The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held r**emotely** on Monday 3 August 2026 at 10.00am

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr R Gunn
Mr A Jarvie
Mr S Mackie
Ms J McEwan
Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie

In attendance:

Ms C MacIver, Community Development Manager
Mr M Crowe, Project Officer - Community Regeneration
Mr R Macleod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance
Mr G Mackay, Senior Maintenance Officer
Mr P Dent, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

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' 1hlài ragus 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 25 June 2026 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 was circulated Report No CC/16/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

The Chair advised that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was unable to attend the meeting due to the ongoing Cairngorm wildfire, and Members commended the Service for their hard work in tackling this and other serious incidents.

Thereafter, Members asked for this item to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting and for the Service to provide the most up to date performance report.

The Service also be requested to attend the meeting on the basis this was of significant benefit from a scrutiny perspective.

A further issue raised was the need for reassurance that the Service had the facilities and resources in place locally to enable an early response to wildfires in the area.

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

5. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan airson na Maoin Ath-bheothachadh Coimhearsnachd

There was circulated Report No CC/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

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

Organisation	**Project Title**	**Grant Approved**
Castletown Drill Hall	Disability access and car park improvements	£41,000
Wick Development Trust	Wick Riverside Lighting	£93,257.37
Wick Paths Group	Paths Around Wick – Access Improvement Project	£ 71,030.32
Wick Golf Club	167 Acres of Joy	£ 26,120.00

6. Housing Repairs and Capital Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Càraidhean Taigheadais

There was circulated Report No CC/18/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

- further clarity was sought and provided that while damp was not categorised as an emergency repair, the Service was committed to fast responses and improving communication with tenants and a response would be provided directly to Mrs J McEwan on a specific case;
- a new Scottish Government regulation was to be introduced in October 2026 that set out response timescales for reports of damp in properties and further details were provided in this regard;
- it would be helpful for an update to be provided to the Member/officer monthly housing meetings on progress with the projects previously approved under the environmental budget;
- planned Member and officer housing estate walkabouts were to be held in the area to help inform the current year's spend on the environmental budget and potential to enhance the capital programme;
- the opportunity for discussions be held locally on the new HRA Capital Programme 2027-2032 to consider local needs and priorities and confirmation this would be brought to a Ward Business Meeting; and

- an update was sought and provided on the success of the Void Plus pilot implemented in Caithness and positive feedback received from tenants and in response to a query, it was confirmed Members would be provided with a breakdown of the costs involved in the scheme.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026;
ii. **NOTED** the progress of the Void-Plus policy which has been implemented on a trial basis in Caithness since July 2024; and
iii. **APPROVED** the continuation of the Void-Plus policy in Caithness as part of mainstream efforts to re-let low demand houses and support new tenants to sustain their tenancies

7. Wick Common Good Fund Q4 2025/2026 and Q1 2026/27 Monitoring Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige Ràithe 4 2025/2026 agus Ràithe 1 2026/27

There was circulated Report No CC/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members welcomed the fact that the offices in Wick Town Hall had been successfully leased and that while increased costs were being incurred, this was generating increased rental income and benefits for the Fund. In noting the good progress being made with the Fund, it was important that a strategic approach for the dispersal of funds be considered going forward.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 4 2025/2026 and Quarter 1 2026/2027 monitoring statements for the Wick Common Good Fund.

8. Thurso Common Good Fund Q4 2025/2026 Q1 2026/27 Monitoring Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Theòrsa Ràithe 1 2025/2026 Sgrùdadh Ràithe 1 2026/2027

There was circulated Report No CC/20/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members welcomed the good progress being made with the Fund and it was requested that a meeting be arranged between the officer working group, local Members and community organisations to provde a focus and consider the opportunities going forward.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 4 2025/2026 and Quarter 1 2026/2027 monitoring statement for the Thurso Common Good Fund.

