

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in Talla nan Ros, King Street, Kingussie on Tuesday 6 September 2016 at 10.30 am

Present:

Ms J Douglas
Mr D Fallows

Mr B Lobban
Mr G Rimell

Non Members also present:

Mrs M Davidson

In attendance:

Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager (Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey), Chief Executive's Office
Ms A Clark, Acting Head of Policy and Reform, Chief Executive's Office
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing, Community Services
Ms S MacLennan, Housing Manager (South), Community Services
Ms D Sutton, Amenities Manager (South), Community Services
Ms J Scotson, Business Change Manager, Corporate Development Service
Mr D Gallagher, Business Gateway Service Manager, Development and Infrastructure Service
Ms R Cleland, Corporate Communications Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Miss J Green, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Also in attendance:

Inspector M Middlehurst, Police Scotland
Ms M Thompson, Head of Public Relations and Engagement, NHS Highland
Mr K Rodgers, Head of Finance, NHS Highland

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 (non-financial)
Item 6 – Ms J Douglas (financial)

Item 9 – Mr D Fallows, Mr B Lobban and Mr G Rimell (financial)

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2016 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee.

In accordance with Standing Order 18, the Committee **AGREED** that agenda item 8 be taken at this juncture.

8. Police – Area Performance Summary Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/14/16 dated 12 August 2016 by the South Highland Area Commander which provided a local summary update on progress with reference to the local priorities within the Highland 2014-2017 Policing Plan.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- the number of drink/drug driving detections was substantially lower in 16/17 compared with 15/16 and it was queried as to how much of this was due to lower levels of enforcement and detection rather than fewer negative tests;
- statistics were sought on the amount of time the A9 was closed due to roadworks and road traffic accidents;
- the average speed cameras and mobile speed camera improved the road safety on the A9 but speeding through villages was still a big concern for smaller communities who found it difficult to meet the criteria for the Northern Safety Camera Partnership camera van to be stationed in their village and felt they were not given the same priority as the A9. In this regard, support was required to ensure measures were taken to remind and educate people about the 30mph speed limit coming in to and throughout villages;
- the 40mph speed limit as a means of controlling traffic through the dualling of the A9 road works was working extremely well and the progress being made was good news;
- despite a general low level of crime, it was a concern that the figures for breach of the peace/threatening and abusive behaviour had doubled compared to the previous year;
- appreciation was expressed for the work undertaken by PC Stuart Mackellaig, especially considering the large area that he covered, and specifically for his attendance at a recent Community Council meeting where he was able to help and provide reassurance to the community which was felt went beyond the main duties of his job;
- the figures for antisocial behaviour involved some arrests but there were some incidents of vandalism and antisocial behaviour that did not reach that stage of police involvement and it was therefore an issue that required a cautious police response;
- in relation to unscrupulous traders, the public could help preventative work by monitoring vulnerable neighbours and challenging or reporting any suspicious behaviour; and

- the process of being a witness in a court case was commended which involved regular updates at each stage of the proceedings.

The Committee **NOTED** and scrutinised the progress report and updates in relation to the three Priorities - Road Safety; Antisocial Behaviour; and Dishonesty.

The Committee also **AGREED** that statistics from Transport Scotland on the amount of time the A9 was closed due to roadworks and road traffic accidents be circulated to Members and that Members provide details of communities for targeted speeding measures.

In accordance with Standing Order 18, the Committee **AGREED** that agenda item 6 be taken at this juncture.

6. NHS Highland – Redesign of Services Presentation NHS na Gàidhealtachd – Taisbeanadh Ath-dhealbhadh Sheirbheisean

Declaration of Interest – Ms J Douglas declared a financial interest in this item as a Board Member of NHS Highland but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, would remain to participate in the discussion.

A verbal report was given at the meeting by Ms Maimie Thomson and Mr Kenny Rodgers from NHS Highland on the Redesign of Services in Badenoch and Strathspey during which it was explained that the proposal to modernise services was subject to a formal public consultation that took place between April and July 2014 and had resulted in support for the recommendation to build a new community hospital and resource centre in Aviemore as part of a wider redesign including care homes, community care and care at home. It was also explained that the current stage, to develop the business case, involved preparing an Initial Agreement document, which had been endorsed by the Scottish Government, and also required confirmation of the detailed arrangements for communities. In this regard, a general update was provided on the arrangements for the three main centres in Badenoch and Strathspey, Aviemore, Grantown-on-Spey and Kingussie, and also for the wider area. Furthermore, assurance was provided that there were no concerns relating to the viability of the preferred site at Aviemore's Technology Park and details, including implications and benefits, were provided on the two options for purchasing the land which were either to buy part of the land that met the specific required need or buy the full site. In conclusion, confirmation was provided that it was hoped that the site would be secured this financial year, subject to planning consideration, and the wider funding package was outlined.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- the project had been carefully considered and benefits for the whole of Badenoch and Strathspey were welcomed. In particular, people would be surprised with the services that would still be available in Grantown-on-Spey and Kingussie and how well it would work in the overall scheme;
- although consideration could be given to what the NHS or Community Car Schemes could deliver in terms of transport provision in the future, it remained a challenge that there were no effective means of controlling what public transport providers could do to help develop local infrastructure and ensure there were regular public transport services to the hospital;

