

The Highland Council

Minute of Meeting of the **Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall, on Wednesday 22 April 2015, at 10.30 am.

Present:

Dr D Alston	Mrs I McCallum
Mrs J Barclay	Mr D Millar
Mrs B Campbell	Mrs M Paterson
Dr I Cockburn	Mr M Rattray
Mr M Finlayson	Mr I Renwick
Mr H Fraser	Mrs F Robertson
Mr R Greene	Dr A Sinclair
Mrs A MacLean	

Non Members also Present:

Mr G Farlow

Officials in Attendance:

Mr C McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform, Chief Executive's Office
Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Mr N Downie, Performance Officer, Community Services
Mr D Paterson Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service
Mr C Simpson, Principal Film and Tourism Officer, Development & Infrastructure Service
Ms N Young, Area Education Manager - West, Care and Learning Service
Mrs H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Mr R Bain, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms T Luxton, Area Community Services Manager
Mr S Young, Assistant Area Manager, Community Services
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service
Mr S Fyffe, Civic Officer, Finance Service
Mr A Rattanaphithak, Civic Officer – Youth Trainee

Also in Attendance:

Mr S Robertson, Director of Digital Highlands and Islands, Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Mr T Campbell, North Highland Initiative
Mr R Mair, Chief Executive, COSLA

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr H Fraser in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr C Fraser, Mr J Gordon, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr A Rhind, Ms M Smith, Mr J Stone and Mrs C Wilson.

2. Declarations of Interest

Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:

- Item 5: Mr R Greene (non-financial)
- Item 10: Mrs A Maclean (non-financial)
- Item 11: Mr G Farlow (non-financial)

3. Highlands and Islands Enterprise - Digital Highland Presentation

Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean – Taisbeanadh Gàidhealtachd Dhidseatach

Mr Stuart Robertson, Director of Digital Highlands and Islands, Highlands and Islands Enterprise gave a presentation to the meeting in regard to Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband project which was being rolled out in the Highlands and Islands in partnership with BT and HIE.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- a request that Members be circulated with a copy of Mr Robertson's presentation;
- reference was made to self-help schemes being progressed by communities which required significant levels of funding and it was suggested that it would assist communities if they had complete information in regard to the rollout of the Project and the specific areas to be covered;
- concern that BT's priority was to ensure coverage in those areas which had the most subscribers rather than the more remote rural areas;
- it would be helpful if Members and the public could be provided with a single point of contact for information in regard to the Project and also a map of existing and proposed cabinets and for that to be updated regularly, noting that a key issue for the public was the distance they would be located from a cabinet given that this determined broadband speed; Mr S Robertson advised that he would act as the point of contact for Members, and that members of the public be referred to either Digital Scotland or Digital Highlands and Islands websites to access the latest information in regard to their area;
- reference was made to the launch of a new cabinet in Evanton and the need to raise awareness at a grass roots level in the locality about the new services available;
- clarification in regard to whether new technologies had been developed to address any gaps which remained or whether funding was the critical issue in this regard;
- a point in regard to Community Broadband Scotland and whether it was adequately funded to help communities to deliver solutions, its success in this regard and whether its funding allocation would be increased going forward;
- that BT also required to upgrade its existing infrastructure to improve the delivery of their services; and
- a query in regard to what should be sought in terms of upgrading services and new technologies in the future once the current tranche of funding had been utilised.

Thereafter the Chair thanked Mr Robertson for attending the meeting and his presentation.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that a copy be e-mailed to Members.

4. North Tourism Initiative Iomairt Turasachd a Tuath

There had been circulated Report No SRC/015/15 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which updated Members on the Council's work to develop tourism in the Skye and Ross and Cromarty areas. This included detailing work with the North Highland Initiative which provided some strategic context to accompany the presentation being given to the Committee by Mr Tom Campbell of the North Highland Initiative on their work to develop tourism in the Northern Highlands. These activities all supported the Council's programme commitment "Working with the Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and private sector partners, the Council will maximise the tourism potential of the Highland area."

