

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Partnerships Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 23 March 2016 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Mr H Fraser	Mr T MacLennan
Mr A Baxter	Mrs M Paterson
Miss J Campbell	Mr F Parr (Substitute)
Dr J Davis	Mr M Reiss
Mr N Donald	Mr I Renwick
Mr A Duffy	Mr G Rimell
Mr G Farlow (Substitute)	Mr G Ross
Mr L Fraser	Mr R Saxon
Mr R Laird	Dr A Sinclair
Mrs A MacLean	Ms M Smith

Non-Members also present:-

Mrs I Campbell	Mr B Lobban
Mrs M Davidson	Mrs B McAllister
Mr K Gowans	Mr J Stone

Officials in attendance:

Ms C McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform, Chief Executive's Office
Mr P Mascarenhas, Community and Democratic Engagement Manager
Mrs A Clark, Principal Policy Officer, Chief Executive's Office
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service
Mr S Taylor, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Also in attendance:

Chief Superintendent J Innes, Highland and Islands Divisional Commander, Police Scotland
Mr D Couldridge, Strategy and Policy Co-Ordinator, Police Scotland Strategy Team, Scottish Government
Superintendent A McDowell, Police Scotland
Mr J MacDonald, Area Manager, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr G MacLeod, Head of Ambulance Services Highland, Scottish Ambulance Service

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

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Committee observed a Minute's Silence in respect of the victims of the terrorist attack in Brussels the previous day.

In terms of Standing Order 18, the Committee **AGREED** that agenda item 8 (Feedback from the Meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs for the North of Scotland) would be considered immediately after item 3 and agenda item 7 (Consultation on National Strategic Police Priorities) would be considered immediately after item 4.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Liesgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs L MacDonald, Mrs D MacKay, Mr H Morrison and Ms G Ross.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 9 – Mr G Ross (non-financial)

Item 10 – Miss J Campbell and Mrs A Maclean (both non-financial)

Item 11c – Mr A Baxter (non-financial) and Mr G Farlow (financial)

Community Safety Sàbhailteachd Phoblach

3. Performance Against the Highland Local Policing Plan 2014-2017 Coileanadh mu Choinneamh Plana Obair-phoilis Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd 2014-2017

There had been circulated Report No CP/01/16 dated 14 March 2016 by the Divisional Commander for Police providing an update on progress with reference to the objectives outlined in the Highland Local Policing Plan 2014-2017. In particular, he highlighted the appointment of Andy Cowie as the new Assistant Chief Constable of Police Scotland. Mr Cowie had previously been Deputy Chief Constable in Northern Constabulary and therefore had a good knowledge of Highland issues and it was suggested there was merit in him attending a future meeting of the Committee.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chairman and Depute Leader had met the new Chief Constable at the start of the year and his open approach was welcomed;
- it was queried if performance statistics could be broken down to Ward level;
- confirmation was sought, and received, that test purchasing of alcohol sales to under 18s was intelligence led;
- Hate crime tended to be under-reported and it was important that the police also built good relationships with stewards at late night catering premises, as well as licensed premises, as these were locations where such crimes frequently occurred. In this regard, the speedy response of stewards and police to an incident witnessed by a Member was highlighted;
- compared to the national rate, the significantly higher increase in Sexual and Violent Crimes was disappointing and the reasons for this were sought. There was anecdotal evidence that, in some areas of Highland, “legal highs” were contributing to the increase of crimes of violence;
- there was an increase in violent instances in the High Street, Inverness and a multi agency approach was called for;

