

**The Highland Council
Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee held the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummie, Golspie on Wednesday, 16 September 2015 at 10.30am

Present:

Mr G Farlow
Mr B Fernie
Mrs G Coghill
Mrs D Mackay
Mr D Mackay
Mr W MacKay

Mr H Morrison
Mr N Macdonald
Mr G Phillips
Mr M Reiss
Mr J Rosie
Mr R Saxon

Officials in attendance:

Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager/Clerk , Chief Executive's Office
Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure, Development and Infrastructure Service
Mr C Stewart, Area Community Services Manager, Community Services
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Mr B Northedge, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning
Mrs S McKandie, Benefits and Welfare Manager, Finance Service
Mr K Masson, Policy Coordinator – Climate Change, Chief Executive's Office
Ms S Tarrant, Public Relations Officer, Chief Executive's Office
Mr G Cameron, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service

Also in Attendance:

Items 4 and 5: Chief Inspector I MacLelland, Police Scotland
Item 6: Group Manager M Loynd, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Preliminaries

The Chair reported on a number of preliminary matters as follows:-

- that as this was the final meeting of the Area Committee she wished to thank Members, officials, and partners for their contributions over the past three years and looked forward to the new arrangements for strengthening local democracy and the benefits the separate local decision making forums for Caithness and Sutherland would deliver for communities;
- that meetings of the Deprived Area Fund Working Group had been held on 26 May and 1 September 2015 and the minutes of those meetings were detailed at Item 21 of the agenda; she advised that this was a work in progress and it was anticipated that a final report on the Fund would be brought to Members in December 2015; and
- in regard to the refugee crisis work was ongoing within the Council to respond to the emergency situation and the Chair provided an assurance that Members in Caithness and Sutherland would be given every opportunity to consider appropriate ways in which they could lend their support.

Following on from the above, Mr D Mackay advised that it had been agreed by the Caithness Members at a recent Ward Business Meeting, that a report on the twinning arrangements between Wick and the town of Klaksvik in the Faroe Isles would be

submitted to this meeting of the Area Committee. He expressed concern that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda without prior consultation with the local Members and he sought an explanation for this intervention.

In response, the Chair explained she had been contacted by Administration Leaders asking that the item be withdrawn from the agenda on the basis that it was a specific Caithness issue and would more appropriately be dealt with through the new local arrangements for strengthening local democracy in Caithness, and that she had subsequently e-mailed all Members to advise them accordingly. She suggested that Mr D Mackay contact the Leader of the Council for further clarification on the matter.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the updates.

1. Apologies for Absence
Liesgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Bremner, Mr J McGillivray, Mrs L Munro and Ms G Ross.

2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 7: Mr G Farlow, Mr G Phillips, Mrs D Mackay, and Mr W Mackay (non-financial)

Item 9: Mr M Reiss (non-financial)

Item 12: Mr G Farlow (financial)

Item 13: Mr H Morrison (non-financial)

Item 15: Mr G Farlow (non-financial)

Item 18: Mr G Phillips (non-financial)

3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2015 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee.

4. Police – Area Performance Summary
Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No CS/21/15 dated 2 September 2015 by the North Area Commander for Police Scotland which provided a local summary update for Members on progress with reference to the local priorities within the Highland 2014-2017 Policing Plan.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- that a presentation for Members be arranged on the partnership work being progressed locally as part of the national strategy on counter terrorism, Operation CONTEST;
- that the leaflet produced by Road Safety Scotland for tourists would be circulated to Members and feedback welcomed, and arrangements would be made for its distribution to ferry ports at Ullapool and Gills Bay;

