

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Community Services Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 15 May 2014 at 10.30am.

Present:

Dr D Alston	Mr D Hendry
Mr R Balfour	Mrs L MacDonald
Mrs J Barclay	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr B Clark	Mr K MacLeod
Mrs G Coghill	Mrs B McAllister
Mr N Donald	Mr H Morrison
Mr A Duffy (substitute)	Mr B Murphy
Mr D Fallows	Mr G Phillips
Mr M Finlayson	Mr M Rattray
Mr A Graham	Mr A Rhind
Mr R Greene	Mr J Rosie
Mr A Henderson	Mr J Stone

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr D Kerr
Mrs I Campbell	Mr D Mackay
Miss J Campbell	Mr T MacLennan
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr T Prag
Dr I Cockburn	Mr R Saxon
Mrs M Davidson	Dr A Sinclair
Mr H Fraser	Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Dr C Clark, Head of Environmental and Regulatory Services
Mr R Evans, Head of Roads and Transport
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing
Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager
Ms C Campbell, Performance and Building Maintenance Manager
Mr D McKechnie, Integrated Transport Manager
Mr N Downie, Performance Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Corporate Development Service
Mrs R Daly, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service
Mrs F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service

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

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chairman and Members of the Committee paid tribute to the former Chairman, Mr Graham Philips, commending his hard work and dedication and wished him well for the future.

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

- the agenda had not contained a list of the Committee membership as was the usual practice. The agenda had been issued at the same time as a meeting of the Highland Council when a revised Committee membership was to be approved. Committee membership would be listed on future agendas as was the custom.
- a training session for Members wishing to be involved in Homelessness Appeals would be provided following the meeting. A general briefing on housing issues and future reports to Committee would be provided at a future date.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr B Lobban.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 5 – Mr M Finlayson (non-financial)

Item 7 – Mr D Kerr (financial)

Item 10 – Mr B Murphy (financial)

Item 12 – Mr A Duffy and Mr D Kerr (both financial)

Also, and in terms of the general dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, Mr D Kerr declared a financial interest in any items which might arise during discussion in regard to Council housing on the grounds of being a Council House tenant.

3. Good News Naidheachd Mhath

The following items of Good News were presented by the Chairman:-

- with Highland Council leading the way in Scotland's local authorities in working with Trade Union representatives, Angus Cameron, Michael Hayes and David Griffiths were the first group to be awarded TUC Health and Safety Diplomas;
- Highland Council had received a Gold award from REPIC in March in recognition of being the best performing Council as regards the amount of waste and electrical and electronic equipment collected per head of population;
- the Council's Brora recycling centre received a Silver Award from REPIC in March for the most improved site;

- Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust had taken over the management of Kyle toilets and pontoons, having tapped into the Council's Community Challenge Fund to run these services via a Service Level Agreement; and
- Highland Wood Energy and Highland Council had been shortlisted as finalists in the "Service and Maintenance Initiative" category of the Heating and Ventilation Awards.

The Committee **NOTED** the Items of Good News.

4. Community Services – New Structure, New Approach Seirbheisean Coimhearsnachd – Structar Ùr, Dòigh-obrach Ùr

There had been circulated Report No COM/01/14 dated 1 May 2014 by the Director of Community Services informing and updating Members on progress with the new Service structure for Community Services which aimed to deliver a fresh, customer-centric approach to service delivery. The report also invited Members to agree to hold a seminar on how the Service could better engage with communities (including Community Councils) and help build and sustain confidence in this fresh approach.

In providing details of the new Community Services Management Team, Members were also informed of the phasing and timing of the alignment and deployment of posts below this level and the meetings which had taken place with Trade Unions and Area offices. The new Service would put staff in regular contact with people and the need to put customers at the centre of what the Service did had been emphasised alongside the other values of the Service including the need to be open, honest and transparent and focused on performance. Further, at a time of reducing resources, it was essential that a partnership approach with communities was adopted and an outline of how this might be achieved was provided.