- the funding from the Scottish Government was welcomed;
- thanks were expressed to Ms Thomson and Mr Rodgers for all the support they had given groups and for the good level of consultation which had been carried out from the start;
- despite the large size of the site, there were limitations to what could be done with it due to its odd shape. However, purchasing the whole site would be beneficial in terms of ecology and future proofing the site for another generation and also to create a set piece in the middle of Aviemore;
- it was really important to keep talking and listening and updating people on the progress of the project, which was good for accountability and would ensure all views were considered and could be scrutinised and challenged to get the best result for the locality. In this regard, it was pleasing that Ms Thomson and Mr Rodgers were in attendance at the meeting and at Community Council meetings and continued dialogue and openness was encouraged;
- in general most people were supportive of the project and the small minority who were opposed would be expected for any particular project;
- transport was important not only for the hospital but to the whole area and there was an opportunity to produce an integrated transport system which the Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company would be fundamental to and would involve the input from a wide variety of partners;
- it was felt that the Transport and Access Group had not met enough due to meetings being delayed which needed to be resolved; and
- it was requested that any further updates be presented to future meetings of the Area Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the position and invited NHS Highland to provide updates to future meetings of the Area Committee.

At this point, the Chair welcomed Mrs Margaret Davidson, Leader of the Council to the meeting.

4. Developing Local Priorities for Badenoch and Strathspey Prìomhachasan Sgìre

Declaration of Interest – Ms J Douglas declared a non-financial interest in this item as a 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.

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/12/16 dated 26 August 2016 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which provided an update on the local strategic priorities for Badenoch and Strathspey.

In this regard, the Leader of the Council was in attendance at the meeting and discussed with the Committee their key issues and how the Administration could help progress these issues. The Leader also discussed with the Committee their strategic priorities for the Badenoch and Strathspey Area in order to allow these to sit alongside the priorities as listed in Highland First.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- Members in Badenoch and Strathspey worked very much as a team which contributed to the list of key priorities being produced by jointly considering what was best for the Ward;
- in relation to the Inverness City/Region Deal and the Capital Programme, there had been some discussion about the funding that was being received to support economic development and how it could benefit the Badenoch and Strathspey area;
- there had been discussions regarding the Committee's support for the Steam Railway project "Rails to Grantown" and the positive impact it would have on the wider area;
- transport was another key issue in terms of economic development by ensuring that people could access jobs from village to village and make best use of their skills and also access education particularly for young people going to Inverness. However there was concern about the pressure that would be put on the retail environment in the area due to the dualling of the A9 which would reduce the journey time to Inverness and make people more comfortable with commuting;
- work was being undertaken with Inverness College to deliver college courses within schools and both High Schools had recently introduced Chinese classrooms;
- the Badenoch and Strathspey area had a lot to offer so it was not only about the needs of the area but also about what could be shared with the rest of Highland;
- the review of the Capital Programme would be an opportunity to prioritise the available funds and provide a focus to narrow down the long list of priorities;
- there was a need to change the idea that the Highlands was a satellite to Inverness although it was recognised that Inverness had a much larger population and there were cross area benefits which meant when Inverness was doing well other areas would also benefit;
- concern was expressed in relation to whether the area priorities would fit the Council priorities considering the extent to which the Central Government would allow control to communities to strengthen themselves;
- the South of Badenoch and Strathspey was struggling economically and needed particularly focus, which had been communicated to both HIE and the Cairngorms National Park Authority;
- the two reasons why young people left the area were because they could not find a decent job and could not afford a house and therefore these issues were fundamental to producing a successful economy and diversifying from the tourism base;
- there was an opportunity to develop research facilities in partnership with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) at the new hospital; and
- it was suggested that the Cairngorms National Park Authority be responsible for producing a local development plan and consideration of all planning applications be determined by the Council based on this plan so that planning was part of the democratic process.

In response, the Leader of the Council provided an overview of the progress of the Inverness City/Region Deal, during which she advised that housing was an aspect of the deal that Badenoch and Strathspey could benefit from and encouraged the Committee to review their Local Development Plan and arrange a workshop with the Head of Property Partnerships so that there would be housing suitable for both young and old people. She also advised the Committee not to hesitate to ask for a change in policy on planning and confirmed that a discussion would be arranged with the

Chair of Planning, Development and Infrastructure on delegated powers to planning officers. Furthermore, she highlighted the opportunities that the redesign of NHS Services would present, in particular with the UHI to develop a teaching and research facility alongside the new hospital in Aviemore. In concluding, she provided advice on key local priorities and how they could be integrated into the list of priorities included in Highland First.