- while the reduction in the instances of vandalism was welcomed, information was sought as to how many of these offences had been carried out by children. When children vandalised property, and could not be charged, there was often financial implications for the victim;
- the interesting and worthwhile content of the Driving Ambition initiative was referred to. Part of its success could be put down to the close collaboration between the police and schools;
- the reason for the increase in the number of people detected for speeding was sought. In this regard, reference was made to a successful community speed watch campaign and it was hoped this could be rolled out elsewhere;
- it was important to remind motorists to use headlights as darkness fell;
- a proactive approach where potential accident “blackspots” were identified was encouraged;
- a request was made for a road police unit based in Caithness as structures continued to evolve in the future;
- the Alcohol and Drug Partnership had a range of initiatives to highlight the dangers of Drugs and New Psychoactive Substances and, to keep them informed, a Members’ Briefing was sought about this particular issue;
- those involved in Rock Challenge, a performing arts event promoting positive lifestyle choices, were commended. The initiatives targeted at young people by the police, such as Rock Challenge and Driving Ambition, were important bearing in mind that young people were the next generation;
- some people felt disconnected from the police and, to rebuild confidence and to encourage wider engagement, it was suggested that some type of public forum be established;
- social media could be a factor in a range of crimes, hate or bully being cited as examples;
- Operation Monarda was an annual awareness campaign targeted at vulnerable people in respect of dishonesties and had proved successful in the past;
- at a recent Women’s Aid conference a survivor had explained how she had been supported by various agencies. In particular, the approach taken by individual police officers had been commended;
- a significant number of people went missing each year and, increasingly, Mountain Rescue Teams were used in searches off hills where capacity allowed. Accordingly, there was merit in inviting Mountain Rescue to explain to Members how their role had evolved; and
- promoting the practise of hill walkers/mountaineers leaving details of their proposed route was to be encouraged. This could be achieved through signage at car parks used by walkers.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** and scrutinised the performance report against Highland Policing Plan Objectives, April 2015 – January 2016;
- ii. **AGREED** to invite Assistant Chief Constable Andy Cowie to a future meeting of the Committee;
- iii. **AGREED** that a report be submitted to a future meeting providing an analysis of responses from victims of hate crime to a survey conducted by Police Scotland; and
- iv. **AGREED** to invite the Mountain Rescue Teams to present at a future meeting.

8. Feedback from the Meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs for the North of Scotland March 2016

Fios air ais bho Choinneamh nan Cathraichean Sgrùdaidh airson Ceann a Tuath na h-Alba Màrt 2016

There had been circulated Report No CP/04/16 dated 15 March 2016 by the Head of Policy and Reform outlining feedback from the Meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs for the North of Scotland held on 11 March 2016.

The Chairman informed Members the meeting had been attended by senior police officers from Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority and Scrutiny Chairs of six local authorities from the North of Scotland. The meeting had been very informative and had opened lines of communication on issues such as the future location of Police control rooms. This expanded group would give additional strength to scrutinising policing in localities and it was important to bear in mind policing in the north of Scotland was different from the Central belt and a one-size approach would not fit all. Although concern was expressed that the expansion of the group might dilute the influence of the Highlands and Islands group, Members were assured that this smaller group would continue and would highlight the uniqueness of the Highlands and Islands.

Concern was raised around the location of Police control rooms and it was important that there was an appropriate level of assurance before any transition was made. Disappointment was expressed that a comment had been made that the infrastructure costs of making Inverness a control room for calls had been prohibitive and additional information explaining this was sought. In addition, there were concerns about the lack of knowledge about local areas and dialects etc. However, reassurances had been provided that police officers had been drafted into Highland to raise their awareness of such local issues. The Scrutiny Chairs had also asked for succession planning for these officers so their knowledge would not be lost and there had been some comfort that the gazetteer, currently being developed, would help pinpoint locations quickly.

The Committee **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** that background information be provided as to why infrastructure costs prohibited Inverness becoming a control room for calls.

