

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely on 3 November 2025 at 11am.

Present:

In attendance:

Ms M Ross, Assistant Housing Manager
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Traffic Officer
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Station Commander Mr J Douglas, Scottish Fire and 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.

Ms L Kraft in the chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisqueulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Dr C Birt.

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

There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No WRS/20/25 by the Local Senior Officer for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Station Commander Mr J Douglas, provided an overview of performance data for Quarters 1 and 2 of 2025/26, highlighting that accidental dwelling fires, deliberate fires and non-domestic building fires remained below the three-year average. No fatalities or casualties were recorded and home fire safety visits were offered in all relevant cases.

During discussion, Members welcomed the reduction in incident numbers and commended the proactive work of prevention and operations teams. Reference was made to the positive recruitment figures for retained personnel, particularly in rural areas. It was confirmed that joint mobilising arrangements had been implemented between Torridon and Kinlochewe to address staffing challenges, and that new personnel had recently joined stations in Lochcarron, Glenelg and Applecross.

Further clarification was sought regarding the location of road safety courses for older and younger drivers. The Station Commander undertook to liaise with the Community Safety Department and provide details to Members.

Members expressed appreciation for the efforts made to improve station availability and staffing levels and acknowledged the importance of partnership referrals in supporting post-incident engagement and fire safety advice.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report and **AGREED** that further clarification would be provided regarding the location of road safety courses for older and younger drivers.

4. Housing Management Performance Report – 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025
Aithisg Coileanaidh Stiùireadh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2025 gu 30 Sultain 2025

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

During discussion, Members welcomed the strong performance in rent arrears, which remained significantly below the Highland average. It was confirmed that tenancy sustainment continued to underpin the team's approach, with early intervention and support offered to vulnerable households. Members acknowledged the low number of antisocial behaviour complaints and acknowledged that complex cases often required multi-agency involvement.

Clarification was sought on the rehousing process following eviction and it was confirmed that tenants were offered housing options interviews and could present as homeless depending on individual circumstances. Members also raised concerns about heating affordability and property condition. It was confirmed that while energy tariffs were outwith the Council's control, tenants were signposted to relevant advice services and maintenance checks were arranged where appropriate. A referral to the relevant service lead was offered regarding property upgrades.

Further questions were raised about cross-authority housing allocations. It was confirmed that no national network existed, but advice and assistance were provided where possible.

Members expressed appreciation for the holistic approach taken by the housing team and acknowledged the importance of their work in addressing housing need across the area.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025 and **AGREED** that the Assistant Housing Manager would request the relevant service lead to provide further information regarding property upgrade budgets.

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

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

During discussion, Members expressed support for all five projects and acknowledged the effort made by applicants in preparing their submissions. Reference was made to the alignment of the proposals with local place plans and community priorities. Particular enthusiasm was conveyed for the housing initiative in Applecross, the Wester Loch Ewe land purchase and the Wester Ross Radio upgrade, which were considered to offer strong community benefits.

It was acknowledged that the Gairloch Museum Roundhouse project had requested to defer its application to a future meeting to allow further development.

Members also welcomed the inclusion of the Kyle public convenience refurbishment, recognising the operational issues experienced during the previous tourist season and the importance of completing the works ahead of next summer.

Appreciation was conveyed to the officer for the quality of the assessment and for offering to facilitate contact between Members and project leads where further engagement was desired.

The Committee **AGREED** that funding be awarded from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

- Wester Ross Radio (broadcasting as RWR) - £30,000.00
- Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust - £63,839.32
- Wester Loch Ewe Trust - £40,000.00
- Applecross Community Company - £17,955.00
- Torridon District Community Association (TDCA) - £35,000.00

6. Invitation To Pay Income Teachd-a-steach bho Chuireadh gus Pàigheadh

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

The net income allocated to the Area Committee from car park charges totalled £24,417.31, with a breakdown by individual car park provided in line with policy. These funds were earmarked for the area and once allocated, applications for use of the funds were managed through the Community Support process. It was

acknowledged that the procedure was similar to the Ward Discretionary Fund, requiring applicants to submit a form and set out the intended use of funds within the community. Members welcomed the opportunity for communities to benefit and recognised that similar applications had been received in previous years for a range of local projects.

