The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummuie, Golspie on Monday 1 September 2025 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr M Baird
Mr R Gale
Ms M Hutchison
Mr J McGillivray
Mr H Morrison
Ms LA Niven

In attendance:

Mr P Tomalin, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Ms M Hardie, Economic Advisor
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager
Mr R Macleod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance

Also in attendance:

Inspector K Macrae, Police Scotland
Ms S Harkins, NW2045

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 R Gale in the Chair

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/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 Sutherland County Committee.

4. Police – Area Performance Summary
Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No SCC/19/25 by the North Area Commander.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- a query on the crime statistics figures in relation to Group 6 – Anti-Social Offences. It was confirmed further clarity on the figures would be provided to Members following the meeting;

- the general reduction in the figures detailed in the report be welcomed and Police Scotland thanked for their hard work in keeping people in the area safe;
- an assurance was sought and provided that there was close collaboration between Police Scotland and partners in relation to offences in communities involving indecent photos of children;
- concern in relation to speeding on the A949: Evelix to Dornoch and A9: Helmsdale to Navidale roads. It was confirmed the potential to direct patrols and undertake enforcement in those areas would be taken forward;
- an assurance was sought and provided that concerns around speeding during the night in 20mph zones, particularly by HGV vehicles, would be taken forward;
- an assurance was sought and provided that the unkempt appearance of the Tongue Police Station would be addressed and it was hoped to have a Police officer in post in that area soon;
- an update was sought and provided that the vacancy at Lochinver Police Station had been filled and the officer would be in post soon; and
- it would be helpful for information to be provided on whether there had been a general increase in the number of road traffic collisions over the past few months. It was confirmed that figures would be provided to Members following the meeting.

Thereafter, 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 March 2025.

5. NorthWest 2045 – Call to Action Report
IarThuath 2045 – Aithisg Gairm gu Gnìomh

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

During discussion, Members welcomed the presentation and Call for Action report and expressed support for the excellent work being undertaken by NorthWest 2045.

Thereafter, the following main points were raised:-

- there were significant challenges in the area, however these were being well tackled through the opportunities and potential detailed in the Call for Action report and reference to the large amount of work already undertaken to date;
- welcoming the fact the initiative had reached Scottish Government level and the recent visit of its Population Team to help inform the next phase of the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan. The Team had also discussed with the Minister responsible for child care and young people, the potential to have more flexibility in the legislation to fit rural communities;
- the need to reinforce the point that public policy and spending was driving rather than combating depopulation and for this message to be taken forward in terms of NPF4 and to NatureScot, SEPA and other agencies;
- all Highland MSPs and prospective MSPs should be provided with a copy of and asked to comment on the report, given the forthcoming elections and in terms of informing election manifestos;
- concern as to how to address the challenges around new house building in North West Sutherland due to extremely high tender costs or lack of tenders; and

- a query as to how the high societal value associated with carbon sequestration could be turned into positive investment for the area. It was confirmed a response on this matter would be provided to Members outwith the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** to note and endorse the NW2045 Call to Action report including next steps as outlined in Appendix 1.

6. Area Roads Capital Footpath Programme - 2025/26
Cunntas mu Phrò␣gram Calpa nan Rathaidean Sgìreil – 2025-26

There had been circulated Report No SCC/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, it was explained that delivery of the prioritised Programme for 2025/26 within the available budget would take place over the period until the end of March 2026. The Programme could be reviewed at an area business meeting if Members considered there were any schemes that should be included or afforded a higher priority. In response to a query, it was confirmed the project for replacement of slabbed footways at Dornoch Cathedral would be considered further in terms of heritage, setting and safety issues, and view of the local community council sought.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i. **APPROVED** the proposed prioritised Area Roads Capital Footpath Programme for Sutherland Area; and
ii. **AGREED** to allocate £100,000 from the Sutherland Roads Capital Budget to the Footpath Programme.

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

There had been circulated Report No SCC/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, it was explained there were a number of vacancies in the staffing establishment and details were provided on the posts being advertised, noting these were permanent posts. An update was also provided on the status of the winter gritting fleet, and the fact that new gritting vehicles were due to be delivered in Sutherland before the winter period. In terms of community self-help, further clarity was provided around the need for applications to be endorsed by local community councils in response to concerns about potential delays in this regard.

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

8. Community Regeneration Fund Report Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Aithisg Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No SCC/23/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **APPROVED** the applications presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

Applicant	Project	Grant Awarded
Clyne Heritage Society	Old Clyne School Fit Out Phase	£100,000
Elphin, Ledmore & Knockan Community Association	Community Hall Heating	£3,458.77
Ardgay Public Hall	Ardgay Public Hall Upgrade 2025	£85,353.83
Durness Parish Hall Trustees	DPH Energy Efficiency project 2025	£23,500.61
Go Golspie Development Trust	Fountain Road Hall Heating & Access project	£55,790.00
Assynt Leisure & Community Centre	Sustainable Future for Assynt Leisure & Learning Centre	£31,457.20
Scourie Development Company	Repopulating Scourie 2	£70,245.70
Communities Housing Trust	Borgie Affordable Housing	£100,000.00

The Committee:-

i. **AGREED** to approve £250,000 CRF towards a Development Officer Support Scheme as set out in Appendix 3; and
ii. **AGREED** by homologation to approve a grant of £48,134 for project CRF4152 - Ardvreck Castle.

9. Ward 1 & 4 Discretionary Fund Approvals 2025-26
Aontaidhean Maoin fo Ùghdarras Uàird 1 & 4 2025–26

The Committee **NOTED** the awards:-

North, West & Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1st April 2025 – 1st August 2025

i. Durness Community Council-Multimedia & TV Equipment - £1,400
ii. Kyle of Sutherland Hub – Community Cycling Project - £1,000
iii. Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust – Kyle Feeds - £1,000
iv. Sutherland Sports Council – Supporting Sport in Sutherland - £1,000

East Sutherland & Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1st April 2025 – 1st August 2025

i. Golspie Youth Action project – Youth Club Core Costs - £1,500
ii. Go Golspie Development Trust – Go Golspie Community Car Service - £2000
iii. Sutherland Sports Council – Supporting Sport in Sutherland - £1000
iv. Fèis Chataibh - Fèis an t-Samhraidh - £2000

10. Housing Repairs and Capital Report – 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025
Aithisg Chàraidhean Taigheadais agus Calpa – 1 Giblean 2025 gu 30 Ògmhios 2025

There had been circulated Report No SCC/24/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, officers were commended on the performance achieved in Sutherland and for the prompt responses received to issues raised in respect of housing maintenance.

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

11. Dornoch Common Good Q4 2024/25 and Q1 2025/26 Monitoring

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

In discussion, it was noted that applications to the Fund relating to community and indoor sports facilities were likely to be brought forward in future.

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

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 2 June 2025, which were approved by the Council on 26 June 2025.

Arising from item 3 of the Minutes and reference to depopulation, concern was expressed at the Council's decision to have no permanent Council officer based at the Dornoch Service Point, with customers being asked to use a freephone facility. There was deep concern and frustration within the community that these arrangements were both unsatisfactory and effectively a deemed closure of the Service Point.

The meeting concluded at 11.30am.