

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in Talla nan Ros, King Street, Kingussie on Tuesday 31 May 2016 at 10.30 am

Present:

Ms J Douglas
Mr D Fallows

Mr B Lobban
Mr G Rimell

In attendance:

Mr S Black, Director of Development and Infrastructure
Mr R Porteous, Assistant Area Community Services Manager, Community Services
Ms S MacLennan, Interim Housing Manager, Community Services
Mr P Mascarenhas, Community and Democratic Engagement Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Mrs R Cleland, Corporate Communications Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey
Miss J Green, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Also in attendance:

Mr J Gibbs, Area Manager, Inner Moray Firth, HIE.
Mr F Nixon, Group Manager, Scottish Fire and Rescue 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 B Lobban in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 4 – Ms J Douglas (financial and non-financial)
Item 11 – Mr B Lobban (non-financial)

3. Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee – Appointment of Vice Chair Comataidh Sgìre Bhàideanach Agus Shrath Spè – Suidheachadh De Dh'iar-Chathraiche

Members **AGREED** that the position of Vice Chair for the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee should be appointed on an as and when required basis.

The Chair explained that, although some Local Committees had appointed a Vice Chair, the decision to appoint a Vice Chair on an as and when required basis was the best approach for the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee reflecting the close working relationship between Local Members.

4. Presentation – City and Highland Region Deal Taisbeanadh – Cùmhnant Baile is Roinne na Gàidhealtachd

Ms J Douglas declared a financial interest in this item as the Council’s representative on the Board of NHS Highland pending approval from the Cabinet Secretary and a non-financial interest in this item as Board Member of Inverness College/UHI 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.

A presentation was given on the City and Highland Region Deal at the meeting by the Director of Development and Infrastructure during which he explained the rationale for City Deals and the vision for the Inverness and Highland City/Region Deal which was to position the area as a region of digital opportunity enabling the Highlands to be the best digitally connected rural region in Europe. The Director then outlined the funding package and highlighted a number of projects included in the Heads of Terms Agreement that sought to deliver this vision relating to Enabling the Economy, Growing the Economy and Skills. Furthermore, the Director outlined the leadership and governance arrangements which involved the establishment of a Programme Board reporting to the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee, Highland Community Planning Partners and the Highland Economic Forum which was attended by the Cairngorm National Park and the Cairngorms Business Partnership. In terms of the next steps, the Director explained that a detailed implementation plan building on the Heads of Terms Agreement and detailed business/value for money cases for each of the projects would be produced and, working with the Scottish and UK Governments, an evaluation framework would be developed. In conclusion, the Director summarised the impact of the City/Region Deal and specific opportunities for the Badenoch and Strathspey Area.

During discussion Members made the following comments:-

- there was some confusion about how the funding package was accessible to local communities and it was disappointing that there had not been a bidding-in process for the funding;
- an explanation was sought, and received, of why some projects that were initially discussed had not been included in the Heads of Terms Agreement;
- clarification was sought on how clear tangible benefits from the City/Region Deal would be accessible to people in Badenoch and Strathspey;
- confirmation was sought, and received, that there would be an opportunity for the STEM Learning Centres to be devolved from Inverness;
- information was sought on how projects, similar to the Rails to Grantown project, could realise the benefits of the City/Region Deal and how organisations could be supported to ensure that opportunities were maximised;
- the very large additional sum of money coming to the Highland area which could be used was an underlying very good news story of the City/Region Deal;

- the City Deal was easy to focus and compare with other City Deals across the UK. However adding the Region to the City Deal raised expectations of tangible aspects, some of which it was felt would be progressed anyway in one context or another, for example the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver 100% digital coverage across Scotland by 2020, and the Longman Interchange and East Link;
- in relation to road infrastructure projects for the Region, it was a shame that there was nothing about the A96 or A82 included in the Deal;
- concern was expressed that due to the increasing concentration on Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey would become a more dormitory commuter area and therefore more difficult to sustain;
- Veterans which was the focus of the Innovative Assisted Living Scheme was a small proportion of the older population;
- clarification was sought, and received, about the role of the Cairngorms National Park Authority in relation to the City/Region Deal;
- assurance was sought, and received, that governance would be undertaken at a local level; and
- whilst there was general support for the money coming to the Highland area, it was disappointing that there had not been specific infrastructure projects identified for Badenoch and Strathspey prior to the agreement of the Heads of Terms Agreement.

