

The Highland Council

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

Present:

Ms J Douglas
Mr D Fallows

Mr B Lobban
Mr G Rimell

In attendance:

Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager (Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey), Chief Executive's Office
Ms S MacLennan, Housing Manager (South), Community Services
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Community Services
Mr R Gerring, Transport Planning Manager, Development and Infrastructure Service
Mr N Young, Transport Planning Officer, Development and Infrastructure Service
Mr K MacInnes, Principal Economy Officer, Development and Infrastructure Service
Miss J Green, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Also in attendance:

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 – Mrs J Douglas (non-financial)

3. 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/19/16 dated 3 November 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 2016 - 2017. 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 a summary of the report, Group Manager F Nixon informed the Committee that Station Manager Robbie MacDougall would present reports in future.

During discussion, Members:-

- expressed praise to staff for consistent performance and for the excellent help provided to communities especially recently with firework displays and bonfires;
- sought, and received, confirmation that progress was being made with recruiting staff that reflected the demographics of the communities in Badenoch and Strathspey;
- sought, and received, clarification that the number of staff at the station in Nethybridge was one due to two retiring in October and that it was sustainable at that level; and
- sought, and received, views on whether progress was being made with the new policy implemented requiring staff to work closely with duty holders in order to reduce the number of unwanted fire alarm signals.

Thereafter the Committee thanked Group Manager F Nixon for his attendance and **NOTED** and scrutinised the attached Performance Report.

4. Developing Local Priorities for Badenoch and Strathspey Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Leasachadh Phrìomhachasan Sgìre airson Bhàideanach agus Srath Spè

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/20/16 dated 3 November 2016 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which asked Members to approve the final draft local strategic priorities for Badenoch and Strathspey as outlined in appendix one to the report.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- in regard to the transfer of the Former Folk Museum in Kingussie to the Am Fasgadh Generation Group, a letter of comfort had been issued to the Group which they were satisfied with and could now progress to apply for funding;
- the first participatory budgeting event was run on 25 February and not 18 February 2016 as stated in the report;
- in terms of supporting the community, a key role, which the Ward Manager was already undertaking, was to ensure that people were aware of the access routes that avoided potential liabilities and difficulties and were safe and positive in the long term;
- the Rails to Grantown Project was of fundamental economic importance to the entire area in terms of tourism and had the potential to operate rail services on a regular timetable in future. In this regard, it was suggested that it be

highlighted as a massive economic driver by requesting that the Council make every effort to promote the strengthening of the Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust (SRCT) as the vehicle to support the Rails to Grantown project and ensure economic benefit to Badenoch and Strathspey.

The Committee **AGREED** the local strategic priorities for Badenoch and Strathspey as outlined in appendix one to the report.

- * The Committee also **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Highland Council make every effort to promote the strengthening of the Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust (SRCT) as the vehicle to support the Rails to Grantown project and ensure economic benefit to Badenoch and Strathspey.

5. Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy Ro-innleachd a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh agus a' Ghlinne Mhòir

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/21/16 dated 28 October 2016 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which presented the final version of the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy Document for member approval. It summarised the process undertaken to draft the document and highlighted key elements within the strategy

In this regard, a copy of the strategy document had been attached as an appendix to the report.

During discussion, Members explained that the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy was not a detailed document but presented the overall road map for the area, which was a special place for many people, both tourists and locals, and was of fundamental importance to economic development. Therefore, it was necessary to ensure that this area was protected. In particular, it was requested that the Glenmore Norwegian Stone was not moved and ideally that the nearby trees be felled to provide a view of the mountains.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the strategy document; and
- ii. **NOTED** that reports would be brought back to a future meeting on the progress of the strategy.

6. Rail Services and Fares Còmhdhail ann am Bàideanach agus Srath Spè

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/22/16 dated 3 November 2016 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which presented the background to the ScotRail Franchise and provided information on the current Fare structure and the various Stakeholder engagement groups.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- it was an anomaly that advance rail fares were cheaper between Inverness and Perth than the shorter distance from villages in Badenoch and Strathspey to Perth;

- the Highland Railcard should be extended to include people living in Badenoch and Strathspey which would increase the passenger numbers travelling to Inverness for work. In this regard, it was proposed to seek support for the expansion of the Highland Railcard across Badenoch and Strathspey and the wider Highland area;
- the standard class fare between any two Scottish cities starting at £5 was no use in Badenoch and Strathspey because there was not a city in the area;
- there was concern that a number of services included in the new timetable no longer stopped at some villages in Badenoch and Strathspey. Newtonmore was the only station in the area which showed falling passenger numbers which was not surprising when services did not stop at the station or stopped at times that were not useful for people. It was felt that this was a way to meet the franchise commitment to provide improved journey times at the detriment to rural areas and an explanation of the franchisee's obligation to existing services and confirmation that Newtonmore or Carrbridge would not close in the lifetime of the franchise was sought from the operator. In this regard, it was proposed to ask the Highland Council to lobby the rail company to ensure the inclusion of Newtonmore and Carrbridge as station stops in all through train services for economic prosperity;
- the transformation of the quality of inter-city services was welcomed but it was highlighted that seating had been omitted from the refurbishment. There was a need to ensure that there was sufficient seating for passengers, particularly during summer for tourism;
- there was concern relating to how the franchise were made aware of the issues and anomalies with local service provision and so that these were addressed. In this regard, it was proposed, as a matter of urgency before the new timetable commenced, to write to the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland highlighting the concerns raised.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report including fare structure / railcards;
- ii. **NOTED** the opportunities to provide feedback through the various stakeholder groups; and
- iii. **AGREED** to write to HTRANS seeking continued lobbying for fair and equitable fares for the rural parts of the HITRANS area, in particular Badenoch and Strathspey.
- * iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Highland Council support the expansion of the Highland Railcard across Badenoch and Strathspey and the wider Highland area;
- * v. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Highland Council support the inclusion of Newtonmore and Carrbridge as station stops in all through train services; and
- vi. **AGREED** to write to the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland detailing issues and anomalies in local service provision and seek ways to address these.

