

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair)** held in the Chamber, Tigh na Sgìre, Park Lane, Portree on Monday, 20 June, 2016 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

Mr H Fraser  
Mr J Gordon

Mr D Millar  
Mr I Renwick

### In attendance:

Mr W MacKinnon, Ward Manager  
Mr D Wilkie, Group Manager, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service  
Mr D Esson, Quality Improvement Manager, West  
Mrs J Scotson, Business Change Manager, Corporate Development Service  
Mr R McNab, Performance & Inspection Co-ordinator, Community Services  
Ms L Williams, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services  
Mr P Mascarenhas, Community & Democratic Engagement Manager, Chief Executive's Office  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development 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.**

### Business

#### Mr D Millar – Cathraiche (Chair)

#### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

#### 2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report for 2015-16 Aithisg Dèanadais Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson 2015-16

There was circulated Report No SR/9/16 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland providing an update to Committee Members on the progress against the priorities outlined in the Local Committee Plan for Isle of Skye and Raasay 2015 - 2016.

Priority areas were identified through a range of Intervention, Prevention and Protection activities delivered in partnership to reduce risk to the communities of Skye and Raasay. The report also contained previously agreed information and performance as requested by Committee Members.

In particular, the report showed the current staffing levels on stations and total availability that these individuals have been available for calls, and how this affects the availability of the station's fire appliances. The Service was actively recruiting in a number of communities to improve station and fire appliance availability and recently six new staff had been recruited to stations in Broadford, Dunvegan, Portree and Raasay. Members were asked through their contacts to raise awareness of the need to recruit individuals to most stations in Skye and Raasay. Praise was given to the crews who worked tirelessly to provide operational cover at stations and to Employers for granting leave to crews in order to allow them to attend incidents and training events.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the low incidents of dwelling house fires was good news and the importance of fire safety checks was emphasised. It was explained that in order to receive a fire home safety check, people could contact the Fire Service through the Scottish Fire and Rescue website, which also gave details of a Freephone number or by contacting local crew members. Fire Safety checks that were undertaken, could be as a result of referrals by partner agencies or from members of the community, and the Service also targeted high risk and vulnerable people in the community. Fire safety advice was given and free smoke and heat detectors were provided, if necessary, during safety checks. The Service continued to raise awareness of the opportunity for free fire home safety visits.
- Reference was made to a situation on 19 April, 2016 when for approximately one hour there was a lack of fire appliances available in the Skye area. As a result, improvements had now been made, so that Portree was now a strategic station, so whenever a shortage of crews was identified, other crews would be mobilised to the Skye area. This would ensure that fire appliances would be on Skye at all times.
- The number of unwanted fire alarms was still too high and in an attempt to reduce those, an unwanted fire alarms policy had been introduced and it was hoped this would reduce the number of unwanted fire alarms in future. The incidents of unwanted domestic fire alarms was being addressed through home fire safety visits, educating the public and working with partner agencies. Also, in relation to unwanted fire alarms in NHS premises, it was explained that the NHS had a Fire Safety Officer who covered all NHS properties in Highland and therefore there should be further reductions in unwanted fire alarms in NHS properties as a result.
- The efforts being made in recruiting members of the community to the Fire Retained Service was welcomed. It was also requested that a meeting with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service be held soon in order to look again at the recruitment process and in particular to look at what could be done so that potential applicants did not have to meet arduous and non essential recruitment standards in terms of training and level of entry which was causing problems in recruiting people, particularly in rural areas. In response, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service would be happy to meet with Council representatives to look at how the Service could offer assistance with

recruitment. The Service was looking at how training was carried out which would have less impact for part time staff applying to join the Retained Service.

Thereafter, the Committee having scrutinised the Local Performance Report, **AGREED:-**

i to raise awareness of the need to recruit individuals to most Fire Stations in the Isle of Skye and Raasay area; and

ii that a meeting between the Council and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service be arranged to look at the recruitment process for those people wishing to join the Retained Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

#### **4. Portree Associated School Group Overview Sealladh Farsaing air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Phort Rìgh**

