

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely on 4 September 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr C Birt
Mrs I Campbell

Mrs E Kraft
Mr P Logue

In attendance:

Mr W MacKinnon, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr D Summers, Principal Transport Officer
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Mr D Martin, Area Education Manager
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Insp. Richard Ross, Police Scotland
Ms C Hamilton, Chair, Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council
Mr M Webster, Chair, Torridon and District Community Association
Ms C Johnson, Torridon and District Community Association Sub-Committee
Ms S Cook, Torridon and District Community Association Sub-Committee

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

Ms L Kraft in the Chair

Business

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

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. **Recess Powers** **Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2023 had not been required to be exercised in relation to the business of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee

4. **Police – Area Performance Summary** **Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/10/23 dated 30 August 2023 by the North Area Commander, Police Scotland.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- in response to a question, Inspector Ross undertook to investigate Police Scotland's role in determining what was classed as a short-term let;
- concern was expressed that no Police Officer had attended Lochalsh Community Council following the violent incident that had taken place in the area last year;
- information was sought and provided on why some detection rates were shown as 0%;
- it was good to hear about the decrease in the number of missing looked after children; and
- it was necessary for Local Members to consider how they could help distribute information to protect local people from fraud.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 3, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023.

5. Winter Service Plan 2023/24 Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh airson 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/11/23 dated 27 July 2023 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, it was queried whether routes to school were prioritised. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on the filling of grit bins, which it was clarified were usually situated on steep routes that might not be gritted early in the morning.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2023/24.

6. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Transport Schemes Sgeama Chòmhdhail Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair is Loch Aillse

There was a presentation by the Principal Transport Officer on Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Transport Schemes.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- it was queried whether officers were working with the Kyle Development Trust concerning their electric bus service;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the bus shelter in Kyle and on developments concerning the Applecross bus service; and
- it was queried what the process was for commercial bus routes opening in the area and if it would be possible for the route of the 961 Ullapool Ferry Bus to revert to going through Strathpeffer and Dingwall.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

7. Duncraig Educational Trust Report

Aithisg Urras Foghlaim Dhùn na Creige

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/012/23 dated 4 September 2023 by the Area Education and Learning Manager.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- the Trust should always be for Highland children and those of Highland descent;
- it was queried if there was a way of identifying talented young people who might be eligible for this funding;
- it was queried who had sanctioned the compensation for loss of office payments being taken from the Trust, and the Area Education and Learning Manager undertook to investigate this and report back to Members; and
- in response to a request for details of the grants awarded, it was confirmed that these details were provided directly to Members and not as part of the Committee report due to some information being confidential.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report;
- ii. **APPROVED** continuing to hold the trust funds in the deposit account;
- iii. **AGREED** to delegate authority to the Area Education and Learning Manager to reopen the grant scheme during the year between September and December 2023; and
- iv. **AGREED** to delegate authority to the Area Education and Learning Manager to review the grant scheme and propose any changes to Committee.

8. Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Development Plan for 2023-28 Plana Leasachaidh Coimhearsnachd Thoirbheartan agus Ceann Loch Iù airson 2023-28

There was a presentation by Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council on the Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Development Plan for 2023-28.

- this was a very interesting and impressive project;
- it was interesting to see that the priorities in this Plan matched up with those in the Lochalsh Area Development Plan; and
- papers from Strategic Committees could give an idea of what was being done to help combat the issues raised in the plan throughout Highland.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

9. Ward Discretionary Grants 2023/24 Tabhartasan fo Ùghdarras Uàird 2023/24

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 1 April 2023:-

Organisation	Project	Amount
Lochbroom Community Council	Beach Cleaning & Litter Picking	£800
Strathpeffer Primary School Parent Council	Creation of a multi- sensory learning zone – The Den	£1808
Loch Duich Community Council	Kings Coronation Community Celebration	£500
Wester Ross Fisheries Trust	River Catchment Management Workshop	£800
Highlife Highland Skye & Lochalsh Archive Centre	Angus Og Exhibition	£500
Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust	Floating Classroom	£1000

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated, and were **NOTED**, Minutes of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 12 June 2023 which had been approved by the Council on 29 June 2023.

