

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair)** held remotely on **Monday, 31 May, 2021 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr John Finlayson
Mr Calum MacLeod
Mr Calum Munro

Participating Officials:

Mr Willie MacKinnon, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr Don Esson, Interim Area Care and Learning Manager, Education & Learning Service
Mr Scott Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager, Infrastructure and Environment Service
Mr Rory MacLeod, Housing Manager, Property & Housing Service
Ms Jennifer Bruce, Principal Housing Officer, Property & Housing Service
Mr Colin Simpson, Tourism Co-ordinator, Transformation & Economy Service
Mrs Coila Hunter, Environmental Health Officer, Communities & Place Service
Mr John Murray, Environmental Health Officer, Communities & Place Service
Mr Hugh Gardner, Bereavement Services Project Manager, Communities & Place Service
Mr Alasdair MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance & Governance Service

Also in Attendance:

Group Commander Mike Colliar, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Station Commander Raymond King, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr Stuart MacPherson, Highlands & Islands Enterprise

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

Interim Chair

In the absence of the Chair, Mr J Finlayson was unanimously appointed as Interim Chair for this meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr J Gordon.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Mr C Munro - Items 5, 8, (financial) and Item 7 non financial.

3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 29 March, 2021, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No SR/6/21 by the Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Station availability was becoming more challenging in terms of recruitment and retention of staff. Staffing in 4 stations remained positive, but there would be significant retirement and resignations in particular in Portree and Broadford stations soon. The Service continued to try and proactively recruit and retain personnel.
- It was queried whether there was any discussion nationally regarding changing the age of when young people could join the volunteer fire service. It was advised that it was unlikely that the minimum age of 18 years old for joining the Service would change. This was due to legislative requirements under the Employment Act for employing young people. In terms of engagement of young people and the community to join the Service, it was challenging to recruit young people as there seemed to be an apathy towards the on call retained firefighter model. Reviewing the model may be an option to make it more attractive for young people to join and Members would be informed of any national developments in this respect. Details of engagement activities with young people in the area for recruitment purposes were highlighted.
- Support was sought from the Committee to engage with Community Councils to try and improve the recruitment to the Portree and Broadford stations in particular.
- Along with partners, options for a new Station in Portree were being considered. It was anticipated that a multi agency building would be established. It was hoped that this would assist with recruitment to the Service as well.
- There was a 6 year Development Plan for stations on the Isle of Skye and Members would be updated on the Plan as it progressed.
- It was queried if there were any initiatives to raise awareness of the dangers of wild camping fires with the likely increase in tourists over the Summer months. It was confirmed that the Service did have social media campaigns raising awareness to the public of the need to be careful with campfires, disposal of barbecues etc. Officers also distributed information leaflets at campsites on good practice guides for fire safety. Public awareness in terms of water safety was also provided.
- The work of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service over the past year was acknowledged.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED** the Local Performance Report.

**5. Education Update
Fios às Ùr mu Fhoghlam**

Declaration of Interest

Mr C Munro declared a financial interest in this item as his wife was a Gaelic Medium Teacher in a School in the area. Having considered the general nature of the item and, 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 his involvement in the discussion.

The Interim Area Education & Learning Manager (West) provided an education update in relation to Acting up and Head Teacher appointments. An overview of education from January to April was provided in relation to support to vulnerable children and children of keyworkers; remote learning and phased return to primary and secondary schools. Area teams had been liaising with school staff when Covid guidance had been issued by the Scottish Government. There had been good collaboration between Services during this period in these challenging times. An update of projected school rolls in the local area was provided as well as Portree Associated School Group successes.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members extended their thanks and payed tribute to all staff within Schools for their tremendous work in very challenging conditions over the past year.
- It was encouraging that all Head Teacher appointments in the area had now been made;
- Remote learning in Highland had been well received at a national level and a lot of the national guidance on remote working had been based on the experience in Highland.
- During the Covid period, the empowerment of Head Teachers to make local decisions was essential, particularly in rural areas.
- Highland Schools were following the Scottish Qualifications Authority guidance during the Covid period and this was progressing well;
- The variety of School successes was acknowledged;
- Some progress had been made in relation to School lets and in particular outdoor lets, but given the current Covid restrictions a cautious approach was being taken. A Working Group had been set up to look at School internal and external lets and it was anticipated that internal School lets would not take place until after the School holidays, subject to Covid restrictions being lifted.
- Virtual pupil transitions were highlighted and as Covid mitigations were reduced there would be transitions from nursery into primary and primary into secondary.
- Details were provided in relation to school transport arrangements and the good collaboration between central/area transport officers and Schools to ensure arrangements went smoothly.

