

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in the Chamber, The Court House, High Street, Nairn on Wednesday 19 March 2014 at 10.30 am

### Present:

Ms J Douglas  
Mr D Fallows  
Mr L Fraser  
Mr M Green

Mr B Lobban  
Mr C Macaulay  
Mrs L MacDonald  
Mr G Rimell

### In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Acting Head of Community and Democratic Engagement  
Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey  
Mr G Hamilton, Head of Environment and Development, Planning and Development Service  
Mr C Thomas, Research Officer, Planning and Development Service  
Mr C Mackintosh, Area Education Manager (South), Education, Culture and Sport Service  
Ms T Urry, Housing and Property Manager (South), Community Services  
Mr J Taylor, Acting Area Roads and Community Works Manager, Community Services  
Mrs A MacNeill, Senior Public Relations Officer, Chief Executive's Office  
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office  
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

### Also in attendance:

Mr M Johnston, Area Manager, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (Item 3 only)

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.**

### Mrs L MacDonald in the Chair

#### Business

#### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

#### 2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 6 – Mr D Fallows, Mr B Lobban and Mr G Rimell  
Item 8 – Mr C Macaulay  
Item 10 – Mr L Fraser

### **3. Presentation: Highlands and Islands Enterprise Overview of Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Economy**

**Taisbeanadh: Sealladh Coitcheann Iomart na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean air Eaconamaidh Inbhir Narann, Bhàideanach agus Shrath Spè**

Mr Martin Johnson, Inner Moray Firth Area Manager, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), undertook a presentation which introduced HIE as one of the three key agencies that delivered Scottish Government Economic Strategy.

With an overall purpose to generate sustainable economic growth across the Highlands and Islands, HIE provided a range of assistance to companies with growth potential, including account management, leadership, innovation, sales, digital opportunities and access to finance. Their priorities were outlined as follows:

- supporting businesses and social enterprises to shape and realise their growth aspirations;
- strengthening communities and fragile areas;
- developing growth sectors, particularly distinctive regional opportunities; and
- creating the conditions for a competitive and low carbon region.

HIE measured business success through increases in turnover; international trade; and the numbers of jobs created or retained. Social Enterprise success could also be measured through turnover and jobs created, as well as by measuring the acquisition of assets by communities.

The importance of major growth sectors such as Energy, Food and Drink, Tourism, Financial Business Services, Universities and Life Sciences was explained, with specific examples given of local companies in the region which had received support from HIE, including several Social Enterprise companies. Overall, HIE aimed to create conditions for a competitive and low carbon area, which included creating a digital region, jobs and opportunities for young people, the development of low carbon opportunities and a strategic property and business infrastructure.

Turning to the Inner Moray Firth, HIE had invested £23 million into the economy in the previous three years, with £15 million going towards a small number of large projects mainly around port infrastructure and financial business services. In Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (NBS), £1.2 million had been invested in the previous three years.

The total population of the Inner Moray Firth area was 153,000, with NBS having 26,605, an increase of 13.4% from 2001 to 2011. Of this, 19,400 people had been economically active in 2011 and a breakdown was provided of employment by sector and occupational structure in the area.

Looking to the future, Mr Johnson explained that various economic strategies were being brought together through a single outcome agreement, a key strand of which was economic growth and regeneration, which would support improvements to infrastructure, business support, skills and employability and creating successful places.

The Area Leader thanked Mr Johnson, who then responded to questions as follows:-

- a preferred bidder for Cairngorm Mountain (funicular operator) had been announced and the contract was in the latter stages of negotiation;
- a copy of the slides would be provided to all Area Members;