- concern at issues of speeding and the lack of courtesy shown by drivers on single track roads, and the opportunities for the Police to target drivers by being more visible on those routes;
- it was suggested that a benefit of a single Police force was the ability to bring in additional support to the Area which had not been available previously; reference was to recent incidents in the Area and appreciation was expressed to Police Scotland for their excellent work on these cases;
- the opportunities for Police Officers when attending community council meetings to provide more specific local information around incidents such as speeding in the relevant community council area;
- that the increased reporting of domestic abuse and sexual crimes be welcomed and the potential for hairdressers and vets to act as a link in terms of reporting incidents was also highlighted;
- the opportunities to highlight damage to geological sites, in conjunction with Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Geological Code;
- in terms of the priorities of road safety, alcohol abuse/misuse and anti-social behaviour it was suggested that the District Partnerships had an important role in examining trends over a longer period and tackling these issues through a partnership approach;
- that consideration be given to the provision of additional Council signage or directional arrows at junctions at specific tourist locations in the Area, and the opportunities for Police Scotland's name to be incorporated into any such signage;
- issues in regard to the feedback received from residents and the Association of Caithness Community Councils in regard to lengthy road closures following fatal accidents and an assurance was sought that all necessary action was being taken to minimise the time taken to re-open routes in such circumstances;
- the opportunities for Police Scotland to meet with organisations such as Ormlie Community Association to provide information and discuss concerns in relation to legal highs;
- issues around the ability of older people to report incidents given that local Police Stations may not always be manned and that they may not have access to a mobile phone, online services or the Internet;
- the work being undertaken by the Police in regard to driving offences be welcomed; it was also suggested that the reduction in the drink driving limit was having a positive impact which would be reflected in future statistics;
- a comment that the overall trends showed there had been a steady decline in levels of crime over a number of years and that this be welcomed;
- that further clarification be provided on the information contained in the report in relation to stop and searches around the supply of drugs;
- a point in regard to the potential workload associated with Police Scotland administering the forthcoming legislation on air weapons;
- there was a perception that the number of Police officers in Thurso had declined over a number of years and it was important to be aware of this issue in terms of the figures shown in the report and in the future;
- that issues around seatbelt incidents in the Area be considered by the District Partnerships and reference was made to the importance of using the seatbelt convincer at events to demonstrate the impact of not wearing a seatbelt; it was noted that Police Scotland's seatbelt convincer in Highland had been serviced and made available to the Road Safety Unit for use;
- that it was important that further discussions take place with Police Scotland in regard to the most effective method of engagement and

consultation through the new arrangements for strengthening local democracy in Caithness and Sutherland, with an emphasis on avoiding duplication

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress report in relation to the 5 Priorities: Road Safety, Alcohol and Drug Abuse/Misuse, Antisocial Behaviour/Disorder, Crimes of Dishonesty and Protecting People;
- ii. **AGREED** that a presentation be arranged for Members on the partnership work being progressed locally as part of the national strategy on counter terrorism, Operation CONTEST;
- iii. **AGREED** that arrangements be made for the leaflet produced for tourists by Road Safety Scotland to be circulated to Members; and
- iv. **AGREED** that further discussions take place with Police Scotland in regard to the most effective method of engagement through the new arrangements for strengthening local democracy in Caithness and Sutherland, with an emphasis on avoiding duplication.

5. Safer Caithness Gallaibh nas Sàbhailte

There had been circulated Report No CS/22/15 dated 1 September 2015 by the Chief Superintendent, Highland and Islands Division for Police Scotland which provided some background information on a new Safer Caithness initiative to address public and private space issues based on the Inverness pilot. The initiative will see local resources combine to respond quickly to local problems to ensure early intervention, better outcomes and value for money.

Arising from the report, Chief Inspector MacLelland advised that an invitation would be extended to local Members to attend a meeting of the Safer Caithness Response Team.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the start date of the trial of 7 September 2015;
- ii. **NOTED** the willingness of agencies to work together and that an invitation would be extended to local Members to attend a meeting of the Safer Caithness Response Team; and
- iii. **AGREED** to support the initiative and receive a further debrief on progress.