The Committee **NOTED** the Education update for the Isle of Skye and Raasay area and that the Committee's thanks and best wishes would be intimated to all School staff in the area for their commitment and effort during the Covid-19 period.

**6. Newton Rooms
Seòmraichean a' Bhaile Ùir**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda and would be submitted to the next meeting instead.

**7. Isle of Skye and Raasay Investment Plan
Plana Tasgaidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich is Ratharsair**

Declaration of Interest

Mr C Munro declared a non financial interest in this item as a trustee of a Community Trust which will participate in the development of an investment plan for the Isle of Skye and Raasay. Having considered the general nature of the item and, 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 his involvement in the discussion.

There was a verbal update on progress and an outline of the consultation Programme on the Isle of Skye and Raasay Investment Plan with the intention that the Plan would be submitted to Committee later in the year. The various methods of engagement were highlighted with the first engagement commencing on 1 June, 2021 followed by further engagement sessions over the next few weeks. The consultation would allow the public to give their views on the priorities they felt most important.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Plan would evolve over time, would be ongoing and would be done in partnership with the public;
- A paper version of the consultation survey would be available to those who could not access it online.
- This latest engagement was in response to what the public asked for and would ensure that there was comprehensive feedback from the community on their priorities for the Investment Plan.
- The main aims and objectives of the Plan had been changed to reflect the outcomes from the initial engagement exercises. Thereafter after the current engagement these aims and objectives may change again and feedback on the outcomes on the consultation would be given at a future Committee meeting.
- Architecture and Design Scotland would independently provide the outcomes from the workshops and their advice and guidance was an important part of consultation process.
- The consultation was ambitious given the length of time and number of people involved in the engagement and it was progressing well.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the update on the Isle of Skye and Raasay Investment Plan.

8. Visitor Management Plan Plana Stiùiridh Luchd-tadhail

Declaration of Interest

Mr C Munro declared a financial interest in this item as the joint owner of a self catering business. Having considered the general nature of the item and, 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 his involvement in the discussion.

The Tourism Co-ordinator provided a verbal update on the Visitor Management Plan with some of the main areas covered being:- road and parking improvements; seasonal access Rangers; public conveniences; enhanced waste services; motor home waste disposal; public transport and rural tourism infrastructure fund.

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- It was requested that contact details for the 3 seasonal Rangers on Skye and the locations and contacts for comfort schemes be provided to Members;
- it was queried what responsibility takeaway businesses had for providing extra bins outside their premises. It was advised that there was an expectation that takeaways/shops would help their customers dispose of rubbish. Clarification would be sought from the Waste team if there was a legal obligation for these businesses to provide extra bins.
- given the increased number of motorhomes in the area, road safety was paramount in terms of visitor management and it was queried if there were any initiatives that could help engage Transport Scotland in road safety campaigns. It was advised that Transport Scotland and Police Scotland did liaise every year to provide information via leaflets and social media on road safety and there had been targeted campaigns on motorbike safety in the past. It would be checked if there were any road safety campaigns this year.
- Tribute was payed to the many community groups involved in litter pick up events.
- The proactive approach to tourism was very important in terms of Highlands reputation as a destination.
- A report on the Visitor Management Plan for all of Highland would be submitted to the Tourism Committee on 16 June, 2021;
- An announcement was still to be made by the Scottish Government on further projects to be awarded Rural Tourism Infrastructure Funding.
- There was a weekly visitor management operational group meeting and Members would be briefed on discussions of that Group at Ward Business Meetings.
- It would be checked if there had been an appointment to the Access Officer post for this area.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the Visitor Management Plan.

