

Member Questions

(1) Mr M Reiss

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

Officers have mentioned recent exercises held with Transport Scotland regarding different sections of Trunk roads in Highland being closed on a long term basis to clarify what alternatives were feasible especially for Heavy Goods Vehicles- what alternative route for commercial vehicles was identified for the A9 if it was closed in the Portgower area of Sutherland?

The A9 is used by all traffic to/from Orkney and also by businesses based at Scrabster which include high value fish cargos. The A9 is also the route to Dounreay, NRTE Vulcan and the Sutherland spaceport.

This question is recognising that in 2019 the A9 south bound was closed near Portgower for several weeks due to a landslide but, fortunately, one lane remained open with traffic light control.

Highland Council as Roads Authority were consulted by BEAR Scotland as part of their review of the Standard Incident Diversion Route (SIDR) for the Northwest Unit. SIDRs were created to cover most Trunk Roads within Scotland and developed by each Operating Company in close working partnership with Local Authorities Roads Departments, Traffic Scotland and Police Scotland. SIDRs are considered for implementation where Police Scotland designate an Incident/Accident of such significance that it will require a section of Trunk Road to be closed.

Highland Council were asked to comment on the suitability of the identified SIDRs for various sections of the Trunk Road noting that any diversion route, where possible, should be of an "all-purpose route" standard, however due to the nature of the Northwest Unit this is not always practicable and possible and therefore consideration must be taken when making an assessment of a trunk road closure.

BEAR Scotland will be the contact for any identified diversion routes and considerations that may be required in the event of an unplanned closure.

Member Questions

(2) Mr A Baldrey

To the Leader of the Council

The Scottish Household Survey 2020 found higher rates of loneliness reported for lone parents (64%), single adults under pension age (63%) and single adults over pension age (46%). In 2021, British Red Cross research identified those living alone, clinically vulnerable people and carers as being particularly isolated.

What steps is Highland Council taking to provide assistance and so reduce feelings of loneliness in its population?

Tackling isolation and promoting good wellbeing amongst our population is a key priority for Community Planning Partners, including the Council. There are a range of activities supported by the Council and partners that bring people together within local communities alongside specific activities to address isolation - for example NHS Highland, as adult care lead, commissions befriending services

Member Questions

(3) Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

You cannot walk around Inverness area without being aware of weeds over pavements, with blocked drains and gullies, which I'm sure most of us have received complaints from residents. Why has it reached this stage and when is it going to be fixed?

Unfortunately, the external contractor that had been engaged to carry out weedkilling was unable to meet their obligations due to staffing issues. As a result, this work has had to be carried out by diverting in-house resources, which has required training, the provision of equipment and the balancing of existing competing priorities. A new contractor has now been procured as of the beginning of August and over the past several weeks a noticeable difference has been observed.

Member Questions

(4) Mr C Ballance

To the Leader of the Council

The Scottish Women's Budget Group survey of women and transport across Scotland, published in August, found that 26% of women surveyed – rising to 47% of disabled women- are dissatisfied with safety on public transport.

In March this year Transport Scotland (Report: Women and girls' views and experiences of personal safety when using public transport March 2023) recommended amongst other things the development of "more credible and accessible information and guidance for women and girls regarding what to do and who to contact if they feel threatened or unsafe or if they are victim to incidents when using public transport."

If Highland Council is aware of these recommendations, what is it doing about it?

The Council's draft Local Transport Strategy – Case for Change fully recognises the issue of personal safety on public transport, for women and for those holding other protected characteristics such as Race or Disability. This is a complex issue, and the recommendations of the Transport Scotland report will be taken into account in developing the full LTS and the Council's new Active Travel Strategy, which is currently in its early stages.

The Highland Council is fully committed to playing our part as key partner in tackling the unacceptable behaviour which limits the safety, dignity and independence of women and girls making everyday journeys.

Member Questions

(5) Mr R MacKintosh

To the Chair of the Climate Change Committee

A recent YouGov opinion poll has revealed that 67% of Highlanders support the introduction of a carbon emissions tax on Scotland's biggest land holdings, with only 16% opposing the idea, and almost 80% of voters in Scotland agree that "landowners who produce polluting greenhouse gases should have to pay for any costs resulting from it". It is clear that there is massive support for a carbon emissions tax, which will help Highland reach Net Zero, and will generate income for the cash strapped Highland Council.

Please can the Chair of the Climate Change Committee advise when the CELT members workshop will be held, as agreed at the Climate Change Committee in May.

Work to scope out an agenda for the member workshop has been undertaken and will look at an introduction to Land reform/current land related issues, Potential of CELT (advantages/disadvantages), Case study – Sporting Estate – rates (lessons learned) and next steps. We are working to agree a suitable date with all parties involved and will advise members as soon as possible when this workshop will take place.

Member Questions

(6) Ms K Willis

To the Leader of the Council

The Good Food Nation Act (2002) requires local authorities to produce their own food plans that ensure the food system produces nourishing healthy food in ways that are sustainable and reduce food insecurity. This will require a whole system approach and partnership working with key organisation in the Highlands such as the Highland Good Food Partnership, HIE, NHS Highland, producers, suppliers, and communities.

What steps is Highland Council taking to develop a Good Food Nation Plan for the Highlands?

Work is being progressed to scope out the development of a Good Food Nation Plan for Highland. The duty to develop a Good Food Nation Plan lies with both Local Authorities and NHS Boards. Early discussions have suggested that a shared plan for Highland would ensure a collaborative and consistent approach is adopted. At this stage formal guidance to support implementation of the Act from the Scottish Government is awaited.

Following discussions at a partnership meeting, the Highland Good Food Partnership have advised that it was agreed to wait until the Scottish Government have published their National Food Plan which is anticipated will be published later this year. A local plan for Highland will then be developed aligning with the objectives set out in the National Plan.