

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday, 30 October 2023, at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

Ms T Collier  
Mr D Louden  
Mrs P Munro  
Ms M Nolan

Mr A Rhind  
Ms M Ross  
Ms M Smith

### **Participating Officials:**

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.  
Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager  
Mr D Martin, Area Education & Learning Manager  
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead (Investment & Building Maintenance)  
Ms F Richardson, Corporate Improvement Project Manager  
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager  
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer  
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Planning, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy  
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

### **Also in Attendance:**

Area Inspector Stephen Mezals, Police Scotland (Item 3)

**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**

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

There were none.

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

There were none.

#### **3. Police – Area Performance Summary Report Poileas – Geàrr-Aithisg Coileanaidh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/18/23 by the Area Commander.

Following a summary of the report, the following issues were raised during discussion:

- assurance was sought and provided that recent incidences of violence were being investigated, and the public were urged to report any information that might help, either to the local police or through Crimestoppers;
- it was possible that increased detection rates of drink and drug driving offences in Easter Ross compared with in Caithness and Sutherland could be the result of increased deployment of resources in Easter Ross;
- police officers were thanked for their assistance tackling a recent incident of vandalism in Invergordon; and
- concern was expressed that a number of vehicles were being abandoned in residential parking places and it was requested that this be tackled by joint working between the Police, the Council and the DVLA.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 3, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2022 – 31 March 2023; and
- ii. **AGREED** to liaise, through the senior Ward Manager, with the Police and DVLA on the issue of long-term abandoned vehicles in residential areas.

#### **4. Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2023-27 Prògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd a-steach Taigheadais 2023-27**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/19/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- information was sought for future reports on the number of houses impacted by funding streams, with particular reference to climate change adaptations, to help understand how long projects were likely to take;
- a breakdown was requested, for ward business meetings and in future reports, of figures at ward and / or estate level;
- information was sought and provided on progress with Scottish Government's new Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH) and whether air source heat pump heating was the preferred option. It was explained this was often the case but depended on individual circumstances. Communication had been undertaken with tenants on changes to heating tariffs;
- in relation to environmental projects, officers would be reminded to attend ward business meetings to engage with local Members;
- concerns were raised about housing stock which was coming to the end of its useful lifespan and further refurbishment would not be cost effective. The challenging balance between repairing existing homes versus building new ones was summarised, and attention was drawn to the budget restrictions. The importance of not raising public expectations was emphasised;
- Members thanked the Housing team for their work and assistance with customers; and
- concern was expressed that in rural areas the mobile signal was sometimes not strong enough to support the use of smart meters and suppliers and the government should be lobbied about this.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the summary update on the HRA Capital Programme at section 5 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the HRA Capital resources identified for Easter Ross area at paragraph 6.7 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed investment priorities in the HRA Capital Programme for Easter Ross 2023-27 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- iv. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme will continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Local Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee;
- v. **AGREED** to provide a breakdown, to ward business meetings and in future reports, of figures at ward and / or estate level; and
- vi. **AGREED** to provide information in future reports on the number of houses impacted by funding streams, with particular reference to climate change adaptations.

The Committee **AGREED** to take item 6 before item 5.

## **6. Associated School Group Overview (ASG) Foir-shealladh air Buidhnean Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte**

### **a) Alness Academy ASG Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Alanais**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/21/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning.

During discussion, with reference to the poor attainment figures for several primary schools, and secondary being behind Highland and national levels, information was sought and provided on improvement work being undertaken. A summary was provided of the levels of support being offered to each school, including support from Collaborative Lead Officers and for the Head Teacher. The figures presented were for 2021-22 and it was expected that attainment will have increased in more recent figures.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

### **b) Invergordon Academy ASG Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/22/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning. An updated report had been circulated to Members with a correction to the figures in the table in section 6.2, 'Destinations of Pupils (%)'

During discussion, Members expressed disappointment at the drop in attainment for Invergordon Academy and information was sought on what was being done to address this. Newmore and Park Primaries were commended for their performance and, while acknowledging that adequate facilities were

being provided at the Academy, it was also important to give honest and realistic information to families about the problems the Council was facing with the capital programme and its inability to fund a new school for Park at this time. It was clarified that the schools project on the capital programme had been deferred, not removed.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