During discussion, Members thanked the Director for outlining the priorities for the new service and his expectations and raised a range of issues, including the following:-

- Members welcomed the renewed emphasis on community consultation and engagement as a number of projects had been impaired because of a lack of community engagement;
- the proposal to hold a seminar would be crucial in establishing meaningful community consultation and it was queried when and where this might take place;
- Area visits could take place following the initial Seminar;
- it was acknowledged that consultation was a two-way form of communication and not only should the Council prioritise its engagement with Community Councils but also that Community Councils should be encouraged to liaise with the Council through Service Points;
- it was unclear how the issue of staff being managed from one area but budgets being held in other areas would be addressed e.g. some staff in the Skye, Ross and Cromarty area were managed from Golspie;
- it was hoped that the new service structure would streamline many activities, in particular bulky uplifts; and
- restating values was particularly important and while it was acknowledged that there were many challenges ahead this provided a great opportunity for the new Director, new Chairman and new Service to take forward these values.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress with the new Service structure for Community Services which aimed to deliver a fresh, customer-centric approach to service delivery and that a further report on progress with the restructure of Service Teams would be reported to the next Community Services Committee; and
- ii. **AGREED** to hold a seminar on how the Service could better engage with communities (including Community Councils) and help build and sustain confidence in this fresh approach.

5. Food Safety Team Plan Plana Sgioba Sàbhailteachd Bìdh

Declaration of Interest

Mr M Finlayson declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds of being a trustee of the Cornerstone Project, which also ran a café in Evanton 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 circulated Report No COM/02/14 dated 6 May 2014 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the Food Safety Service Plan for 2014/15.

The statutory guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency required each food safety service to document and implement a food team plan in accordance with a specified standard. The Highland Council Team Plan for 2014/15 followed the format set out in the Food Standard's Agency Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls. The Plan provided background information on the team, specific targets for the year and a review of it would be submitted to the Committee later in 2014.

While the Food Standards Agency expected full compliance with all inspection frequencies, as stated in previous reports to the Committee, the Council's food safety service was not able to achieve this standard within current resources. Premises inspections were currently risk assessed and carried out on a priority basis.

During discussion, Members welcomed the item and commented that:-

- the aims and objectives of the Food Safety Plan involved engagement with communities on the grounds of providing a customer orientated and responsive service which played a significant role in underpinning public confidence in food hygiene, Highland food products and supporting the tourism industry;
- the service was of vital importance without which the public would be at serious risk as it addressed food safety from the food producer to the plate;
- the inspection results for some premises were not currently listed on the internet and so it was not clear whether or not they had been inspected;
- in terms of the staffing allocation and given the importance of the service, it was stressed that the practise of not filling vacancies would not be appropriate for this service and it should not be expected to operate with fewer than 15 FTE officers; and

- despite the food safety team being hard pressed, they were commended for their helpful and courteous approach to Elected Members and members of the public.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Food Safety Team Plan for 2014/15 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

6. Landfill Community Fund Maoin Coimhearsnachd Làraich Sgudail

There had been circulated a Report No COM/03/14 dated 6 May 2014 by the Director of Community Services which advised Members of the Landfill Community Fund (LCF) and inviting approval of the governance arrangements in relation to the allocation of funding.

The report summarised the remit and functions of the LCF and some key changes that had taken place in recent years, notably the significant reduction in available funds and restrictions on the criteria for submitted projects. An additional restriction of a maximum of £10,000 annually for any single project, to be subject to Area Committee approval, was proposed. In addition, the report summarised the position in relation to the devolution of landfill taxes to Revenue Scotland, the new tax authority for Scotland's devolved taxes.

During discussion, Members stressed the importance of allocating the funding which otherwise would return to Revenue Scotland.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** distribution of Landfill Community Fund as set out in Section 3 of the report; and
- NOTED** the devolution of landfill tax in 2015.

7. Revenue Budget 2014/15 – Monitoring Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2014/15 –Sgrùdadh

Declarations of Interest

Mr D Kerr declared a financial interest in this item but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No COM/04/14 dated 7 May 2014 by the Director of Community Services inviting Members to note the revenue budget position for the 2014/15 financial year and approve the actions to manage the budget.

