

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held **remotely** on Monday, 4 August 2025 at 10.00 am

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr R Gunn
Mr A Jarvie
Mr S Mackie

Ms J McEwan
Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie

In attendance:

Mr P Tomalin, Community Development Manager
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead (Transport and Logistics)
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration
Ms I MacMillan, Programme Manager
Mr G Ralph, Repairs Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Station Commander G Cringles, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service

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 A Jarvie in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There was an apology for absence from Mr W Mackay.

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

There were no declarations of interest/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 Caithness Committee.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No CC/17/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an update was sought and provided on recent wildfires in the area, specifically the significant incident near Thurso and the Service was commended on its response. Information was also provided on the challenges in identifying the causes of wildfires and the work being undertaken by the Service to build partnerships in terms of prevention;
- the Service be commended on the excellent work being undertaken in schools in the area and on its positive impacts and it was hoped this initiative would continue going forward; and
- in response to a query, clarification was provided on the seasonal fluctuations in the statistics for deliberate fires and it was confirmed more detail would be provided to Members on trends with a view to prevention.

Thereafter, Members raised a number of issues in relation to battery energy storage systems (BESS) as follows:-

- an update was sought and provided on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's latest guidance for BESS planning applications and on the newly formed working group on this issue;
- information was sought and provided on the chemicals present in the smoke and fumes generated by a BESS fire and confirmation that in terms of the guidance the Service asked for two separate access routes on sites;
- details were sought and provided on how the Service would combat an actual BESS fire at a Caithness site;
- the need to provide assurance to the public on the design features built into BESS in relation to fire suppression systems and the requirements for manufacturers/builders of sites to comply with the Service's and partner emergency response plans and operational intelligence processes and documentation;
- the relationship between the industry, legislators and planners in terms of the design and development of BESS sites and the importance of the Service being recognised as a statutory consultee in respect of planning applications;
- in response to a query, details were provided on the Service, Police Scotland and Highland Council's partnership response to any potential issues of public safety arising from a BESS fire to nearby residents, businesses and farm animals;
- concern the statistics showed the majority of BESS fires occurred during construction and the first year of operation and therefore the importance of fire mitigation measures being in place prior to the construction phase; and
- the potential to calculate and identify a minimum safe distance for the location of BESS sites from other buildings and infrastructure.

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

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

There had been circulated Report No CC/18/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on what determined the resource in terms of the Winter Service Plan for 2025/26, this being a combination of the revenue budget allocation, hierarchy of road network, winter service policy and level of service to be provided;
- an explanation was sought and provided that the policy which determined the replacement of the HGV fleet was constantly under review with leasing options being considered;
- an update was sought on the work being undertaken with the aim of ensuring a full complement of winter fleet outwith spares was available to ensure the Winter Service Plan for Caithness was delivered. it was confirmed an update would be provided to Members in the run up to the winter season on fleet availability and the procurement of new vehicles;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed the potential use of dedicated snow/ice tyres on the winter gritting fleet and associated costs would be considered in conjunction with the Roads Service and an update provided to Members;
- further clarity was sought and provided on the Service's approach to the deployment of footpath tractors in the area;
- the information provided on the Winter Resilience scheme for communities and provision of salt/grit bins was helpful; and
- the assistance the Service provided to the Trunk Roads Authority as the responsible authority to deal with fallen trees on the A9 in storm conditions.

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

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

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

In discussion, Members noted that the following projects, which had been invited to make an application for funding by Members, had asked for more time to develop their applications. The applications would be brought to a future meeting once they had been submitted and assessed as eligible:-

- Caithness KLICS – Wick Base Building Extension;
- John O'Groats Development Trust – Destination Playpark Project; and
- The Watten Shop Ltd – Shop Refurbishment.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the application presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

Organisation	Project Title	Grant Approved
Halkirk Village Council	Church Lane, Halkirk, Playpark Upgrade	£43,000

7. External Funding for Energy Efficiency Projects
Maoineachadh on Taobh A-muigh airson Pròiseactan Èifeachdas Lùtha

There had been circulated Report No CC/20/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of this report; and
- ii. **AGREED** the development of externally funded projects and the opportunity to scale up.

8. Wick Common Good Fund – Q4 2024/25 and Q1 2025/26 Monitoring
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige – Sgrùdadh Ràithe 4 2024/25 agus Ràithe 1 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No CC/21/25 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 4 24/25 and Quarter 1 25/26 monitoring statements for the Wick Common Good Fund.

9. Thurso Common Good Fund - Q1 2025/26 Monitoring
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Theòrsa – Sgrùdadh Ràithe 1 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No CC/22/25 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 1 25/26 monitoring statement for the Thurso Common Good Fund

10. Housing Repairs Performance 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 CC/23/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, it was confirmed that officers would provide a breakdown on how many of the bathroom replacements detailed in the report had been carried out to sheltered properties. It was explained there was scope under the aids and adaptations budget to carry out adaptations to such properties, subject to medical/occupational therapy assessment.

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

11. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved for the period 1st April 2025 – 15th July 2025:

- Caithness Youth Pipe Band – Edinburgh Tartan Parade - £1000.00
- Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum - £500.00
- Home Start Caithness – Summer Day Trip for Families in Need - £960.00
- Highlife Highland – Active Schools Coaching & Equipment - £1,500.00
- Thurso Football Academy – Professional Football Coaching Sessions - £750

Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved for the period 1st April 2025 – 15th July 2025:

- Caithness Youth Pipe Band – Edinburgh Tartan Parade - £1000.00
- Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum - £500.00
- Newton Park Parent Council – Newton Park Breakfast Club - £242.98
- Highland Council – Step Forward Wick Youth Summer London Visit - £1,500.00
- Thrumster Parent Council – ELC Container - £1,400.00
- Royal Burgh of Wick Community Council – Town Works - £761.72

12. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 28 April 2025 which were approved by the Council on 15 May 2025.

The meeting concluded at 11.50pm