**c) Tain Royal Academy ASG  
Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/23/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Hilton of Cadboll interim Head Teacher and staff were thanked for their work;
- it was suggested that writing attainment at Tain Royal Academy was a concern and information was provided on the improvement plan, and work being undertaken by the Collaborative Leads, including sharing good practice from other schools;
- concerns were expressed in relation to conditions on the site for the new campus, and the impact on local residents, and a meeting should be arranged to address these issues, including the possible need for a drainage ditch; and
- in response to questions about the management structure for the new campus, it was explained that the interim Head Teacher was in post until Easter 2024 when it was intended a permanent Head Teacher would be in post, with 4 or 5 deputy Heads for both secondary and primary. More detail, including on a name and uniform for the campus would be considered through stakeholder meetings and could also be addressed at ward business meetings.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report and **AGREED** to arrange a meeting with local Members, affected local residents, and representatives from Kier Construction to consider issues related to Tain Campus.

**5. Place Based Investment Programme (PBIP) Grant Award 2021/22: Tain Streetscape  
Duais Tabhartais Prògram Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite 2021/22: Cruth-sràide Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/20/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

Members expressed disappointment that the project costs had escalated beyond the £100,000 allocated to the Tain Streetscape project at by the Committee at their meeting on 17 February 2022, with the shortfall being around £110,000. Various options were discussed including retendering the project, phasing the project, or seeking funds from elsewhere to cover the difference.

The importance of the project was emphasised but due to the risks of the Scottish Government withdrawing the funds if amendments were sought to the project, Members spoke in favour of seeking agreement to carry forward the funds as recommended, and to discuss the project with the Roads team in the meantime.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to formally withdraw the offer of grant of £100,000 PBIP from the Tain Streetscape Project;
- ii. pending agreement of the Scottish Government, **AGREED** to carry forward the £100,000 PBIP funding into the available Community Regeneration Fund allocation for Easter Ross for 2023/24; and
- iii. **AGREED** to arrange a meeting with Roads officers to discuss the project.

## **7. Invergordon Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There had been circulated joint Report No ERA/24/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Community and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

During discussion, it was proposed that support be offered to the group dealing with the application for Invergordon Naval & Heritage Museum for the Community Asset Transfer of Invergordon Town Hall, which had been paused for a minimum of 4 months. The reported investment interest was low but was anticipated to be higher by the year end. Members were reminded that the Common Good Fund was responsible for the upkeep of its assets.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Q2 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund; and
- ii. that the Community Asset Transfer application received from the Invergordon Naval & Heritage Museum has been paused for reasons due to instability in the applicant group as outlined in section 5 of the report.

## **8. Tain Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated joint Report No ERA/25/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Community and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

During discussion, clarification was sought and provided that ringfenced money from the sale of the mussel boat would be shown separately on the annual accounts. Disappointment was expressed that from time to time additional funds required to be spent on minor repairs to the Alexandra swing bridge.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Quarter 2 monitoring statement for the Tain Common Good Fund; and
- ii. the update on current Tain Common Good issues.

**9. Easter Ross Area Place Plan – Progress Update  
Plana Àite Sgìre Rois an Ear – Cunntas air Adhartas**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/26/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

A presentation was provided covering key local, regional and national drivers for Easter Ross, the scope and target audience of the plan, methodology, progress, draft priorities and areas for action. A workshop was scheduled on 2 November 2023.

Members commented that, given the strategic importance of Easter Ross, it was hoped funding streams would be made available for local initiatives.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the emerging themes and priorities for action identified so far at Section 5.2, and the further background and information shared by the Officer through a verbal presentation on the day; and
- ii. the next steps for progressing this work and broadening participation, including the launch of online engagement, aligning community-led activity and establishing governance model.

**10. Invergordon Common Good Fund - the bust of Sir John Gordon by Edmé Bouchardon.  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain – ìomhaigh-bràghad Shir Iain Ghòrdain le Edmé Bouchardon**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/27/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Performance & Governance.

