

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday 27 January 2025, at 10.00 am.

Present:

Sarah Atkin
Sinclair Coghill
Tamala Collier
Laura Dundas
John Edmondson

Lyndsey Johnston
Derek Loudon
Morven-May MacCallum
Maureen Ross
Maxine Smtih

Participating Officials:

Ms A Jansson, Chief Officer Education (Primary)
Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance
Mr G Ralph, Housing Investment Officer
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in Attendance: Chief Inspector Calum Smith, 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.**

Ms L Johnston 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 Report Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BIER/1/25 by the Area Commander (North Highland Area Command).

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

- Police officers were thanked for their work, with reference being made to particular incidents;

- further explanation was sought and provided on the following:
 - the figures for the 3 and 5 year averages in the report;
 - the difference between reported and detected crimes;
 - the No Knives, Better Lives initiative;
 - the rise in the reported levels of missing care experienced young people;
 - resources available for tackling drink and drug related driving offences;
 - the new approach for the police to interact with community councils, noting the need for community councils to have up to date contact information for appropriate police officers;
 - Police interaction with the Council and other Housing services;
 - national improvements to the process for tackling sexual crimes, and work being undertaken with the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership;
 - the use of AI to assist with policing;
 - procedures for dealing with cuckooing and monitoring vulnerable people; and
 - work being undertaken with license holders and licensed premises on crime prevention and detection;
- concern was expressed at the amount of speeding on the Arabella road and Members requested that this be monitored;
- the Harm Prevention Officers had a significant geographical area to cover;
- the rising number of assaults on emergency service workers was of concern; and
- concern was expressed at ongoing issues and anecdotal reports of harm being caused to animals in woods, possibly by snares / traps, and this would be further considered outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

4. Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2025/26

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members thanked the roads officers for their work, especially during the periods of severe winter weather;
- with reference to the strategic allocation of £1,349,000 which was awarded each year to a different committee area within Ross and Cromarty, this coming year being Easter Ross and Black Isle, Members felt consideration should be given to allocating it according to the condition of the roads in each of the three areas, rather than on a rotating basis. The poor state of the roads in Easter Ross and Black Isle was emphasised;
- it was disappointing that the strategic timber funding, which had previously provided funding for surface dressing, was coming to an end;

- it was hoped that as a result of the strategic funding, the red line on the Roads Programme 2025/26, as shown in appendix 3 of the report, could be moved down and additional projects undertaken; and
- attention was drawn to specific area in the wards which required attention.

The Committee:

- APPROVED** the proposed 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for Black Isle and Easter Ross Area;
- AGREED** that, in relation to the strategic allocation of £1,349,000, consideration be given to the whole of the road network and priority be given to the worst roads; and
- AGREED** that investigation be undertaken into various issues raised by Members including the potholes on the Arabella Road (Please insert the correct road name) and an area of road deterioration on the Nigg Road (please insert the correct road name).

5. HRA Garage Rents 2025/26

Màil Gharaidsean Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2025/26

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the definition of a void rent was sought and provided;
- it was clarified that reference in the report to Caithness was an error;
- some Members felt that an 8% rise was appropriate as this is what the tenants had voted for, while others pointed out that the financial difference between an 8% and 9% rise was a relatively small amount of money, and that rental income was essential to facilitate maintenance of the garages. It was suggested that the wording on future consultations could be clearer on the reasons for the increases and the need for investment funding, as well as including the amounts in sterling as opposed to only including the percentage increases;
- concern was expressed that the garage rental rates were higher in Ward 9 than in Wards 6 and 7, and that these should be equalised. Information was sought and provided by officers on the means of achieving this;
- a summary was sought and provided on the work being undertaken to bring void garages up to a lettable standard; and
- many of the garages were too small for modern cars and were being used for storage, and the future uses of the garages should be discussed at ward business meetings in the first instance.

The Committee **AGREED**:

- a 9% rise in garage rents for wards 6 & 7, and a 5.6% rise in ward 9, to bring the rent levels in all 3 wards into alignment the Service Lead Housing; and
- the Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance be invited to a ward 6&7 business meeting to discuss the future use of garages in the wards.