There was circulated Report No.SR/10/16 by the Area Care & Learning Manager (West) which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Portree Associated School Group and useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- In relation to the data for school successes/activities, it was requested that in future reports the number of participants and the school roll be shown rather than the percentage figure;
- In terms of funding, there seemed to be some anomalies with the cost per pupil amounts detailed in the report, and these would be checked and Members briefed on this at a future Ward Business Meeting. Further information would be provided to Members on the investment in buildings and whether this was current or future investment.
- In relation to a query regarding the levels of literacy and numeracy of primary school pupils who would soon be going into Secondary School, it was explained that there was standard testing done on primary school pupils, which was shared with Secondary Schools. As the National Improvement Framework was rolled out, there would be increased information with regard to literacy in Primary and Secondary Schools. Within the year, there would also be Government guidelines on standardised testing. The information from this would help Members compare levels of attainment in Primary and Secondary schools.
- There had been reports in the past from Employers that some new employees did not have the basic skills in literacy and numeracy to do their job. In response, it was advised that this issue had been acknowledged nationally, and there was an emphasis with Curriculum for Excellence in developing skills in learning for work and looking at employability skills. As part of this a career standard had been introduced whereby from the age of 3 to 18 years old, young people would be given a clear framework in the development of skills in learning for work and employability skills. In future it was intended that the career standard would link in with local employers and local chamber of commerce as a means of creating work placements for young people. It was noted that the percentage of pupils from Portree High

School going into employment after leaving school was significantly higher than the rest of the Highland area and Scotland and this was commended.

- While information in the report focused on academic achievements, a lot of pupils did not go onto further education after leaving school and it would be useful to have information on how well Portree High School was preparing them for future employment. In particular it was requested that information be provided on the work done in Learning Support Units in order to acknowledge the successful work being done there. In this respect, it was advised that information would be provided to a future Ward Business Meeting on additional support needs and vocational courses delivered in schools. Information on a facility for Construction skills in Portree High School was also requested.
- Information was requested on user information for libraries/service points in the Isle of Skye and Raasay area, other than those referred to in the report.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

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

There was circulated Report No. SR/11/16 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 up to 31 March, 2016.

In particular it was advised that rent arrears had increased, and welfare reforms was impacting on the level of arrears.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- In terms of welfare reforms impacting on the level of rent arrears, a political solution at a national level would be required to address this issue.
- In relation to those tenants who were having to wait a period of 6 weeks prior to receiving Universal Credit and the impact this would have on their ability to pay rent on time, Housing Officers were sympathetic to this situation and would offer assistance to tenants.
- In relation to the reduction in homeless presentations, the Council had changed its approach to homelessness. When looking at housing options, the Council would try to keep people in their tenancy's as long as possible rather than accepting people straight away as homeless. The Council would also work with landlords in order to help people maintain their tenancy.
- It was explained that the Scottish Government a few years ago had stopped Local Authorities and Housing Associations from given points for the length of time people were on waiting lists, and points were based on need rather than the length of time people were on a housing waiting list. Information was requested for Members on the number of people on the waiting list for affordable accommodation in the Isle of Skye and Raasay area.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April, 2015 to 31 March, 2016.

**6. Digital Inclusion Presentation**  
**Taisbeanadh mu Chom-pàirteachadh Didseatach**

A presentation was given by the Business Change Manager on Digital First and Digital Highland projects. In particular, the Manager highlighted the benefits which allowed customers access to Council Services anytime, anywhere on any device. To date, nearly 12,000 customers had signed up to “myaccount” to use this facility and this generated savings not only in staff time but also improvements to process times. 90 forms were now available online and the range of activities was to be collated into a poster which would be displayed at Service Points etc. In terms of payments to the Council, 35% were now transacted on-line. To help customers to use the system a variety of training and courses were available, the details of those taking place in the Isle of Skye and Raasay area being provided to Members, and Members were encouraged to promote these in their local community. Members would be kept up to date with training and courses available in the area and would also be introduced to the Digital Champion for the Isle of Skye and Raasay to look at what opportunities there may be for increasing digital skills provision.

In discussion, it was queried what digital skills training was planned for the South end of the Isle of Skye. It was advised that the Digital Champion would look at opportunities to expand digital training to other areas of Skye and would work with Community Groups in this respect. It was requested that a list of the locations where digital training had been provided and was planned for the future, on the Isle of Skye and Raasay, be provided for Members.

Thereafter, the Cathraiche (Chair) thanked the Business Change Manager for a very informative presentation.

**7. Area Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges**  
**Prògram Càraidh Sgìreil airson Rathaidean agus Dhrochaidean**

There was circulated Report No SR/12/16 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the proposed Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges for the Isle of Skye and Raasay Area for 2016/17.

The report detailed the budget allocations for roads maintenance, the road structural maintenance programmes and the bridge maintenance programme for 2016/17.

Following consideration, the Committee **APPROVED** the Maintenance Programmes for Roads and Bridges for the Isle of Skye and Raasay area for 2016/17.

