

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held **REMOTELY** on Monday, 27 July 2020 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Balfour	Mr A Jarvie
Mr B Boyd	Ms E Knox
Mrs C Caddick	Mrs I MacKenzie
Miss J Campbell	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr R MacWilliam
Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs B McAllister
Mr A Christie	Mrs T Robertson
Mrs M Davidson	Ms E Roddick
Mr K Gowans	Mr G Ross
Mr A Graham	Mr C Smith
Mr J Gray	

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer - Resources & Finance
Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration
Ms N Grant, Head of Education Services
Ms F Shearer, Area Care and Learning Manager, Education Services
Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Miss M Zavarella, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Ms R Fraser, Head of Strengthening Communities and Regional Development, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Ms L Ganley, TSI Services Manager, Highland Third Sector Interface

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.

Mrs H Carmichael in the Chair

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the City Committee paid tribute to two former Councillors who had recently passed away – Mr George Cruickshank and Mr Alistair Milne – and highlighted the service which both had given to the Council over many years.

Business

**1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr I Brown.

**2. Declaration of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

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

Item 5 – Mr A Jarvie (Non-Financial)

**3. Return to School Update
Fios às Ùr mu Thilleadh dhan Sgoil**

During a verbal update, the Chief Executive, the Head of Education Services and the Area Care and Learning Manager provided an update on the return to schools.

In this regard, it was highlighted that direction had been received on 23 July from the Scottish Government confirming the return to school for pupils at full capacity from 12 August. As part of this direction, it had been advised that transport would operate as normal and there would be no need for physical distancing between pupils. Key considerations included staggered breaks and lunches, an enhanced cleaning regime, a daily cleaning service, catering adjustments and encouraging pupils to remain close to the school over the lunch break.

It was noted that there would be further guidance from the Scottish Government on 31 July and this would be communicated to all families at that time.

Overall, there was now confidence to implement all practical elements and guidelines along with the high paced approach to recovery of learning and teaching. It was also highlighted that numeracy, literacy and outdoor learning frameworks created by the Council had received national attention as best practice.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- it was suggested that staff should encourage pupils to stay close to the school during lunch breaks and that any measures, including catering arrangements, to enable this to be accommodated should be considered;
- it was noted that in larger schools there would be staggered times for lunches (including provision for taking lunches in classrooms) and discussions would take place between head teachers and local businesses regarding managing pupils going out into the community from a practical point of view;
- there would be a staggered intake during the first week of return to allow these conversations to occur between staff and pupils and in addition there would be discussions with catering colleagues about what food and staffing was available and how various scenarios would be managed;
- it was commented that head teachers and school staff had done an incredible job to provide as complete an education as possible for pupils during an unprecedented time and these efforts were consistently praised by Members;
- there was concern that, due to the additional requirement for supervision of pupils during lunch periods, staff would not have time for breaks or preparation. In response, it was confirmed that staff health and wellbeing would continue to be a priority and as such there had been regular communication with both staff and trade unions throughout the planning process;

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- it was noted that the Council had been commended with respect to efforts in benchmarking, blending learning and flip learning and surveys had been completed by pupils, parents and teachers and would be sent to Members regarding problem areas and good practice;
- there had been additional funding awarded for digital provision and more access to ICT moving forward and this was welcomed. It was also noted that, by the return to school date, all students would have access to a Chromebook;
- in respect of future outbreaks, national guidance would become available in the coming week which would explain explicitly how to manage and respond to local outbreaks in the school environment;
- information was sought and received with respect to the return of children with ASN and how these pupils and their support staff would be supported during the transition back to school given that as a result of the lockdown there could be increased anxiety and concern about returning to the classroom. In this respect, it was confirmed that there would be a full return of all students and there would be links with the educational psychology teams and additional school resources. It was commented that ASN allocations changed from year-to-year depending on levels of need and matching the needs to staffing levels had been initiated and a meeting would occur again with head teachers in the first few weeks of the new session to ensure the necessary support was available;
- in relation to transport, and the importance of communicating with parents as soon as possible. it was noted that this was being coordinated by the Principal Transport Officer and would be communicated as soon as possible;
- there was a need for Members to receive the same information and updates for their local areas with respect to return to school that the head teachers were receiving. In this respect, assurance was provided from Officers that Local Members would be copied into correspondence moving forward. It was also suggested that in addition it would be useful for Members to follow the social media platforms linked with their local schools;
- it was agreed that information would be provided as soon as possible in relation to the refurbishment of Inverness High School and specifically whether this work would be completed prior to the return to school date;
- with regard to cleaning within schools, it was confirmed that facilities management teams had an updated process in place which included enhanced cleaning in the evenings and throughout the school day, updated cleaning products in line with virus requirements and reminders in place for pupils regarding handwashing stations and hygiene practices;
- in terms of an assessment of pupils upon their return to school to determine deficits and supports required given the differing levels of engagement of education among pupils in the home environment, it was highlighted that the Council had set up a Working Group in this respect, together with assessments which would take place in the first term around recovery of learning and targeted resources would be put in place where necessary; and
- it was confirmed that many of the issues raised by Members would be addressed further and more fully at the upcoming Education Committee meeting on 6 August 2020.