The meeting concluded at 12.15 pm.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Wednesday 6 September 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr A MacDonald
Mr R Bremner	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr S Mackie (Remote)
Mr A Christie	Mr D Millar (Remote)
Mr R Gale	Mr C Munro
Mr S Kennedy	Mr P Oldham
Mr D Louden	

Non-Members also present:

Mr C Ballance	Mr T MacLennan (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Remote)	Mr D Macpherson (Remote)
Ms S Fanet (Remote)	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Ms L Kraft (Remote)	Mr M Reiss

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Interim Depute Chief Executive
 Mr P Nevin, Interim ECO Performance and Governance
 Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR, Resources and Finance
 Ms C Campbell, Head of Community Operations, Communities and Place
 Mrs S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Resources and Finance
 Mr B Porter, Head of Corporate Finance, Resources and Finance
 Mr J Shepherd, Head of ICT and Digital Transformation, Performance and Governance
 Ms M Mackenzie, Strategic Commercial Manager, Commercial & Procurement Shared Service
 Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
 Ms A MacRae, Senior Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

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

BUSINESS

1. **Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence** **Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr M Green and Mr B Lobban.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:

Items 5a, 6c, 7, 12, 13 and 14 – Mr A Christie

3 Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaìdh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2023 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Corporate Resources Committee.

4. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Committee **NOTED** the following good news stories:-

- the Council's 2022/23 unaudited annual accounts had been completed by the 30 June 2023 deadline;
- the Induction and Employee Review and Development (ERD) documents had been reviewed, relaunched and promoted via Traineasy (the on-line training system) to ensure staff and Managers were effectively using these documents. There had been improved recording of ERDs;
- the Central Safety Committee had heard a presentation from PAM (People Asset Management OH) who were the new Occupational Health (OH) provider. This would include absence management, health surveillance, fitness to work assessment and wellness monitoring;
- the in-year Council Tax collection rate exceeded the budget by £0.726m generating additional income for the Revenue Budget;
- 86.8% of Sundry Debts were collected overall compared with 83.81% for 2021/22, which supported reduced Bad Debt Provision;
- there were top quartile performance indicators relating to the processing of Housing Benefit New Claims and Changes in Circumstances;
- following on from the award-winning pathway development during 2021/22, Welfare Advice and Health Partnership services were launched in 2022/2023;
- across the team a number of Staff Awards had been won, recognition for the hard work and key roles in service delivery and initiatives;
- a number of significant legislative changes had taken place necessitating the adaptation and development of processes and reviewing priorities to deliver in both lead and support roles; and
- there had been significant expansion of delivering activities for benefits and entitlements. This had involved managing 9 additional entitlements, which was absorbed, wherever possible, within existing staff resources and by making best use of existing technologies, to achieve value for money and implementation at pace.

5. Corporate Revenue and Capital Monitoring - 2022/23 Near Final Outturn and Quarter 1 2023/24 Aithisg Teachd-a-steach Corporra agus Sgrùdadh Calpa gu 30 Ògmhios 2023

a. Corporate Revenue Monitoring to 30 June 2023 Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu Ògmhios 2023

Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No RES/18/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was questioned which of the agreed savings with a RAG status of amber had been taken into account in the forecasted overspend of £3.055m. Specific reference was made to what appeared to be a disconnect between the near balanced position shown for Health and Social Care and the level of amber savings highlighted for that budget. It was confirmed Members would be provided with more detailed information on this matter outwith the meeting;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that the level of overspend due to the extended outage of the Corran Ferry was considered to be a reliable assessment based on the available information available to officers;
- information was also sought about the cost of the repairs to the MV Maid of Glencoul and MV Corran and whether the latter would be repaired given the age of the vessel. It was confirmed that Members would be provided with further information on this matter outwith the meeting;
- details were requested on the fee earning vacancies and the earnings that would be made if those vacancies were filled and reference to the need to refer to the Housing & Property Service for this information;
- it was questioned what the impact of the rent increase agreed for the current year in terms of the overspend on the Housing and Property Service budget would be. It was noted that the HRA was based on the rent level set by the Council and other factors were impacting on the variance shown and officers were actively seeking to manage the position; and
- it was recognised that budgets were fluid at this stage of the financial year, however it was important to deliver as much in-year savings as possible.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the near-final 2022/23 out-turn position as set out in this report;
- ii. the financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 30 June 2023 and the estimated year end forecast;
- iii. the status of budgeted savings in the year; and
- iv. that Members would be provided with further details on (a) the savings with a RAG status of amber detailed in Appendix 7; and (b) the cost of repairs to the MV Maid of Glencoul and MV Corran