- the Business Gateway service was available to all companies, whereas HIE provided assistance to those identified as having growth potential. There was a formal monthly process for clients to be referred from Business Gateway to HIE and any known instances of businesses being 'stuck' should be reported to HIE;
- if the planned development at Whiteness came to fruition, the medium to long term projection for employment was between 2,000 and 3,000, which was likely to be a combination of local and incoming labour. The project would be largely driven by the private sector, notably off-shore wind farms;
- LEADER was a key enabler in terms of funding and HIE would expect to be involved with some of their clients;
- at present, HIE was not involved in negotiations with landowners for the release of land with business development potential;
- much of HIE's work was business-specific and the Planning Authority remained the principle point of contact in terms of community planning. HIE would, however, be pleased to contribute in any way considered helpful, such as attendance at ward forums or similar;
- HIE's internal structure and focus of work had been reorganised since the 1990s, in part to re-align with new Local Authority structures;
- demographic data from the census that related to the care sector would feed into community planning, with the lead on employment issues being taken by Skills Development Scotland;
- Tourism was a key sector in Badenoch and Strathspey and the most likely source of large scale employment;
- the creation of a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) or Business Improvement District (BID) for Nairn was a possibility but would create overheads. An alternative was for Nairn to maintain a presence on the DMOs/BIDs for larger neighbouring regions; and
- the frequency and price of flights between Inverness and London, along with other related transport issues, were monitored on a regular basis by HITRANS and HIAL and remained a key area of focus.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the presentation; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a copy of the presentation slides be circulated to Members of the Committee.

#### **4. Nairn Town Centre Regeneration Ath-chruthachadh Meadhan Baile Inbhir Narann**

At its meeting on 3 December 2013 the Committee agreed that officers hold a public consultation event to find the best ways of delivering town centre regeneration in Nairn. This followed a successful bid for funding from the Scottish Government with similar events also being held in Tain and Fort William.

Officers were currently making arrangements to appoint a design team and liaise with local Members and the community to discuss the aims and objectives for this work and encourage participation in the forthcoming events. Community representatives in Nairn were particularly keen to support the Council in running the event by helping to raise awareness amongst community groups and get people involved. In order to provide adequate time for pre-charrette engagement, and in turn to maximise attendance, it had been proposed to hold events towards the end of April 2014.

The Area Leader informed Members that consultants CR2M Hill, previously Halcro, had now been appointed and a meeting was scheduled with them on 20 March 2014 to plan the next steps, notably the involvement of community groups in the process.

The Committee **NOTED** the position.

## **5. Tourism Forum Fòram Turasachd**

Following the report on Tourism in Nairn that came before the Committee on 3 December 2013 it was agreed to hold a Ward Forum with the relevant parties to consider approaches and with the aim of preparing an Action Plan. It was also agreed that the Chief Executive of the Cairngorm Business Partnership be invited to give a presentation to such a Forum.

The Ward Forum would take place on Monday 31 March 2014 at the Court House in Nairn from 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm and would focus on tourism and events. The advantages of a Business Improvement District (BID) for Nairn would be explored.

During discussion, Members welcomed the forthcoming Forum and commented that the creation of a BID, or even a Destination Management Organisation, for Nairn should be explored. It was highlighted that Nairn beach had been voted the best beach in Scotland and this, along with many other features, could be exploited to attract more tourists. Much work was ongoing in the larger areas around Nairn, such as Inverness and the Cairngorm National Park and it was important to ensure Nairn was not overlooked.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made.

## **6. Partnership Agreement: Cairngorm Mountain Estate and Glenmore Forest Park Aonta Com-pàirteachais: Oighreachd a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh agus Pàirce Coille a' Ghlinne Mhòir**

### **Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr D Fallows, Mr B Lobban and Mr G Rimell declared non-financial interests in this item as Members of the Cairngorms National Park Authority but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to participate in the discussion.**

**Mr B Lobban also declared a non-financial interest as a Member of the Cairngorms, Rothiemurchas and Glenmore Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No NBS/01/14 dated 7 March 2014 by the Director of Planning and Development which introduced the draft Cairngorm and Glenmore Partnership Agreement 2014. It set out the purpose of the proposed Agreement, working principles and proposed outputs during 2014. A copy of the full draft Agreement was attached as an appendix to the report.

The report listed the five parties that would be incorporated in the Partnership, namely the Cairngorm National Park Authority, the Forestry Commission Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Highland Council. The

overall aim was to work in partnership to deliver long term and integrated management of the publicly owned land on the Cairngorm Estate and Glenmore Forest Park, with several subsidiary aims listed in the report. A management board was to be established with representation from each partner, in addition to a delivery team which would include the Cairngorm Mountain operating company. The Agreement was due to be reviewed after an initial three year period.

Members welcomed the Partnership but spoke strongly in favour of increasing the proposed levels of communication. It was felt that one meeting per year might be insufficient and that a robust method of communicating between meetings was required, especially in relation to progress on work streams. Members also emphasised the importance of involving local communities in the work of the Partnership and of keeping local Members fully up to date on progress. In relation to transport infrastructure, a holistic approach should be taken.

