

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely on 27 April 2026 at 11am.

### **Present:**

Dr C Birt  
Mrs I Campbell

Ms L Kraft  
Mr P Logue

### **In attendance:**

Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration  
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager  
Mr J Mitchell, Housing Manager North  
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager  
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

### **Also in attendance:**

Mr M Colliar, Group Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (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.**

**Ms L Kraft 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**

The Committee **NOTED** the following transparency statement :-

Item 5 – Ms L Kraft

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

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/07/26 by the Local Senior Officer for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question regarding the deliberate fire recorded during the period, it was clarified that the incident related to a small grass fire, likely associated with muirburn activity. It was confirmed that the incident was not assessed as being of concern. Further location details would be provided outwith the meeting if required;

- clarification was provided on the definition of deliberate fire, confirming that it referred to fires where there was intent to set a fire, including managed land burning, as distinct from accidental fires where spread occurred unintentionally;
- Members sought clarification on whether road traffic collisions were being analysed to identify specific hotspots. It was advised that incidents were generally spread across the area, with no clear hotspot identified, although higher impact collisions were more likely on main routes. It was confirmed that liaison with Police Scotland and partners would take place where patterns emerged;
- a query was raised regarding station availability figures. It was explained that the percentages reflected achievement against full availability requirements. It was observed that recent system changes had affected reporting for Ullapool's second appliance and that this would be corrected. Joint mobilising arrangements were outlined, recognising that these were not currently captured in availability statistics;
- Members queried whether staffing levels were considered adequate. Group Commander advised that recruitment remained challenging due to local demographics and employment pressures but that overall staffing levels were improving and that he was satisfied the Service was moving in the right direction;
- positive comments were made on community engagement activity, including exercises, school engagement and the careers fair in Ullapool;
- recognition was observed of Watch Commander John Campbell's 30 years of service at Aultbea Fire Station;
- a question was raised in relation to the reduction in wildfire incidents and whether Seasonal Access Rangers may have contributed to this. It was advised that this would be explored further and that feedback would be provided to Members outwith the meeting;
- clarification was sought on whether firefighters acted as first responders. It was confirmed that firefighters responded to a wide range of emergency incidents, including medical and humanitarian responses and were not limited to fire-related incidents; and
- thanks were expressed to Mr M Colliar for his attendance and for the work of the Service across the committee area.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Area Performance Report;
  - ii. **AGREED** that further information would be provided outwith the meeting regarding the location and circumstances of the deliberate fire incident recorded during the reporting period; and
  - iii. **AGREED** that it would be explored whether Seasonal Access Rangers had contributed to the recent reduction in wildfire incidents and that feedback would be provided to Members.
4. **Housing Management Performance Report – 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026**  
**Aithisg Coileanaidh Riaghladh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2025 gu 31 Màrt 2026**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/08/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- clarification was sought on the respective roles of the Housing Manager for North Highland and the Principal Housing Officer for Wester Ross and Skye. It was explained that the Principal Housing Officer held local operational responsibility, while the Housing Manager provided wider managerial oversight and was attending in her absence;
- a question was raised regarding the availability of key worker housing in the area. It was confirmed that a small number of properties had been acquired through the Rural Key Worker Fund and that key workers were now being identified through the Highland Housing Register application process;
- a concern was raised regarding a key worker currently accommodated in temporary accommodation for an extended period and the higher cost of temporary accommodation rents. Members were advised that temporary accommodation rents could be higher due to service charges and that further detail could be looked at if shared outwith the meeting;
- Members sought clarity on measures taken to reduce the length of time spent in temporary accommodation. It was explained that teams focused on early outcomes for homeless applicants and prioritised allocations based on housing need. It was observed that limited stock turnover in Ward 5 presented challenges;
- an inquiry was raised regarding a vacant former janitor's house which had been empty for several years and whether rural housing grant funding could be used to bring it back into use. It was observed that ownership and account arrangements would require to be confirmed;
- clarification was sought on how key workers were identified within housing applications. It was confirmed that a new question had been introduced into the application process, allowing applicants to explain their key worker status, recognising that definitions varied depending on local circumstances; and
- positive comments were made on the overall performance reported, particularly rent arrears performance, early intervention activity and the stable position on homelessness, while acknowledging wider housing pressures across the area.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026;
- ii. **AGREED** that further information would be provided outwith the meeting regarding the vacant former janitor's house referred to during discussion, including ownership arrangements and whether any funding options could be applicable; and
- iii. **AGREED** that individual case details relating to temporary accommodation and key worker housing would be followed up outwith the meeting.

## 5. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Place Plan (APP) Update

## Ùrachadh air Plana Àite na Sgìre airson Ros an Iar, Srath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse

**Transparency Statement: Ms L Kraft made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item, as she was a Board Member of the Biosphere. However, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/09/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- clarification was sought on how the Area Place Plan should be used when considering regeneration funding and grant applications. It was explained that the Plan was intended to inform Members' decision-making by linking funding proposals to agreed community priorities, while recognising that final decisions remained a matter for Members;
- Members queried whether projects aligned with the Plan would receive priority over other applications. It was explained that alignment with the Plan was intended to provide supporting context and evidence when assessing applications, rather than override established decision-making or statutory processes;
- clarification was sought on the relationship between the Area Place Plan and the planning process. It was confirmed that the Plan did not replace or influence statutory planning determinations, but helped inform wider collaboration, investment planning and partnership working;
- a question was raised regarding geographical coverage and officer roles in leading the work. It was clarified that officer involvement reflected community partnership arrangements and areas of responsibility, rather than changes to ward representation;
- Members welcomed the quality of the Area Place Plan and commented positively on its evidence-based approach and alignment with issues raised through community engagement;
- a question was raised regarding the Plan still being shown as “draft” on the Council website. It was confirmed that the Plan had been adopted by the Area Committee in January 2025 and should be published as a final document. It was advised that this would be checked and, if necessary, corrected; and
- thanks were expressed for the update and for the work undertaken to develop, promote and embed the Area Place Plan across the area.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress against the WRSL APP;
- ii. **NOTED** the support for and promote the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other plans, strategies, development and funding opportunities across or impacting the WRSL area; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the Council website would be checked to ensure the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Place Plan was clearly published as an adopted document and not shown as a draft.

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

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/10/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

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

— Gairloch Museum £45,000.00

**7. 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 have been approved from 1 January to 31 March 2026:-

- Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust - Micro Eco Village - £2,920.00
- Garve & District Development Company - Connecting Communities - £900.00
- Torridon District Community Association - Replace Stairlift at Loch Torridon Community Centre - £1,000.00
- Torridon & Kinlochewe Community Council – Purchase of Defibrillator for Community First Responder Scheme - £978.00
- Aultbea's Men Shed - Purchase of corrugated roof for a second shed - £1,126.97
- Toybox Children's Centre - Staff Training and Learning to Support Best Start for Children - £930.00.

**8. Minutes  
Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 19 January 2025 which were approved by the Council on 26 March 2026.

The meeting ended at 11:50am.