

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held **REMOTELY** on Wednesday, 24 February 2021 at 11.30 am

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr A Henderson (Chair)
Mr B Allan	Mr A MacInnes
Mr R Balfour	Mr D Macpherson
Mr J Bruce	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Ms K Currie	Mrs M Paterson
Mr C Fraser	Mr I Ramon
Mr R Gale	Mrs T Robertson
Mr J Gordon	

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr J Finlayson
Mrs J Barclay	Mr B Lobban
Mr R Bremner	Ms F Robertson
Mrs M Davidson	Ms M Smith

In attendance:

Ms C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
Ms A Clark, Head of Policy, Communities and Place
Ms C Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources, Communities and Place
Mr P Mascarenhas, Community and Democratic Engagement Manager, Communities and Place
Mr A Yates, Environmental Health Manager, Communities and Place
Mr A McKinnie, Senior Waste Manager, Communities and Place
Miss J Maclennan, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Highland Local Policing Commander, Chief Superintendent Conrad Trickett

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

Mr A Henderson in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam and Mr A Rhind.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 11iii – Mr D MacPherson (non-financial)

Item 13 – Mr A Henderson and Mr J Gordon (financial)

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Chair highlighted the following items of good news:-

- Highland Council was supporting NHS Highland with a mobile vaccination unit to support the Covid-19 vaccination programme across Highland. The mobile unit had been nicknamed the Jabbernaut;
- the bin crew on Stratherrick Road was appreciated by a local resident by obtaining the correct bin when the wrong one was placed on the roadside and included as an example of the positive feedback waste teams receive;
- the great work of the Environmental Health team was highlighted for their efforts to support local seafood businesses with their export trade, assisting businesses to meet the requirements for export health certificates in trading with the EU; and
- refuse workers on the Isle of Skye were praised for their quick thinking in ensuring the safety of an elderly islander who required medical assistance during a snowstorm.

The Committee **NOTED** the items of good news and staff achievements.

4. Community Asset Transfer Requests Iarrtasan Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No. CP/1/21 dated 22 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the transfer of the former Maryburgh Primary School was welcomed by Members, highlighting that there was a keen group ready to take the Men's Shed project forward and confidence that it would be of great benefit to the local village and wider community;
- to prevent any potential interference of community projects supported by all local Members it was suggested that Community Asset Transfers under £100,000 be devolved to relevant Area Committees and in response it was explained by the Chair that this could be explored when the Scheme of Delegation was being revised;
- the project was a good use of Community Asset Transfer as it benefited the community, displayed localism in a positive way, saved money to the Council

- on upkeep/non-domestic rates and it was encouraging that the development included developer contribution;
- in response to a query about the source of funding for the project, the Community and Democratic Engagement Manager agreed to gather that information and liaise with Councillor Macpherson directly; and
 - the project would be a major improvement for the Ross-shire village and other areas should be encouraged to get involved in a similar vein for their own communities.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the sale of the former Maryburgh Primary School to Maryburgh Men's Shed for £1, subject to the terms of transfer set out in section 2.1 of the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** the decision taken by the Chair of Communities and Place and the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place to approve a small increase in the extent of land transferred as part of the already agreed transfer to Cromarty Development Trust at Whitedykes Industrial Estate, Cromarty. This was agreed as part of the terms of transfer.

5. Sleat War Memorial Conservation Agreement Aonta Glèidhteachais Cuimhneachan-Cogaidh Shlèite

There had been circulated Report No. CP/02/21 dated 27 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the report was welcomed by Members and it was encouraging to see a solution for the Sleat War Memorial;
- significant effort had been made by officers, stakeholders, tenants and landlords alike to reach a solution;
- in response to a comment, it was confirmed that the funding made available for maintenance had been used for upgrades to the Memorial; and
- it was suggested that decisions around war memorials that involved minimal or no cost be devolved to Area Committees rather than using the forum of Strategic Committees and the Chair agreed this could be explored when the Scheme of Delegation was being revised.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the legal burden the agreement places on the tenant and landlord of the land on which the war memorial is sited; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Council enter into the Conservation Agreement as detailed in the report to secure the long-term management and maintenance of the site of the Sleat War Memorial.