6. Fire and Rescue Service – Area Performance Summary Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn - Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No. CS/23/15 dated 7 September 2015 by the Local Senior Officer which provided an update on the progress against the priorities outlined in the Area Committee Plan for Caithness and Sutherland 2015 - 2016. The report also contained previously agreed information and performance as requested by Members, and attached the Performance Report and Area Committee Plan for 2015-16.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- that Mr Gordon Cook, Community Safety Adviser be thanked for all his work at a national and local level, on the occasion of his retirement;
- a point on the efforts being made to achieve a good gender balance within the Service;
- concern at the figures shown in the report in relation to station availability in specific wards and the associated risks particularly in terms of securing public safety; in regard to Lochinver Station, the Group Manager advised that he would provide regular updates to Mr H Morrison on progress with the action being taken to resolve the staffing issues at the Station;
- the need to review the national recruitment entry standards for retained firefighters to address the recruitment difficulties being experienced, for example in relation to fitness and academic requirements;
- in regard to the above it was suggested that a barrier in terms of recruitment was the time commitment required of new recruits as part of their initial training; the Group Manager provided an overview of the action being taken by the Service in this regard and confirmed that he would arrange for a progress update to be provided to Members at their next meeting;
- the opportunities for retained fire fighters to be paid for the travel time involved in attending courses; the Group Manager confirmed that he would raise this issue with his Local Senior Officer;
- an update be provided on progress to upgrade Thurso Fire Station to provide suitable accommodation for both male and female firefighters; the Group Manager advised that he would seek a progress update for Mr D Mackay from the relevant Property Officer within the Service;
- that the recent 'High Fires' youth event held at Thurso High School had been extremely successful and it was suggested that consideration be given to rolling out the initiative further across the Area; the Group Manager confirmed that he would investigate the potential to roll out the initiative further, referring also to the staffing and resourcing implications of holding these events;
- a point in regard to the reasons why householders were still without smoke detectors and the action being taken to address this issue;
- in terms of station availability that more flexibility be given to the firefighters on the ground to decide whether they had sufficient numbers to turn out to incidents in their locality; and
- noting that at a recent meeting of the District Partnership, the Chief Executive of High Life Highland had confirmed that the organisation would be sympathetic to any request by an employee to volunteer for the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Area Performance Report and that feedback would be provided to Members in response to a number of specific points, as detailed in the Minute;
- ii. **AGREED** that the potential for the 'High Fires' initiative to be rolled out further across Caithness and Sutherland be investigated; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a progress update be provided to Members on the action being taken to manage the amount of time new recruits were required to commit as part their initial training.

7. Advice and Information Services: End of Year Monitoring
Seirbheisean Comhairleachaidh agus Fiosrachaidh: Sgrùdadh Deireadh Bliadhna

Declaration of Interests:- Mr G Farlow as Vice Chair of North West Sutherland, Mrs D Mackay and Mr G Phillips as Directors of East Sutherland Citizens Advice Bureau and Mr W Mackay as a Director of Caithness Citizen's Advice Bureau all declared a non-financial interest in this item, but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CS/24/15 dated 31 August 2015 by the Director of Finance which advised that advice and information services were recognised as a critical approach in alleviating poverty in the Council's Programme and Single Outcome Agreement. The report provided Members with the end of year monitoring of advice and information services in Highland for 2014/15.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- that the Council's advice and information services and the CABs be praised for the excellent and high standard of service it provided to its customers in providing a vital link and safety net, particularly for vulnerable people in the Highlands;
- the opportunities for the content and language used in Council tax reminder letters to be less threatening in the case of regular payers who may have missed a payment, for example due to being on holiday or having a hospital appointment;
- that the change in the legislation which had resulted in a reduction in pay day lending be welcomed;
- concern was also expressed that this extraction of money from the local economy through welfare reforms would have a multiplier effect in terms of the impact on local businesses/retailers and therefore the work being done through the advice and information services and CABs to retain money in the local economy was extremely important;
- in regard to the above it was also important that going forward the Council's budget for advice and information services was maintained both in the interests of the Council and its customers;
- concern at the impact the demand for advice in regard to pension pots was having on the workload of both the Council's advice and information services and the CABs; and
- the importance of considering how further advice and support could be provided at an early stage to those customers experiencing council tax debt and rent arrears to prevent them going further into debt.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. level of support provided to customers across Highland in 2014/15; the continued increase in demand for these services; and the pressures associated in delivering the intensive resource required to resolve complex cases;
- ii. positive impact of the Mental Health Project in addressing issues presented by vulnerable clients which has current funding until the end of March 2016;
- iii. positive impact of the Reaching the Unreached service in preventing households being evicted and avoiding additional pressures on the Council's homeless services. This service has Scottish Legal Aid Board funding until end of September 2016;