In response to comments from Members, the Acting Head of Community and Democratic Engagement suggested that approval of the Agreement by the Council should be subject to a Communications Plan with the community, partners and the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee being considered by the Partnership and progress being reported back to the Area Committee in due course.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** and **AGREED** to endorse the purpose and proposed outputs of the draft Partnership Agreement; and
- \* ii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the approval and signing of the draft Partnership Agreement subject to a Communications Plan with the community, partners and the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee being considered by the Partnership and progress being reported back to the Area Committee in due course.

## 7. **Population Change in Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey – 2001 to 2011** **Atharrachadh Àireamh-sluaigh ann an Inbhir Narann is Bàideanach is Srath Spè** **– 2001 gu 2011**

There had circulated Report No NBS/02/14 dated 5 March 2014 by the Director of Planning and Development which presented early results from the 2011 Census, giving local information on the number and ages of people living within Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey. It compared these figures with those from 2001 to show that the population had “aged”, and that there were a large number of people who were close to retirement age. The population of the area had grown by 15.6% (compared to the Highland average of 11.1%) with a similar increase in each Ward. Local population growth was strongly linked to the building of new homes.

The Planning and Development Service Research Officer presented the demographic changes from 2001 to 2011 and their implications. A major issue was the anticipated increase, in around 15 years from now, in the number of people of retirement age, and decrease in people of working age.

The growth and age profiles of several settlements were shown, with most areas experiencing population growth, some to a significant extent. Some settlements, such as Nairn, had a relatively high percentage of retired people and some, such as Aviemore, had a significantly lower proportion, and some of the possible reasons for this were explored.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was difficult to obtain detail about work place populations from the census due to built in confidentiality. Bespoke analysis could be undertaken for businesses where possible;
- the trend for fewer retired people than average in Aviemore might reflect the seasonal nature of employment and the possibility of a higher than average migrant labour force. However it was pointed out that while some Eastern European migrants had been transient ten or so years previously, there were a growing number who had settled permanently;
- there was capacity for more growth on the west side of Nairn, which might be expedited if the Whiteness development went ahead;
- although an aging population had considerable implications for health care, there were also benefits to local economies, for example their spending power and their involvement in voluntary and community initiatives;
- career planning for care workers should be undertaken in good time to meet the anticipated increase in retired people in around 15 years; and
- in very small rural communities, actual numbers gave a clearer picture than percentages when reporting changes in demographics.

The Committee **NOTED** that over the last decade the population of the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey area had grown by 15.6%, higher than the Highland average, and:-

- i. that there had been significant growth in parts of Aviemore and Nairn;
- ii. that the Census results confirmed that the population was ageing and there was about to be a significant increase in the number of retired people; and
- iii. the strong links between economic growth, new house building and population growth.

## **8. Nairn Academy Associated School Group Overview Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Acadamaidh Inbhir Narann**

### **Declaration of Interest:**

**Mr C Macaulay declared a financial interest in this item as his wife was a member of the Senior Management Team at Nairn Academy and left the room following the discussion regarding the redevelopment of the former dental unit at Millbank Primary School**

There had been circulated Report No NBS/03/14 dated 6 March 2014 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Nairn Academy Associated School Group (ASG) and useful links to further information in relation to these schools.

The report explained that the primary schools in the ASG served over 857 pupils with the secondary school serving 775 young people. In relation to Nairn Academy, detailed information was provided on attainment and the findings of the most recent Education Scotland Standards and Quality Report. Details of wider achievement and notable successes were provided for all schools within the ASG. In addition, the report contained statistics on school leavers, school rolls, attendance/absence/exclusions, staffing and funding. With regard to school buildings, information was provided on suitability, condition and occupancy as well as