At this point the meeting was adjourned for a short break and the meeting resumed at 12.15 p.m.

9. **Housing Performance Report** **Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais**

There was circulated Report No. SR/7/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Property and Housing.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chairman extended the Committee's best wishes for a long and happy retirement to Mr Jim Holden, Housing Manager and thanked him for his support and service to the Council.
- It was queried what support tenants were receiving in relation to rent arrears. The universal credit case load for Skye North West had the largest increase in Highland in the last year of 201%; South Skye was an increase of 135% and Skye North East at 119%. It was understandable therefore that rent arrears were increasing. It was advised that support and advice to tenants with rent arrears and those in receipt of universal credit was given by Housing Officers and the Welfare support team.
- Members were receiving an increasing number of requests for housing from people who had been appointed to jobs in the area. It was queried if there were any short term housing options until long term housing became available as there was an extensive house building programme on the Isle of Skye. It was advised that the Council did have short term furnished accommodation and secure tenancies but the number of properties available was low. The Council did what it could to address housing needs, but it was acknowledged that it was very difficult situation. The Council was appointing a Private rented sector Officer within the Housing Service covering all of Highland and this Officer would look at options for housing need. Housing Officers were also liaising with Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association regarding Shared Equity and Mid market rents. There was also a significant housing development programme for the Isle of Skye and details on this would be provided at a future Ward Business meeting.
- It was noted that the Skye/Raasay area had a higher proportion of homelessness presentations compared to the Highland average.
- The good work of the local housing team was acknowledged and this could be seen by positive results in relation to time taken to complete repairs and re-let times.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

10. **Environmental Health Update** **Fios às Ùr mu Shlàinte Àrainneachdail**

There was circulated Report No. SR/8/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place which was supplemented by a presentation on Environmental health local issues and wider Environmental health service issues.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members acknowledged the important work Environmental Health had carried out over the Covid period;
- It was queried if a Communities Works Officer/Dog Warden could be appointed for this area;
- If there were enough signs to show that a vehicle was clearly abandoned then Environmental Health could put a notice on them and have them removed. However, if the vehicle was on private ground then the landowners permission would be required. The number of abandoned vehicles tended to fluctuate depending on the value of scrap metal. At present the value of scrap metal was low. Environmental Health, DVLA and the Police did carry out targeted campaigns at times to tackle the problem of abandoned vehicles in areas where there was a significant number of them.
- It was explained that the sampling regime for private water supplies placed a legal duty on the owners to get them tested and Environmental Health would carry out the testing and receive income for doing this.
- If there were problems with septic tanks, the public would normally advise Environmental Health and they would investigate.
- Additional comfort schemes were proposed for Skye and they would require additional emptying of septic tanks. However, Scottish Water did not seem to have the capacity to do this and it was queried if there were any private operators that could carry out this work. It was explained that if a septic tank was managed properly it should only require emptying every 2/3 years. However, if there was more demand in rural areas for emptying tanks, with there being new comfort schemes and motor home sites then more private operators may be interested in carrying out this work.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the background information on the Environmental Health team;
- ii. the type and volume of work being undertaken locally by team;
- iii. the ongoing challenges in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and the other statutory duties undertaken by environmental health; and
- iv. the new report format and content.

**11. Burial Ground Capacity Update, Isle of Skye & Raasay
Fios às Ùr mu Chomas nan Cladhan, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach is Ratharsair**

There was circulated Report No. SR/9/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The report showed where the pressures were on burial ground capacity and timescale for projects and Members indicated their support to efforts with land acquisition for burial grounds.

Reference was made to some areas only being allowed 10 burials per annum. These were Scottish Environment Protection Agency guidelines based on the soil type at burial grounds.

Further, an update was provided in relation to acquisition of burial grounds in areas where there were pressures on burial ground capacity such as in Ashaig, Staffin, Dunvegan and Strath – Broadford. Also, for a small investment existing burial ground capacity could be increased substantially in some areas.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i progress made on establishing the accurate numbers of available lair capacity and the ongoing work to secure land for burial ground expansion focusing on priority sites; and

ii that discussions would continue on burial ground capacity with local communities.

The meeting ended at 1.20 p.m.