Having thanked the Leader for her attendance at the meeting, the Committee **AGREED:-**

- i. the draft local priorities for Badenoch and Strathspey as detailed in appendix 1 to the report; and
- ii. that the draft local priorities would be further refined following discussion with the appropriate officers at a future meeting to be arranged and reported to the next meeting of the Area Committee.

5. Taking Forward Community Partnerships Com-pàirteachasan Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/13/16 dated 25 August 2016 by the Acting Head of Policy and Reform which provided an update on the next steps for establishing a Community Partnership for Badenoch and Strathspey.

During discussion, Members queried how the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) had been chosen to take the responsibility as the lead agency and chairing the partnership, but it was agreed that regardless of who had been chosen as the lead agency, it would be incumbent on all partners to ensure that communities were engaged in the new partnership.

The Committee **NOTED** the next steps to taking forward local Community Partnerships within the Badenoch and Strathspey Committee area.

In accordance with Standing Order 18, the Committee **AGREED** to take agenda items 9 to 12 before agenda item 7.

9. Cairngorm National Park Partnership Plan 2017-2022 Freagairt Cho-chomhairle Plana Com-pàirteachais Pàirce 2017-2022

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Fallows, Mr B Lobban and Mr G Rimell declared financial interests in this item as Board Members of the Cairngorm National Park Authority but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, would remain to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Joint Report No BSAC/15/16 dated 29 August 2016 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure and Inverness City Area Manager which advised Members of the main themes in the Draft National Park Plan which would be forwarded to the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) as the Council's feedback.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- extensive consideration had been given to the Cairngorms National Park

Partnership Plan and the Ward Manager was commended for the response she had produced;

- consideration should be given to more innovative ways to deliver housing that was flexible;
- the comment included in the draft consultation response that some of the language and phraseology should be reflected on as it could be considered to be unhelpful in a partnership context was endorsed;
- further emphasis should be put on the request for a clear explanation of what the CNPA vision was around delivery of simpler, more effect and better value public services in the National Park and how the CNPA saw this being delivered in terms of the responsibility of the CNPA and partners;
- there was not enough reference to partnership in the draft National Park Plan;
- concerns were expressed in relation to the impact of Brexit on the National Park as a number of their functions relied on EU funding and it was suggested that the Committee request that the CNPA explain what the impact would be;
- it was suggested that the target number of house builds both within and outwith the National Park be sought during discussions with the Head of Property Partnerships to ensure that there was enough land allocated for housing;
- there was a requirement to lobby the Scottish Government to allow the allocation of land for specific housing in particularly affordable and mid-market housing;
- the Housing Need and Demand Assessment published in November 2015 showed that Badenoch and Strathspey had the second highest need for housing in Highland and it was essential that the Council aimed to meet this need and deliver it in affordable ways; and
- despite efforts the Chair and Ward Memebtrs had been unable to meet with the CNPA before the meeting and it was therefore suggested that the CNPA be invited to a future meeting.

The Committee **AGREED** the response to the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan consultation 2017 – 2022.

The Committee also **AGREED** to invite the Cairngorms National Park Authority to a future meeting.

10. Business Development: Badenoch and Strathspey Update Leasachadh Gnothachais: A' Fàs ar n-Eaconamaidh

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/16/16 dated 12 August 2016 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which provided an update on the performance of the Council's business development services in Badenoch and Strathspey. It summarised the delivery of the Business Gateway over the first quarter of 2016, and informed Members on progress with Council involvement in local business development activity in Badenoch and Strathspey during the first quarter of 2016/17.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- concern was expressed about the ability of the functions of Highland Opportunity Limited (HOL) to continue, in particularly to provide loans to small companies looking to develop, due to the lack of promotion of these activities and awareness of the total funds available due to unresolved issues relating to

- pension liability;
- statistics were sought on the baseline activity of Business Gateway including the amount of attendees at surgeries and the number of enquiries made;
- the quarterly activity report contained a lot of information which was not appropriate for a public report and the language used was unhelpful and could be perceived to be negative. It should instead have focussed on the solutions and not the problems;
- it was felt that there was little awareness of the local marketing activity being undertaken and workshops being held by Business Gateway despite it being reported that there was a good amount of visibility;
- further information was sought on who was getting paid, what they were getting paid to do, how much it was costing the Council, who they were talking to and what they were achieving;
- it was suggested that the report be reconsidered and brought back in a similar format to the Housing Performance reports so that it could be effectively scrutinised;
- there was consensus that the report lacked statistical and financial detail and Members feedback on this should be shared with the report author;
- it was fundamental to rural communities that small enterprises were provided with real assistance and given the opportunity to grow within large procurement exercises such as the shared services agreement with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils;
- an explanation of why the Council was negotiating with Scottish Enterprise and not HIE regarding the future funding of the services provided by the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) was sought;
- there was no reference on the Council's website to the HOL Loan Fund, which had been very useful to small business and it was therefore very important that it was given a high profile and promoted effectively; and
- it was important to monitor the progress of people who had attended surgeries or made enquires with Business Gateway to ensure that a reasonable amount of people were benefiting from the loan fund.