9. Environmental Health - Annual Report & Activity 2025/26 Slàinte Àrainneachdail – Aithisg Bhliadhnail & Gnìomhachd 2025/26

There was circulated Report No CC/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the action being taken in relation to specific issues of fly tipping/nuisance from accumulation in Thurso and Lybster was appreciated by local Members and communities;
- concern as to whether the number of stray dogs and associated dog fouling in Thurso had increased and noting while this was a Police matter, the Council's dog warden was also undertaking work in this regard; an increase in numbers had not been noted by officers, however this would checked further;
- in response to a query, further clarity was provided on the role of the Service in dealing with asbestos in shed/building demolitions and referral to the Health and Safety Executive as and when required;
- concern in relation to the number of animal welfare cases being reported to the Procurator Fiscal; it was confirmed these related to agricultural settings and the Service was engaging with farming and other relevant organisations in response to this issue;
- a robust approach be taken to enforcement around abandoned vehicles, in the area, with reference to specific issues in Castletown; in response, details were provided on the action taken by the Service on this issue within the boundaries of the legislation and available staff resource, and it was confirmed updates on progress would be provided to local Members;
- the issue of abandoned and nuisance vehicles and the resource required to deal with this problem was being considered by the Council's Redesign Board and Members were welcome to engage in and contribute to that process;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the procedure showing the definition of and process for dealing with abandoned and nuisance vehicles would be shared with Members; it was also confirmed that registered owners were charged by the Council for the uplift of vehicles;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the role of the Service, Planning Service and SEPA in terms of scrapyards extending beyond their boundaries; Members were encouraged to report concerns on this and any of the above issues to the Service in the first instance and for onward referral if required; and
- further clarification was sought and provided on the increase in the number of noise complaints, the majority involving neighbour disputes, and that a breakdown of complaints by type could be provided if required.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

i. the scope and volume of work currently being delivered in the local area;
ii. local issues and current operational priorities;
iii. Highland wide issues impacting Environmental Health services; and
iv. the format and content of the report.

10. Winter Service Plan for 2026/27
Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh airson 2026/27

There was circulated Report No CC/22/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- an explanation was sought and provided on the lessons learned from the previous winter season, particulary on how the Council reacted to extreme weather events and pulled together inhouse and external resources;
- confirmation was sought and provided that there was a dedicated list of contractors who could respond at short notice in extreme winter conditions and this was reviewed annually;
- the need for a broader discussion on how the requirement for more external help and assistance in emergency conditions could be escalated and for this to be raised with Corporate Communications;
- in regard to the above, it was important to ensure those engaged were competent and there was the available resource to guide and manage where they were located on the road network;
- further clarification was sought and provided in relation to the treatment of footpaths within policy and challenges in having the full resource to deliver this element of the service at peak times;
- confirmation was sought and provided that Members would be provided with details of community winter resilience requests received over the previous winter season; it was highlighted that such requests had to be supported by community councils and the scheme applied to those areas with footpaths;
- in response to a query, further clarity was provided that the emergency response for individuals element using 4X4 vehicles was led and coordinated by NHS Highland;
- in terms of the publication of the Winter Service Plan on the Council's website, it would be helpful if the primary and secondary routes on the map were more clearly identifiable; the potential for routes to be added to the Council's GIS mapping software also be raised with Corporate Communications;
- in regard to the above, an assurance was provided that more detailed maps for Wick and Thurso would be added to the Website; it was explained that roads was being considered by the Council's Redesign Board, and this included route optimisation software and Members comments on this matter would be fed back as part of the process; and
- it would be helpful for the Council to make it as clear as possible to the public and on the map of routes, the extent of BEAR Scotland's responsibility for winter services on trunk roads in the area.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27.

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 have been approved for the period 1st April 2026 – 20 July 2026:

Scottish Surfing – Scottish National ChampionshipsHighlife	£4,000.00
Highland Active Schools & Coaching EquipmentThurso	£2,250.00
Football Academy – Professional Football Training CampNorth	£950.00
Highland Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
	£1,924.50

Vivis Roots CollectionThurso Beach & Town initiative – Thurso	£460.00
Tennis Court Flower Beds	£500.00
Join in More (Caithness)	

Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications have been approved for the period 1st April 2026 – 20 July 2026:

North Highland Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Vivid Roots Collection	£1,924.50

12. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 27 April 2026 which were approved by the Council on 14 May 2026.

Following on from this item, Members welcomed the good news that funding had been confirmed for the continuation of Wick Public Service Obligation (PSO) air services to Aberdeen and Glasgow and paid tribute to all involved on the excellent work undertaken to secure these services. Members were also thanked for their support in relation to this item and an assurance provided that the early release of the news in the press by sources outwith the Council and prior to Members being informed would be raised with all relevant parties.

The meeting ended at 12.05pm.