During a summary of the report, it was confirmed that the Final Accounts for 2013/14 would be presented to the Council at its meeting on 26 June 2014 with a Near Final summary being reported to the Resources Committee on 28 May 2014. However, early indications showed that the Non-Housing Revenue Account would be slightly overspent while the Housing Revenue Account would show a balanced budget. Overall, the former Transport, Environmental and Community Services (TECS) budget would be underspent by at least £0.500m, mainly due to the mild winter. There had also been various pressures and underachieved savings in the TECS budget but these had been offset by a

combination of underspends and one-off savings, the details of which were provided. It was emphasised that the Roads Maintenance underspend included £0.600m held back in anticipation of bad weather and that this sum was included in the overall balancing of last year's budget by the former Director of TEC Services.

Combined pressures from the last and current financial year had resulted in a sum of £2.766M to be found in this financial year. £800k of this could be managed within the Service however this left a balance of £1.966m. A prudent course of action had been taken by removing £1.966m from the Roads Maintenance budget. This would be mitigated by the new Roads Innovation Fund of £1.25m which would be subject to separate monitoring and reported to Members for scrutiny. A request would also be made to the June Council seeking approval to put £500k back into the Roads budget which represented an underspend on the salt budget.

During discussion, Members expressed their concerns regarding the current budgetary position but welcomed the clarity of information and the opportunity to scrutinise the revenue budget at this early stage in the financial year. Members welcomed the commitment to open and transparent communications and commented as follows:-

- there was concern that there would be an £800k shortfall and pressure from waste management and landfill charges;
- while the new Service structure was welcomed, reference was made to financial constraints in the Housing budget to address maintenance of car parks and it was hoped that this situation would not be exacerbated if scarce funding for car park maintenance were to be redirected towards roads maintenance;
- while there was some £45m in the Housing Revenue Account there had also been a reduction in the numbers of council tenants caused by Right to Buy legislation and increases in Housing Association properties and there was a call to transfer all paths and car parks within Council Housing schemes to the Community Services budget;
- Members confirmed that the Housing Revenue Account was a separate budget which was ringfenced;
- in terms of waste management, it was important to get the message across that whatever was put to landfill would incur a cost for the Council. There was a need to accelerate the culture change to deal with waste in a different way. While the increases in recycling had been to the credit of the public this was now a critical issue and it would be crucial to redouble efforts to deal with this for the future;
- further clarity was requested on why waste arisings were now increasing and attention was drawn to processors who used too much packaging. In addition, there should be consideration given to looking at recycling opportunities for roadside waste bins used primarily by tourists;
- it was queried how effectively information on the budget was fed back to staff;
- Area officers had claimed, early in the last financial year, that there was no Roads maintenance and repairs budget available and, while the operational/strategic divide was acknowledged, concern was expressed that decisions made by officers overrode decisions taken by Members. It was suggested this was unacceptable that Members did not have full information to scrutinise budgetary matters;

- it was disappointing that there was no way of scrutinising the disbursement of the Strategic Change and Development Fund given it was part of the overall general roads budget in 2013/14;
- it was requested that the Director's introductory statements for this item be provided to all Members of the Committee; and
- information was sought as to the future for the Seatter Landfill site.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the revenue budget position for the 2014/2015 financial year;
- APPROVED** the actions to manage the budget; and
- AGREED** that the Director's introductory comments explaining the budgetary position be provided to all Members.

8. Roads Maintenance Gleidheadh Rathaidean

(i) Allocation of Road Maintenance Budget - 2014/15

There had been circulated Report No COM/05/14 dated 10 April 2014 by the Director of Community Services inviting Members to approve the distribution of the Roads Maintenance Budget for 2014/15 between the four new Operational Areas.

The report summarised the method of distribution across winter maintenance, routine maintenance, surface dressing and structural road maintenance, as well as providing information on the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey (SRMCS).