Thereafter, Mr K Gowans, seconded by Ms E Knox, **MOVED** that a Special Meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee should be arranged for Monday, 10 August to allow further updates and reports on the return to school in the City of Inverness Area to be provided for Members.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mrs H Carmichael, seconded by Mr G Ross, moved that the status quo should remain and the next meeting of the City of Inverness Area Committee should be held as scheduled on Thursday, 27 August.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 7 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 14 votes, with no abstentions, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr B Boyd, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox, Mr R MacWilliam and Ms E Roddick.

For the Amendment:

Mr R Balfour, Mrs C Caddick, Miss J Campbell, Mrs H Carmichael, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Davidson, Mr A Graham, Mr J Gray, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mr D Macpherson, Mrs B McAllister, Mrs T Robertson, Mr G Ross and Mr C Smith.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the Update on the Return to School which had been provided.

**4. COVID-19 Response
Freagairt COVID-19**

A Presentation was undertaken by the Inverness City Area Manager on the Highland Council response during which information was provided on the setting up of humanitarian assistance centres, the Covid-19 helpline, ten local community hubs, distribution hub, virtual hub and the operation of other local arrangements.

The key learning issues were also highlighted, including the positive outcomes, challenges faced and the opportunities to carry forward examples of best practice and especially partnership working.

Ms Rhona Fraser, Head of Strengthening Communities and Regional Development, HIE Inner Moray Firth Area Team, provided information in relation to the Scottish Community Grant Fund. In this regard, examples of positive joint work which had been undertaken with various organisations throughout the area was highlighted, including detail on the distribution of funds as necessary. Details of the work surrounding the Pivotal Enterprise Fund within the Inner Moray Firth area were also provided.

Ms Leah Ganley, TSI Services Manager, Highland Third Sector Interface, was also in attendance at the meeting and highlighted examples of the extremely positive community response to Covid-19 from across the Highlands, including the setting up of a Community Action Register which contained details of all action being undertaken in the area. In addition, a Covid-19 Website had been set up to provide guidance and examples of best practice, along with a helpline for third sector organisations which offered free online training as and when required.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was a need to commend the significant level of volunteering across the Highland area in recent months and the thanks of the City Committee were conveyed to all those involved;
- the thanks of the City Committee were also conveyed to the Officers who had been involved to date and who continued to provide overwhelming support and guidance throughout this unprecedented situation;
- the insights into what was being provided were extremely helpful and the hugely improved examples of communication and partnership working between organisations across the area were welcomed;
- it was hoped that the new partnership working arrangements would be continued into the future and that this would be done in conjunction with communities in the area;
- there was a need for the hubs to be evolved whilst at the same time ensuring that Highland Council staff could return to their normal duties and it was noted that a report in this regard would be submitted on this issue to the Communities and Place Committee;
- it would be imperative to involve Local Members in all future arrangements so that they were fully informed of all future action being taken, particularly as it was anticipated that there were difficult situations still to come, not least the potential for a 'second wave' of the virus, the ending of the furlough scheme and the Brexit situation at the end of the year;
- there was a need to focus on Action Plans in respect of Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention and specifically future funding requirements in this respect;
- there was a feeling that there had been less activity around hubs and volunteering in areas outside the City and it was hoped that this activity could perhaps be expanded in the coming months;
- it was felt that some community groups had initiated action in advance of the Council at the start of the pandemic and it was hoped that lessons could be learned from this for the future;
- there was an urgent need to build on the community network which was now in place;
- further information was required in terms of how the 'Spaces for People' initiative would be taken forward;
- it would be helpful if support could be provided for charities in terms of future liaison and also involvement from Churches added to the network already in place;
- it was suggested that information and advice on food budgeting as part of the food distribution arrangements would be advantageous for many people;
- it was highlighted that there would be a need to review recent events at some point, specifically in order to learn lessons to inform any future Council response/resilience planning in terms of a 'second wave' of the virus;
- further information was needed on the actions to be taken by the Council to ensure that the volunteering legacy was maintained;
- it was important to also recognise and commend the response from third sector colleagues and the excellent examples of partnership working;