**8. Grounds Maintenance Performance Monitoring Report**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdaidh air Dèanadas a thaobh Cumail Suas Raointean**

There was circulated Report No SR/13/16 by the Director of Community Services which detailed performance management information on Grounds Maintenance Services from April to 8th June 2016. There was tabled an updated report at the meeting.

Concern was expressed regarding reports that there had been no inspections of grounds maintenance recently in the Skye area and there were reports of poor standards of grounds maintenance particularly in cemeteries, with the result that

some families had resorted to cutting grass on their relatives lairs. However, it was advised that given that families owned the lairs, they sometimes wished to take personal care of them. The point was made that contractors were being paid to deliver a service at a required standard and they were not delivering this. The delivery of the contract was the issue that had to be addressed. If there was more supervision at a local level, then there would be a higher standard of service from the contractor. However, at present there was not sufficient staff in rural areas to monitor these contracts. In particular, it was requested that cemeteries in Portree, Broadford, Ashaig and Kilmarie should be inspected.

It was noted that primary responsibility for monitoring the quality of works lies with the in-house team and/or contractors by way of self-assessment and it was queried how reliant this self-assessment process was. In response, it was advised that the Service had been aware of some complaints regarding maintenance in cemeteries and within the last week there had been 21 inspections of cemeteries of which two of these sites had failed the inspection and corrective action would be undertaken. The Service was aware that cemeteries were a sensitive area and a priority for the public to be maintained to good standards and that they needed to be better managed. In relation to weed killing, path maintenance and other associated works, the In-house team did not have the resources to deliver these activities. Grass cutting was required within certain parameters and the self assessment from the contractor stated that they were achieving the required standard and no complaints had been received to date. However, having heard the concerns from Members the Performance & Inspection Co-ordinator would be carrying out his own inspections. Any contractual performance issues would be dealt with by the Service as they arose.

It was acknowledged that there was a shortage of in-house staff on the Isle of Skye and Raasay area which was a consequence of the Council having to address severe budget reductions. When the process of entering into new contracts for grounds maintenance was looked at, standards of grounds maintenance, particularly in cemeteries had to improve.

Information was requested for future reports on the number of validation Inspections for the Isle of Skye and Raasay area and that this information should be provided by the In-house team and not the contractor as the self assessment process was inadequate.

People were encouraged to use the Council's on-line complaint reporting form to report failings in grounds maintenance standards.

The Committee having scrutinised the performance management and remedial action information provided on the grounds maintenance service set out in the report, **NOTED** the management action taken to address the performance issues identified.

**9. Your Island, Your Cash, Your Choice – Participatory Budgeting Update and Next Steps**  
**Ur n-Eilean, Ur n-Airgead, Ur Roghainn – Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhuidseatadh Com-pàirteach agus Ath Cheumannan**

There was circulated Report No. SR/14/16 by the Acting Head of Policy which updated Members on the recent Your Island, Your Cash, Your Choice Participatory

Budgeting process and asked Members to comment on the process and the partnership that delivered it. It asked Members to consider how the process is developed in the future in terms of the mechanism used, the services potentially in scope, the focus of future activity and the resource that could be utilised. Members were asked to note the feedback on the process and comment on potential future developments.

In discussion, the Cathraiche (Chair) advised that the Participatory Budgeting event held on Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2016 had been very interesting and successful, but unfortunately due to other long standing commitments that day, he had not been able to attend for the whole of the event. The work involved in the event by Councillor J Gordon, the Local Member on the Participatory Budgeting process, the Community and Democratic Engagement Manager and the Ward Manager was acknowledged. Members felt the event had been a very positive experience with a high number of participants, and a wide range of projects which resulted in 15 projects being fully funded.

It was noted that in Lochaber the participatory budgeting process had been done on-line, and therefore it would be appropriate to review how the event was organised in the Isle of Skye and Raasay area in future, perhaps by using digital tools to complement an event. In terms of the number of participants at the event, it was felt that there could have been more people attending if it was scheduled for a shorter period of time, as not everyone had the time to attend an all day event.

It was advised that the Scottish Government had announced that through its Community Choices Fund a further £1.5m would be made available across Scotland for the next stage of participatory budgeting. It was understood that the focus of this funding was to be on areas of deprivation. It was confirmed that the Highland Council would submit a bid for some of this funding.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the feedback on the participatory budgeting process and potential future developments.

## **10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 29 February, 2016, which were approved by the Council on 10 March, 2016.

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 29 February, 2016.

The meeting concluded at 12.40 p.m.