During discussion, Members commented that:-

- greater detail of works was required through Ward Forums. It was feared that the results of the SRMCS meant that those projects coded "green" would never be done and those coded "red" related only to emergency works;
- without proper investment in roads maintenance there would likely be a consequential impact on tourism to the area and an increase in insurance claims against the Council;
- there was concern expressed regarding the timing of works in the Easter Ross area which would now be funded from the Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area. It had been understood that draft proposals were to be presented to Members on road maintenance but this had not taken place in all Wards. As a result, the Area Committee had, as yet, not been asked to approve any works and the next meeting would not be held until August which left little time for works to be completed before the winter months. Clarification was sought that this would not present an inherent problem;
- the report was not about the budget quantum but about the mechanism for distributing funding. The methodology had been introduced to provide a clear evidence-based approach to prioritising works rather than an anecdotal approach. The approach was acceptable to Audit Scotland and so it was now important to adhere to this distribution mechanism;
- the joint Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Ward Business meeting had received a briefing from the Area Community Services

Manager who indicated works that were due to take place over the summer months. This had been particularly appreciated and the Community Council had welcomed the work carried out on Sandown Road; and

- it was important to highlight the work that had been undertaken on drainage and gully clearing which it was hoped would slow down deterioration on the roads network. In addition, improvements in gully clearing meant that the Council was not wasting resources – it was acknowledged that frontline staff were best placed to identify where improvements could be made.

The Committee **APPROVED** the distribution of the Road Maintenance Budgets for 2014/15 between the four Operational Areas on the basis of need, as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

(ii) Roads Asset Management Plan Version 3 and the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey Results

There had been circulated Report No COM/06 /14 dated 29 April 2014 by the Director of Community Services presenting the third version of the Council's Road Asset Management Plan for approval and updating Members on the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS) joint project with Scottish Local Authorities and Welsh Unitary Authorities to implement a common asset management framework for the road and bridge infrastructure in Scotland and Wales. The report also updated Members on the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey (SRMCS) and compared results of recent surveys which indicated ongoing deterioration. The funding situation was also explained.

It was pointed out that Highland's road condition indicator remained better than the Scottish average, although a worsening trend was evident with a 3.7% deterioration over the last 3 years. As a result, the road maintenance backlog for Highland had been calculated at £151m, which indicated that Highland needed to spend approximately £15m per annum on structural maintenance to maintain "steady state".

During discussion, Members sought clarification that the need in Highland to be spending in the order of £15m every year on structural maintenance to maintain "steady state" did not include Highland's share of the maintenance backlog of £151m.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the third version of The Highland Council's Road Asset Management Plan 2013-15;
- ii. **NOTED** the introduction of the new contract for the SCOTS Road Asset Management Project which now included partnership working with CSS Wales; and
- iii. **NOTED** the results of the 2012-14 Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey.

(iii) Additional Road Maintenance Funding 2014/15 – "Roads Innovation Fund"

There had been circulated Report No COM/07/14 dated 27 April 2014 by the Director of Community Services introducing the Roads Innovation Fund whose objective was to explore ways to make more effective use of road maintenance budgets. The report recommended approval of the associated Roads Innovation Fund Action Plan and progress reports would be provided for the scrutiny of Members at each Community Services Committee during 2014/15.

Members were reminded that at its meeting on 13 March 2013, the Highland Council had allocated £1.25m additional budget to Community Services as part of the Roads Innovation Fund. As well as exploring methods of delivering road maintenance, it also sought to involve communities and to build better overall engagement, participation and co-operation with the Council. The Plan described proposals for implementing and testing innovative techniques and, while these would not on their own redress Structural Maintenance backlog concerns, they would free up resources.

