

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 30 January 2025 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Mr L Fraser	Mr S Mackie
Mr A Graham	Ms K MacLean
Mr R Gunn	Mr D Millar
Mrs J Hendry	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair) (remote)
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)	Mrs M Reid (substitute)
Ms M MacCallum	Mr M Reiss
Mr W MacKay (remote)	Ms M Smith
Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)	Ms K Willis (substitute)

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Dr C Birt (remote)	Mr B Lobban (remote)
Mr S Coghill (remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr R Gale	Ms K McEwan (remote)
Mr J Grafton (remote)	Mr R Stewart
Dr M Gregson (remote)	

In attendance:

Ms A Clark, Chief Officer – Housing and Communities
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead - Waste Strategy and Operations
Ms D Sutton, Strategic Lead - Community Operations and Logistics
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Ms C Pieraccini, Strategic Lead – Finance
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Project Manager
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Superintendent R Shepherd, Divisional Commander, Police Scotland

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

Mr G MacKenzie 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 A Baldrey, Mr J Bruce, Ms T Collier and Mr M Green.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 4: Mr D Millar and Mrs M Reid

Item 8: Mr S Mackie

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Chair informed the Committee of the following items of good news:-

- the development of the extension to Croy cemetery had progressed well, with the contractor having installed strip foundations for 87 new lairs. Landscaping of the area would be completed in March 2025. This phase of the extension would provide over 30 years increased capacity at the cemetery;
- all Mechanics and Team Leaders in the service were now IRTEC accredited mechanics. IRTEC was an independent accreditation and validated the competence of technicians working to maintain commercial vehicles, trailers and passenger carrying industries. An IRTEC licence was valid for five years and tested both the knowledge and practical level of an individual's competence.
- congratulations were extended to Kevin Gordon who, following a mini reorganisation in Ross and Cromarty and Skye, had been appointed as the new Amenity Officer for Skye and Lochalsh. Kevin was a longstanding and valued member of the Amenities team on Skye and brought an extensive knowledge of the full range of operations carried out by Amenity Services.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. Police Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh a' Phoileis

Transparency Statements: Mr D Millar and Mrs M Reid declared a connection to this item on the basis that a close relative was an officer within Police Scotland but, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CP/1/25 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

Chief Superintendent Shepherd highlighted the main themes of the report and provided updates on a recent seizure of 40kg of cannabis worth £600,000, the rollout of body-worn video equipment, the number of drink and drug driving offences detected over the Christmas period, the safety of Elected Members, and the 2025/26 budget allocation from Police Scotland.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in relation to incidents involving reckless conduct with firearms, reference was

made to the tragic shootings that had taken place in Skye and Dornie in 2022, and concern was expressed regarding the time it would take for the Armed Response Unit, based in Inverness, to respond to an incident in a remote and rural part of Highland. Further discussion ensued, during which information was sought, and provided, on the issuing and revocation of firearms certificates in Highland, whether it was possible to review how the firearms response was delivered, and whether the Council needed to contact Police Scotland to further explain the unique situation in Highland and ask for additional funding for firearms trained officers to protect Highland communities appropriately. Chief Superintendent Shepherd explained that an investigation into Police Scotland's response to the shootings in Skye and Dornie was ongoing, and he undertook to find out the timeline for the outcome. Members having praised two of the officers involved for their bravery, it was confirmed they would be honoured locally with Divisional Commander commendations;

- high-profile drug seizures were welcomed;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether the reduction in the number of missing children was linked to the Council's Home to Highland programme, the reasons for the improved shoplifting detection rate, the low detection rate for fraud offenses, methods of detecting mobile phone use while driving, the recording of statistics on road traffic accidents, the plans for the future use of the Police Station and Police House at Dunvegan, the steps taken to mitigate assaults on Police Officers, the recruitment of Special Constables, the training needed to gain entry to buildings, and whether it was considered there were sufficient numbers of Police Officers in Highland;
- concern having been expressed regarding the increase in the number of sexual assaults, it was confirmed that, while some of the reports were historic and the increase might be due to increased confidence in the Police, this was being investigated. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on the support in place for victims, and whether there were any initiatives, similar to Operation Protector, focusing on sexual assault;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Armed Response Officers participated in regular Police duties and were mainly used to support other officers so they could still be available to attend firearms incidents if needed;
- the collaboration between Police Scotland and NHS Highland on drug and alcohol issues was commended;
- it was queried whether Operation Close Pass for bicycles could be extended to horses;
- concern was expressed regarding the increase in "road rage";
- it was disappointing to see an increase in public disorder offences; and
- the recent County Lines awareness sessions had been very helpful.