4. Police Scotland Control Rooms Seòmar-Smachd Poileas Alba

A presentation was given by Superintendent A McDowell on police control rooms during which it was explained that the proposal was to move from the 10 control rooms Police Scotland had inherited down to 3 regional control rooms. In addition, the number of Service Centres would also be reduced from 9 to a national Police Scotland Service Centre provided across 3 sites. Members were assured that services would still be delivered locally but, arising from a recent Call Handling Review, a recommendation had been to stabilise systems, processes and resources and to plan for the remodelling and integration programme. Members were assured that the public would see the same service being provided in the future and that all plans would be risk assessed. The new plans would also mean that local police officers would be better supported.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought as to what feedback, if any, a caller dialling 101 would receive. In response it was highlighted that calls using this telephone number

were not emergency calls. However, if a police response was required, the caller would receive an incident number;

- a breakdown of the chain of events once a 999 emergency call was made was requested, and provided;
- to ensure public confidence wasn't detrimentally affected, it was important that there was consistency in the handling of calls made to either 999 or 101;
- staff currently operating the Inverness Control Room would be used to deliver national database enquiries to police officers. Overall, information was sought as to the impact on staffing numbers in Inverness and if the change would affect the quality of jobs;
- details surrounding the cost of the proposal were requested;
- a reduction in Control Rooms had happened previously, during the time of Northern Constabulary, and it was important that the lessons learnt during that transition phase were taken into account given that many of the issues of concern would be the same;
- given the success of community policing in Highland, callers often wanted to speak to someone they knew. It was hoped that, if the officer concerned was on duty, it would be possible for this still to happen;
- obtaining addresses from people in distress might prove difficult and it was queried how the new system would address such a problem. In response, it was explained that staff were trained to deal with callers in distress and how to obtain the necessary information from them;
- clarification was sought as to how the system would locate calls received from mobile phones. In response, it was highlighted that there was currently no automated system of determining the exact location from which a mobile phone was calling from;
- information was sought as to whether the new control rooms set-up would take into account current practise. In response, it was highlighted that current practise in control rooms would be analysed and the best methods selected for use in a standard process going forward;
- the poor quality of Broadband coverage in rural areas in Highland was highlighted;
- the importance of the addressing the high level assurances recommended in the Interim Call Handling Report was emphasised;
- the importance of local knowledge in being able to interpret an incident that might not already have been dealt with by Police Scotland was emphasised;
- there was still a huge gap in knowledge, both locally and nationally, on the appropriate use of the 101 call number;
- unease was expressed at the rapid progress of the transfer of call handling services outwith Highland as there had been no strong assurances made prior to and following the announcement of the closure date for the Inverness Control Room;
- concern was expressed regarding automatic officer call-outs in Inverness following 101 calls and that in some instances officers had not responded;
- the use of CCTV from the Inverness Control Room to assist in immediate responses to calls was highlighted;
- the development of a database system to act as a check against mistakes being made in areas of Scotland where there could be confusion around place names was raised;
- the importance of call handlers being able to establish where a major incident had taken place was emphasised given a number of instances where callers had been connected to the wrong area of Scotland due to confusion around similar place names;

- place names could cover large areas up to 15 miles and a more generic description of these areas should therefore be included in the gazetteer;
- the possibility of combining Police, Fire and Ambulance control rooms in the future was raised; however, in response, Members were advised that there were no plans for this;
- whilst the cost of providing a local call handling service was recognised, the reassurance people gained from speaking to someone local was emphasised;
- reassurance was sought that call handlers would be able to engage in dialogue with callers to ensure that a response team would be sent to the correct location given there were places in Scotland which shared the same name, Uig in Isle of Skye or Western Isles being cited as an example;
- the good quality of service experienced by users of the 101 service in North and West Sutherland was highlighted; and
- clarification was sought, and received, that individuals wishing to report an incident or crime on the 101 number could do so anonymously.

Thereafter the Chairman thanked Superintendent A McDowell for his presentation and the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

7. Consultation on National Strategic Police Priorities Co-chomhairle mu Phrìomhachasan Ro-innleachdail Nàiseanta a' Phoilis

A presentation was given by Mr D Couldridge, Police Division, Scottish Government on the consultation on National Strategic Police Priorities. During his presentation he outlined current Strategic Police Priorities, the purpose of the consultation, the programme of engagement and the feedback to date. In formulating a response to the Consultation it was important to consider what was important about policing in communities, what sort of police service was wanted and what future ambitions the police service should have.