During discussion, Members welcomed the report, its implications and the detail of how the funding would be spent on individual projects. Members commented as follows:-

- feedback on projects contained in the Strategic Change and Development Fund report considered by the Transport, Environmental and Community Services Committee on 15 August 2013 was sought;
- it was queried whether this funding should be kept in the roads budget during the current financial year as it represented research and development activity which it was hoped would prove useful;
- fuel represented the biggest drain on resources and proposals for implementing and testing innovative techniques would be particularly welcomed; and
- the proposal to continue the ROADEX Drainage survey of road-side ditches and watercourses near roads was particularly welcome as not looking after ditches and gullies had led to many problems.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to welcome the funding of a Roads Innovation Fund while acknowledging the objective to drive down unit costs;
- ii. **AGREED** the Action Plan as presented in Appendix A of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** to delegate changes to the Action Plan required between Community Services Committee meetings to the Director of Community services, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee;
- iv. **NOTED** that Action Plan progress reports would be brought to every Community Services Committee during 2014/15 for scrutiny; and
- v. **AGREED** that feedback on projects contained in the Strategic Change and Development Fund report considered by the Transport, Environmental and Community Services Committee on 15 August 2013 be provided to Councillor Baxter.

9. Corran Ferry – Review of Ferry Fare Aiseag a' Chorrain - Ath-sgrùdadh air Faraidhean

It was recalled that at the Transport, Environmental and Community Services Committee on 6 February 2014, Members had agreed to defer any decision on ferry fare levels until a socio-economic study had been carried out and the local community had been consulted on the contents of that study. In this connection, there had been circulated Report No. COM/08/14 dated 2 May 2014 by the Director of Community Services explaining that feedback from the local Community Councils on the study had not been received by 2 May 2014 and therefore the reporting of any feedback would be provided to Members at the 6 November 2014 Community Services Committee. It was also recommended that consideration of any proposals for fare increases be deferred to the meeting on 6 November, when the full effect of current fare levels on ferry income and potential savings in revenue expenditure would be known.

In summary of the report, it was explained that feedback from the public meetings held during the consultation exercise had been taken on board. As a result, a number of proposals had been revised, as outlined in the report, including the retention of the current concessionary book of 30 tickets. The revised proposals would provide an estimated £100k in fare income, as required by the 2014/15 budget, but was dependent on future usage of the ferry and was insufficient to close the £170k gap between income and expenditure. Consequently, it was proposed that a review of all operational costs and income be undertaken.

Clarification was also provided that the report should have explained that the Transport, Environmental and Community Services Committee of 6 February 2014 had agreed to defer any decision on *above inflation* ferry fare levels and that the diagram at Appendix 1 of the report should not have indicated projections for total income by a dotted red line.

During discussion, Members welcomed the report and the proposal to defer making a decision on future fare increases and commented as follows:-

- the ferry service was not sustainable for the Council, neither was it sustainable to repeatedly demand fare increases as the ferry serviced an area of rural deprivation evidenced by recent studies and economic activity in the areas of Ardnamurchan and Morvern had been significantly affected;
- the Lochaber Area Committee had asked for an in depth review of the costs, particularly in relation to annual refits and fuel, and there were opportunities to make significant savings;
- to maintain tourism activity it would be important to look at this in the context of other ferry routes such as those across to Mull and work together with Argyll and Bute Council who, it was confirmed, had been provided with a copy of the Socio-economic study;
- there was a need to look forward to the provision of a fixed crossing. While it was acknowledged that this was not in the Council's immediate gift, it might attract European funding and would avoid the need for repeated provision and maintenance of ferries at increasing costs. The option to look at generating renewable energy from the Corran narrows should also be explored to help fund a bridge;
- it would be important to garner the support of the Scottish and UK Governments and others to secure a fixed crossing for the longer-term to ensure that the communities of Ardnamurchan and Morven were sustainable for the future. It was confirmed that the Council was open to consider any option for crossing the Corran Narrows and would not