- iv. potential of the Midwifery project to support new and expectant mothers in the Highlands to maximise their incomes which has funding until end of May 2016; and
- v. outcomes being achieved in supporting Highland residents to mitigate the effects of poverty.

The Committee **AGREED** that consideration be given to how further advice and support could be provided at an early stage to those customers experiencing council tax debt and rent arrears.

8. Capital Projects – Investing in Caithness and Sutherland Pròiseactan Calpa – A' Tasgadh ann an Gallaibh agus Cataibh

There had been circulated Report No CS/25/15 dated 3 September 2015 by the Director of Finance which listed the capital projects included in the Council's Capital Programme being delivered in the Caithness and Sutherland area in financial year 2015/16 and the in-year budgets for these projects.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- that the level of information contained in the report was not helpful in terms of Member scrutiny and that consideration be given to future reports replicating the format of reports submitted to strategic committees on the Capital Programme, which provided more information in regard to the budget allocation, spend to date, estimated outturn and comments in relation to individual projects;
- concern at the lack of capital projects ongoing in Sutherland and particularly North and West Sutherland, it being suggested that there was not an equitable distribution of capital monies across the Area;
- a contrary view that the report provided a snapshot of the current budget allocation of what was a rolling programme and that Sutherland had benefited from capital projects in other years;
- that the completion of the Thurso Library project be welcomed; and
- a progress update was sought and provided in regard to the capital works being undertaken on the A99 Keiss to North Keiss road.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the budgeted capital projects being delivered in the Caithness and Sutherland area in 2015/16; and
- ii. **AGREED** that consideration be given to future reports replicating the format of reports submitted to strategic committees on the Capital Programme, to allow for further Member scrutiny.

9. Grounds Maintenance Performance Monitoring Report Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Dèanadais a thaobh Obair-càraidh Raointean

Declaration of Interest:- Mr M Reiss declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that family members attended Thurso High School, 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 CS/26/15 dated 19 August 2015 by the Director of Community Services which detailed performance management

information of the Grounds Maintenance Services from April to mid-August 2015. Members are invited to note the management actions taken to deliver contracted and SLA grounds maintenance operations.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- that the performance monitoring pass rate for April 2015 had been disappointing and there was a need to improve on this figure in the next financial year;
- that Golspie Community Council had asked for clarification in regard to who was responsible for an area at Shore Street, Golspie which was not being maintained; the Area Community Services Manager advised that he would check and report back directly to Mr G Phillips on this matter;
- concern that the weed killing which had been undertaken in Thurso should have been done at an earlier stage in the season;
- that there were restrictions in terms of legislation and health and safety regulations on the type of weed killers that could be used and method of application which resulted in treatments being carried out later in the season;
- a comment in regard to grass cuttings which had been left on the sports field at Thurso High School;
- a point in regard to whether the current grounds maintenance staffing levels in North West Sutherland and vehicle provided were adequate given the large geographical area which had to be covered; the Area Community Services Manager advised that he would discuss this matter directly with Mr H Morrison outwith the meeting;
- it was important that in the consideration of any budget cuts that the public garden areas in Thurso be continued to be maintained;
- that clarification be provided on the Council's statutory duty in terms of road verge maintenance and concern in regard to the road safety implications of verges and visibility splays not being cut;
- in regard to the above it was noted that the Council had agreed as a saving that road verges and other key areas deemed necessary would be cut once annually towards the end of the year and that in the current year this had been brought forward to September; however following Member discussions with the Director of Community Services on the policy, it had been confirmed that the first cut would be undertaken in July in the next financial year before the new school session commenced, and that consideration would be given to a second cut being carried out in some areas later in the season if required; and
- that the point be reinforced to staff on the need to remove grass cuttings from paths and head stones within cemeteries given the sensitivity of these areas.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the performance management and remedial action information provided on the grounds maintenance service set out in this report;
- ii. **NOTED** the management action taken to address the performance issues identified; and
- iii. **AGREED** to review required service standards at future Ward Business Meetings.