- clarification was needed at an early date as to any proposed future use of Ward Discretionary Budgets in relation to the Covid-19 response;
- it was felt by some Members that they could have had further and more detailed information over recent months and in addition to the local briefings which had been undertaken;
- there was concern for support workers at present in view of the significant issues with drug/alcohol in some areas of the City in particular;
- it was noted that there was to be a national audit of the Covid-19 response from Councils across Scotland, including collation of specific data, and this was welcomed; and
- above all, the thanks of Members should be conveyed to all Council Officers for the outstanding work which had been and continued to be taken during this unprecedented set of circumstances.

Thereafter, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the Presentations which had been undertaken and thanked the Officers present for their attendance at the meeting.

**5. City and Area Recovery Plan
Plana Ath-shlànachaidh Baile agus Sgìre**

Declaration of Interest – Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a member of the Inverness & Nairn Access Panel 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.

An Update was provided by the Head of Development and Regeneration on the initial work of the City and Area Recovery Group which had been established by the Council’s Recovery Board in line with establishing links to areas across Highland.

Information was provided in respect of the City and Area Recovery Plan which highlighted the Council response to Covid-19 and included the proposed remit of the City and Area of Inverness Economic Recovery Group, current partnership arrangements, current interventions and projects, current capital projects, potential projects for the City Centre in the short and medium terms and also potential projects which were City and Area wide (also in the short and medium term).

In this regard, the proposed remit of the new Economic Recovery Group was detailed as follows –

- (i) to oversee and provide input to the overall Highland Economic Recovery Plan by ensuring a co-ordinated approach to the issues relevant to the City of Inverness, recognising the significant role of the City in the Highland economy;
- (ii) to provide a sounding board for the actions being taken to ensure a return to business within Inverness, working closely with key partners such as Inverness BID;
- (iii) to provide input to the development of a medium to longer term economic regeneration strategy for the City and area which would maximise the opportunities for regeneration, redevelopment and new build, all tied in to

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- the economic recovery of the City and the Highlands from the impact of COVID-19; and
- (iv) to prepare updates and reports to the City of Inverness and Area Committee, the Recovery Board and other groups as appropriate

Current partnership arrangements included weekly meetings with business leaders and others, Inverness BID re the City Centre, HIE and the Scottish Government Regional Office. Meetings were also being held with other providers, such as public transport organisations, and meetings were to be arranged with SDS/UHI regarding employment, re-skilling and training.

In terms of current interventions and projects, these encompassed Business Grant Support in Inverness (1600 business grants approved, £17.5 million), Community Hub support to 150 households per week in the Inverness area, the Spaces for People project, the bounce back campaign and outdoor spaces (supporting the hospitality trade).

Current capital projects were listed as West Link Phase 2, Smithton/Culloden Flood Protection, Inverness Active Travel, Merkinch Primary School and Inverness High School. Housing examples included Academy Street (the former 'Farm Foods' site), Church Street (the former 'Parrot Pine' site), Castle Street ('Chisholms'), Kinmylies, Slackbuie (two projects), Easterfield and Stratton Farm (Phase 1) – with an overall value of £36.3m.

Potential projects for the City Centre in the short and medium term, with a focus on low carbon, digital and partnership working and ensuring that projects were deliverable and almost 'shovel ready', included the following:-

Short Term

Inverness Castle (Phase 1)
Union Street ('Arnotts')
Academy Street (Public Realm Works)
Victorian Market (Refurbishment)
Rose Street Bus Link (bid to pop-up Infrastructure Fund)
Active Travel Project
High Street (decluttering)
Old Town ("branding")

Medium Term

Northern Meeting Park
Eden Court
Inverness Castle (Phase 2)/Upper Bridge Street
City Transport Hub
Railway Station/Bus Station area – and wider regeneration (Library)
Eastgate Hostel
Viewhill House

Finally, potential projects which were classed as City and Area wide encompassed the following:-

Short Term

Inshes Park (Phase 3)
Torvean Park/Parkrun route

Investment in the School Estate
UHI Campus (new projects led by HIE)
UHI Campus Sports provision
Raigmore Hospital Bus Gate (funding bid to pop up Infrastructure Fund)
Drumnadrochit Flood Scheme
Active Travel Improvements

Affordable Housing projects

Stratton Farm (Phase 2)
Balloch Farm (Phase I)
UHI Campus (zero carbon housing project pilot)
Wester Inshes.