- immediately dismiss the option of a bridge for the future. The Chair was already actively seeking talks with the Minister on this issue;
- building a fixed crossing would require to go through the STAG process and this was not an immediate solution. The Council had to work within the current trading operation framework – the expenditure-income gap was the key driver for fare increase and much work was currently underway to reduce fixed costs, particularly costs associated with the ferry refit, which might take pressure of fare increases for the future;
 - it was not necessarily the case that residents had been happy with the current fare structure, rather that they had opposed the options previously presented to them;
 - the current ferry model was an expensive option that involved maintenance of two ferries and the two piers which were currently of no use to any other boat because of their design. If there was no other way of recovering money from the use of the piers, Transport Scotland should be asked to take on responsibility for the piers and slipways as an extension of the road;
 - it was requested that the report to the Lochaber Area Committee would provide assurance that the Council had not breached any state aid regulations. Local communities had been placed in a position whereby state aid prevented the Council from helping them, despite the aim of European legislation to achieve social inclusion;
 - Road Equivalent Tariffs had been established to assist ferry dependent communities, however these provisions were not assisting these local communities which were very much dependent on the ferry;
 - it was highlighted that the Council had lobbied the General Assembly of the Committee for Peripheral Maritime Regions for a relaxation of state aid for both ferry and air links. This had received support for onward submission to the European Commission and work was on-going on a range of other rural connectivity issues;
 - the concessionary book of 30 tickets was not a practical option for families trying to budget because of the timeframes within which the concessions applied; and
 - clarification was sought whether local residents benefitted from the scheme for reduced fuel costs and, if not, this should be addressed.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the 4% annual inflationary increases in fare levels had been applied on 1 April 2013 and 1 April 2014. A 30p increase had also been applied in fares per trip in 1 November 2013 and that the full impact of these fare levels on income were still to be realised;
- ii. **AGREED** to defer consideration of further above inflation increase in fares until the Community Services Committee on 6 November 2014 when the full effect of current fare levels on ferry income and potential savings in revenue expenditure would be known;
- iii. **NOTED** that a review of all operational costs and income would be undertaken and that the outcome of the review would be presented to the Lochaber Area Committee, with a further report being taken to the Community Services Committee on 6 November, taking into account State Aid Regulations and social inclusion;
- iv. **NOTED** that the report on 6 November would make recommendations on whether or not above inflation fare increases would be required; and
- v. **NOTED** that feedback from Argyll and Bute Council and Community Councils on the socio-economic study would also be provided to Members at the Community Services Committees on 6 November.

The Committee adjourned for lunch at 1.00 p.m. and resumed at 1.45 p.m.

10. Housing and Property Services Performance Report – 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014
Aithisg Dèanadais Seirbheis an Taigheadais is na Seilbhe – 1 Giblean 2013 gu 31 Màrt 2014

Declaration of Interest

Mr B Murphy declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds of being the provider of temporary accommodation and left the room following the discussion in relation to housing repairs.

There had been circulated joint Report No COM/09/14 dated 15 April 2014 by the Directors of Community Services and Development and Infrastructure providing information on how the Housing and Property Service performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators during the fourth quarter of 2013/14.

The Scottish Housing Regulator set out the performance indicators that it would use to form part of its scrutiny of landlords. In response to Members' requests, a revised format had now been adopted which allowed comparison of trends on key indicators. The report detailed performance in relation to complaints, repairs, tenancy management, rental arrears and homelessness/homeless prevention as well as other performance information for housing management performance, property indicators and staff absence.

During discussion, concern was expressed in relation to the length of time taken to re-let some Council properties and the rental income that was lost as a result. This could, in part, relate to the maintenance of properties and information on this was sought and whether work on voids was undertaken in-house or by contractors. Similarly, repeated refusals for specific properties could also contribute to the delay in re-letting and could skew the statistics overall. Consequently, a report on void management was requested for the next meeting of the Committee.

Further points were made as follows:-

- benchmarking information was sought on a regular basis;
- housing related reports should not always be at the end of the Community Services Committee agenda;
- fuller information on homelessness was sought at Area Committee level;
- the eventual withdrawal of subsidies would have a knock-on effect on rent arrears, which already required attention;
- information was sought as to the length of time given to relatives to vacate a house following the death of a tenant; and
- a report was sought on housing application statistics, including information on the number of applications from people leaving the armed forces.