**b. Corporate Capital Monitoring to 30 June 2023
Sgrùdadh Calpa Corporra gu Ògmhios 2023**

There had been circulated Report No RES/19/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was argued that it was not appropriate for the Corran narrows crossing to continue to be the Council's responsibility but it should form part of Scottish Government's services. The Chair advised that it was a matter for the full Council to consider its policy on the best way forward; and
- an explanation was sought for the significant underspends shown on Heating/Energy Efficiency budgets on the HRA and as to why expenditure

was not being maximised. It was confirmed that the Council's Energy Team would be asked to respond directly to Mr C Ballance on this issue.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. near final outturn for the 2022-23 financial year;
- ii. net spend for Q1 2023/24, the forecast year end outturn and the funding profile; and
- iii. updated position of approved major capital projects.

6. Revenue and Performance Monitoring – 2022/23 Near Final Outturn and Quarter 1 2023/24

a. Depute Chief Executive's Service Seirbheis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigeir

There had been circulated Report No RES/20/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

- further clarity was sought, and provided, that the chart at section 6.3 of the report reflected that no complaints had been received over the period. A zero figure would be provided in future reports where this was the case;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the action being taken towards meeting the target for responses to Freedom of Information requests set by the Scottish Information Commissioner. It was noted this was a challenging target for the Council and other local authorities and was subject to regular monitoring and assessment;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, that the target for 'percentage of satisfied customers' had been increased in respect of performance on the in-house ICT Service Desk; and
- an explanation was sought, and provided, on the action being taken to improve the Council's performance generally on the investigation resolution of complaints within 20 days and escalated resolution. This information was also reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis.

Thereafter, it was suggested that it would be helpful for the Committee to be provided with an analysis of FOIs received in terms of the subject matter, where they originated from, and an indication of the financial cost and resource involved in dealing with such requests. Reference was also made to the need for a continued focus on improving the availability of information to reduce the number of requests.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Service's revenue monitoring position and performance and risk information; and
- ii. **AGREED** that an analysis of Freedom of Information request be provided to a future Committee.

b. Performance and Governance Service Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais

There had been circulated Report No RES/21/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance.

- scope to increase that percentage as young men could be a vulnerable group in terms of mental health. It was added that when they did access counselling in school they were the most likely to recommend it so it was clearly working;
- it was queried what action was being taken to future-proof the service in the event Scottish Government funding was withdrawn;
 - information was sought, and provided, as to what could be done to reduce the causes of anxiety given that it was the main reason for referral for counselling;
 - it was queried whether there were any plans to address the fact that there were currently no Gaelic-speaking counsellors in Highland schools;
 - 70% of deaths by suicide were male, and it was important to ensure that there were no gender obstacles and that everyone who needed help sought it;
 - there was a perception by some that schools referred children for counselling when their behaviour became a problem. However, a child who needed counselling might not necessarily be disruptive and could be suffering in silence. It was queried whether this was considered to be an issue and, if so, how it could be addressed;
 - in relation to the table at section 8.2 of the report, clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether the figures represented the number of individuals accessing the service or the number of contacts. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on the average number of interactions with a counsellor and the number of onward referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and the Neuro Developmental Assessment Service;
 - on the point being raised, the Chair undertook to have a further update on Counselling in Schools at the Committee in May/June 2024;
 - it was queried whether pupils in small rural schools, where it was more difficult to be anonymous, were less likely to come forward and, if so, how that could be addressed;
 - officers were commended for implementing an in-house counselling service so quickly and providing continuity where possible;
 - the use of Kooth to provide online counselling and support was welcomed;
 - having counselling in schools normalised seeking help for mental health issues and reduced stigma; and
 - the Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, spoke to the importance of gender equity and providing gender-equal play, and undertook to share an e-learning module in that regard with Members of the Committee; and
 - it was good to have a debate on what had, in the past, been a taboo subject.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress made on embedding a school counselling service across Highland and the data gathered to date in relation to this service;
- ii. **NOTED** that counselling was one part of the available supports for promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing across Highland;
- iii. **NOTED** the training available in relation to Promoting Positive Relationships, Mental Health Awareness and Becoming Trauma Informed and **AGREED** to signpost this as appropriate to schools and services within communities;
- iv. **NOTED** and **AGREED** to promote the use of the website created for parents/carers, pupils and practitioners in Highland to support mental health and wellbeing: <https://www.wellbeinghighland.co.uk/> and;
- v. **AGREED** that a further update on Counselling in Schools be presented to the Committee in May/June 2024.