**10. Winter Maintenance Priority Network 2015/16
Lìonra Prìomhachais Obair-càraidh Geamhraidh – 2015/16**

There had been circulated Report No CS/27/15 dated 13 August 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on winter maintenance preparations and arrangements for the 2015/16 winter period and invited the Committee to agree the network of Primary & Secondary Priority routes within Caithness and Sutherland.

In presenting the report, the Area Community Services Manager advised of a correction to paragraph 3.1 of the report which should read that there would be a total reduction in the winter maintenance budget in years 2015/16 and 2016/17 of £0.48m, and not £0.84 as stated in the report. He also advised that to achieve the required savings a review of the gritting fleet had been undertaken and he outlined the rationale by which two gritting vehicles would be removed from the fleet in the Area, one at Brora and the other at Lochinver, while noting that the fleet would have to be reduced further by two vehicles in the next financial year. He advised that there would no change in the treatment of the primary and secondary routes in those areas which would be in accordance with the agreed policy.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- concern at the loss of two gritting vehicles in the Area as part of the requirement to achieve savings on the budget and concern as to how the level of service in terms of staff and vehicle resources could be maintained if an extreme winter was experienced;
- in terms of the impact of the removal of one gritting vehicle from Lochinver that clarification be provided on the proposal for early morning school runs within the area and also in respect of the school run to Ullapool High School;
- that despite the reductions which had to be achieved in the winter maintenance budget it was suggested that the overall service would remain similar to that in the previous year;
- that as further reductions were made to the budget it was important to communicate the message to the public that they could do more to improve their own safety at marginal extra expense, such as fitting snow tyres to vehicles and snow grips to footwear;
- in the event of an extreme winter the opportunities to cooperate further with BEAR Scotland and also for joint working with the Service's staff in Ross and Cromarty;
- the opportunities to secure funding to allow more cameras to be installed on non-trunk road priority routes to allow the public to make more informed decisions as to whether to travel;
- that the drivers of gritting and snow clearing vehicles be commended for continuing to deliver the service, often in poor weather conditions;
- that an update be provided on the timescale for using the new salt stance in Lochinver;
- that some of the current fleet of footpath tractors were in poor condition and required to be replaced;
- the opportunities for Members to continue to engage with community councils to develop community resilience plans which would help address some of the issues raised in terms of snow clearing and keeping people safe and respond to the different challenges in localities in a sensitive manner to ensure communities were as prepared as possible;

- that part of the rationale for agreeing the budget cut in relation to the gritting vehicles was that they were being replaced with larger vehicles as and when required which could hold a greater volume of salt and undertake a longer run, and it was queried whether this was happening in Caithness and Sutherland;
- that the Council's Administration in considering the Council's budget for 2015/16 was considering roads and winter maintenance as a priority for the next financial year particularly given that this was consistently identified by the public as one of their highest priorities;
- that clarification be provided on the volume of salt the Council had in stock and how the required stock levels were to be achieved before the onset of winter;
- concern in regard to whether the framework contract was robust and clarification was sought on the number of local contractors which had been engaged as part of that framework;
- a point in regard to the take up of community self-help under the Council's 'Winter Resilience' scheme and the opportunities to make the scheme more user friendly; and
- that there was emergency and developing work ongoing through the Emergency Liaison Groups in terms of more focused work being undertaken in localities.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the Winter Maintenance Priority Network of Primary and Secondary routes for the Caithness and Sutherland Area for 2015/16, which includes the priority road maps, presented in Appendix B to the report.