6. Progress report on the Framework for Community Participation and Involvement

Adhartas agus gnìomh bhon Fhrèam airson Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/03/21 dated 1 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in relation to mental health and wellbeing, the Council had a duty of care, not only to its staff but to all Highland citizens. GPs had reported a surge in people coming forward with mental health concerns, particularly in the under 25 age group, one of the main causes being furlough and the possibility of being made redundant. In addition, people had not come forward with health complaints as soon as they usually would, and it was anticipated that many people's ailments would now be at a more advanced stage and more challenging to treat;
- thanks were expressed to all volunteers for their efforts throughout the pandemic, and the need to recognise them and harness volunteering for future resilience was emphasised. Particular reference was made to the outstanding work of volunteers in Citizens Advice Bureaux, to whom Members had directed constituents with concerns about fuel poverty and benefit entitlement;
- it was good to see that cognisance had been taken of what was happening in Highland, and the work taking place would stand the Council in good stead for future resilience responses;
- it was encouraging to see the amount of work the Council and organisations across Highland had done to support local communities;
- it was important that investment was made in professional mental health resources, particularly Community Psychiatric Nurses, and information was sought on what communication had taken place with NHS Highland in that regard and how the Council was working with partners on mental health issues;
- Mental Health Youth Workers were doing tremendous work with young people but they were inundated and it was queried whether any local funds were available to fund apprentice-type posts to support them; and
- it was understood that Distress Brief Interventions, whereby people in distress could phone and talk to somebody straight away, were working well, and it was suggested that further information be sought and circulated to community groups, via the weekly briefing, and Committee Members.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the engagement and support for third sector groups since the end of last year, including a weekly written briefing to over 400 community bodies, setting up 6 new local resilience networks, a new resource pack for information and signposting on mental health and wellbeing support, ongoing support and information to help people experiencing food and fuel poverty and the additional Covid ward funding availability designed to be even more accessible;
- ii. **NOTED** the action underway by the Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) to understand the impacts of Covid on volunteering as recently reported to the Highland Community Planning Partnership;
- iii. **NOTED** how the motion agreed at Council would be progressed as outlined in section 6 of the report and in appendix 1, with the new action on a weekly virtual

- briefing commencing week beginning 15th February and reviewed after 3 months;
- iv. **NOTED** the update on the progress against the participation and engagement framework including the shift in timescales due to the latest lockdown period;
 - v. **AGREED** to the revised timescales proposed for the Recovery Plan actions outlined in 7.5 of the report and **NOTED** that further actions would be developed based on the learning from this latest period and brought to the next committee for consideration;
 - vi. **AGREED** that the Head of Policy would liaise with relevant partners and colleagues and provide further information to Committee Members on the various strands of work taking place in respect of mental health and wellbeing, Community Psychiatric Nurse provision and the potential to fund apprentice-type posts to support Mental Health Youth Workers; and
 - vii. **AGREED** that information on Distress Brief Interventions be sought and provided to community groups, via the weekly briefing, and Committee Members.

7. Performance against the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020 - 2023 Coileanadh mu choinneamh Plana Poileasachd Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/04/21 dated 10 February 2021 by the Highland Local Policing Commander, Chief Superintendent Conrad Trickett.

During a verbal update, a detailed explanation of the statistics was provided in relation to several areas of the report and it was highlighted that all statistics were impacted by Covid-19.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- one explanation for the reduction in road deaths could be the lack of international visitors and the decrease of traffic on the roads, it was highlighted that a campaign on road safety on the A82 was ongoing at the moment and required additional funding/investment to protect against accidents;
- it was likely that the additional number of drug driving offences was only a fraction of the true number and this had to be enforced as strongly as drink driving had been in the past through licensing boards, supermarkets etc.;
- deaths due to drug use was a tragedy for the individual, their family, the community and involved agencies and it was important to support those with substance abuse issues;
- it was emphasised that home was not always a safe environment for people and incidents of domestic crimes were too high;
- the mounted police team initiative was commended and feedback from constituents was positive. in response to a question on further rollout of the mounted police initiative, it was explained that the trial of the initiative in the Inverness area would be reviewed in a few months' time and results reported back to a future meeting of the Committee;
- in response to a query about the debated extension of the 50 mile speed limit in the Munlochy Road/B9161 area, it was agreed that Chief Superintendent Trickett would determine the policing position and liaise with Councillor G Adam directly, given the conflicting views provided by traffic police at the community consultation meeting and given to Transport Scotland;
- regarding missing persons, it was explained that there was a reduction from previous years. Most often, missing persons were eventually located;

- information was sought, and provided, on visitor management in rural areas for the upcoming tourist season and it was explained that a local group was continuing to look at the broader elements of infrastructure, environmental and enforcement with a focus on partnership working. It was highlighted that police had been involved at all levels of discussion from the Highland Council to Scottish and UK Governments and there was ongoing planning to ensure a deliverable set of operations when restrictions were lifted which included; toilet provision, refuse, traffic hotspots, and criminality;
- appreciation was expressed for police officers that were managing domestic crimes and it was confirmed that these cases required significant resource and partnership working;
- regarding cyberbullying, it was highlighted that, despite not being mentioned in the report, it was an area of growth and a cyberbullying division was being established in Police Scotland and that education and partnership working played a key role;
- in relation to a question about managing online threats towards Councillors in the context of upcoming elections it was explained that police meetings around election planning were ongoing. There was a national operation running for elected members, MSPs etc and security advice to all people standing for election would be provided in the lead up to the election in May. Furthermore, there was a process that police had with multinational social media companies to report concerns raised; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, on drug driving and it was explained that the roadside testing could detect 17 types of drugs and that prescription drug abuse was less commonly found in cases where the user had the drugs prescribed in their own names.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Local Performance against the Highland 2020-2023 Policing Plan.

