

CHAIR'S REPORT, JUNE 2025

This report to the AGM covers the period from 25 June 2024 to 24 June 2025.

This has been and, looking ahead, will be a critical time for Sleat: land sales, wind farms and workers' camps affect us all. Roads, ferries and schools impact on our daily lives. Central to this is agency; our voice. We are told (constantly) by Highland Council, CalMac and the Scottish Government that they "want to hear what communities think". Yet there is scant (and decreasing) evidence that they listen. Democracy works when our voice is heard and helps to shape the outcome.

Whether this is around the resourcing of our school, the insipid reform of legislation on land reform or the onslaught of industrialisation across the island, it should be us, not a line in a spreadsheet in Inverness, not lobbyists in Holyrood and Westminster, that decide our future. To ignore a Community Council, is to ignore democracy at its grass roots and the voice of the community.

In last year's chair's report, I mentioned several ongoing issues. Two of these persist. First, the hard question of how we engage more young people in our community continues to challenge us with, it seems, no obvious or easy solution. The second is around land management. Whilst I'm pleased to say that we have a good relationship with Fearann Eilean Iarmain, the same cannot be said of Clan Donald Lands Trust. A third issue which will occupy much of our time for the foreseeable future, as I touched upon earlier, is the over-industrialisation of Skye and the

exploitation of our natural resources at the expense of our environment and quality of life, with little if any benefit returning to the community.

We must also address our own representation on the Community Council; with two members stepping down we have vacancies that co-option can fill. Being a community councillor and supporting your community is a unique privilege, you can contribute to making where we live a better place. I'd like to thank those members of the community council who have made so many positive contributions to our work and acknowledge their commitment to supporting and advancing all of our community. Whilst being a community councillor is not onerous, it involves far more than turning up to a meeting once a month.

I spoke last year of the importance of having a Local Place Plan. I'm delighted to say that thanks to the hard work of members of the council and others—and to the community itself for sharing their visions, ideas and concerns—we now have this. What we've produced is a significant resource for us. Our challenge now is to turn aspirations into projects, so they become real. We can do this through a Local Action Plan and I look forward to working with partners such as the Sleat Community Trust and Camuscross and Duisdale Initiative to make this happen.

In the end, genuine solutions come through dialogue. The Community Council has

strengthened existing relationships and built new ones over the last year. We continue, of course, to work closely with the Highland Council on many issues and we're grateful for the support of the many council staff who have helped us progress issues and challenges over the last year. We're also grateful for the support and hard work of our ward Councillors, John Finlayson, Drew Millar and, until recently, Calum Munro. We are delighted to welcome Chrissie Gillies as our new Councillor, replacing Calum. We note her depth of community knowledge and relationship with Sleat through Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.

I'd like to thank Hans Petri for his work connecting Sleat with both Broadford and Strath, and Kyleakin and Kylerhea Community Councils which, for now at least, I will pick up. Given what lies ahead in terms of power line upgrades, wind farms and workers' camps blighting our island, collaboration and cooperation is much needed. We're working closely with Community Councils across Highland to make sure that communities are not ignored. My thanks to Tim Shone for attending the recent meeting in Beaully on

this matter. Thanks to Tim also for stepping up to represent the Community Council on the new Sound of Sleat Ferry Committee and to Rob Ware for facilitating the establishment of this new body.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge Hans Petri, who had stepped back to be an associate member and is now stepping down from that role. Our long-standing secretary, Rob Ware, is leaving the Community Council after many years of tireless service. We wish him all the very best with his move. Irreplaceable as Rob is, I'd like to thank Kate Duffus for stepping forward to take on the pivotal role of Secretary and all the other office bearers for their hard work over the last year, particularly Janet MacDonald who has stepped in to chair meetings when I've not been able to.

The year ahead promises to be challenging, we need strong voices. Above all, we need to work together to ensure that our community can be heard and can thrive.

Dr Andy Williamson
June 2025