current/future investment. Statistics were also provided in relation to High Life Highland facilities and services within the ASG.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the redevelopment of the former dental unit at Millbank Primary School into a Nurture Room was commended. The Council's Adult and Children's Services Committee had contributed £50,000 to the project, which was a model of best practice in terms of partnership working. The Nurture Room was expected to open in August 2014 and would facilitate early intervention and allow young people to access services locally;
- concern was expressed regarding the significant reduction in occupancy in Cawdor and Millbank Primary Schools and information was sought as to whether this was a trend that was expected to continue;
- Nairn Academy had improved significantly and Members praised the Head Teacher, staff and Parent Council for their efforts;
- extra-curricular activities had historically been run by teachers. However, given the mounting pressure on resources and teaching staff, activities were increasingly being run by parents and external organisations. It was emphasised that, in order for clubs, societies and activities to flourish, more parents needed to come forward and assist; and
- reference was made to the continuing success of the Nairn Academy Debating Club and information was sought as to how this could be replicated in other schools.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** that information on school roll projections in respect of Cawdor and Millbank Primary Schools be provided to Members of the Committee.

## **9. Education Scotland Reports – November 2013 to March 2014 Aithisgean Foghlam Alba – Samhain 2013 gu Màrt 2014**

There had been circulated Report No NBS/04/14 dated 6 March 2014 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which provided details on Education Scotland's inspections of schools in the Area during the period November 2013 to March 2014.

The report explained that, each year, Education Scotland inspected and reported on the quality of education in a sample of pre-school centres, primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, community learning and development services, colleges and residential educational provision. A routine inspection had been carried out at Auldearn Primary School in November 2013 and the resulting evaluations against various quality indicators were provided together with a link to the full inspection report and information on actions as a result of the inspection.

Having congratulated staff, pupils and parents for the positive report, the Committee **NOTED** the Education Scotland report in respect of Auldearn Primary School.

## 10. Housing Performance Report - 1 April to 31 December 2013 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2013

### Declaration of Interest:

**Mr L Fraser declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Sub-Contractor for the Housing Service in Nairn but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No NBS/05/14 dated 4 March 2014 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on housing performance indicators during the first three quarters of 2013/14.

The report explained that the Scottish Housing Regulator had set out the performance indicators it would use to form part of its scrutiny of landlords. These replaced statutory performance indicators for housing from April 2013. Most of the indicators were not directly comparable with previous statutory performance indicators and it was therefore not possible to obtain data retrospectively to allow reporting of trends. Statistics were provided on repairs, tenancy management, rent arrears and homelessness/homeless prevention. Additional detailed information by ward was available on the Members' Intranet.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought on the reasons for the variance in the length of time taken to complete repairs in Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey. In particular, serious concern was expressed regarding the time taken to complete emergency repairs in Badenoch and Strathspey and this could not be allowed to continue;
- information was requested on how often officers or contractors were unable to gain access to properties and how this could be resolved. It was suggested that lessons could be learnt from bodies such as NHS Dentists who had reduced the number of "no shows" for appointments by using telephone and text reminders;
- housing officers in Nairn were commended for the excellent performance figures in relation to repairs and the seamless procedures that were in place;
- the focus on reducing re-let times was welcomed and information was sought on the type of strategies being employed to reduce them further. In addition, it was requested that information on the number of re-lets in both Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey be incorporated in future reports;
- reference was made to the new apartments being built at the former bus station site in Nairn and it was important that robust procedures were in place so that, if people downsized from larger Council properties, re-let times were as short as possible;
- in relation to repairs, it would be helpful to see a graph that showed how long it took to complete all repairs in total or how many were outstanding after 28 days;
- with regard to re-let times, it would be helpful to establish whether the problem lay with contractors carrying out repairs following the Clerk of Works' inspection or whether delays were taking place after properties had been released to housing officers to re-let;
- the distance contractors required to travel might be a factor in relation to the time it took to complete repairs in Badenoch and Strathspey; and
- information was sought as to whether there were any delays in housing officers reporting repairs to contractors.



In response to requests for additional information, the Housing and Property Manager (South) confirmed that information on the number of re-lets in both Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey could be incorporated in future reports. Further information was provided on the Members' Intranet and it was suggested that Members look at what was available and advise if there was anything they wished to be replicated in the Housing Performance Report. In addition, more detailed information could be provided to Members outwith the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April to 31 December 2013; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the Housing and Property Manager (South) consider information on the number of re-lets in both Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey being incorporated in future reports.

## **11. Grounds Maintenance Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Cumail Suas Raointean**

There had been circulated Report No NBS/06/14 dated 24 February 2014 by the Director of Community Services which detailed the arrangements for monitoring performance of the Grounds Maintenance Service in the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area.