During discussion, it was suggested that a link to Mr Couldridge's presentation be forwarded to all Members to provide an opportunity for them too to consider the issues. Clarification was sought, and provided, as to how this consultation would feed in to the consultation on local policing plans and, in this regard, comment was made that contact appeared to have been made with some community councils asking them to identify priorities. As the intention was for the plan to be built up from Wards, its presentation would be considered by Local Committees.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that a copy of the presentation be circulated to all Members for them to feed any views back before 29 April 2016, with a formal consultation response considered at a future Committee meeting.

The Committee adjourned for lunch at 1.15pm and resumed at 1.55pm.

5. Fire and Rescue Service Quarterly Performance Report for Quarter 3 2015/16 Dèanadais Ràitheil na Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn airson Ràith 3 2015/16

There had been circulated Report No CP/02/16 dated 12 March 2016 by the Local Senior Officer for Fire and Rescue, together with accompanying quarterly performance report (QPR) for Quarter 3, 2015/16, providing detail on Fire and Rescue Service performance across a range of Intervention, Prevention and Protection activities for Quarter 3, 2015/16.

A presentation was provided during which specific trends and points of information were highlighted. In particular, reference was made to the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016 Consultation and which Members would have an opportunity to consider in more detail at the Committee's next meeting. In the interim, an offer of a Members' workshop was made to help support the formulation of a response.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members sent their best wishes to the firefighters affected by the accident involving two Inverness based fire appliances on 6 February 2016;
- the decrease in the number of unwanted fire alarm signals was welcomed;
- Fire Safety Enforcement for April-December 2015 had achieved 124%. However, there had been a decrease in the last 3 months of the year and information was sought, and was received, as for the reasons;
- the increase in firefighting personnel in remote areas was encouraging, particularly in Lochinver, and, from previous experience, demonstrated how the fragile stability of fire stations could be turned around. It also was a good example of community empowerment;
- the requirement to live within 5 minutes of a fire station had been relaxed in Lochinver, which had helped with the recruitment process. It was suggested that this be considered in other remote areas if appropriate;
- the increase in women entering the fire service was also welcomed;
- providing training locally and at weekends and evenings would be beneficial;
- information was sought as to the specific geographic locations of deliberate fires in the Cromarty Firth ward;
- similarly, the number of accidental dwelling fires in the Inverness Central ward was markedly higher than elsewhere and the details as to why this was the case were requested. Generally, if there were common denominators leading to such fires, it was important to publicise these to raise awareness; and
- 351 free smoke detectors had been fitted in Quarter 3. This did not mean that all these homes had not previously had a smoke detector but could be because the smoke detectors had not been properly located.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the SFRS service delivery and performance contained within the Report and accompanying QPR for Quarter 3, 2015/16; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a workshop be organised on the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016 consultation before the end of May to inform the draft Council response.

At this juncture, on behalf of the Committee, the Chairman made a presentation to Chief Superintendent J Innes who was due to retire shortly. Tribute was paid to his huge contribution to the safety of Highland communities and to his many achievements. He was an outstanding public servant, trusted by Elected Members, and who had genuinely welcomed the scrutiny by the Committee.

