, 57 indirect financial interventions and 146 non-financial interventions.

HIE's pipeline of pre-approved projects currently included 212 potential interventions with a total approval value of £65.9m, of which 199 were with third-party clients. These included 180 direct financial interventions, 19 indirect financial interventions and 14 non-financial interventions.

The Board thanked the Director and the Planning and Partnerships team for the report.

4.2 Financial statement to 31 May 2025

The Director of Corporate Services presented HIE's financial statement for the first two months of 2025/26.

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

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

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

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

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

The Board thanked the Director for the report and endorsed the overall approach to budget management, which aimed to achieve a balance between control and flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. Ongoing work to improve alignment between HIE's targets for spend and performance was also commended.

4.3 Revenue budget outlook

The Director of Corporate Services outlined future scenarios for revenue budgets to support HIE's forward financial planning, noting that HIE's baseline revenue budget from the Scottish Government had effectively reduced by 11% since 2022/23.

HIE's budget had needed to absorb ongoing cost pressure from, for example, pay awards, inflation and increased Employers National Insurance contributions while seeking to balance meeting its Running the Business costs alongside delivering direct support to businesses and communities and working to realise opportunities from strategically important projects.

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

HIE's Best Value plan was delivering efficiency savings and enabling ongoing delivery within the baseline funding envelope while retaining the staffing complement to support effective delivery. Through active management and investment in business and digital transformation HIE had realised savings of over £2m as well as delivering improved customer service.

The agency had established a new Financial Saving and Efficiency forum to oversee the prioritisation and ongoing capture of savings and pursuit of efficiency opportunities. *[Sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].*

The Scottish Government's approach to Public Service Reform signalled an ongoing drive for efficiency which had been reflected in the Government Strategy and the Programme for Government. *[Sentences removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].*

Board members emphasised the value of continuing to work closely with the Scottish Government to underline the unprecedented scale of opportunity that the Highlands and Islands currently presented for Scotland's economy, while also demonstrating the agency's success in delivering Best Value in line with public service reform agenda. Forward planning over several years and partnership working with other public bodies, including through growth deals, were other important features of HIE's approach. The Board also requested that the forward financial plan should cover at least a three year period or otherwise meet Audit Scotland's recommendations for financial planning.

The Board thanked the Director and the Finance team for their report.

4.4 Corporate risk register

[Name removed due to Data Protection] joined the meeting.

The Board welcomed the latest corporate risk register, noting changes that had been made since the previous version in April. *[Sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs].*

4.5 Risk appetite statements

The Business Improvement Manager presented the latest set of risk appetite statements that support efficient and effective activity and decision making by HIE and were currently being updated. New statements had been created for regional transformational opportunities, net zero strategy and action plan, and multi-year revenue commitment.

It was agreed that a section on regulation should include HIE's own governance rules and procedures in addition to compliance with external rules and legislation. Communication with staff on risk appetite would continue to be important in ensuring consistency of approach and informing a culture of risk appetite within HIE.

The Board noted the report, supported the risk appetite approach being taken and thanked the Business Improvement Manager.

[Name removed due to Data Protection] left the meeting.

4.6 Risk and Assurance Committee annual activity report

Angus Campbell, as Chair of the Risk and Assurance Committee (RAC), presented the committee's 2024/25 annual report.

The RAC had met as planned four times in 2024/25 when items discussed were aligned to an agreed plan, covered key risk areas, and ensured sufficient focus on current and emerging issues. The Committee had been content with the quality of internal and external assurance reports and wider activity although

opportunities for improvement in transparency in some areas had been noted. Areas for ongoing consideration in 2025/26 were also identified.

Overall, the work of the Committee during the year had been comprehensive and should provide positive assurance to the Board in relation to the internal control environment. Mr Campbell thanked HIE staff for their support to the Committee, which was highly valued.

The Director of Corporate Services highlighted an error in the Committee's terms of reference, which stated: 'The HIE Board Chair and the HIE Accountable Officer should not be members of the Committee'. For consistency with other points in the terms of reference, this should have read: 'The *substantive* HIE Board Chair and the HIE Accountable Officer should not be members of the Committee'. The Board were agreed that this correction reflected the intention of the original wording and should be made.

4.7 Draft minute of the Risk and Assurance Committee, 4 June 2025

The Board welcomed the draft minute of the Risk and Assurance Committee meeting that had been held on 4 June 2025 and was included on the agenda for information. The minute will be presented for formal approval at the next meeting of the Committee, scheduled for 18 September.

It was agreed that development opportunities that were being arranged for Committee members should be offered to the full Board.

5 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION **CUSPAIREAN AIRSON FIOSRACHADH**

5.1 Northern Innovation Hub

[Name removed due to Data Protection] joined the meeting.

The Board welcomed an update paper on the Northern Innovation Hub, an Inverness City-Region Deal project delivered by HIE, which had entered its final year of delivery and would conclude in March 2026. Members noted that NIH was continuing to perform strongly and was on course to exceed targets for the number of enterprises supported.

An end-of-programme evaluation was planned and would capture lessons learned over the lifetime of the project, which had launched in 2018. *[Sentence removed in the interests of the effective conduct of public affairs, and due to commercial sensitivity]*. In discussion, the Senior Project Manager highlighted NIH's achievements in creating opportunities for young entrepreneurs and early stage businesses as key successes.

The Chair observed he had been impressed at how HIE staff had adapted the programme in response to early challenges and thanked the NIH team for their continuing excellent work in delivering the project towards conclusion.

[Name removed due to Data Protection] left the meeting.

5.2 Any other business

[Paragraph removed due to commercial sensitivity].

In closing his final Board meeting, the Chair observed that he had enjoyed a challenging and rewarding 11 years of Board membership, including five as Chair of HIE. He expressed his gratitude to members of the Board and Leadership team and colleagues throughout the organisation at all levels and all stages of their

careers. He also offered thanks to HIE's sponsorship team in the Scottish Government for their contribution to a positive and productive relationship.

In return, the Chief Executive thanked Mr Dodds, noting how much HIE staff had enjoyed working with him over the years and wishing him a long and happy retirement.

5.3 Forthcoming meeting dates

The Board noted and approved a forward schedule of meeting dates from February to December 2026.

The next HIE Board meeting will take place in An Lòchran, Inverness Campus, on Tuesday 26 August 2025.

Chris Roberts
Head of Communications
1 July 2025

APPROVED