Members also commented on the significant amount of positive information contained in the report, such as the homelessness figures being half what they had been at their peak and the number of repairs which were completed within timescale.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and
- ii. **AGREED** that reports be submitted to the Community Services Committee on 21 August 2014 on:
 - the time taken to re-let void properties; and
 - Housing Allocation Monitoring.

11. Homelessness Appeals Tagraidhean Dith Dachaigh

There had been circulated Report No COM/10/14 dated 6 May 2014 by the Director of Community Services advising Members of the current process for dealing with appeals against decisions on homelessness cases and seeking agreement on future arrangements for Member involvement in final stage appeals.

Any homelessness applicant unhappy with a decision made in relation to their case had a right to have their case reviewed. The Appeals process had clear timescales for dealing with cases to ensure there was a balance whereby appeals were dealt with as quickly as possible while providing an opportunity for the applicant to receive independent advice. The current process worked well and therefore no changes were proposed. However, it was recommended that any Member of the Community Services Committee who had undertaken training in homelessness appeals be able to chair the hearing and, as a result, a training session had been organised to following the Committee meeting to which all Members of the Committee had been invited.

Members having asked whether substitute Community Services Committee Members were permitted to chair Appeal hearings, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to continue with the current appeals process, with final stage appeals chaired by a Member of the Community Services Committee;
- ii. **AGREED** that any Member of the Committee who had undertaken training in homelessness appeals would be able to chair an Appeal hearing;
- iii. **NOTED** that training sessions had been arranged following the Community Services Committee meeting on 15 May 2014 to which all Members of the Committee were invited; and
- iv. **NOTED** that a further training session will be arranged if required.

12. Allocations Policy Update Fios Às Ùr mun Phoileasaidh Riarachaidh

Declarations of Interest

Mr A Duffy and Mr D Kerr declared financial interests in this item but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No COM/11/14 dated 29 April 2014 by the Director of Community Services providing an update on the allocation of social rented housing in Highland, including the legal and regulatory framework involved, and summarising the key points arising from the recent Members workshop which would inform future consideration of policy changes.

The Highland Housing Register had a common allocations policy that included, as well as the Highland Council, the five main Registered Social Landlords operating in Highland. The current allocations policy, agreed in May 2013, was a points based system with applicants awarded points based on their circumstances and empty homes awarded to those with greatest need thus ensuring best use was made of stock. Members were also provided with the changes that would be brought about by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, currently being considered by the Scottish Parliament, and the duties and powers of the Scottish Housing Regulator.

In August 2014, the Community Services Committee would be presented with the first annual housing allocations report. A number of issues had suggested the need to review the housing allocations policy, one of which was the relatively high refusal rate of Council properties. In addition to the key concerns from the Members' workshop outlined in the report, Members had also asked for consideration to be given to the transfer of people with children out of flats and the reintroduction of the allocation of points for length of time spent on the waiting list. A further workshop for Members was therefore proposed prior to the August Committee meeting.

Members welcomed the forthcoming review, especially given the number of homeless presentations and the pressure on housing in rural areas. A broader approach might also be necessary, taking into account factors such as Local Plans and the Council's affordable housing stream and, consequently, confirmation was sought that non-Members of the Community Services Committee could also attend the next workshop.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the summary from the Member Workshop;
- ii. **AGREED** that work continued with the Highland Housing Register Partners on policy options relating to prioritisation of applications and a wider housing options approach;
- iii. **AGREED** that further policy changes be considered arising from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2013;
- iv. **AGREED** that these issues be considered further when the annual Housing Allocations Monitoring Report was presented to the Community Services Committee on 21 August 2014;
- v. **AGREED** that a further Member briefing session be held prior to the August Committee; and
- vi. **AGREED** that the proposed workshop to discuss future policy options in more detail be open for all Members to attend.

13. Minutes

Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Harbours Management Board of 10 April 2014; and
- ii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Education Transport Entitlement Review Sub Committee of 6 May 2014.

The meeting ended at 2.15pm