8. Ongoing Covid-19 service impacts and adjustments **Buidhean is atharrachaidhean seirbheis leantainneach Covid-19**

There had been circulated Report No CP/05/21 dated 4 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- Members welcomed the report and commended the work of the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Service Management Team;
- the use of technology such as Microsoft Teams, which many people had now embraced, presented real opportunities for savings across the Council;
- in relation to the Visitor Management Plan, Members were impressed by the number of staff from several different services who had researched and put in place measures that it was hoped would prevent many of the issues experienced the previous summer. Much of this had fallen to the Communities and Place Service and appreciation was expressed in that regard;
- the pace at which new services had been set up was commendable. Particular reference was made to the free Covid helpline, which it had been reassuring to be able to direct constituents to;
- the humanitarian response to the pandemic had been incredible and thanks were expressed to Council staff as well as partners including High Life Highland, NHS Highland and Eden Court Theatre;

- reference was made to the increase in fly-tipping, and the proposed prioritisation of waste services, should the need arise, was welcomed;
- members of the public had welcomed the public conveniences being open at Whin park, and had commended the standard of cleanliness;
- in relation to burials and cremations, the efforts of all involved and the dignified manner in which arrangements had been carried out were commendable; and
- the report would be a useful document if similar challenges were faced in the future.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the five service risks and mitigating action now in place to support business continuity and the Council's duty of care as an employer as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- NOTED** the service adjustments in place for the Environmental Health Team given their need to prioritise public health tasks and support for business trading with EU countries, as set out in paragraphs 6.2 and 6.3 of the report;
- NOTED** the seven new workstreams affecting the Environmental Health, Policy and Ward Management and Customer Services Teams, the re-start of the amenities review and new work on play areas, the service lead role in supporting NHS Highland's vaccination programme, contributing to a Council Visitor Management Plan and participating in the running of elections;
- NOTED** the adjustments required for the Policy and Ward Management Team as set out in paragraph 6.5 of the report;
- NOTED** that for the time being Committee business supported by the service would focus on urgent and time critical reports, supplemented by Member briefings and Ward Business Meetings;
- AGREED** the temporary re-prioritisation of waste, public conveniences and grounds maintenance services as set out in paragraph 6.3, although these would only be required if staff absence could not be covered; and
- AGREED** that a longer timescale be sought for some statutory duties and requirements as set out in paragraph 6.10 of the report.

9. Update on the support for businesses exporting to, and importing from, the European Union (EU)
Fios às ùr mun taic do ghnothachasan ag às-mhalairt gu, agus ag ion-mhalairt às, an Aonadh Eòrpach

There had been circulated Report No CP/06/21 dated 10 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the knowledge of the speakers at the recent Brexit seminar was commended;
- information was sought, and provided, on how quickly fish exports were getting to France and Spain; whether fishermen were having to freeze fish when they would not have before, whether supply lines were anything like what they had been previously; the difference in the paperwork for chilled versus frozen fish; and whether the difference in the cost businesses could charge for chilled fish and shellfish as opposed to frozen had been taken into account; and
- thanks were expressed to the Environmental Health Manager and his team for their efforts in getting French and Spanish fishermen back into Lochinver, which meant a lot to the area, particularly in terms of employment.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the approach to taking forward the motions through the Brexit Working Group and workshop;
- ii. the demand from businesses in the region for support to trade with the EU and the enhanced service provided by the Environmental Health team as set out in paragraph 6.5 of the report;
- iii. the shortfall in income of around £70k forecast to end March 2021; and
- iv. given uncertainty around the intentions of business following EU exit, the Committee previously agreed to a six-month review of service demand and provision to report to the Committee in August 2021.

10. Communities and Place Revenue Monitoring Report to 31st December 2020
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Choimhearsnachdan is Àite gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2020

There had been circulated Report No CP/07/21 dated 6 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the improved outturn forecast from Q2 with the budget gap forecast to reduce from £3.272m to £1.005m;
- ii. that the budget gap reported is associated mainly with shortfalls in income, disrupted by Covid and forecast to amount to £2.6m of external income. Government grant for income recompense will help reduce income shortfalls across the Council and is held corporately and not allocated to individual Services;
- iii. the budget gap has reduced because of further income recovery for grounds maintenance, Government Covid grant received and ongoing expenditure controls; and
- iv. on-going mitigation continues in Quarter 4 and includes ongoing expenditure controls, further income recovery where possible and claiming all potential Government grant.

