

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee**
held remotely on 4 August 2025 at 11am.

Present:

Dr C Birt

Ms L Kraft

Mrs I Campbell

Mr P Logue

In attendance:

Mr E Marsh, Repairs Manager

Mr J Mackay, Amenity Services Manager

Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager

Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager

Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager

Mr B Cumming, Senior Environmental Health Officer

Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration

Ms R Robertson, Project Co-ordinator

Mr A Bone, Roads Officer

Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector Mr C Smith, 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 the Committee.

Due to power cuts during the meeting, Mrs I Campbell took the Chair for Items 1–5, with Ms L Kraft assuming the Co-Chair for Items 5–12.

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. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 26 June 2025 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee.

4. Police – Area Performance Report Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Coileanaidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/13/25 by the Chief Inspector - Area Commander.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members raised concerns about the growing prevalence of fraud and the challenges in tackling crimes committed from outside the UK. It was recognised that post-Brexit, access to EU crime databases had been restricted. Officers confirmed that coordination was ongoing at national and international levels, with increasing focus on cybercrime and prevention;
- Members sought clarification on whether drink driving rates were higher in the North Highland area. Officers advised that detections were higher, likely due to rurality and limited transport options;
- Members enquired about road traffic accidents, particularly involving drivers from outside the UK and the North Coast 500 (NC500). It was confirmed that both tourists and locals contributed to speeding offences. Regarding international drivers, it was acknowledged that accidents had occurred due to driving on the wrong side of the road, particularly at junctions. Officers undertook to provide further data on this and confirmed that proactive work is ongoing;
- concern was expressed about the geographical coverage of the report, with Members highlighting that Lochalsh appeared underrepresented. It was explained that the police reporting boundaries did not align precisely with Council ward boundaries. It was accepted that this issue could be discussed further outside the meeting and that relevant data for Lochalsh could be provided; and
- reference was made to a serious incident in Kyle two years previously, with Members querying its absence. Officers clarified that the case was outside the current reporting year but was included in longer-term averages.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the 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 01 April 2024 – 31 March 2025; and
- ii. **AGREED** to provide further data on road traffic accidents involving drivers from outside the UK.

5. Environmental Health Annual Report and Activity 2024/25 Slàinte Àrainneachdail – Aithisg Bhliadhnail & Gnìomhachd 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer gave a presentation providing information on the scope of environmental health duties, including reactive service requests, proactive inspections and enforcement activity. Key issues in Ward 5 included short-term let licensing, private water supply sampling, export health certification, food premises registration and abandoned vehicles.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members queried the volume of short-term let licensing cases and whether each property was physically inspected. It was confirmed that inspections were carried out, but clarification would be provided on whether all properties were visited or assessed by risk rating;
- concerns were raised regarding faulty septic tanks, particularly in rural areas. It was confirmed that environmental health might become involved where statutory nuisance was reported and it was indicated that the matter would be investigated to determine whether septic tank conditions formed part of short-term let assessments;
- Members highlighted ongoing issues with septic tanks discharging into the sea in Dornie. It was confirmed that environmental health had a role in such cases and it was acknowledged that the matter would be looked into;
- clarification was sought on the inspection backlog and automatic approvals for short-term let applications. Members recognised the pressure on the Licensing Committee and the importance of timely input from Environmental Health;
- Members praised the department's swift response to fly tipping and asked for clarification on responsibilities. It was confirmed that both Environmental Health and waste services were involved, with Environmental Health able to issue fixed penalty notices where evidence was available;
- concerns were raised about antisocial behaviour at overnight campervan sites, including public urination. It was suggested this might fall under Police Scotland's remit, though Environmental Health could act where fly tipping or waste disposal was involved;
- Members raised the issue of long-term empty hotels in Strathpeffer and Garve. In this regard, it was indicated that the matter would be explored further in liaison with relevant colleagues;
- concerns were expressed regarding Mackay's Hotel in Strathpeffer, particularly in relation to its licensing status and the standard of accommodation being offered; and
- mention was made of a noisy incinerator in Strathpeffer. It was confirmed that complaints had reduced, and the matter would be checked to confirm the current status.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the range and volume of work being undertaken locally by the
- Environmental Health team;
- NOTED** the Highland wide issues;
- NOTED** the report format and content;
- AGREED** that confirmation be sought whether all short-term let properties were physically inspected; and
- AGREED** to review the role of Environmental Health in assessing septic tanks.

6. **Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications** **Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members considered five applications totalling £78,775.71, with £555,393.80 available in area funds. If approved, £476,618.09 would remain.

