

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 6 March 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baldrey (remote)	Mr R Gunn
Mr M Cameron (remote)	Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr L Fraser	Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr R Gale	Ms K MacLean (substitute)
Mr A Graham	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr M Green	Mrs M Reid (substitute)

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mrs B McAllister (remote)
Mr J Grafton	Mr D Millar (remote)
Mr R MacKintosh	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr T MacLennan (remote)	Mr A Rhind
Mr D Macpherson (remote)	Ms M Ross

In attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Ms C Campbell, Head of Community Operations and Logistics
Ms A Clark, Head of Community Support, Contact and Engagement
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Ms K Ellen, Community Food Growing Coordinator
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Superintendent R Shepherd, Police Scotland

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair offered his condolences to the friends and family of Julie Wileman, Community Support Officer, who had died suddenly in January. Julie had been hugely valued by her colleagues and by Members, had showed outstanding enthusiasm and commitment to her role and would be greatly missed.

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 J Finlayson, Mrs J Hendry, Ms L Niven, Ms M Nolan and Mr M Reiss.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 7 – Mr M Green

3. Police Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Poileis

Under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, the Local Authority had responsibility for monitoring and scrutinising performance of Police Scotland against the Local Policing Plan for their area. Each Local Plan must be approved by the Local Authority and reviewed every three years. The current Local Plan had been approved by the Committee in May 2023.

There had been circulated Report No CP/01/24 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

In addition to the report, Chief Superintendent Shepherd provided updates on the following areas: the effects of the financial settlement from the Scottish Government on officer numbers; the increase in the overtime budget; body-worn video equipment; the Proportionate Response to Crime pilot; the Service Delivery Team pilot; the reduction in road deaths; the increase in driving offences due to higher detection rates; response times for 999 and 101 calls; series two of Highland Cops; and Police housing.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- the retention of the Operational Support Division in Highland and the rollout of body-worn video equipment were welcomed;
- information was sought, and provided, on the possible loss of experienced officers due to early retirement; assaults on officers; the Concern for Persons policy; drink driving detection rates; the increase in driving offences; how online crime was being addressed; the reasons for and effects of the new Service Delivery Team pilot; and Police involvement in the issue of wild fires;
- on the point being raised, it was clarified that there had been six times more drug driving offences than drink driving offences and that, in future reports, these figures would be recorded separately along with a breakdown of age demographics and, if possible, the types of drugs detected; and
- in response to a question, an assurance was provided that there were no plans to close any Police Stations in Highland other than the station in Muir of Ord which was no longer in use.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023.

4. Communities and Place – Revenue Budget Monitoring and Service Performance Reporting for Q3 1 October 2023 to 31 December 2023
Coimhearsnachdan agus Àite – Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach agus Aithris Coileanaidh Seirbheis airson R3 1 Dàmhair 2023 gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2023

There had been circulated Report No CP/02/24 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- the high rates of complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests resolved within the target time were commended; and
- information was sought, and provided, on how the increase in income from garden waste had been achieved; whether the increasing number and complexity of FOI requests was having an impact on officers' time; the level of sickness absence within the service and whether there was a correlation with vacancy management and increased workload; the forecasted underspend in the budgets for Ward Management, Community Support, Service Points and Registrars; the digital resubscription system for garden waste collections; and whether it was workable for the service to make greater use of existing employees and less use of contractors.

The Committee:-

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

5. Capital Monitoring – Quarter 3 2023/24
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Calpa

There had been circulated Report No CP/03/24 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- the work done by Communities and Place staff together with community organisations to provide playparks was a good example of the Council and communities working together; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the funding of the waste shredders; the areas of slippage in Bereavement Services; the possibility of introducing hybrid fuel heavy vehicles; and when the equipment would be installed to enable the public conveniences in Thurso to be open full-time. In relation to the latter, the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place, undertook to provide a clearer date to Mr R Gunn following the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the forecasted capital outturn for the Communities and Place Service for 23/24 as at Quarter 3; and
- ii. the current forecast for the major project for the Communities and Place Service for 23/24.

