

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held **remotely** on Monday 19 January 2026 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

Mr W Mackay

In attendance:

Ms C MacIver, Community Development Manager

Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager

Ms D Sutton, Chief Officer, Operations & Maintenance

Mr J Gunn, Senior Engineer, Roads Operations

Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration

Mr L MacDonald, Housing Repairs Manager

Ms K Van Voorneld, AQIM (Farr KLB Thurso Wick Golspie)

Mr N Young, Project Manager (Active Travel)

Mr R Bartlett, Principal Traffic Officer

Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr J Thrower, 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.

Mr A Jarvie in the Chair

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

Item 6 – Mr M Reiss and Mr W Mackay.

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

There was circulated Report No CC/01/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, information on the following issues was sought and provided:

- the availability of specialist wildfire resources for deployment to Caithness, these being currently located in Invergordon and Ullapool, with further resources due to go live in Dornoch;

- mitigation measures for severe weather, for example high snowfall and its impact on fire appliances, with attention being drawn to the Highland Resilience Partnership, to maintenance and inspection regimes, and to driver training;
- the main causes of modern domestic fires, with smoking being a significant issue;
- procedures relating to Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) fire hazard issues, including a visit to a facility that had been helpful and might be useful to do again for both Members and the public, to provide assurance. It was clarified the visit had been a Planning Committee site visit; and
- consideration was given to the perceived reduction in road traffic issues on the NC500 and efforts that had been taken to improve driver behavior.

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

4. Area Roads Capital Programme Update - 2025-26 Cunntas mu Phrògram Calpa nan Rathaidean Sgìreil – 2025-26

There was circulated Report No CC/02/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members thanked staff for their work on the road network during the recent severe weather;
- concern was expressed at the overall roads budget shortage across Highland, it being insufficient to even maintain the current state of the roads. The additional funding that had been allocation to Caithness was welcomed, and attention drawn to the Redesign Board Road's Review which aimed to improve the efficiency and fair distribution of the roads funding;
- information was sought and would be provided outwith the meeting on the availability and use of the jetpatcher and potholer pro machines;
- information on a possible active travel scheme around Janetstown would be looked into outwith the meeting;
- it was emphasised that some works, for example improvements being undertaken in Wick, were being funded from sources external to the Council and with money that was not transferable to the Roads budget;
- the importance of long term planning in relation to road maintenance and repair was vital, with reference to the expenses of repeated temporary repairs;
- contractor capacity was a challenge at times, noting the significant number of other projects being undertaken across Highland. Roads staffing levels were based on the approved winter maintenance policy. Tar shortages also provided a challenge at times and, in response to a suggestion that the Council should consider producing its own tar, this was being considered as part of the Redesign Board's Roads Review;
- concern was expressed at the number of small issues that required attention, for example unpainted white lines and missing signage;
- assurance was provided that unspent capital budget could be carried forward;
- it was pointed out that the list of road defects was increasing, and attention was drawn to the policy agreed in 2018 to add all issues to the overall roads structural maintenance report, and that some minor issues that would not have been included in the past, were now reported, including issues that did not require immediate attention. The advantages of a planned maintenance

regime to protect the road asset were emphasised and this was being considered by the Road Redesign project. The significantly lower cost of surface dressing compared to full resurfacing was highlighted;

- the huge extent of the road network in Caithness (around 500 miles with only ten gritters) was highlighted;
- the advantages of the Highland Investment Plan were highlighted and information was sought on the pace and progress of the Roads Redesign Review, with further Members workshop planned and an intention to report to the Redesign Board in May 2026. The mechanism for the Highland Investment Plan to consider roads issues was queried; and
- an example was provided of a road surface that had failed after two years and the impact of HGV vehicles on the road surface was referenced.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the works completed on the approved prioritised list to date;
- ii. **NOTED** the additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the works still proposed for the 2025/26 financial year;
- iv. **AGREED** to provide information to the Committee on the availability and location of the jetpatcher and potholer pro machines; and
- v. **AGREED** to provide information to the Committee on a possible active travel scheme around Janetstown

5. Area Roads Capital Programme 2026-27 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2026-27

There is circulated Report No CC/03/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members asked that they be involved with varying the priority ranking of the programme through the year if required.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the rolling programme of Capital schemes as listed in Appendix 2 to the report, which will be a multi-year programme;
- ii. **AGREED** to delegate to officers in consultation with local Members to allow variations of priority ranking to be made if the need arises through the year;
- iii. **NOTED** that the Area budget will be available after the Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee on 12 February 2026; and
- iv. **NOTED** that the rolling programme might require to be updated once results from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey had been received and considered.

6. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications Iarrtas Maoineachaidh Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd

Declarations of Interest: The following Members declared interests in this item for the reasons provided, and they left the meeting for this item:

Mr M Reiss as a friend of a CVG post-holder

Mr W Mackay as a Director of CVG

There was circulated Report No CC/04/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, Members summarised the benefits of the projects and agreed the applications as follows:

John O'Groats Development Trust

Development of Playpark at John O'Groats – £150,000

Caithness Voluntary Group

Caithness Rural Transport – Minibus - £43,500

Caithness Voluntary Group

CVG Third Sector Support Officer - £30,758

Lyth Arts Centre

Caithness Artists in Residence (CAIR) 2026 - £34,640

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the CRF applications presented and that an approval of funding should detail the amount approved and outline any conditions of funding that Members wish to attach to the approval over and above the required technical conditions. A deferral would allow an applicant to resubmit the current application at a future date with updated information or for the project to be approved subject to further funding becoming available. A rejection would mean that the application will not proceed and any future application to the fund should be brought forward initially as a new expression of interest or application; and
- ii. **AGREED** the approved CRF grant award for each application up to the value of the available area allocation, as detailed above.

7. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2026/2027

There was circulated report CC/05/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, it was queried and explained that the garage rental income was used towards the revenue budget for garage repairs and maintenance, and Members expressed concern that no information or evidence was available on the maintenance programme and budget required for it. Some Members spoke in favour of a 10% rise, while others considered the matter be deferred until more information was provided on the extent of the repairs that were needed, either to the next meeting of the Committee, or to a special meeting.

AGREED to DEFER a decision on level of rent increase to apply to Caithness Garages and Garage Sites, to either the next meeting of the Committee, or to a special meeting of the Committee if a decision was required before the end of the financial year, pending the provision of further information on the repairs budget required. [*post-meeting note: the matter is deferred to the meeting of the Committee on 27 April 2026*]

8. Housing Repairs and Capital Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais

There was circulated Report No CC/06/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

At paragraph 6.3 of the report, a table containing emergency repairs data, was missing, and should have been as follows:

Table 1: Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs (hours)

Target 12 hours
2024/25 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 3.9 hours

EME	No of Houses	2024/25		2025/26		
		Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
Thurso and Northwest Caithness	840	2.4	1.7	3.2	2.7	2.2
Wick and East Caithness	1205	2.2	0.2	3.2	2.9	2.7
Highland	15351	4.8	3.5	4.9	3.9	3.1

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

9. Wick Street Design – A99 High Street & Bridge Street, Traffic Calming Raised Tables

There was circulated Report No CC/07/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the history of the street design project was summarised, as were the concerns raised by the community. Information was provided on liaison that had taken place with contractors and provisions being put in place for ongoing communication with the community and local businesses;
- unsafe and inappropriate parking practices, and loading issues were highlighted. The benefits of the advance stop lane for cyclists were explained and Members asked that it be kept as small as possible; and
- it was intended the wider improvements in Wick would be helpful in attracting people and investment to the town centre.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the background to the proposed installation of two Raised Table Traffic Calming/Pedestrian Crossing features on the A99 High Street and Bridge Street, Wick and the representations received;
- ii. considered and **NOTED** the objection made to the proposed installation of two Raised Table Traffic Calming/Pedestrian Crossing features on the A99 High Street and Bridge Street, Wick"; and
- iii. subject to i) and ii) above **APPROVED** the installation of the two Raised Table Traffic Calming/Pedestrian Crossing features on the A99 High Street and Bridge Street, Wick, subject to the advanced stop lane being as small as possible.

10. Education Associated School Group Report

Aithisg Foghlaim Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

There was circulated Report No CC/08/26 and CC/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - People.

It was clarified that formatting inconsistencies in the report would be rectified for future reports, and that the report was based on 2023-24 data, as 2024-25 data was not yet available.

Members welcomed the positive report, with many local schools performing well against the national average.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the reports.

11. Wick Common Good Fund – 2024/25 Annual Accounts and Final Monitoring, 2025/26 Quarter Three Monitoring Report and 2026/27 Proposed Budget Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige –Ràithe 2 2025/26

There is circulated Report No CC/10/26 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, Members sought information on the 2026-27 budget surplus figures and on a possible donation of a communion table to the Common Good Fund.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Wick Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1) and Quarter 4 monitoring report for 2024/25 (Appendix 2);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Wick Common Good Fund, as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement (Appendix 3) against budget for 2025/26;
- iii. **APPROVED** the Wick Common Good Fund Annual Budget for 2026/27 (Appendix 4); and
- iv. **AGREED** the Community Development Manager would provide the Committee with information on the 2026-27 budget surplus figures outwith the meeting and would liaise with the Common Good Fund Officer on a possible donation of a communion table to the Common Good Fund.

12. Thurso Common Good Fund – 2024/25 Annual Accounts, 2025/26 Quarter Three Monitoring Report and 2026/27 Budget Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Theòrsa – Ràithe 2 2025/26

There was circulated Report No CC/11/26 by the Chief Officer Community and Housing and Chief Officer Corporate Finance.

During discussion, Members queried the timescale for the conclusion of the identification of assets, and information on the latest position with regard to rental income from Thurso Caravan Park, both of which would be provided outwith the meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Thurso Common Good Fund Statement of Accounts for 2024/25 (Appendix 1);
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Thurso Common Good Fund, as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement (Appendix 2) against budget for 2025/26; and
- iii. **AGREED** Thurso Common Good Fund Annual Budget for 2026/27 (Appendix 3); and
- iv. **AGREED** information on the timescale for conclusion of the identification of assets and the latest position with regard to rental payments for Thurso Caravan Park would be provided to the Committee outwith the meeting.

13. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

There was circulated and **NOTED** details of the Ward Discretionary Budget Applications approved for Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward and Wick and East Caithness Ward from 1 April 2025 to 5 January 2026.

14. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 3 November 2025 which were approved by the Council on 11 December 2025.

The meeting ended at 12.55pm