6. **Housing Repairs** **Càraidhean Thaighean**

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- with reference to the catch-up period for housing repairs, there was an ongoing impact from previous years but it was hoped the benefits from the programme would be noticeable over the coming two quarters;
- the importance of ensuring people's houses were up to standard and appropriately adapted to help reduce delays in residents returning to their homes from hospital was highlighted and a summary was provided of the housing needs and occupational health assessment referral processes;
- the importance of tackling pavements in addition to roads was referenced, with particular examples provided;
- it was queried whether the reported underspend was a budget reporting timing issue;
- it was clarified that environmental improvements was a ward-based budget in consultation with local Members;
- clarity was sought on the apparent £1m capital underspend and, following an explanation that this was a report on one year of a five-year budget, it was suggested that further consideration be given to the presentation of these figures in future;
- information was sought and provided on maintenance and improvement measures being undertaken, including energy efficiency and investment, to reduce the average re-let time period; and
- a 10-30 year maintenance and replacement cycle would be useful.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024 and **AGREED** to review how the 3 and 5 year capital budgets were reported to the Committee.

7. **Education Attainment Reports** **Aithisgean Buileachadh Foghlaim**

7a Attainment Report – Fortrose **Aithisg Bhuileachaidh – A' Chananaich**

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

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- it was disappointing that the data was from 2022 and largely irrelevant to the current situation;
- Pan-ASG data would be useful;
- some schools waited a significant amount of time before being inspected;
- specific concerns could be addressed outwith the meeting;

- it was not considered acceptable that 15-20% of secondary pupils were not achieving the expected standard;
- some of the terms used, eg 'good' were insufficiently descriptive; and
- a summary was provided of performance indicators, themes, and evidence, and the possibility of inviting Headteachers to future meetings was suggested.

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

7b Attainment Report – Tain Aithisg Bhuileachaidh – Baile Dhubhthaich

There had been circulated Report No BIER/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, Members pointed out that the results for Craighill Primary School had been impressive. Disappointment was expressed that the reports were so out of date and emphasised the need for more up to date data to facilitate proper scrutiny. Particular reference was made to Tain Royal Academy in this regard. Concern was expressed in relation to teacher recruitment challenges.

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

8. Common Good Funds Maoin Maith Choitchinn

a. Cromarty Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Chromba

There had been circulated Report No BIER/7/25 by the Chief Officer Housing & Communities and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, information was sought and provided on the situation with East Church Hall.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** the Cromarty Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1a) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 1b); and
- NOTED** the position of the Cromarty Common Good Fund as shown in the 2024/25 Quarter Three monitoring statement at Appendix 2; and
- APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 3.

b. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann na Cananaich agus Ros Maircnidh

There had been circulated Report No BIER/8/25 by the Chief Officer Housing & Communities and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, in relation to coastal erosion, information was sought and provided on the situation with the gabion baskets, the recent cost of

investing in their repair, and the challenges associated with predicting the potential impact of coastal erosion.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Fortrose & Rosemarkie Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1a) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 1b);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Fortrose & Rosemarkie Common Good Fund as shown in the 2024/25 Quarter Three monitoring statement at Appendix 2;
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 3; and
- iv. **AGREED** to delegate to the Community Support and Engagement Team power to approve expenditure up to £10,000 in relation to Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good within the annually set budget and following consultation with relevant Ward Members. This delegated power will be reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.

**c. Invergordon Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There had been circulated Report No BIER/9/25 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing, and the Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, an update on progress with the sale of the Bouchardon Bust was sought and provided. Notable progress would be reported to the Committee on an ongoing basis. In relation to Invergordon Town Hall, a rent review would be undertaken when required. A list of Common Good Fund assets could be provided outwith the meeting.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the Invergordon Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 2);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Invergordon Common Good Fund as shown in the 2024/25 Quarter Three monitoring statement at Appendix 3;
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 4; and
- iv. **AGREED** a Common Good Fund asset list be provided to Members

**d. Tain Common Good Fund
Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No BIER/10/25 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing, and the Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

Concerns were expressed about the ownership of the Blarliath Industrial Estate, which had been raised at several Area Committee meetings. The matter was subject to ongoing discussions, but was not yet resolved due to pressure of work on the Common Good Fund Officer.

Members:

- i. **AGREED** the Tain Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2023/24 (Appendix 2);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Tain Common Good Fund as shown in the 2024/25 Quarter Three monitoring statement at Appendix 3; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix; and
- iv. **NOTED** the ongoing concern expressed by Mr Louden and Ms Ross about the issue of landownership between the Council and the CGF for land at Blarliath Industrial Estate.

9. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

There had been circulated and was **NOTED**, details of the Discretionary Budget applications that have been approved.

10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee held on 4 November 2024, which had been approved by the Council on 12 December 2024.

The meeting ended at 2.10pm