11. Waste Projects Update
Fios às Ùr mu Phròiseactan Sgudail

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Macpherson declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that a relative owned one of the potential sites in Fort William, and confirmed that he would take no part in any discussion on that particular matter.

There had been circulated Report No CP/08/21 dated 5 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In relation to the Fort William Transfer Station a call was made to keep Lochaber Members informed of progress in identifying a site. The location of the Transfer Station would need to be dealt with sensitively and local Members would be best placed to gauge opinion and act as advocates. In addition, information was sought, and provided, as to when a response would be received from SSEN in relation to the heat generation proposal for an Energy from Waste plant in the Longman.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Inverness waste transfer station tender evaluation had concluded, the capital allowance was confirmed by Council in January 2021 and senior management approval has been provided to proceed to the award of contract;
- ii. the tender specification for the Aviemore waste transfer station was currently out to tender;
- iii. discussions to identify the most suitable site in Fort William for the waste transfer station requirement were continuing;
- iv. the next phase of the planned progressive restoration of Seater landfill site would be undertaken mid-2021;
- v. specifications were being developed for interim, medium-term waste management contract requirements to take to the market during 2021;
- vi. work continued to ascertain the feasibility of progressing a proposal for an energy-from-waste facility;
- vii. minutes from the Members' Waste Strategy Working Group of 23 December 2020 as detailed later on in the Committee's agenda;

and **AGREED**:-

- viii. that a quarterly update on the Fort William Waste Transfer Station be provided to Lochaber Elected Members.

12. Minutes of Waste Strategy Working Group Geàrr-chunntas Buidheann-obrach Ro-innleachd Sgudail

The Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 23 December 2020 were **APPROVED**.

13. Response to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee call for views on the statutory instruments for short-term letting Freagairt do ghairm Comataidh Riaghaltas Ionadail agus Choimhearsnachdan Pàrlamaid na h-Alba do bheachdan mu na h-innealan reachdail airson leigeil air mhàl san ùine ghoirid

There had been circulated Report No CP/09/21 dated 27 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- The Scottish Government announced on 18th February 2021 that it had withdrawn the Order to provide more time to deal with concerns raised; however the implementation date was not being postponed;
- in response to concern about the possibility of local Members being overruled in larger committees by those not supportive of Planning Control Areas, it was explained that the strategic approach to Planning Control Areas would be made by the Strategic Committee (Infrastructure and Environment) and the decision on local implementation would be made by Area Committees. It was agreed that the Environmental Health Manager would seek confirmation on this governance point based on the decision made at Council and a response would be provided to Members; and

- the introduction of Planning Control Areas was important to many areas of the Council and local area views being circumvented would not be supported, ultimately if this was the case it would be brought before Full Council and the expectation that input from Area Committees be paramount to decision making.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** that the response requested clarification on the definition of the term guest house for licensing purposes;
- NOTED** that the response requested clarification on the application of control areas to B&B accommodation;
- NOTED** the request for a later implementation date if required by local authorities;
- HOMOLOGATE** the consultation response which was submitted to meet the Scottish Parliament deadline of 27th January 2021 as attached at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- NOTED** that Members previously agreed that after the regulations are finalised, the implementation of Planning Control areas should be the subject of a report to the Economy & Infrastructure Committee and following consultation with the Housing & Property Committee and relevant Local Committees and that the setting of fees for the proposed licensing scheme should be the subject of a report to the Licensing Committee.

14. Scottish Government Consultation on the Welfare of Animals during Transport **Freagairt co-chomhairle Riaghaltas na h-Alba – sochair bheathaichean ann an còmhhdhail**

There had been circulated Report No CP/10/21 dated 29 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- in response to a question about implications for non-commercial animals such as horse owners, dog breeders etc., it was explained that the main concern was to ensure the welfare of all animals. There was not any significant change for domestic pets and it was emphasised that partnership animals should be given the same protections as other animals;
- regarding any impact of the Internal Market Act given that Scotland and Wales had stronger environmental requirements compared to England, it was explained that, despite not having a joined-up UK measure to ensure seamless movement between borders, it was not anticipated that this would have any impact on trade between nations; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the need for animals travelling South to abattoirs and it was explained that Dingwall and Grantown were the nearest premises and, given the lack of trade requests locally for over 30-month animals (OTM) or stock animals, the travel was necessary to have the trade available to them.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the background to the recommendations to improve the welfare of animals during transport and the proposed consultation response; and

ii. **AGREED** the proposed response is submitted to the Scottish Government.

The meeting ended at 2.55 pm