The Chair thanked the Director for his attendance at the meeting and welcomed him to provide an update at a future meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Presentation – Economic Development Taisbeanadh – Leasachadh Eaconamach

A presentation was given on the opportunities and challenges for the Badenoch and Strathspey economy at the meeting by Mr James Gibbs, Area Manager, Inner Moray Firth, HIE. Mr Gibbs began by setting the context explaining that Badenoch and Strathspey was a rural area and a significant part of the Cairngorms National Park, with much land not developable or with limited economic use. However, it benefited from major transport links in road and rail which meant all areas were approximately 90 minutes away from a major town. Mr Gibbs then outlined some of the opportunities for the area, which included the duelling of the A9, increasing international interest in the Cairngorms National Park and significant investment plans with some of the area's significant businesses. He also outlined some of the challenges, which included the lack of affordable housing, the public perception of key industries and the danger that the A9 became a by-pass for southern Badenoch and Strathspey. In conclusion, Mr Gibbs referred to HIE's aim to feedback concerns in to the Area Plan and continue to engage with partners in the business community, the Council and the Third Sector with a particularly need for a closer working relationship with Business Gateway and the Cairngorms Business Partnership.

During discussion Members made the following comments:-

- in general the last 12 months had been quite difficult for the Badenoch and Strathspey area due to flood, fire and job losses so it was a step in the right

direction to see the Grantown on Spey Smokehouse being reoccupied with the creation of another 20 jobs;

- it was pleasing to see that the Cairngorm Mountain Railway was highlighted during the presentation because there were some serious concerns regarding the management and operation of the business which was fundamentally important to the area;
- appreciation was conveyed to Mr Gibbs for his comprehensive grasp of a range of local issues which were helpfully summarised;
- it was important to generate opportunities to allow people to make a choice to work in the area and closer working with Business Gateway was essential to this;
- statistics were requested on the proportion of resources HIE allocated to Badenoch and Strathspey area in comparison to other areas;
- Russwood played a vital role in the community by creating a locally skilled workforce;
- views were sought, and received, on the opportunities in the area to maximise the City/Region Deal or the funding that might be released from elsewhere because of the City/Region Deal;
- confirmation was sought, and received, that the care sector had a role to play in the area and that there would be increasing support to ensure that it was a career of choice;
- suggestions of other funding sources and support available for the Rails to Grantown project were requested, and received, and it was confirmed that the account management for the organisation was undertaken by HIE;
- the lack of affordable housing which was causing recruitment difficulties and the lack of developable land for commercial purposes were a result of issues with land supply and land price. In this regard, it was suggested that a partnership approach be taken to considering the legislative change required to leverage land availability at the right price to increase the provision of affordable housing and keep it affordable when it entered the market; and
- the ability to allocate land for specific housing in the Local Development Plan would ensure the provision of affordable housing increased and the price of land supply decreased.

Having thanked Mr Gibbs for his attendance at the meeting, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that statistics on the proportion of resources HIE allocated to Badenoch and Strathspey area in comparison to other areas be provided to Mr G Rimell.

6. Scottish Fire and Rescue Area Committee Performance Report for 2015-16 Aithisg Coileanaidh Comataidh Sgìreil Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson 2015-16

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/06/16 dated 16 May 2016 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland which provided an update on the progress against the priorities outlined in the Area Plan for Badenoch and Strathspey 2015-16. Priority areas were identified through a range of Intervention, Prevention and Protection activities delivered in partnership to reduce risk to the communities of Badenoch and Strathspey. The report also contained previously agreed information and performance as requested by Committee Members.

During discussion Members made the following comments:-

- the performance report was generally positive however the number of false alarms continued to affect the service and it was suggested that, to reduce the number of unwanted fire alarm signals, duty holders should pay for repeated calls;
- in relation to station availability, the number of successful and failed turnouts from Community Response Units (CRUs) were requested;
- it should be compulsory for commercial premises to fit sprinklers where there was an adequate water supply and the view was sought on whether there was a willingness from local businesses to do so;
- the ongoing recruitment in a number of communities was welcomed and thanks were added to the professional team currently in place;
- in relation to recruitment, it was asked whether there was interest from Eastern Europeans settling into the community;
- the home fire safety visits were carried out quickly by thorough staff and were greatly appreciated; and
- the reduction of special service incidents relating to road traffic collisions was recognised despite the increased traffic.

The Committee **NOTED** and scrutinise the attached Performance Report and **AGREED** that figures of successful and failed turnouts from Community Response Units (CRUs) be provided to Mr D Fallows.

7. **Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016** **Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2015 gu 31 Màrt 2016**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/07/16 dated 18 May 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 March 2016.

During discussion Members:-

- welcomed the appointment of a Housing Management Officer to fill the vacant post and focus on improving rent arrears performance;
- sought an explanation for the increase of the figures for the housing options approach reason 'notice served by landlord' and the fewer options available for case closure outcomes particularly private rented or local authority tenancy;
- sought, and received, assurance that both the number of tenancy offers refused, despite significantly increasing since the previous year, and the percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year in the area, which was below the Scottish average for quarter four but above in previous quarters, were reasonable;
- felt that the ragging of some performance indicators was sometimes too critical, for example, the rent collected as a percentage of rent due of 98.7% was close to the target of 99% but ragged as Amber; and
- sought reasons other than staffing issues for the increase in rent arrears since the same quarter in the previous year and it was suggested that this could relate to changes in welfare benefits.