11. **Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets Update** **Prògram Rothaireachd, Coiseachd agus Sràidean nas Sàbhailte**

There had been circulated Report No. CS/28/15 dated 23 July 2015 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which invited Members to approve the projects delivered through the Scottish Government funding for Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets for Caithness and Sutherland, as set out in Appendix 1.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- that the projects to be delivered in Caithness and Sutherland be welcomed and the Road Safety Officer be commended on the work and advice and guidance he had provided in this regard;
- that further clarification be provided on the propose timescales and funding of the works;
- a point in regard to whether there was a priority programme for projects in the longer term and if not the opportunities to develop a prioritised work schedule going forward, with consideration being given to issues such as details of the schemes included in that programme against the available funding, the criteria used to prioritise projects, and potential funding opportunities; and
- a request that consideration be given to a request that works at Gledfield Primary School be undertaken outwith pupils travel to school time.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Cycling Walking and Safer Streets/Safer Routes to Schools projects detailed in Appendix 1;

- ii. **NOTED** that the Road Safety Unit will continue to work with schools to develop further Safer Routes to Schools Projects for future years;
- iii. **AGREED** that clarification be sought in regard to whether there was a priority programme for projects in the longer term and if not the opportunities to develop a prioritised work schedule going forward; and
- iv. **AGREED** to consider a request that works at Gledfield Primary School be undertaken outwith pupils travel to school time.

12. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais

Declaration of Interest: Mr G Farlow declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission for Scotland, remained to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. CS/29/15 dated 19 August 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators during the first quarter 2015/16.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- concern at the continuing impact of welfare reform in regard to increasing levels of rent arrears;
- that the levels of voids continued to be of concern and it was important that improvements were delivered in this area going forward;
- in contrast to the above that the ongoing range of measures being progressed by the Service, such as the choice based letting system, were having a positive impact in terms of tackling issues of low demand and reducing void levels in the Area;
- reference to the benefits of the choice based letting system to both tenants and the Council and the opportunities for the scheme to be rolled out to other areas;
- that the substantial decrease in the time taken to carry out emergency and non-emergency repairs to properties be welcomed;
- a point in regard to the point a property became available for let if works to upgrade the property were required; and
- the importance in ensuring that at the outset prospective tenants were made aware of issues such as under occupancy rules that may impact on their ability to sustain a tenancy going forward.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2015 to 30 June 2015.

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

Declaration of Interest:- Mr H Morrison declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that family members attended Kinlochbervie High School, 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.

a) Farr High School Associated School Group Overview
Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-sgoil Farr

There had been circulated Report No. CS/30/15 dated 3 September 2015 by the Director of Care and Learning, which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Farr High School Associated School Group (ASG), and provided useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

In presenting the report, the Education Quality Improvement Manager provided figures on the additional staffing that was being provided in terms of Additional Support Needs and Pupil Support Assistants staff within the ASG and the identified level of need at the start of the school session.

In discussion, it was noted the proposal was to reinstate the Gaelic medium provision at either Farr High School or Farr Primary School and that work on this matter was ongoing.

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

b) Kinlochbervie High School Associated School Group Overview
Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-sgoil Cheann Loch Biorbhaidh

There had been circulated Report No. CS/31/15 dated 3 September 2015 by the Director of Care and Learning, which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Kinlochbervie High School Associated School Group (ASG), and provided useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

In presenting the report, the Education Quality Improvement Manager provided figures on the additional staffing that was being provided in terms of Additional Support Needs and Pupil Support Assistants staff within the ASG and the identified level of need at the start of the school session.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- the extent to which distance learning was being used by schools to give pupils a greater choice of subjects;
- concern at the lack of teachers in some subjects which had been experienced within the ASG; in this regard it was noted that the shortage of teachers was both a Highland wide and national issue and it was important to develop creative solutions in response to the issue, for example through the ongoing small schools review; and
- that clarification be provided in regard to the High Life Highland information contained in the report which related to Scourie Playing Field and the arrangements which applied in terms of its availability for let by sports clubs; the Education Quality Improvement Officer advised that he would discuss this matter further with Mr H Morrison outwith the meeting.