Mr T Campbell gave a presentation on the North Highland Initiative with a particular focus on its North Coast 500 project which he advised had been designed to bring together the best of the North Highlands in one iconic touring route round the coastal edges of the Highlands.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- that the North Coast 500 initiative and the tourism and economic benefits it would bring to the towns and villages along the route and to the wider area should be welcomed;
- issues around the roads infrastructure in some areas of the route and the lack of funding available to the Council to undertake improvements, specific reference being made to the condition of the road in Dornie;
- it was suggested that there was a collective responsibility to support tourism growth in the Area by extending the length of tourist season and opening hours of tourist facilities and restaurants in the Area, and improving facilities for tourists;
- it was noted that VisitScotland should better promote that in some areas, such as the Isle of Skye, the tourist season extended over the whole year and that the Area benefited from high quality facilities;
- it was also important to take a positive approach and focus on promoting and attracting visitors to the facilities that were currently available in towns and villages in the Area;
- it was suggested that the Highlands to the north of Inverness was not well promoted by VisitScotland and that the North Coast 500 represented an exciting high profile project which would help address this issue;
- the opportunities for North Coast 500 to link in with the Inverness and Loch Ness Tourism BID area and the Isle of Skye;
- a request that further information be provided on the towns and villages that would be located on the North Coast 500 route and the opportunities to promote events being held along the route, for example through links with the North Highland Initiative's and town and community websites; a question was also raised in regard to how local communities and organisations could access North Coast 500 branding; it was confirmed that the Principal Film

- and Tourism Officer would arrange for the relevant contact details for the North Highland Initiative on these matters to be circulated to Members;
- there was also a significant amount of community involvement and volunteer support involved in the tourism industry in the Area such as the Invergordon Tourism Alliance which it was suggested was not recognised in the report and there was a need for the Council to improve links in this regard;
 - that there was a need for the Council to take a more strategic approach to the upgrading and maintenance of harbours in the Highlands to make them a more attractive destination for visitors and to maximise benefits from marine tourism and the cruise liner industry with specific reference being made to Portree Harbour;
 - there may be significant opportunities to support tourism growth in the Area by maximising the potential benefits through any City-Region deal to be agreed and information was sought on any proposals in this regard; the importance of the Region to the deal and repositioning Inverness in the tourist map of Scotland was also emphasised including the need to better promote tourism on the north and east coasts;
 - a query on the strategy to be adopted in regard to signposting the North Coast 500 route on roads and in towns and villages; and
 - a point expressing concern at the removal of tourist signs in the area which had occurred with reference being made to specific issues in the Lochcarron area;

Thereafter the Chair thanked Mr Campbell for attending the meeting and for his presentation.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the presentation given by the North Highland Initiative;
- ii. **NOTED** the approach that has been taken by the Council to develop tourism including entering into service delivery contracts with destination organisations and;
- iii. **AGREED** that tourism growth could be further supported in the Area by improving links with community and volunteer support, and also maximising potential benefits through any City-Region Deal to be agreed.

5. Landfill Communities Fund Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais

Declaration of Interest - Mr R Greene declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Trustee of the Wester Ross Fisheries Trust, but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No SRC/016/15 by the Director of Community Services on an application to the Highland Council Landfill Communities Fund.

The Committee **APPROVED** for the Council's interest the application as detailed in the Appendix to the Report.

6. Area Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges **Prògram Càraidh Sgìreil airson Rathaidean is Dhrochaidean**

There had been circulated Report No SRC/017/15 by the Director of Community Services on the maintenance programmes for roads and bridges for the Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area 2015/16.

In presenting the report, the Area Community Services Manager advised of the following additions to the Programme in relation to Ward 6:-

Route U3091: Highland Hotel Access, Strathpeffer (overlay works)

Route U3705: Incheril, Kinlochewe (inlay works)

During discussion Members raised the following points:-

- that a presentation be arranged for the next meeting on the different techniques used in road repairs, correlating costs and their suitability;
- clarification was sought on the position regarding the deployment of a Hot Box machine in Ward 8; the Area Community Services Manager advised that she would update Mrs F Robertson directly on this matter;
- that clarification be provided on the Council's policy in regard to the cutting of grass verges as agreed by the Community Services Committee including an explanation of the definitions included therein, the areas to be cut and proposed frequency of cuts and opportunities for Member involvement;
- in regard to the above it was requested that a map showing those areas that would be maintained in terms of the Council's policy on verge maintenance be presented to ward business meetings as soon as practicable;
- that clarity be provided on the next project on the list that would be progressed in the event that the works at Balnabruach were not required;
- concern about the lack of ongoing maintenance to pavements due to the demands on the budget which it was suggested was compromising safety and in some cases the resilience of the pavements; the Area Community Works Manager confirmed that she would arrange for any specific concerns Members had in relation to this matter to be investigated, and also discuss directly with Mr M Rattray his concerns on this matter;
- issues around the need to consider a more permanent cost effective solution to temporary cold tar repairs to potholes; concern was also expressed in regard to the cost to the Council arising from compensation claims to damage to vehicles caused by potholes;
- that there was an urgent need to upgrade the road in Dornie and requesting that this issue be given immediate attention;
- that the staff within the Service be commended on their work in the Area within a restricted budget allocation;
- concern at the continuing pressures on the budget for the maintenance of roads in the Highland and the need for external Government funding to be made available to the Council to ensure that the condition of the roads did not deteriorate any further and also so that improvements could be undertaken; it was also suggested that the underfunding of roads maintenance in the Highlands was a historical issue;
- it was important that any road resurfacing works were not undertaken until such time as any water/flooding issues on a route were resolved; in regard to

