

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday, 22 May 2023, at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms T Collier
Mr D Louden
Mrs P Munro

Ms M Nolan
Mr A Rhind

Officials in Attendance:

Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager
Mr L Clancy, Principal Housing Officer
Mr C Sharp, Housing Repairs Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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

Mr D Louden in the Chair (except Item 9, which was chaired by Ms M Nolan)

1. **Apologies for Absence** **Leisgeulan**

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mrs S Rawlings and Ms M Smith.

2. **Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement** **Foilseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

Item 9 - Mrs T Collier and Mr D Louden.

3. **Inspection Report of St Duthus Special School by HMle** **Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Sgoil Shònraichte an Naoimh Dubhthach le Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlaim**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/9/23 by the Area Education & Learning Manager.

During discussion, the progress reported was welcomed, with particular reference to the positive information on the relationship between staff and pupils, and noting that the Head Teacher had only been in post a short time when the inspection had taken place. Improvements to the school environment would be welcomed. As the Area Education & Learning Manager had been called away on urgent business, it was requested that he present the report to the next Area Business Meeting for information.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and **AGREED** the report be presented by the Area Education Manager to an Area Business Meeting.

4. **Ross & Cromarty Educational Trust Report** **Aithisg Urras Foghlaim Rois is Chromba**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/10/23 by the Area Education & Learning Manager.

During discussion, Members sought further information on the potential costs if funds were to be managed differently. It was also suggested that investigation be undertaken into potential investment opportunities similar to those used by the Council's pension fund management team.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to delegate authority to Education officers to explore options to improve investment income and report findings, including costings, back to the Committee; and
- iii. **AGREED** to discuss and report back on possible investment options with the Principal Accountant Corporate Finance, Resources and Finance.

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

There had been circulated Report No ERA/11/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the increasing level of rent arrears was concerning, though it was noted that this was consistent across the Highlands. It was confirmed that of 1445 properties in Cromarty Firth, around 593 were in arrears, though the figures were fluid and some arrears could be due to the timing of the report;
- in response to concerns about long waiting times for repairs, it was clarified that the targets were 14 hours for emergency repairs, 8 days for routine repairs, and 3 months for minor works. Some larger projects, such as replacement kitchens, were part of the capital programme and as a result void times could be longer to allow for the contract to be completed;
- information was sought and provided on the procedure for reporting and for tackling mould, which included commissioning an independent contractor report, and Members said it would be helpful if they could receive copies of these reports, and any actions planned. A high percentage of mould issues were the result of property management issues, for example lack of ventilation or heating, often exacerbated by high energy costs;
- in response to concerns about lack of response to some maintenance requests, it was advisable to log all issues via the service centre to ensure they were properly tracked and monitored. Ms M Nolan offered to discuss with her colleagues putting a motion to the Housing and Property Committee on this issue;

- in relation to homeless accommodation, Ms T Collier asked for information on how to facilitate a family in temporary accommodation staying permanently in that property. The reasons why this was not standard allocation practice were outlined and the query would be further addressed outwith the meeting; and
- Members were invited to visit the depot in Alness to gain a further insight into Housing issues such as maintenance and void management.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and **AGREED** the Principal Housing Officer for homelessness contact Ms T Collier in relation to a customer query.

6. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the circulated Ward Discretionary Awards information for the periods 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, and 1 April 2023 to 30 April 2023.

7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There is circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 23 January 2023, which were approved by the Council on 9 March 2023.

8. Exclusion of the Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **AGREED** to resolve that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

9. Disposal of Invergordon Town Hall – Update Faighinn Cuidhteas de Thalla-Bhaile Inbhir Ghòrdain – Cunntas às Ùr

Declarations of Interest

Ms T Collier, due to her partner's involvement with the Invergordon Naval Museum & Heritage Centre, and Mr D Loudon, as a Director of Tain Heritage Trust, declared an interest in this item and left the meeting for its duration:

Ms M Nolan took the Chair for this item.

There had been circulated Report No ERA/12/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** that the Invergordon Town Hall sale process be paused for a 6 month period, as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 11.30am