The Committee **NOTED** and scrutinise the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 and **AGREED** that further

information be provided to Ms J Douglas explaining the increase for the housing options approach reason 'notice served by landlord' and the fewer options available for case closure outcomes particularly private rented or local authority tenancy.

8. Grounds Maintenance Performance Monitoring Report – Early Season Update Aithisg Sgrùdadh Dèanadais a thaobh Cumail Suas Làraich

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/08/16 dated 19 May 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided details of the performance management information of the Grounds Maintenance Services for April and May 2016.

During discussion Members commended staff for the manner in which they had responded to complaints. However disappointment was expressed at the poor standard of contract grass cutting in high visibility areas and the impact this had on public perception. Members also highlighted that statistics on the first quarter of the previous year were not included in the report to allow for comparisons to be made but that the standard of contract grass cutting was always unacceptable at the start of the season each year. An update was sought on the progress of digital innovations to improve inspections which included the contractor sending photos to the contract supervisor once the job had been completed and an interactive ground maintenance map. In this regard, an additional recommendation was proposed to reflect Members' frustration and ensure measures were taken to improve the early season contract grass cutting.

Furthermore, thanks were expressed for drawing Members attention to the varied services delivered by in-house staff listed in appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee **NOTED** the performance management and remedial action information provided on the grounds maintenance service and the management action taken to address the performance issues identified and **AGREED** that measures be taken to ensure improvement in early season contract grass cutting and that these be reported back to the Area Committee.

9. Badenoch and Strathspey Roads Maintenance Programme Prògraman Càradh Rathaidean Bhàideanach agus Shrath Spè

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/09/16 dated 12 May 2016 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the Badenoch and Strathspey Roads Maintenance Programme for 2016/17.

During discussion Members:-

- welcomed the funding allocation for drainage treatment at Shankland Court, Grantown-on-Spey and sought clarification on the timescales for completing this project;
- sought an indication of when the Surface Dressing operation would be complete and whether it would happen together with the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Lining Programme;
- sought views on whether the results of the Jet Patching were satisfactory as expected;
- asked if there were any planned works with the barriers on Ski Road; and

- sought information on how much of the area budget allocation if not used would be available for approval by the Area Committee under new delegated powers.

The Assistant Area Community Services Manager having responded to the comments raised, the Committee **APPROVED** the Badenoch and Strathspey Roads Maintenance Programme for 2016/17.

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

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/10/16 dated 17 May 2016 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 the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Cycling Walking and Safer Streets /Safer Routes to School projects detailed in Appendix 1 to the report and **NOTED** that the Road Safety Unit would continue to work with schools to develop further SRTS Projects for future years.

11. **Participatory Budgeting** **Buidseatadh Com-pàirteach**

Mr B Lobban declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) 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 BSAC/11/16 dated 19 May 2016 by the Acting Head of Policy which highlighted 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.

During discussion Members made the following comments:-

- to progress participatory budgeting a single face to face event was preferred;
- consideration should be given to using digital engagement tools, for example video conferencing or online voting, at a future event to ensure a wider range of voices are involved;
- an explanation was sought and received regarding the criteria for an additional £5k of Scottish Government funding which was utilised for the Nairnshire participatory budgeting event but unavailable for Badenoch and Strathspey;
- there was some support for all local members to be involved in the partnership group. However it was felt the partnership group should be small and focussed and therefore it was later proposed to appoint one local member at a future Ward Business Meeting;
- it was suggested that the partnership group include two representatives from the Associated School Group for youth matters and two Community Council

representatives from the Badenoch and Strathspey Community Council Forum. Further consideration could be given to representatives from the Badenoch and Strathspey Sports Council and Cairngorms Business Partnership;

- the Ward Manager's additional workload due to the requirements of the Community Empowerment Act was recognised; and
- based on the cost of previous events a contribution of £15,000 from the Ward Discretionary Budget was proposed for a Participatory Budgeting event; and
- confirmation was sought and received that the funding allocated would not be used for meetings of the partnership group.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. a contribution of £15,000 from the Ward Discretionary Budget for a Participatory Budgeting event in Badenoch and Strathspey; and
- ii. to form a partnership group based on the membership outlined in paragraph 3.2 of the report and including two representatives from the Associated School Group, two Community Council representatives from the Badenoch and Strathspey Community Council Forum and one Local Member to be appointed at the Ward Business Meeting.

12. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 23 February 2016, which were approved by the Council on 10 March 2016 which were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 1.00 pm.