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

14. Education Scotland Reports

Aithisgean le Foghlam Alba

There had been circulated Report No. CS/32/15 dated 3 September 2015 by the Director of Care and Learning which provided details of Education Scotland's inspections in the area during the period March 2015 to June 2015, for Members' scrutiny and monitoring.

Arising from the report, Members asked that the Head Teacher and staff at Scourie Primary School be congratulated on the good progress made at the School as referred to in Education Scotland's report following its re-visit to the School in June 2015.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

15. Carbon CLEVER Community Grant Fund 2015-16 Sgeama Thabhartasan Coimhearsnachd Càrboin Ciallaich

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 CS/33/15 dated 1 September 2015 by the Head of Policy and Reform which set out proposals in respect of the Carbon CLEVER community grant fund in Caithness and Sutherland for 2015-16. The report advised that no applications were received for Caithness and Sutherland and recommendations were presented for either a further round of funding this financial year or to carry the allocation forward to 2016/17.

In discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- that the administrative burden of completing application forms and criteria for funding may be acting as a disincentive to community groups applying for funding and it was therefore important that groups be encouraged to contact the Carbon CLEVER Team for advice and assistance in this regard; and
- it was suggested that the proposed deadline of 27 October 2015 for a further round of funding in 2015/16 did not provide sufficient time for community groups to develop and submit their applications and therefore that the deadline be extended to the end of the financial year with any remaining balance of the allocation being carried forward to 2016/17.

The Committee **AGREED** to promote another round of funding this financial year (2015/16) with any remaining balance of the allocation being carried forward to 2016/17.

16. Request for Boundary Change by Lairg and Rogart Community Councils Iarrtas airson Atharrachadh Crìche le Comhairlean Coimhearsnachd Luirg agus Sgìr Raoghard

There had been circulated Report No. CS/34/15 by the Head of Policy and Reform which details a request by Lairg and Rogart Community Councils for an amendment to be made to the boundary between the 2 Community Councils.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- reservations in terms of the new boundary on the basis it would have been preferable for the lineage to have followed a more natural boundary, however it was noted that the change would deliver good outcomes; and
- that the proposal had been the subject of discussion and consultation for a considerable period of time and the opportunity to finalise the matter be welcomed.

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed boundary amendment set out at Appendix 1 as proposed and agreed by the 2 Community Councils and the local community.

17. East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Fund and Community Services funding for St Andrews Church Board, Golspie
Maoin fo Ùghdarras Uàird Chataibh an Ear agus Eadardain agus maoin eachadh Sheirbheisean Coimhearsnachd airson Bòrd Eaglais Naomh Anndra, Goillspidh

There had been circulated Joint Report No. CS/35/15 dated 3 September 2015 by the Head of Policy and Reform and Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the provision of Ward Discretionary and Community Services funding to support construction of a disabled access ramp at St Andrews Church of Scotland, Golspie.

In discussion, thanks were extended to all parties which had collaborated to allow a solution to be developed in regard to disabled access at the Church.

The Committee **APPROVED** the total funding package from Highland Council of £14,750

18. Flood Risk Management – Progress Report
Rianachd Cunnart Thuiltean – Aithisg Adhartais

Declaration of Interest:- Mr G Phillips declared a non-financial interest in this item as Chair of the Golspie Links Working Party, 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. CS/36/15 dated 3 September 2015 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which advised that SEPA had concluded the appraisal of the Flood Risk Management Strategy for the Highland & Argyll Local Plan District and agreed actions with The Highland Council for the first 6 year cycle (2016-2022). Due to the large number of studies required to better understand flood risk within the Highlands, these actions have had to be prioritised such that some studies will take place in the first cycle, with others taking place in the second, from 2022 onwards. Within the Caithness & Sutherland Area Golspie, Thurso, Wick, Dornoch and Lochinver were designated as Potentially Vulnerable Areas (PVA) requiring appraisal by SEPA.