7. **Business Development: Badenoch and Strathspey Update** **Leasachadh Gnothachais: Cunntas às Ùr mu Bhàideanach agus Srath Spè**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/23/16 dated 1 November 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 for seven months of 2016, and informed Members on progress with Council involvement in local business development activity in Badenoch and Strathspey during the first half of 2016/17.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- the report linked with the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy in that it was appreciated that tourism as the traditional industry was changing slightly and it was therefore important that reports were presented on a regularly basis;
- the report was more encouraging than expected and began to show an improving picture which needed to be maintained;
- the report was better than the previous report but it was again requested that reports were formatted similar to the housing performance reports so that statistics for Badenoch and Strathspey and other areas in Highland were presented in a table to allow for comparisons to be made and resources to be scrutinised;
- clarification was sought, and received, that the Business Gateway Highland LEDs for live TV football games referred the pitch-side advertising boards;
- an update was sought, and received, in relation to the progress of transferring the responsibility for assisting businesses from Business Gateway to HIE; and
- it was important to ensure that small businesses were aware that the financial support previously provided by Highland Opportunity Limited was still available from the Council.

The Committee **NOTED** the Business Development Service performance in Badenoch and Strathspey for the period April to October 2016/17.

8. Housing Performance Report – 1 April to 30 September 2016 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean gu 30 Sultain 2016

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/24/16 dated 2 November 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 September 2016.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- there was a typographical error in the second last row of the table on appendix 1 which should have read number of allocations where temporary accommodation had been accepted;
- praise was expressed to staff who had taking on board feedback in relation to repairs and made improvements for the benefit of communities however there were concerns in relation to the waiting times for some tenants and confirmation was sought, and received, that legacy cases would be picked up;
- the number of homeless presentations had doubled and in response to a query whether it was confirmed that there had been a similar increase elsewhere in Highland due to the method of reporting additional statistics; and
- praise was expressed for the work undertaken to decrease the rent arrears balance despite the current economic challenges and further information was sought on how this had been achieved. In response it was explained that a dedicated member of staff had been in place since May, working with Citizens Advice Beaux and engaging with tenants to reduce rent arrears.

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

In accordance with Standing Order 18, the Committee **AGREED** that agenda item 11 be taken at this juncture.

11. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 6 September 2016, which were approved by the Council on 8 September 2016 which were **NOTED**.

9. Roads Winter Maintenance Plan for 2016/17 Plana Obair-gleidhidh Geamhraidh airson 2016/17

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/25/16 dated 1 November 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided Members with information on winter maintenance preparations and arrangements for the 2016/17 winter period and invited the Committee to approve the Winter Maintenance Plans for Badenoch and Strathspey.

During a summary of the report, the Roads Operations Manager confirmed that he would circulate copies of the Winter Maintenance Plans for the Area to Members.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- information on the process for requesting salt/gritting services and contact details of appropriate staff should be distributed to Community Councils;
- it would benefit the Council if Community Councils were provided with salt bins at specific locations and therefore it was important to ensure that the method for requesting this was made easier;
- footpaths were as important as roads and a plea was made that common sense was applied to the treatment of Safer Routes to School;
- in addition to the priority road maps, it was requested that a map of priority footpaths be circulated to Members;
- a JCB was being used to clear snow at Aviemore Primary School which was not fit for purpose and incurred additional costs to the Council. In this regard, with specific reference to the co-ordination and support for other services alternative methods of snow clearing were sought;
- although there was no objection to the purpose built snow cutter head being based in Grantown on Spey it was wondered why Grantown had been chosen instead of Kingussie or Newtonmore, which were at a higher ground level and therefore had more snow, and it was suggested that one snow cutter was not enough and another should be sought in a future allocation;
- the current snow blower was at the end of its lifetime and in need of a replacement and the cost of an additional snow blower would be offset by being able to avoid the adverse economic impact of otherwise having to close roads, in particular the Cairngorm Ski Road; and
- it was necessary that the Council recognised the need for a snow blower and in this regard it was proposed to recommend to the Council that provision be

made for capital investment in a self-propelled snow blower to be based in Badenoch and Strathspey.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Maintenance Plan for the Badenoch and Strathspey Area, which included the priority road maps presented in Appendix B, and **AGREED** to circulate a map of priority footpaths to Members.

- * The Committee also **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that provision be made for capital investment in a self-propelled snow blower to be based in Badenoch and Strathspey.

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

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/26/16 dated 25 October 2016 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the project 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.

During discussion, Members:-

- sought and received an explanation of the basis of the objection;
- felt it was a good project and a good use of Scottish Government funding; and
- requested that the potential growth of Newtonmore was taken into account when considering the provision of Safer Routes to School.

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

The meeting concluded at 11.55 am