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 2024 – 31 December 2024.

5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Q3 and Service Performance Reporting for Q3 1 September 2024 to 31 December 2024

Aithisg Sgrùdadh Buidseit Teachd-a-steach agus Coileanadh Seirbheis

There had been circulated Report No CP/2/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to whether it was anticipated that the £0.7m overspend in respect of the Service General budget could be reduced in Quarter 4;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that absence management information for Quarter 3 would be available the following week and could be circulated to Members;
- concern was expressed at the pattern of overspends across several Committees, the overspend in respect of Communities and Place being the largest, and it was queried what impact this would have on next year's budget and what lessons had been learned;
- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for the increase in staff absences, whether any savings were expected from the new waste and recycling collection arrangements, the Council's unallocated reserves, the costs involved in transferring the Council's fleet to electric vehicles; and the latest position on how waste would be transported from Seater Landfill Site;
- concern was expressed that not all invoices had been paid within 30 days as there were often penalties for paying late or discounts for paying early; and
- it was queried whether embedding Net Zero into Council activities would help to reduce costs in terms of waste and fleet, and whether it would be useful to report on carbon emission savings in future.

The Committee:-

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

6. Capital Monitoring Report Q3 2024/25 **Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseit Calpa**

There had been circulated Report No CP/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that there was no capital funding set aside for playparks other than the allocated funding from the Scottish Government.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED**:-

- i. the forecasted capital outturn for the Communities and Place Service for 2024/25 as at Quarter 3; and
- ii. the current forecast for the major project for the Communities and Place Service for 2024/25.

7. Bereavement Services Update **Aithisg Ùrachaidh Seirbheisean Caoidh**

There had been circulated Report No CP/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the progress made in terms of reporting on burial grounds, both at the Communities and Place Committee and Area Committees, was welcomed;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the installation of new equipment in Inverness Crematorium was expected to be completed in early 2026, and the cremators would be replaced one at a time to minimise disruption to services;
- now that the issue of the availability of cemetery space was well on the way to being addressed, it was necessary to focus on the management and maintenance of burial grounds;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the public would be able to purchase lairs at Thurso Cemetery once the extension had been completed;
- concern was expressed regarding damage to cemeteries in Caithness as a result of heavy rain;
- information was sought, and provided, on the maintenance of burial grounds, including how the unusable lower terraces in Thurso cemetery would be maintained, and the availability of amenities staff in Skye;
- in relation to the changes to burial legislation, some Members welcomed the new approach to lair purchase. However, other Members expressed concern regarding the 25-year term, and information was sought, and provided, as to what would happen at the end of that period. The importance of people being able to be buried in the community they came from was highlighted, and the need for flexibility was emphasised. In terms of how the 25-year term had been decided, the Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to provide Ms M MacCallum with the documents from the consultation that had led to the decision. It was confirmed that the 25-year rule would not be applied retrospectively;
- the improvements to Canisbay Cemetery were welcomed; and
- in response to a request, the Strategic Lead - Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to provide an update on the burial grounds in Portree and Skeabost to Ward 10 Members.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the progress of current projects on burial ground extensions; and
- ii. **NOTED** the changes to burial legislation.

8. **Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging** **Dleastanas Leudaichte air Solaraichean a Thaobh Pacadh**

Transparency Statement: Mr S Mackie declared a connection to this item as the owner of a company that was being levied for the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging. Having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare but elected to leave the meeting for the duration of the item.

There had been circulated Report No CP/5/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in relation to the estimated Extended Producer Responsibility payment to the Council for financial year 2025/26, information was sought, and provided, on how

the figure of £9.5m had been calculated. It was confirmed that the £9.5m would be general income, and the waste and recycling service change had resulted in savings for the Council;

- the importance of education around recycling was emphasised;
- with regard to the rollout of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements, the need for clear, concise information was emphasised, and the provision of labels to indicate what went into which bin was welcomed;
- on the point being raised, an update was provided on glass recycling collections. It was clarified that glass banks were Council property and therefore the Council was responsible for their maintenance; and
- in response to a question, it was explained that bad weather and missed collections over Christmas had affected food waste collections, and funding had been requested for an additional food waste collection vehicle.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the purpose of the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging Regulations;
- ii. the estimated 2025/26 financial impact; and
- iii. the importance for demonstrating waste service efficiency and effectiveness.

9. Membership of Waste Strategy Working Group

Ballrachd de Bhuidheann-obrach na Ro-innleachd Sgudail

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr R Gunn would replace Mr R Gale on the Waste Strategy Working Group.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 am.