Following a summary of the report, the following issues were raised:

- there had been speculation online about what would happen if the bust was sold but it was clarified that a decision was only being sought at this stage on whether to proceed with a consultation on whether to sell it;
- if the bust were to be displayed locally, the costs of insurance and security to display it would be prohibitive;
- in response to comments, a summary was provided of the statutory consultation process. There was no legal requirement for a public meeting but a public awareness raising session, with a defined agenda, could be beneficial. The permitted uses of Common Good Fund assets and who was permitted to benefit from them was outlined, as was the lengthy legal process that would be undertaken if a sale was the preferred option from the consultation, and that any investment decisions on the proceeds would be taken in line with legal procedure, at the appropriate time;
- the importance of clear communication with regard to the consultation was emphasised;
- Members were keen to hear the public's view on the possible sale of the bust;

- assurance was provided that the bust was being stored in a safe and appropriate location; and
- Members thanked all involved in the process over the previous 25 years and asked that they be involved in the preparation of the consultation document.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the update on the work undertaken to explore the potential of selling the Bouchardon Bust;
- NOTED** the assessment of the various sale options and the advice from Sotheby's that a sale by private arrangement might be most beneficial in financial terms; and
- in light of this information, **AGREED** to commence a Community Empowerment consultation to inform the decision making in respect of a proposal to sell the Bouchardon bust.

#### **11. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** the Ward Discretionary Projects that had been approved since 1st April 2023.

#### **12. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 7 August 2023, which had been approved by the Council on 14 September 2023.

#### **13. Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Reallocation of Funds Maoinean Stèidhichte air Àite – Ath-riarachadh Mhaoinean ga Mholadh**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/28/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** to repurpose the remaining £12,000 from the £20,000 allocated to the Invergordon Social Club for its Feasibility Study, to a Ward 6 Community Grants stream set up to address one or more of the four harms of Covid.

The meeting ended at 2.40pm

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday 7 November 2023 at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

Ms S Atkin  
Ms L Johnston

Ms M MacCallum

### **In attendance:**

Mr B Cameron, Service Lead – Housing Policy and Performance  
Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager  
Mr M Greig, Ward Manager  
Ms J Wileman, Assistant Ward Manager  
Mr A Coyle, Corporate Communications and Engagement Officer  
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

### **Also in attendance:**

Mr P Young, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

**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 Johnston in the Chair**

### **Business**

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

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

#### **3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Performance Report Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn**

There had been circulated Report No BI/13/23 dated 25 October 2023 by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the procedure when there was an automated fire alarm during the night; progress with recruitment of firefighters in Fortrose; the cause of the deliberate fires that had taken place; and the location and cause of the road traffic collisions that had taken place, which were above average;
- it was reassuring that there had been no accidental dwelling fires in this reporting period;

- appreciation was expressed for the work of the SFRS in the communities of Fortrose and Cromarty. In particular, Members commended the outstanding work that had taken place in respect of the Halloween community event in Cromarty;
- the SFRS had had an extremely challenging summer, and appreciation was expressed for their heroic efforts in tackling the unprecedented wildfires that had taken place;
- reference having been made to a vehicle fire that had taken place in Cromarty, concern was expressed regarding appliance availability, not only in the Black Isle but across Highland, and information was sought, and provided, in that regard and on minimum crewing levels. On the point being raised, it was confirmed that Cromarty Community Response Unit staff were not respiratory trained. However, the Cromarty appliance dealt with road traffic accidents and wildfires, and had been a great asset at the recent incidents in Cannich and Daviot; and
- in response to a question, it was explained that the joint mobilising arrangements that were in place in some remote areas were at the pilot stage. However, the scheme was under constant review, and it was possible it could be rolled out to other areas going forward.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

#### **4. Black Isle Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved since 23 May 2023**

##### **Iarrtasan Buidseit fo Ùghdarras Uàird an Eilein Duibh air an Aontachadh bho 23 an Cèitean 2023**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Black Isle Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 23 May 2023:-

- Fortrose Academy Parent Council - Duke of Edinburgh Awards Expedition - £1,000
- Chanonry Sailing Club SCIO - Quest to Develop: Purchase of two RS Quest Sailing Dinghies - £500
- Knockbain Community Council - North Kessock Underpass Community Artwork & Youth Competition - £2,300
- Highland Rugby Club - Under 16 Legacy Tour to Italy in October 2023 - Multi Ward - Lead Officer Mark Greig - £400
- First Scottish Searching Services - Legal Report Munlochry Tennis Court - £76
- Avoch and Killen Community Council - to support the running costs for the local public bathrooms - £1,000.
- Ferintosh Community Council - contribution towards the cost of maintaining equipment and insurance - £250.

