

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday 12 May 2025, at 10.00 am.

Present:

Sarah Atkin
Sinclair Coghill
Tamala Collier
Laura Dundas

John Edmondson
Lyndsey Johnston
Morven-May MacCallum
Maureen Ross

Participating Officials:

Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Ms R Robertson, Bereavement Services Project Co-ordinator
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance
Mr A Byrne, Principal Housing Officer
Mr G Ralph, Housing Investment Officer
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

Also in Attendance:

Mr David Cowie, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr Jamie Thrower, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Ms Kate Kenmure, NHS Highland

**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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr D Loudon.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement.

Item 4: Mr J Edmondson

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Services Area Performance Report Aithisg Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No BIER/11/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Mr D Cowie, recently appointed Station Commander in Invergordon, introduced a new style of performance report. An update was provided and it was said that the report was visually improved, easier to understand, and provided more information at a glance.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Chair expressed delight as the number of firefighters included 8 women;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the number of Home Fire Safety Visits;
- the recent wildfires were concerning, especially when the majority of wildfires had a human element;
- road signs indicating high fire risk had been considered. The matrix signs on the A9 near to both Tore and Kessock Bridge roundabouts had been used in the past, however, social media was currently the most cost-effective method. It was appreciated that social media posts would not be seen by everybody;
- it was disappointing that 'The Place' in Alness had been forced to close due to anti-social behaviour. Members were encouraged that a meeting had taken place to tackle the behaviour, and they looked forward to an update;
- most fires involving lithium batteries occurred in waste sites;
- it was asked if the Balintore Fire Station would be upgraded. It was confirmed that station areas were under constant review and operational intelligence visits would be carried out;
- in terms of battery storage, SFRS were consulted at every stage of the planning process;
- school visits continued but with busy curriculums, it was difficult to be fitted in; and
- recruitment was ongoing.

The Committee **NOTED** the attached Area Performance Report.

4. Easter Ross Area Place Plan Plana Àite Sgìre Rois an Ear

Transparency Statement: the undernoted Member declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare:-

Mr J Edmondson – as a Director of Ardross Online, a community interest company that helped with the provision of broadband in the local area.

There was circulated Report No. BIER/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the Easter Ross Area Based Plan could be used to create local area plans. Support offered to communities wishing to take their own plans forward was welcomed, but it was asked how much support could be provided in areas where there was only a small number of enthusiasts. Invergordon was given as an example;
- the plan highlighted a need for communities and employers to consider what their hopes and aspirations were for employment and training opportunities going forward. Although the Social Values Charter was not compulsory, it was felt beneficial for local businesses to sign up. Community Support Officers would work with local businesses and in the community;
- public engagement was difficult. It was thought that the survey responses received might not capture everyone's feelings. Progress was fed back to communities and an update would be provided to this Committee. It was suggested that local Members encouraged engagement;
- school based attainment was important if opportunities from the Freeport were to be realised;
- the above points raised would be considered by the Community Partnership Working Group for People, as well as data the working group had already gathered, which included the thoughts of children and young people;
- it was felt that mentioning specific locations for improvement in the Plan, such as the Tomich junction on the A9, might convey that other locations not mentioned were being ignored, which was not the case; and
- effective broadband was important and this should include homes in rural areas.

The Committee:

- AGREED to adopt** the Easter Ross Area Place Plan, using it as a tool to inform and support decision making about Easter Ross;
- AGREED to support and promote** the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other plans, strategies, development and funding opportunities across or impacting the Easter Ross area; and
- NOTED** the next steps for progressing the work set out in the plan.

5. Bereavement Services Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Sheirbheisean Caoidh

There was circulated Report No. BIER/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the consideration of green burials was important, in terms of climate change and net zero obligations;
- in response to a question regarding fallen headstones, Members were reminded that headstones were not owned by the Council and that the priority was safety within the grounds;
- repairs to steps at Rosskeen Cemetery would be considered;
- in response to a question regarding cemetery boundaries, and in terms of the Burial and Cremations Act 2016, there was no requirement to have an 8 foot high wall; and

- the purchase of additional burial space was ongoing and an update would be provided in due course.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in the Black Isle and Easter Ross area; and
- ii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development

**6. Housing Management Performance Report 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025
Aithisg Coileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2024 – 31 Màrt 2025**

There was circulated Report No. BIER/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, regarding assistance available to tenants with rent arrears;
- concerns were raised in terms of anti-social behaviour. Members were informed of weekly Safer Ross meetings with Police Scotland and Housing Associations, and were invited to pass any concerns to the Housing Service;
- it was asked if data was collected in terms of section 8.5 of the report, and a response was provided; and
- in terms of sections 8.4 and 8.7 of the report, it was asked if trend lines could be added to the graph. A response would be provided outside of the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

**7. Area Roads Capital Programme 2024/25 Update
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Calpa Rathaiden na Sgìre 2024/25**

There was circulated Report No. BIER/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Roads Operations Manager outlined the works completed in 2024/25.

Members found the report confusing and were concerned about the budget for 2025/26 works. Clarification was provided.

In terms of the breakdown of roads investment, Members were directed to Report HC/05/24, Place Based Approaches to Strategic Capital Planning and Asset Management, from the Meeting of the Highland Council on 14 March 2024.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the final budget allocation for Black Isle and Easter Ross area for 2024/25;
- ii. the works completed on the approved list to date; and
- iii. the additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year

8. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

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

9. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** minutes of the meeting of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Committee held on 27 January 2025, which had been approved by the Council on 27 March 2025.

The meeting ended at 12.20pm.