- this issue it was suggested that the opportunities to have outlets constructed in known problem areas on routes be investigated;
- a query in regard to whether Members could be provided with a programme for gully cleaning and road markings in the Area; in this regard it was suggested that arrangements be made for Members to be provided with information on the planned schedule of maintenance works referred to in the report within the Area;
 - the opportunities to cooperate with the Trunk Roads Authority in regard to undertaking road markings on the wider roads network in the Area;
 - that consideration be given to the potential to establish an emergency fund to cover any emergency works that may be required;
 - the opportunities to involve community councils more in the development of the Programme and to improve communication by having more direct contact between officers and community councils;
 - a request that the patching works proposed to Craig Road, Dingwall in Ward 9 be extended up to the bridge on the road; and
 - the opportunities to deploy contractors to undertake works in the event there was any slippage on the Programme and the Council did not have the necessary resources to undertake the works;

The Committee

- i. **APPROVED** the Maintenance Programmes for Roads and Bridges for Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area 2015/16 listed in Appendix 2 and 3 of the Report subject to the inclusion of additional works in Ward 6 on the U3091 and U3705 routes as outlined by the Area Community Services Manager;
- ii. **AGREED** that a presentation be arranged for the next meeting on the different techniques used in road repairs, correlating costs and their suitability;
- iii. **AGREED** that a map showing those areas that would be maintained in terms of the Council's policy on verge maintenance be presented to ward business meetings as soon as practicable; and
- iv. **AGREED** that arrangements be made for Members to be provided with information on the planned schedule of maintenance works referred to in the report within the Area.

7. Proposed Traffic Calming Feature, West Road, Muir of Ord Feart Socrachadh Trafraig a Thathar a' Moladh, Rathad an Iar, Am Blàr Dubh

There had been circulated Report No SRC/018/15 by the Director of Community Services informing members of the objection to this application.

In discussion it was confirmed that there had been extensive consultation with the public and Members in regard to the proposal which it was suggested represented the best available solution to address the problem.

The Committee **APPROVED** the introduction of 1 No build-out on the West Road, Muir of Ord.

8. Common Good Funds Maoin Maith Choitchinn

There had been circulated Reports Nos SRC/019/15 – SRC/023/15 by the Head of Policy and Reform which provided information on the following Common Good Funds: Cromarty, Dingwall, Fortrose and Rosemarkie, Invergordon and Tain.

In regard to the Tain Common Good Fund, the Senior Ward Manager circulated details of a formal offer received in respect of the lease of the Net Salmon Fishing Rights which she indicated was a conservation bid, and advised that the recommendation to Members was that the offer be accepted. She also advised that an Options Appraisal Paper had been drafted by the Head of Development and Environment in relation to the mussels fishery and discussed with the Ward Members and community council representatives. The consensus arising from those discussions was that operation should continue but be closely monitored, and opportunities to reduce costs and obtain grant income investigated.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the budgets for the five Common Good Funds for 2015/16 as detailed in the reports: Cromarty, Dingwall, Fortrose and Rosemarkie, Invergordon and Tain; and
- ii. in regard to the Tain Common Good Fund: (a) **AGREED** to homologate acceptance of the bid for the grazing lets; (b) **AGREED** to accept the formal offer received for the lease of the Net Salmon Fishing Rights; and (c) **NOTED** that an Options Appraisal Paper had been drafted in relation to the mussel fishery.

9. Street Naming – New Housing Developments Ainmeachadh Sràide – Leasachaidhean Ùra Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report Nos SRC/024/15 – SRC/025/15 by the Head of Policy and Reform concerning the creation of addresses, following consultation with the respective Community Councils and local Members, for new housing developments at Alness and Balmacara.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the naming of the new street in Alness as Wallace Ross Place;
- ii. **HOMOLOGATED** the naming of the new development in Balmacara as “The Dairy”;

10. Associated School Group Overviews Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

a) Fortrose Academy Associated School Group Overview

Declaration of Interest - Mrs A Maclean declared a non-financial interest in this on the grounds that her sister was a Head Teacher within the Associated School Group, but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No SRC/026/15 by the Director of Care and Learning which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Fortrose Academy Associated School Group (ASG) and provided useful links to further information in relation to these schools.