6. Scottish Ambulance Service Report Aithisg Seirbheis Charbadan-eiridinn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Performance Report by the Scottish Ambulance Service for the Highland area for the period from September 2015 to February 2016.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the importance of the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) was recognised and it was vital that it was properly funded;
- the role of paramedics in remote and rural communities often meant that long journeys to hospital were avoided as patients could be treated in their own home;
- disappointment was expressed at the increase in the number of Patient Transport Service (PTS) bookings cancelled 24 hours prior to appointments;
- thanks were expressed for work being undertaken in relation to community empowerment and attendance at Community Council meetings in Sutherland. In response to a request for an update on future visits it was confirmed that a visit to Lochinver was being arranged for mid-April and there was a willingness to visit other areas;
- there were issues between the expectation and delivery of PTS in the West Coast of Sutherland;
- an explanation was sought for the increase in A&E demand for Cat A and Cat B calls. In response it was explained that there was no specific reason and that most services were experiencing an increase in demand due to population and expectation changes;
- confirmation was sought, and received, that the new Falls pathway referrals scheme had already been introduced in Caithness;
- it was assumed that the extra paramedics being recruited across Highland would meet the need for transfers from Caithness General Hospital. In response it was confirmed that Caithness would receive some additional support and meetings were ongoing with NHS Highland to resolve the situation;
- assurance was sought that the pressures on PTS which impacted on vulnerable, frail and disabled users would be improved;
- from a Member's personal experience, the ambulance service were thanked for the manner in which they had dealt with a situation relating to a family member;
- it was asked whether there had been any discussion with the Scottish or UK Government in relation to increasing the number of miles travelled by volunteer PTS providers before tax. In response it was explained that this was not an issue that specifically affected SAS;
- paramedics providing first aid training would help prevent inappropriate admission to hospital; and
- an overview of PTS provided by the Scottish Ambulance Service and other organisations across Highland to identify gaps in service was requested. It was recommended that this issue would be more appropriately addressed at District Partnership level.

In response to questions, the Head of Ambulance Services Highland explained that steps were taken to ensure that a suitable alternative was in place in instances where PTS journeys had to be cancelled or could not be resourced. Furthermore improvements to the booking system were being investigated.

The Committee **NOTED** the terms of the report as circulated.

Equalities

Co-ionannachdan

9. Dementia Friendly Highland Working Group Molaidhean airson Gàidhealtachd Chàirdeil a thaobh Dementia

Declaration of Interest – Mr G Ross declared a non-financial interest on the grounds that a family member suffered from dementia 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 his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CP/04/16 dated 29 11 March 2016 by the Head of Policy and Reform summarising the Council's commitment to become a Dementia Friendly Highland and suggesting how this work would be progressed to develop an associated action plan.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- Members interested in joining the Working Group would be welcomed;
- although a lot had been achieved in Highland, more could be done at a local level and Local Members were urged to promote it to communities;
- improved signage in the city centre for those with poor eyesight or who suffered from dementia was sought. Ideally these would include photos to help them recognise where they were/wanted to reach;
- a sign/notice could be displayed in restaurants, banks and shops to show dementia sufferers where they could ask for help; and
- dementia awareness training for public transport operators was suggested.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the work underway which would be overseen by a Member-led Working Group and which would contribute towards Highland becoming a Dementia Friendly Community;
- NOTED** that further work would be required across Council services as well as working together with Alzheimer Scotland and Community Planning Partners; and
- AGREED** that a report on progress along with a draft action plan be presented to the next Communities and Partnerships Committee meeting.

**10. Violence Against Women Strategy Group – Minutes
Buidheann Ro-innleachd Fòirneart An Aghaidh Bhoireannach– Geàrr- Chunntas**

Declarations of Interest: Mrs A MacLean and Ms J Campbell declared non-financial interests in this item as Directors of Ross-shire Women's Aid and Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey Women's Aid respectively 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 their involvement in the discussion.

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Violence Against Women Strategy Group which had been held on 22 September 2015.

**Community Empowerment and Localism
Ùghdarrachadh Coimhearsnachd agus Ionadaileachd**

**11. The Community Empowerment Act 2015 – Update on Progress with Implementation
Achd Ùghdarrachaidh Coimhearsnachd 2015 – Cunntas às Ùr mu Adhartas le Buileachadh**

- Part 2 Community Planning
Pàirt 2 Dealbhadh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No CP/06/16 dated 15 March 2016 by the Head of Policy and Reform providing Members with an update of progress being made with the new duties arising for community planning partners (CPP).