In relation to the North Kessock Underpass Community Artwork and Youth Competition, Members commended the artist involved and the impact of the artwork on the underpass. Members also praised the efforts of parents at Fortrose Academy in relation to Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

It was highlighted that, since the above applications had been approved, the maximum award had been reduced to £1000 to ensure that the funding went as far as possible. A small amount of money at community level made a huge difference and it would be great to support more community projects going forward.

## 5. Common Good Funds Maoin Maith Choitchinn

### a. Cromarty Common Good Fund – Quarter Two Monitoring Report

There had been circulated joint Report No BI/14/23 dated 4 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

In introducing the report, the Senior Ward Manager drew attention to the proposed budget changes as a result of the reclassification of the Victoria Hall. In relation to the options set out in the report in respect of the grants budget, it was explained that the officer recommendation was to set a nil budget.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members were content to set a nil grants budget in the short-term with the caveat it could be reinstated if the position of the fund was to change or if there was a project that had significant community impact that merited support; and
- the East Hall remained empty and it was necessary to consider the impact that might have on the fabric of the building in the long-term. Impetus was needed to bring it back into use so it could serve the community and generate income for the Common Good Fund. The Senior Ward Manager confirmed that she had noted Members' comments and suggested the matter be picked up following the Community Support and Engagement Team restructure when the officer appointed to support the Black Isle would be looking to build relationships with community groups. Members welcomed the suggestion, added that the Cromarty community was resourceful and it was amazing what could be achieved with some creativity.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the position of Cromarty Common Good Fund as shown in the 2023/24 Quarter Two Monitoring Statement; and
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed budget changes outlined in paragraph 4 of the report in order to reflect the reduced income now available to the fund as a result of the reclassification of the Victoria Hall and to avoid a deficit budget; and
- iii. **AGREED** to set a nil grants budget on the basis that it could be reinstated if the position of the fund was to change or in exceptional circumstances.

## **b. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund – 2023/24 Quarter Two Monitoring Report**

There had been circulated joint Report No BI/15/23 dated 5 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

The Senior Ward Manager highlighted that, due to a miscommunication, there was an error in the report in that the contract for the urgent safety works to the gabions on the coastal area running from the Golf Club House towards Rosemarkie had not yet been awarded. The recommendation was therefore that the Committee approve expenditure estimated at £90,000 to deliver the urgent safety works required.

A detailed discussion took place during which Members expressed concern regarding the devastating impact of coastal erosion, not only on the gabions, as detailed in the report, but on surrounding areas which were beyond the scope of the Committee. In relation to the gabions, whilst the proposed expenditure was significant relative to the size of the Common Good Fund, the works were essential given the safety risk. However, the effectiveness of gabions having been questioned, it was emphasised that the urgent nature of the repairs was about making them safe, not more effective.

With regard to the surrounding areas that were beyond the scope of the Committee, and noting the need for urgency, the Senior Ward Manager undertook to liaise with Members and appropriate officers and arrange an initial meeting on the earliest possible date. It was noted that wider engagement with stakeholders would also be needed.

Thanks having been expressed to the Senior Ward Manager for her efforts in respect of this and the preceding Common Good report, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the position of Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund as shown in the 2023/24 Quarter Two Monitoring Statement; and
- ii. **APPROVED** expenditure estimated at £90,000 to deliver urgent safety works to the gabions on the coastal area running from the Golf Club House towards Rosemarkie.

## **6. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Black Isle Committee held on 15 August 2023 which had been approved by the Council on 29 June 2023.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 am.