During discussion Members raised the following points:-

- issues around the difficulties in recruiting primary head teachers across Highland and the opportunities to make such posts more attractive to potential recruits for example by providing additional administrative support; it was noted that a piece of work in this regard was being progressed by the Head of Education;
- that the potential for Fortrose Academy to provide administrative support to primary schools within the Associated School Group be investigated; the Education Quality Improvement Manager confirmed that he would arrange for this matter to be explored further at an ASG level; and
- discussion around the progress being made within schools in regard to securing improvements through self-evaluation.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

b) Gairloch High School Associated School Group Overview

There had been circulated Report No SRC/027/15 by the Director of Care and Learning which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Gairloch High School Associated School Group (ASG) and provided useful links to further information in relation to these schools.

During discussion, Members expressed concern in relation to the problems caused by fluctuations in the population in rural areas in terms of the impact on staffing levels and the curriculum at rural schools in these areas. It was suggested there was a need to assess school roll projections and staffing levels more frequently than the current annual review.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

**11. Wester Ross Biosphere Project
Pròiseact Biosphere Rois an Iar**

Declaration of Interest – Mr G Farlow declared a non-financial interest in this item as Chair of the North West Highlands Geopark, but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No SRC/028/15 by the Head of Policy and Reform on the progress towards the submission of an application to UNESCO to renew the designation of the Beinn Eighe Biosphere Reserve. Currently UNESCO guidelines required a larger area, including substantial population and following consultation with communities, the proposal was to include the western portion of Ward 6, creating the Wester Ross Biosphere.

In discussion, Members welcomed the Project and the potential economic benefits it could bring to the Wester Ross area.

The Committee **AGREED** that the Council should sign an application to UNESCO, to designate an area of Ward 6 as a Biosphere.

12. Presentation on the Findings of the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy

Taisbeanadh de Thoraidhean a' Choimisein airson Deamocrasaidh Ionadail a Neartachadh

Mr Rory Mair, Chief Executive, COSLA, gave a presentation to the meeting on the findings of the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy during which he outlined the evidence gathered by the Commission from other countries in regard to different models of local democracy, and the key findings, principles and propositions set out in the Commission's report.

Following the presentation and during discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- it was suggested that the case for increased levels of centralisation had been based on the need to achieve savings and therefore any proposal to strengthen local democracy would require a different funding model for local authorities; it was also suggested there was a need to consider a fairer system of funding local government;
- that the feedback from the public in the Highlands was that action to strengthen local democracy should be progressed as soon as possible;
- it was suggested that a major challenge was to consider how to engage people in the democratic process by developing a more participative form of local democracy, reference being made to the low turn out at most elections and difficulties in attracting people to serve on community councils;
- that clarification be provided on the process for determining local priorities through the Community Planning Partnership and on the opportunities for the Partnership to engage with communities and the third sector to consider how best to deliver and fund services at a local level; the Head of Policy and Reform advised that she would arrange for a briefing on the ongoing work being undertaken by the Community Planning Partnership in this regard to be circulated to Members;
- that it would be helpful for Members to receive further information on other countries with a high level of participation on the basis that lessons could be learned from how these countries operated; Mr R Mair advised that he could provide Members with the evidence which had been gathered in the preparation of the Commission's report in this regard;
- information was sought on the next steps and timescales associated with taking forward the Commission's findings and the role of local authorities in terms of consultation; Mr R Mair advised that the Commission had prepared a plan to take forward its findings and that he would arrange for this to be shared with Members;
- concern that procurement represented a significant barrier for communities in terms of delivering services particularly with larger contracts;
- that the Commission's report demonstrated that a one size fits all approach did not work and that there was a real desire within communities to have more local decision making powers and budgets; and

- that using the evidence gathered in relation to the models operated in other countries it was suggested that proposals to strengthen local democracy in the Highlands should be developed as early as possible and reference was made to the potential for Skye, Ross and Cromarty to be used as a pilot area in this regard; there was also a need to consider how best to consult with communities going forward.

Thereafter the Chair thanked Mr R Mair for attending the meeting and for his presentation.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

13. Minutes

Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and the Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area Committee held on 4 February 2015, which had been approved by the Highland Council at its meeting on 12 February 2015.

The meeting ended at 2.45pm.