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- to address social deprivation it was important there were adequate resources in place to meet aspirations. Community planning placed additional pressure on existing Council staff and it was therefore vital that community planning partners also inputted;
- where local community planning arrangements had worked well, such as Lochaber, these should be mirrored in areas such as Easter Ross and Inverness. It was also essential timescales were set out for when community planning would be in place as Easter Ross and Inverness covered some of the most disadvantaged areas in Highland;
- part of the difficulty in taking locality planning forward in Inverness was because the City of Inverness Area Committee was too large a forum at which a consensus could be reached but calls were made for this to be included on the next City of Inverness Area agenda of avoid any further delays;
- community planning in Lochaber had taken time to evolve and initially there had been duplication and overlap. To a degree this still remained and this led to community disengagement; and
- whilst recognising the importance of providing the general public with an opportunity to participate, the District Partnership approach had not always been the most effective mechanism.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the new legal duties relating to community planning and that new processes were needed for the shared leadership and resourcing of it, supporting community bodies to take part and the focus on disadvantage;
- ii. that work was in progress with partners to:
 - a. discuss how to share the new duty and resource it;
 - b. develop local community planning arrangements, with action underway in Lochaber and Skye and to be developed for Caithness, Sutherland, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey as the next phase;
 - c. seek feedback with NHS Highland from District Partnerships on how to ensure health and social care arrangements could be part of the new community planning arrangements;
 - d. make the links between the local CPPs and the Highland CPP by involving the local Chair in the CPP Board and the lead local officer in the Chief Officers Group once new arrangements were in place; and
 - e. develop the process for locality plans for disadvantaged places in rural and urban Highland;
- iii. that partnership work on other Parts of the Community Empowerment Act was reported separately to this meeting; and
- iv. that consultation on the draft statutory guidance and regulations for the Act was expected between March and June 2016 with the final materials provided by September 2016. These would be built into the new arrangements.

The Committee also **AGREED**:-

- v. that the Chairs of the Local Committees and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Communities and Partnerships Committee be consulted on the evaluation framework for local community planning partnerships and the methodology for identifying the areas for locality plans in advance of proposals to the Community Planning Board and with further reports to this Committee. It was proposed that District Partnership Chairs would be consulted too and this would also need the agreement and support of NHS Highland; and
- vi. that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee on proposals for local community planning arrangements.

(b) Part 3 Participation Requests
Pàirt 3 Iarrtasan Com-pàirteachaidh

There had been circulated Report No CP/07/16 dated 23 March 2016 by the Head of Policy and Reform explaining that the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 put in place a new legal duty for the majority of community planning partners to respond to the rights of community bodies to make participation requests. The Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Board at its meeting in December 2014 agreed that a partnership approach should be taken to designing a process to consider these requests rather than several separate approaches being used for community bodies in Highland.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the approach agreed with community planning partners so far. This took into account how communities were supported to develop and manage their input to the process. The approach would be adjusted as required by the statutory guidance when it became available;
- ii. **AGREED** that consultation take place between the Chair and Vice Chair of the Communities and Partnerships Committee and the Chairs of the Local Committees in advance of any proposals being made to the CPP Board; and
- iii. **AGREED** that further reports be brought to this Committee on the proposed approach for Members to consider.

(c) Part 5 Asset Transfer Requests
Pàirt 5 Iarrtasan Gluasad So-mhaoin

Declarations of Interest:

Mr A Baxter declared a non-financial interest in this item given his involvement in asset transfers of public buildings in the past 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 their involvement in the discussion.