The Committee **NOTED** the earmarked funds from the Invitation To Pay Parking of £24,417.31.

7. **Short Term Let Control Area** **Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine**

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

The Committee received an introduction of the report from the Principal Planner, Dr M Maguire, who presented evidence on the prevalence of short-term lets within Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh and the associated impact on housing availability and affordability. It was explained that a short-term let control area would have required planning permission for any future conversion of housing to short-term lets but would not have applied retrospectively and would have excluded existing short-term lets, second homes, guest houses, B&Bs, annexes and pods. The process involves statutory consultation and Scottish Ministers' approval, with an estimated timescale of 12 -18 months. Evidence from the Housing Need and Demand Assessment showed high levels of short-term lets in the area (11% in Ross and Cromarty West and 18% in Skye and Lochalsh), low housing market containment and significant affordability pressures, with 71% of local residents unable to afford average sale prices. Local Place Plans had highlighted community concerns.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- Members acknowledged strong community support for the proposal, including a formal letter from Plockton and District Community Trust, which had long advocated for a short-term let control area. They stressed that any public consultation must be clear, structured and supported by an evidence-based statement of reasons, similar to approaches used elsewhere, to ensure informed responses;
- clarification was sought on several issues: the weight that public opinion would carry in the decision-making process, whether the designation could restrict new residents purchasing homes for permanent occupation and the implications for crofting diversification, given previous government encouragement for crofters to supplement income through tourism. It was confirmed that the policy would not affect permanent occupation or existing short-term lets and that crofting proposals for pods or conversions of long-term empty structures would generally comply with planning policy. It was acknowledged that purpose-built tourism accommodation already requires planning permission;
- concern was expressed about displacement effects if boundaries were drawn too tightly, with Members acknowledging the risk that applications for short-term lets could increase in areas just outside the designated boundary

before implementation. Ms M Maguire advised that setting an overly narrow boundary could undermine the policy's effectiveness, given the 12 - 18 month lead-in period;

- Members debated whether the designation should apply to the whole ward or selected areas. While recognising the diversity of the ward, Members considered evidence of high prevalence and rapid growth of short-term lets across multiple locations, alongside affordability pressures and endorsed that a wider boundary was preferable to avoid unintended consequences;
- the importance of balancing housing needs with support for the tourism economy was emphasised. Members acknowledged tourism as a major employer and economic driver but highlighted the need to protect housing stock for local communities and workers. It was reiterated that the measure was not a ban and that purpose-built holiday accommodation would continue to be supported through the planning process; and
- reference was made to early indications from Badenoch and Strathspey, where similar measures had reportedly improved housing availability and affordability, reinforcing the potential benefits of introducing a control area in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the evidence presented demonstrating the degree of prevalence of Short Term Lets within Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh;
- ii. **NOTED** that this evidence, demonstrated that the housing market within parts of Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh, was subject to significant pressure, exacerbated by high rates of potential dwellings being converted to Short Term Lets;
- iii. **NOTED** that the designation of any new Short Term Let Control Area would have no retrospective impact on existing Short Term Lets where no material change of use had occurred at the time of establishment, and would therefore only require planning permission from new Short Term Lets established after a Short Term Let Control Area comes into force;
- iv. **NOTED** that should the Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee formally commence the process of introducing a Short Term Let Control Area, this would initiate a process of further evidence gathering and public consultation with communities;
- v. **AGREED** that the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Committee therefore seek to progress with the process of considering the introduction of a Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area; and
- vi. **AGREED** that progressing with consideration of a Short Term Let Control Area enabled communities within the area to participate in that consultation at the appropriate stage.

8. **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward Discretionary Budget Buidseat fo Ùghdarris 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 from 1 June – 30 September 2025:-

- Artic Convoy Museum - Space to Curate - £2,000.00
- CFINE - Fairshare in Highland - £693.00

9. Minutes

Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 4 August 2025, which had been approved by the Council on 18 September 2025.

The meeting concluded at: 12:25pm.