6. Update on Recycling Improvement Fund (RIF) Project Cunntas às Ùr mu Phròiseact Leasachaidh na Maoin Ath-chuairteachaidh

There had been circulated Report No CP/04/24 dated by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the work they had done on the RIF project;
- the importance of communication around the changes in waste collections was emphasised as many members of the public were still unclear about what was happening;
- more education about what happened to waste and the recycling process was needed to encourage greater public buy-in;
- the communications plan had been well thought out;
- Local Members would be able to provide feedback from the public and Community Councils;
- it was suggested that local radio stations could be used to publicise the upcoming changes in waste collections;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Local Members would be kept up to date with the rollout of the new bins at Ward Business Meetings;
- information was sought, and provided, on glass recycling collections; whether communal bins could potentially be provided for flats; the possibility of households sharing bins; and the rollout of the new refuse collection arrangements to parts of Easter Ross. In relation to the latter, the Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations, undertook to provide further detail on the rollout to the Seaboard Villages to Mr A Rhind following the meeting;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Fort William Waste Transfer Station was still scheduled to be completed by spring 2025; and
- the progress of the planning application for the new depot in Portree was welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED:-**

- i. the progress that had been made in advance of the phased introduction of Recycling Improvement Funded collection service changes;
- ii. the timeline for essential infrastructure projects that would support service change in Caithness, Skye and Lochaber; and
- iii. the detail of the comprehensive communications plan to support the service change.

7. Growing Our Future: Allotments Policy and Rules and Regulations for Allotment Sites on Council Land A' Fàs ar n-Àm ri Teachd: Poileasaidh agus Riaghailtean Lotaichean airson Làraich Lotaichean air Fearann na Comhairle

Transparency Statement: Mr M Green declared a connection to this item as the Council's Solitary Bee Champion but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CP/05/24 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- the policy was welcomed as many communities had been requesting allotments and wished to grow their own food;
- the effective engagement with the Nairn Allotment Society was commended;
- although the Nairn Allotment Society did not currently allow the keeping of bees, allotments would attract solitary bees to the area; and
- the policy promoted local food resilience projects and response to the climate change crisis.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** and adopted the revised Allotments Policy set out at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED**, in principle, the Rules and Regulations for allotments pending further public notice, as outlined at section 9.5 of the report.

8. Bereavement Services – Project Updates Seirbheisean Bàis – Cunntasan às Ùr mu Phròiseactan

There had been circulated Report No CP/06/24 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- in relation to burial ground projects where land investigations were underway, information was sought, and provided, on the process if discussions with landowners broke down and whether Compulsory Purchase Orders would be utilised;
- the progress that had been made in terms of raising the profile of Bereavement Services, one of the most important and sensitive services the Council provided, was welcomed, and thanks were expressed to officers for bringing specific reports on the matter to the Committee;
- the progress in respect of the project to review the options for the replacement of the cremators at Inverness Crematorium was encouraging, and support was expressed for the gas-fired cremator option;
- Kilvean Cemetery probably had 15 to 20 years left in terms of capacity, and the long-term need for a new large cemetery to serve the city of Inverness was emphasised;
- it was requested that consideration be given to a long-term strategy for Bereavement Services, encompassing all the various aspects such as Inverness Crematorium, the need for a new cemetery in Inverness, how it was intended to deal with cemetery capacity issues in other towns and smaller settlements, and where the pressure points were;
- in relation to Lochaber, given the mountainous geography, the challenges associated with identifying land for burial grounds that would meet the SEPA guidelines were recognised. A new crematorium could help to relieve the pressure on burial grounds, and the engagement that had taken place with Local Members in that regard was appreciated and it was hoped would continue. The completion of the works at Beoraid Cemetery in Morar was welcomed but this only provided another five years of capacity;