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, remained to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CP/08/16 dated 14 March 2016 by the Head of Policy and Reform explaining that the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provided for community bodies to request ownership, lease, management or use of publicly owned buildings or land whether or not they were available for sale or deemed surplus to requirements by the owning body. It was

likely that the Council and its partners would need to refresh their asset transfer policy and process to meet the new purpose and approach the Act brings. The Community Planning Partnership Board (CPP) agreed that we should design a common process for Highland.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- information was sought, and received, regarding the deadline for publishing the Community Asset Register. It was also important that, when drawing up this document, that it was in a format that was easy for the public to inspect;
- disappointment was expressed that the asset transfer process had, in the past, been at times unnecessarily cumbersome, time consuming and was not community friendly. It was essential when redesigning the process that those seeking to take control of public buildings were kept informed of progress and that there was regular communication about what they could expect from the Council at each stage;
- given Members' experience in asset transfers it would be beneficial for them to be involved in the process at an early stage through participation in a workshop;
- where asset transfers took time to process this resulted in lost revenue both for the community and the Council. It also delayed the regeneration of communities;
- other local authorities had good Asset Transfer Policies which Highland could adopt;
- the Council's Community Planning Partners also needed to examine their asset transfer policies and examples of poor practise were cited. In particular, disappointment was expressed that communities were expected to raise money to buy back properties which had, in some instances, been built as a result of public subscription. Furthermore, where money was raised as a result of asset transfer, ideally this should be retained in the local area to improve services;
- the success of the Elphin Hall had been highlighted at the recent Scottish LEADER conference where the former school was now well used by the local community;
- there had been occasions where property had been used by the Council for storage when better use could have been made by the community;
- communities sometimes had good ideas and aspirations but lacked the financial and/or business backing to carry forward the project. It was important approaches were risked assessed at an early stage so that resources were not wasted;
- where assets were transferred, a clause should be built in to ensure that, when they became available for disposal again, the Council had the first option to buy them back;
- given the future budgetary challenges the Council faced, it was likely that community buildings would be closed/disposed. A more proactive approach was suggested whereby, before the decision to dispose of properties was made, communities were approached to ascertain if there was any interest for them taking the asset over; and
- when asset transfers were completed it was important that all Council Services were informed.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the approach being taken to support further asset transfers in Highland;

- ii. **NOTED** that further work was required on the approach and governance arrangements and that it would have to comply with the statutory guidance when it was available. Further reports could be made to this Committee as well as the CPP Board and the Asset Management Board; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a workshop on Asset Transfer be organised for Members of the Committee to feed in their experience to inform the new approach.

(d) Part 10 Participatory Budgeting Update
Pàirt 10 Buidseat Compàirteachaidh

There had been circulated Report No CP/09/16 dated 14 March 2016 by the Head of Policy and Reform highlighting progress in the development of participatory budgeting (PB) in Highland. It set PB in the context of the requirements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 particularly the requirements to develop local democratic structures and involve communities in decision-making around resources. Members were invited to comment on progress and how the process might develop.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- PB had been particularly successful in Lochaber and an example was given where consideration of projects from the youth budget had attracted 1279 participants of various ages. It had not required additional resources but had had a huge impact locally and had been generally warmly welcomed;
- a similar exercise had been carried out in Nairn recently and it too had been successful. Work was ongoing to assist those who had not been successful in the funding process;
- sophisticated PB platforms were available to encourage community participation and these needed to be considered in addition to public events. In doing so, public participation would grow;
- to ensure service delivery, it was important PB was embedded in any Council reorganisation; and
- the potential of PB was enormous and the Council should aim eventually for at least 1% of its net controllable spend to be allocated in this way. By doing so communities would become involved in the complex decision making process and would realise the pressures the Council faced. Furthermore it also helped inform the Council in its decision making.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the statutory requirement for public participation in decision-making, including resource allocation and that statutory guidance on this Part of the Act was awaited;
- ii. **NOTED** the arrangements for rolling out Participatory Budgeting across Highland to date;
- iii. **NOTED** that another date would be found for the masterclass for Members on Participatory Budgeting; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Council bid for funding from the Scottish Government's Community Choices Funding once the application process and criteria were known.

The meeting concluded at 4.20 p.m.