The Committee **AGREED** that the report be reviewed and brought back to the next meeting to include more statistical and financial detail and that the Chair discuss this issue with the Director of Planning and Development.

The Committee adjourned at 12.35 pm and resumed at 12.40 pm.

11. Housing Performance Report – 1 April to 30 June 2016 Aithisg Dèanadais Taigheadais – 1 Giblean gu 30 Ògmhios 2016

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/17/16 dated 6 September 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 30 June 2016.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- the progress being made particularly in relation to the average length of time taken to complete repairs and the significant improvement in the average re-let time was encouraging;
- the increase in the current rent arrears and number of homeless presentations

- was to be expected due to the impact of welfare reform;
- the number of homeless presentations had increased despite still being relatively small and further information was sought on the types of homeless presentations within the last year including the reasons why there had been an increase, how it impacted on staff workload and how many had been addressed by the initial housing option or by providing accommodation;
- confirmation was sought, and received, that the Housing Need and Demand Assessment 2015 did highlight Badenoch and Strathspey as an area of significant need despite an Official from the Scottish Government stating that Aviemore was no longer a housing priority area; and
- in relation to developing a local housing strategy, local consultation with communities and stakeholders about what the priorities were for the area was welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2016 to 30 June 2016.

The Committee also **AGREED** that information on the types of homeless presentations within the last year be circulated to Members.

12. **Grounds Maintenance Performance Monitoring Interim Report** **Aithisg Sgrùdadh Dèanadais a thaobh Cumail Suas Raoin**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/18/16 dated 26 August 2016 by the Director of Community Services which detailed performance management information of the Grounds Maintenance Service covering the period of April to August 2016.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- it was disappointing that the workshop on delegated powers in relation to the Community Services budget was only taking place following the meeting and that the Committee had not been involved at an earlier stage;
- communities were disappointed by poor performance in relation to grass cutting, particularly with the time taken for remedial action in cemeteries;
- acknowledgement was expressed for the hard work undertaken by the monitoring team;
- it did not make a good impression on communities to report an improvement in the pass rate of inspections for contracted grass cutting despite the total number of inspections being reduced by half and the pass rates for both quarters still being unacceptable;
- one lesson that had been learnt was that there was a need for a well-resourced monitoring process. In this regard an electronic monitoring system was suggested whereby contractors could submit a photo on completion of their work which would reduce costs and increase monitoring; and
- there was not a preference for who carried out grass cutting provided that it was value for money.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the performance management and remedial action information provided on the grounds maintenance service set out in the report;

- ii. **NOTED** the management actions taken to address the performance issues identified; and
- iii. **AGREED** to review required service standards at future Ward Business Meetings

7. **Digital Inclusion** **Com-pàirteachadh Didseatach**

A presentation was undertaken at the meeting on Digital First and Digital Inclusion by Ms Jenny Scotson, Business Change Manager from Corporate Improvement during which she explained that the Council was on track towards achieving the target of 40% of transactions carried out online by April 2017 with a current 31% digital update. In particular, she highlighted the benefits which allowed customers to access Council Services anytime, anywhere on any device. To date, over 16,500 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. 91 forms were now available online and the range of activities these covered was detailed. To help customers to use the system a variety of training and courses were available, the details of those taking place in Badenoch and Strathspey being provided to Members.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- it was surprising but pleasing that 31% of transactions were currently carried out online which could have indirect benefits including being able to provide more accurate figures on housing need in the area due to people being more likely to apply for housing because the process had been made easier online;
- the activities happening locally and the appointment of a Digital Champion who was very enthusiastic was welcomed;
- there were improvements which could be made to some online forms, specifically in relation to paying for school meals, and feedback would be provided;
- with specific reference to head teacher job applications, a review of other internal processes could be undertaken; and
- assurance was sought, and received, that all transactions could still be undertaken at Service Points for those customers who would never digitally engage.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

13. **Minutes** **Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 31 May 2016 which were approved by the Council on 29 June 2016 which were **NOTED**.

Arising from the minutes, it was reported that the statistics that were requested on the proportion of resources HIE allocated to the Badenoch and Strathspey area in comparison to other areas were still outstanding.

The meeting concluded at 1.30 pm.