The report advised that Golspie and Thurso have been prioritised for the first cycle, with a Flood Protection Study (and Natural Flood Management Study) required to be commissioned for each. Dornoch and Lochinver have been

prioritised for the second cycle, with a Flood Protection Study required to be commissioned to assess specific options in more detail. Wick (fluvial and coastal) has been identified as needing 'improved understanding' in the first cycle, meaning that the current modelling has not accurately reflected the risk and more detailed modelling will be carried out by SEPA.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- an update was provided on the ongoing work of the two local community groups which had been established in Golspie in response to flooding issues and the ongoing collaboration with the Council in this regard;
- in regard to Thurso more detailed clarification be provided on the timescales for undertaking the flood protection study required before any flood prevention schemes could be progressed;
- in regard to the above concern was expressed that given the flood problems experienced in Thurso and previous commitments given by former officials that it should be progressed as a priority;
- reference was made to the importance of modelling work in allowing an overview to be taken and in the proper planning of flood prevention schemes; and
- the opportunities for potential low cost solutions to be developed in relation to a local tidal flooding issue near the River Wick in the town. The Head of Infrastructure advised that he would investigate this matter further, while cautioning that the Scottish Government was concerned that schemes should not be delivered outwith its overall Strategy.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress and next steps in relation to Flood Alleviation Measures.

**19. Board of Golspie Links Trust
Bòrd Urras Machair Ghoillspidh**

Members were advised that the Golspie Links Trust was a recently formed organisation which would work collaboratively to take forward funding applications for the beach replenishment scheme in Golspie area following flood damage in the area in December, 2012. The Committee was invited to appoint a nominated Member to sit on the Board of the Trust as a Director.

The Committee **AGREED** to nominate Mr G Phillips as a Director of Golspie Links Trust.

**20. Dornoch Common Good Fund – Quarterly Monitoring Report 2015/16
Maoin Maith Choitchinn Dhòrnaich – Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ràitheil 2015/16**

There had been circulated Joint Report No. CS/37/15 dated 3 September 2015 by the Director of Finance and Head of Policy and Reform which invited Members to consider the position of the Dornoch Common Good Fund as shown in the Quarter 1 Monitoring Statement.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- that to allow for further Member scrutiny, future reports provide a five year rolling forecast of income and expenditure, and as far as possible this information be provided on a quarterly basis;

- it was suggested that the commitment of £100,000 of Common Good funding towards the Dornoch Sports Barn project was no longer required given that this had been overtaken by a larger project which had been included in the Council's Capital Programme; the relevant officials should therefore be advised that this item should be removed as a commitment from the Fund;
- that a request had also been received from the Dornoch and District Community Association seeking a commitment of £100,000 from the Common Good Fund towards the project to build a new Community Centre in Dornoch and Members were asked to support this request and also to request that this item be included on the Council agenda for 29 October 2015 for approval to allow the Association to meet an application deadline for lottery funding of 30 November 2015; and
- in regard to the above that this should be subject to the Director of Finance being asked to clarify outstanding commitments in respect of the Fund and that the Fund could meet this commitment.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Quarter 1 monitoring as set out in Appendix 1;
- AGREED** that consideration be given to future reports provide a rolling five year forecast of income and expenditure, to allow for further Member scrutiny; and
- AGREED** (a) to support a request by the Dornoch and District Community Association for funding of £100,000 to be committed from the Common Good Fund towards the project to build a new community centre in Dornoch and to request this item be included on the Council agenda for 29 October 2015 for approval; and (b) that the above is subject to the Director of Finance clarifying outstanding commitments in respect of the Fund and that the Fund could meet this commitment.

21. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Minutes of the Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee held on 26 May 2015, which were approved by the Council on 25 June 2015; and
- APPROVED** the Minutes of the Deprived Area Working Group held on 26 May 2015 and 1 September 2015.

At the conclusion of the meeting and on behalf of Members, Mr R Saxon, thanked Mrs D Mackay, Area Leader for her contribution as Chair of the Area Committee over the period.

The meeting ended at 4.15pm.