Projects included Clachan Lochbroom Heritage Trust, Strathpeffer Residents' Association, Dornie Moorings Associations and Gairloch and Loch Ewe Action Forum.

It was indicated that two projects had requested additional time to develop their applications for the November Committee: Wester Ross Radio and Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust.

During discussion, Members expressed general support for all five applications. It was acknowledged that while some projects might appear lower priority, the availability of funds allowed for their approval. Specific reference was made to the value of clean energy initiatives and the positive impact of cycling infrastructure in Strathpeffer. Clarification was also sought regarding a separate bid from Westview for land purchase for housing. It was confirmed that the application had been submitted to the Scottish Land Fund and that further discussion would take place at the next area business meeting due to a miscommunication in the submission process.

Thereafter the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the CRF applications presented; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the five grant applications as detailed in the report.

7. Bereavement Services- Project Updates Seirbheisean Caoidh – Cunntasan às Ùr mun Phròiseact

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was confirmed that there were no major problems in relation to burial ground provision at present;
- concern was expressed regarding access to land for burial ground extensions, with reference made to the significant work required to prepare sites, such as the recent extension at Fodderty Cemetery;
- it was highlighted that the most frequent issues raised by constituents related to maintenance, including grass cutting and general upkeep, rather than lair availability;
- positive feedback had been received regarding the standard of maintenance at certain sites, with specific reference to the graveyard adjacent to the Tarbat Discovery Centre, which was described as difficult terrain but well maintained; and
- concerns were raised regarding Clachan Church in Lochbroom, where the graveyard was under Council ownership but the church was managed by the community. The community had expressed interest in developing an accessible path around the site, and it was confirmed that the Burial Grounds Team would engage with the group to explore options.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh area;
- ii. **NOTED** challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development;
- iii. **AGREED** that the Burial Grounds Team would liaise with the Clachan Church community group regarding the proposed accessibility improvements.

8. Scottish Government Play Park Funding Maoineachadh Phàircean-cluiche Riaghaltas na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was acknowledged that Balmacara was to receive a slightly larger installation than Applecross and Members understood that this was based on a complex assessment of play value, site suitability and available space;
- it was recognised that Applecross had a smaller site, which limited the scope of equipment that could be installed;
- Members accepted that equal distribution of funding was not always feasible and welcomed the opportunity for communities to seek additional funding to enhance their local provision;
- the relocation of the play park in Contin was warmly welcomed, with Members highlighting the improved accessibility and suitability of the new site, as well as the potential for future expansion;
- it was confirmed that a contingency had been retained to allow for the purchase of additional equipment, such as a rope swing, subject to installation by Council staff;
- Members expressed enthusiasm for the project and suggested that a springtime tour of the refurbished play parks be arranged to view and test the new equipment;
- the importance of securing contractor availability was emphasised and it was anticipated that installation would be completed by the turn of the year, subject to supply chain constraints.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** £150,182.70 to be allocated to the agreed projects as outlined in section 6.4 of the report.

9. Winter Service Plan for 2025/26 Plana Seirbheis a' Gheamhraidh airson 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/18/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the 2025/26 Winter Service Plan remained unchanged from the previous year;

- reference was made to issues experienced in Wester Ross during the previous winter and it was hoped that these had now been resolved;
- Members emphasised the importance of ensuring the plan was widely shared with communities, particularly to clarify priority routes and manage expectations during periods of winter pressure;
- it was suggested that Community Councils be supported to disseminate the plan locally and that residents be encouraged to consult the Highland Council website for details of road classifications and priorities;
- Members referred to the visibility of funded and unfunded projects within the Capital Work spreadsheet and expressed interest in revisiting the capital plan in more detail at a future meeting with relevant officers; and
- concern was expressed regarding delays in reviewing speed limits in areas such as Poolewe and Shieldaig and it was acknowledged that this fell under technical functions rather than road maintenance, with resource constraints contributing to the backlog.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2025/26.

**10. Housing Repairs and Capital Report - 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025
Aithisg Coileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais– 1 Giblean 2025 gu 30 Ògmhios 2025**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/19/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Members welcomed the summary of the report. Positive feedback was expressed regarding the department's communication and engagement, with reference made to previous interactions which had been constructive and well received. It was further observed that the work being undertaken in collaboration with climate change initiatives was becoming increasingly visible within local communities, particularly in relation to housing improvements and this was considered encouraging.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 June 2025.

**11. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Fund applications had been approved since 28 April 2025:-

- An Talla Solais - Dolphin Arts Project - £972
- Wester Loch Ewe Community Council - Football/Playing field & purchase equipment - £615.78

**12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 28 April 2025, which were approved by the Council on 15 May 2025.

The meeting concluded at 1pm.