- the importance of informing Local Members when it was intended to carry out major works in cemeteries was emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, on when it was intended to open the new cemetery in Nairn, and the impact of Nairn amenities staff covering work in Inverness;
- the Council could be proud of Bereavement Services and the dedicated team that did their utmost for families in their time of need;
- thanks were expressed in respect of the recently extended St Duthus Cemetery in Tain and the works at Chapelhill Cemetery in Nigg. Only two burial grounds in the Tain and Easter Ross Ward gave cause for concern, namely, Logie Easter and Tarbat, and it was confirmed that information on capacity and plans for future extensions would be provided to Mr A Rhind;
- positive action was needed in respect of the mole problem at Chapelhill Cemetery and Kilmuir Easter Cemetery, and the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, undertook to raise this with the local team to see whether anything further could be done;
- Inverness Crematorium was a great facility and effectively used. However, the benefit of some of the works that had been carried out, such as the walls that had been taken down and the new feature near the front door, was questioned. Concern was expressed regarding the issues with the solar panel on the roof and the associated works which had led to the large chapel being closed on Mondays and Tuesdays throughout March, and it was requested that consideration be given to reopening the small chapel which had been closed since the Covid pandemic;
- an update on progress was sought in respect of burial grounds on Skye, particularly the major extension at Portree Cemetery and the status of the Skeabost and Borge Cemetery, so Members could report back to the community. Information was also requested on which of the cemeteries that were closed would ever re-open if land could be acquired. The Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, confirmed that an update would be provided to Local Members;
- concern having been expressed regarding the difficulties that had been experienced in recruiting amenities staff on Skye and the severe pressure being placed on existing staff, the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, undertook to liaise with the local amenities team in that regard; and
- the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, confirmed that a member of his team would contact Ms T Collier to discuss her query regarding maintaining access to burial grounds.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in Highland;
- ii. proposals for cremator replacement at Inverness Crematorium;
- iii. the recent inspection undertaken by the Scottish Government at the Inverness Crematorium and the positive findings; and
- iv. the update on the feasibility of a crematorium in the Lochaber area.

9. Environmental Health Performance 2023/24 and Operational Plan 2024/25 Coileanadh Slàinte Àrainneachdail 2023/24 agus Plana Obrachaidh 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No CP/07/24 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, information was sought, and provided, on the following points:-

- the reasons why only 44% of high-risk private water supplies had been inspected and sampled, and whether there was any cause for concern;
- the abandoned vehicle process, including the timescale from reporting to conclusion, which organisation received the fees, which seemed low for the amount of officer time involved, and whether the fees had increased since the previous year;
- whether the short-term lets licensing regime was self-funding; and
- the changes to the legislation covering animal boarding, including whether this would include catteries, whether there would be consultation with existing establishments and whether there would be fees coming to the Council.

Having welcomed the report, which showed how busy the Environmental Health team was, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the Environmental Health performance in 23/24 to date including delivering statutory duties to over 6000 properties on private water supplies, over 5000 food businesses, and responding to 13,000 annual service requests on a wide range of public health, nuisance, licensing, safety, dog control, animal health and incivility issues;
- APPROVED** the Environmental Health Operational Plan to 31 March 2025 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- NOTED** that the team was preparing annual reports on local Environmental Health team performance for Area Committees in 2024.

10. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Chair spoke to a number of items of good news, as follows:-

- congratulations were extended to Lesley Gray and the Registrar's team for the very successful Wedding Fair they had held at the Archive Centre in Inverness in February. Although the team had previously attended wedding fairs to promote the Highland Registration Service, this had been the first time they had organised and held a wedding fair. Feedback from stall holders and attendees had been extremely positive and it was intended that this would become an annual event and part of the Wedding Fair calendar;
- on Thursday 29 February staff in Customer Services and Registration had participated in National Registrars Recognition Day, hosted by the Association of Registrars of Scotland who had invited all 32 local authorities in Scotland. The event had been organised to mark a day of recognition for the valuable work Registrars undertook in communities every day in respect of recording Scotland's life events, registering births, still-births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships. Service Points and Registration Offices across Highland had closed for the morning allowing staff to attend the online event between 10.00 am and 12 noon. The event had been an enormous success and staff had been very appreciative of being given the opportunity to attend and connect with colleagues across Scotland;
- Hamish Davidson, Acting Assistant Foreperson at Inverness Crematorium, had recently been awarded the Crematorium Technician qualification issued by the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities. The award followed study,

practical training and examination on all operations at the crematorium and the related regulations and codes of practice. Congratulations were extended to Hamish on gaining this qualification;

- the recent annual Scottish Government inspection had concluded that the Inverness Crematorium continued to perform to a high standard and had a dedicated and professional team providing a first class service; and
- progress was being made with training for mechanics on electric vehicle maintenance. Three mechanics had passed Institute of the Motor Industry Level 3 electrical vehicle training and another 12 were due to complete by the end of the month. This supported mechanics to work safely on electric and hybrid vehicles whilst carrying out diagnostic testing and repairs.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

The meeting concluded at 1.10 pm.