8. National Discussion and Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment Deasbad Nàiseanta agus Ath-sgrùdadh Neo-eisimeileach air Teisteanasan is Measadh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/17/23 dated 1 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that it was often said that education was an area of continual change. However, because society was changing so quickly it was necessary to continually review what learning, teaching and assessment looked like and ask if they were fit for purpose in a world where the profile of employment for the future would look so different from what it was today and where every young person deserved the chance to achieve and have their successes at every level acknowledged.

As Members would be aware, two main consultations had taken place in recent times and, following the recent successful workshop about current qualifications, the report provided an opportunity to hear about and discuss some of the proposals that had been put forward for the future as part of The National Discussion on Education and the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised in respect of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment:-

- concern was expressed that the suggested form of assessment could lead to instances of pupils leaving school after S4 with no qualifications;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Highers and Advanced Highers would continue and National 5 certificates would be internally assessed;
- National 5s being internally assessed could reduce the confidence of employers in these qualifications and would lead to pupils sitting Highers and Advanced Highers with no prior experience of externally assessed exams;
- Scotland was going in a different direction regarding qualifications than the rest of the UK which could lead to confusion for employers and universities;
- exams could be intimidating to some young people causing them not to do well, and the importance of having an inclusive education system was emphasised;
- the reference to lifelong learning was welcomed; and
- the need for further consultation and teacher engagement having been emphasised, it was explained that teachers would be given the opportunity to consider and provide feedback on the recommendations at the forthcoming inset day.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the update report on education reform in Scotland; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the actions set out as Next Steps in section 7 of the report to support engagement opportunities of our teachers with the information set out in the National Reports.

9. Revenue Budget Monitoring Final Out-turn 2022/23 and Service Performance Reporting for Quarter 1 – 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023
Fior Shuim Dheireannach Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2022/23 agus Aithris Coileanaidh Seirbheis airson Cairteal 1 – 1 Giblean 2023 gu 30 Ògmhios 2023

There had been circulated Report No EDU/18/23 dated 11 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, the Chair explained that any underspend due to industrial action by teaching staff would be used across the Education Service and the Council generally;
- following concerns being raised around the poor condition of Inverness High School, the Chair commented that there had been significant investment in Inverness High School and officers from both Housing and Property and Education had visited the school. He reminded Members that the Capital Programme Review would be considered at the next meeting of the Full Council;
- the Devolved School Management Scheme disadvantaged schools in older buildings, and it was queried whether the review of the Scheme was ongoing and whether Members would have an opportunity for input; and
- it would make sense, from an educational needs perspective, for the Education and Learning Capital Programme to be reported to the Education Committee for scrutiny and monitoring purposes, as had taken place historically, rather than the Housing and Property Committee. The Chair undertook to investigate this and report back.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Service's revenue monitoring position; and
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance and risk information.

10. Statutory Consultation: Gergask Primary School – Proposal to Proceed to Consultation on Closure
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Bun-Sgoil Gharbhghaisg – Moladh a Dhol air Adhart gu Co-chomhairleachadh a Thaobh Dùnadh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/19/23 dated 1 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal attached to the report.

11. Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise – Closure of Struan Primary School
Ath-sgrùdadh air Eacarsaich Cho-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail – Dùnadh Bun-Sgoil an t-Sruthain

There had been circulated Report No EDU/20/23 dated 23 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, Local Members made the following points:-

- Struan Community Council was fully supportive of the closure of the school and should be commended for their hard work to keep the school building in good condition; and
- it made sense for the catchment area to be transferred to that of Dunvegan Primary School.

* The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that it discontinue education provision at Struan Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Dunvegan Primary School. Struan Primary had not been operational since 2022 and a closure decision would formalise the current operational situation.

12. Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise – Closure of Torridon Primary School Ath-sgrùdadh air Eacarsaich Cho-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail – Dùnadh Bun- Sgoil Thoirbheartan

There had been circulated Report No EDU/21/23 dated 23 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

* The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that it discontinue education provision at Torridon Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Shieldaig Primary School. Torridon Primary School had not been operational since 2012 and a closure decision would formalise the current operational situation.

13. Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers Geàrr-chunntas na Comataidh Barganachaidh Ionadail airson Thidsearan

The draft Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 13 June 2023 had been circulated and were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 12.50 pm.