

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in Talla nan Ros, King Street, Kingussie on Tuesday 14 November 2017 at 10.30 am

Present:

Mr J Bruce
Mrs M Cockburn

Ms P Hadley
Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager (Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey), Chief Executive's Office
Ms S MacLennan, Housing Manager (South), Community Services
Mr L MacDonald, Housing Repairs Manager, Community Services
Miss J Green, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Also in attendance:

Mr M Ferguson, Director of Planning and Rural Development, Cairngorms National Park Authority
Mr G Miles, Head of Planning and Communities, Cairngorms National Park Authority
Mr J Gibbs, Area Manager, Inner Moray Firth, Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Mr R MacDougall, Station Manager, Service Delivery, Highland Central LSO Area, 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 3 and 5 – Ms P Hadley (financial)

3. Cairngorms National Park Authority and Highlands and Islands Enterprise – Economic Development
Leasachadh Eaconamach Ùghdarras Pàirc Nàiseanta a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh

Declaration of Interest – Ms P Hadley declared a financial interest in this item as a Member of the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board but in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission remained in the room to participate in the discussion.

A presentation was undertaken at the meeting by Mr Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning and Rural Development, Cairngorms National Park Authority on economic development in relation to the park authority plan including the economic strategy and the spatial priority regarding the south Badenoch area.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- confirmation was sought and received that the Cairngorms National Park covered Highland, Aberdeenshire, Moray, Perth and Kinross, and Angus with Badenoch and Strathspey being the largest populated area;
- clarification was sought and received that the fact and figures provided from the Cairngorms National Park Authority Annual Review 2016/17 in relation to housing were taken from Council Tax records which did not include useable housing stock being used as businesses to avoid paying Council tax;
- it was queried if anything could be done to minimise the amount of affordable housing being resold;
- views were sought on the effect that the availability of housing in general was having on the local economy in relation to inward investment. In response it was confirmed that there was anecdotal evidence from businesses who were struggling to attract staff to the area that this was the case;
- there was doubt expressed regarding the likelihood of the Reaching 100% Programme (R100) being able to deliver superfast broadband access to every premises in the Badenoch and Strathspey area. In this regard, there was a need for the Council and the National Park to take a joint approach to support the consideration of alternative options;
- confirmation was sought and received that there was a plan to expand the forestry industry within the park area;
- the population in Highland had increased due to immigration rather than the native population. For that reason there was a need to be mindful of the possible impact of Brexit;
- caution was expressed regarding the graphics which were presented, specifically that people retiring to the area were not included in the total figures and reflected in the housing need, and in response it was suggested that a copy of the presentation by the and a link to the evidence report “Stimulating Housing Development in the Highlands and Islands” be provided; and
- it was important that the Council and the National Park met regularly, especially at officer level.

Thereafter, a presentation was undertaken by Mr James Gibbs, Area Manager, Inner Moray Firth, Highlands and Islands Enterprise on the opportunities and challenges relating to economic development in Badenoch and Strathspey during which he explained the resources deployed by HIE, set out the context of local issues and

projects and gave an overview of the priorities of HIE and links with partner organisations. He also provided an update in relation to the Cairngorm Mountain resort and ongoing discussions with the Council to replace the snow clearing equipment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the last couple of years had been difficult due to a number of large firms with well paid jobs going out of business in the area;
- the local economy was highly dependent on the Cairngorm resort in winter and the report that discussions were being held with the Council regarding the replacement of snow clearing equipment was welcomed;
- in terms of availability of housing to attract business, there was a need to consider quality rental accommodation which would suit the transient nature of tourism industries;
- some concern was expressed regarding the increase in the percentage of affordable housing required which it was felt needed to be flexible to encourage developers to build;
- it was queried whether there was a way to encourage more direct involvement between High Schools and the UHI with the aim of producing a better educated workforce and in response it was offered that an invite be extended to Chris O'Neil, Principle of the UHI, to attend a future meeting to discuss this issue.

Having thanked officers for their presentations, the Committee **NOTED** the content of both presentations and **AGREED** that a copy of the presentation by the Cairngorms National Park Authority and a link to the evidence report "Stimulating Housing Development in the Highlands and Islands" be circulated to Members.

The Committee also **AGREED** that an invite be extended to Chris O'Neil, Principle of the UHI, to attend a future meeting to discuss the development of Higher Education and Further Education in the area.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Area Performance Report for 2017/18 Aithisg Coileanaidh Comataidh Sgìreil Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson 2017/18

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/08/17 dated 3 November 2017 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During a summary of the report, Mr R MacDougall explained that the concern which was raised at a previous meeting regarding the current level of resources in relation to the development and expansion in the area had been reported to the Local Senior Officer who had confirmed that the current level of resources was reasonable but the situation would be monitored.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- It was important to monitor the effect on local services in future with regard to the transformation of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service;
- It was queried whether there were any instances of stations in the area not being available due to low availability and in response it was confirmed that the

- best effort was made to maintain availability by working closely with employers and staff and being flexible with fire appliances to cover other stations; and
- the community engagement work to reduce the number of accidental dwelling house fires was commended.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Performance Report.

5. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017
Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2017 gu 30 Sultain 2017

Declaration of Interest – Ms P Hadley declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission remained in the room to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/09/17 dated 31 October 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- It was queried whether the increase in rent arrears was as a result of Universal Credit and in response it was confirmed that staff were working hard to contact tenants on Universal Credit in order to make suitable arrangements for the payment of rent;
- concern was expressed regarding seasonal workers who could potentially be made homeless if accommodation was tied to the job;
- clarification was sought and received that the reason for the delay in the average time taken to complete non-emergency repairs was due to situations where a work order was kept open for multiple visits for example in relation to pest control or to order materials;
- confirmation was sought and received that the number of homeless presentations was the number of applications received which could be for more than one individual;
- further information was sought in relation to cases of homelessness and in response it was offered to provide information on the reasons and outcomes of homeless presentations;
- the performance for rent arrears in the area had slipped slightly but was still reasonable good comparative to other areas in Highland however there was concern regarding the future impact of Universal Credit;
- in relation to tenants being evicted due rent arrears, confirmation was sought and received that the Council were notified by landlords, including Albyn Housing, who had a duty to advise of any potential homelessness;
- confirmation was sought and received that the Council would instruct a 'drain down' to prevent damage from cold weather if informed about an empty property then;
- an update on the progress being made to address the issues relating to biomass heating systems was sought and in response it was explained that the maintenance of biomass boilers required specialist training and would be undertaken by a number of local sub-contractors and assisted by staff based in Inverness and Lochaber; and
- it was queried whether the maintenance of biomass boilers should be carried out in-house given the number of tenants who now had the system installed and

in response confirmed that officers would attend a future ward business meeting to present more detail on the maintenance plan for biomass boilers.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017;
- ii. **AGREED** that further information on the reasons and outcomes of homelessness presentations be circulated to Members; and
- iii. **NOTED** that officers would attend a future ward business meeting to present more detail on the maintenance plan for biomass boilers.

6. Minutes

Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 5 September 2017, which were approved by the Council on 26 October 2017 – which were **NOTED**.

In relation to item 7 Winter Maintenance Plan for 2017/18, concern was expressed that the Council's snow blower would now not be replaced despite it being confirmed at the previous meeting that consideration was being undertaken to do so.

The meeting concluded at 12.15 pm