The report explained that Community Services was responsible for a wide range of horticultural activities including the maintenance of grass in public open spaces; designing and planting of flower and shrub beds; pruning of vegetation and trees; and inspection and maintenance of play areas. There were approximately 1,070,000 square metres of public open and amenity space in the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Wards and, over the course of a year, approximately 19,000 maintenance tasks were undertaken. Activities were carried out to the standards specified in the Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreement and the monitoring and escalation process was summarised. Statistics in relation to inspections and breached standards in both Wards were set out in section 5 of the report.

During discussion, Members referred to the revised procedures put in place as a result of the contractor's poor response to breached standards in Badenoch and Strathspey and sought an assurance that the issue had been resolved.

Thereafter, Committee **NOTED** the information provided on grounds maintenance performance for 2013 for the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area.

## **12. Nairn Common Good Fund - Budget Setting for 2014/15 Maoin Maith Coitchinn Inbhir Narann – Suidheachadh Buidseit airson 2014/15**

There had been circulated joint Report No NBS/07/14 dated 6 March 2014 by the Director of Finance and the Acting Head of Community and Democratic Engagement which invited Members, for the first time, to set a revenue budget for the Nairn Common Good Fund (NGCF) for financial year 2014/15. It clarified the:-

- current governance arrangements;
- anticipated income (primarily from tenancy rentals);
- proposed expenditure; and

- structure of payments made to the Council for services rendered in support of the fund and how these services should be supported in the coming financial year and thereafter.

It also detailed the review of management arrangements currently underway for the NCGF.

The total value of the NCGF was £9.411m as per the accounts to 31 March 2013 but this was subject to change pending re-evaluation of assets.

The Area Leader explained that the Nairn Members had been involved in scrutinising the NCGF. A significant amount of work had already been undertaken by officers and additional work was required to address a number of anomalies that had been identified in the Asset Register. A further report would be presented to the Area Committee in June 2014.

Referring to the revenue reserves, which were expected to be approximately £0.210m at the end of 2013/14, it was proposed that the Acting Head of Community and Democratic Engagement work with the Director of Finance to progress an investment strategy for NCGF and that an update report be presented to a future meeting.

During further discussion, thanks were expressed to officers for their efforts in bringing the Asset Register up to date and to Louise Clark, former Ward Manager, whose investigations had led to some of the anomalies being discovered. The importance of maintaining the Asset Register in the future was emphasised. Previous monitoring reports had contained very limited information and the setting of a basic budget, showing a surplus of £5,000, was welcomed. Costs, such as the grass cutting contract, could be reduced and income could be increased. There was rental income from Sandown and revenue from the commercial area of the Nairn Highland Games which it was hoped would increase if the Games were expanded to a two-day event. The aim was to improve transparency and create a source of sustainable income for the common good of Nairn. Many other areas would welcome a Common Good Fund and, although there were issues to be resolved, there was no reason the people of Nairn could not look forward to something great for the future.

In relation to income, information was sought as to how the anticipated increase of 11% would be achieved. In response, the Area Leader explained that there were a number of issues to be addressed which, it was expected, would increase the income of the Fund. However, it was too early to make an announcement in that regard.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the Nairn Common Good Fund budget for 2014/15 detailed within the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the ongoing review of the Nairn Common Good Fund;
- iii. **AGREED** that update reports be brought back to the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Acting Head of Community and Democratic Engagement work with the Director of Finance to progress an investment strategy for Nairn Common Good Fund with an update report to be presented to a future meeting.

### 13. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 3 December 2013, as approved by the Council on 19 December 2013.

**14. Exclusion of Public**  
**Às-dùnadh a'Phobail**

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**15. Nairn Common Good – 57 Park Street, Nairn**  
**Maith Coitchinn Inbhir Narann - 57 Sràid na Pàirce, Inbhir Narann**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No NBS/08/14 by the Acting Head of Community and Democratic Engagement which sought approval to sell a small area of Common Good land adjacent to 57 Park Street, Nairn.

The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Council agree to the proposed sale of a small area of Common Good land adjacent to 57 Park Street, Nairn as outlined in the report and request that Housing and Property instruct Legal Services to document the sale accordingly.

The meeting concluded at 1.05 pm.