Medium Term

Longman Energy from Waste/ Renewable Energy Hub
Upper Bridge Street
East Inverness Development
Longman Interchange/East Link

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in relation to the 'Spaces for People' initiative, it was clear that the one-way system around Castle Street in particular was not working well at present and should be reviewed as soon as possible;
- it was imperative that consideration was given to the creation of an ambient, attractive City Centre in order to welcome visitors;
- it was important that 'shovel ready' projects were in place in order to take advantage of any future funding opportunities;
- it would be helpful if a Members' Workshop could be arranged in this regard and specifically to provide a focus on potential future projects;
- thanks should be conveyed to Officers for the exceptional level of work which had been undertaken over recent months in relation to City Centre projects;
- the creation of the Recovery Board was welcomed and all Members of the City Committee were encouraged to attend;
- it was hoped that Phase 2 of the Castle project could be brought forward as soon as possible;
- partnership working was the way forward and all opportunities should be progressed as they came forward;
- there had to be a very clear focus on job creation in the coming months;
- in regard to the Common Good Fund, the views of the Fund Managers should be sought on equities and specifically as to what could be liquidated in the next 6-9 months to support local businesses;
- there was a need for more information as to whether there were sufficient staff in place to take forward the projects which had been identified;
- capital investment would be key in relation to future projects;
- consideration should be given to the effect of Covid-19 on businesses and consumer behaviour when taking decisions on future projects;
- there was a need to review 'normal expenditure' from the Common Good Fund in order to be able to support small businesses in particular if this was needed;

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- there should be a focus on 'de-cluttering' the High Street as part of future redevelopment plans;
- there had been reports of bad behaviour amongst some tourists to the area and this had to be addressed before it caused damage to the Highland tourism sector;
- in addition to reviewing the Common Good Fund, consideration should also be given to reviewing spend from the Events & Festivals budget in order to be able to make a strategic contribution to making the City Centre more welcoming in future and a Members' Workshop in this regard would be a good way forward initially to allow discussion;
- the provision of housing would be an extremely important issue for the whole economy in the coming months;
- a sense of urgency, alongside increased partnership working, would be key to the success of the recovery programme and this had to be recognised;
- consideration should be given to ways in which engagement could be undertaken by the Recovery Group with the general public in order to enable views to be expressed and taken forward where possible;
- it would be important to differentiate between those issues which were to be considered by the Recovery Group and those which should come directly to the full City Committee in future;
- in relation to the variety and scale of potential projects which had been identified, there was a need to ensure that the correct projects were selected to be moved forward to 'shovel ready' status in order to be able to take advantage of future funding when it became available; and
- job creation and associated training was imperative and particularly important for the local area and it was stressed that both public and private partnership working would be needed to ensure that this was taken forward successfully wherever possible in the coming months.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

AGREED the membership of the City and Area Recovery Group as follows:-

Miss J Campbell, Mrs M Davidson, Mr G Ross, Mr J Gray, Ms E Roddick, Mr B Boyd, Ms E Knox, Mrs T Robertson, Mr A Graham, Mrs I Mackenzie and Mr A Jarvie.

AGREED to note the priorities identified and that further suggestions for consideration by the Recovery Group would be welcomed – this included the proposal put forward at the meeting by Councillor MacWilliam as follows –

'The City Committee notes with increasing alarm and incredulity reports from across the Highlands of extreme levels of litter, open toileting and disposal of human waste by rogue elements amongst campervan, motorhome and tent dwelling visitors. This situation is an immediate public health risk and will ultimately damage our area's international reputation for high quality tourism. The Committee directs the Recovery Group to consider the drafting of new bye-laws to introduce wild camping bans in the areas affected. It is requested that work is discussed in detail at the next meeting of the Recovery Group in order for proposals to be considered for approval at the next meeting of the City Committee' –

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and that further work was required by the Recovery Group with a further report to the City Committee on 27 August.

AGREED that Minutes from the Recovery Group meetings should be submitted to the City of Inverness Area Committee in the first instance.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm.