

The Highland Council
Highland Council 25 June 2015

Agenda Item	16(iii)
Report No	HC/28/15

Proposed Merger - Nairn Suburban and Nairn West Community Councils

Report by Head of Policy and Reform

Summary

The report outlines a proposal from Nairn Suburban and Nairn West Community Councils to merge. The Community Councils have worked together over the last 12 months to outline how they propose to work together in the future. The proposal has support from all members of each Community Council, the 4 local Members and support from the public during a public consultation meeting. Members are asked to approve the merger of Nairn Suburban and Nairn West Community Councils.

1. Background

- 1.1 Community Councils were formed under the 1973 Local Government (Scotland) Act and provision was also contained for their continuation under the 1994 Local Government (Scotland) Act. Each Local Authority creates a Scheme for Community Councils which provides the framework for their operation. There is provision within the legislation for making minor amendments, reviewing and revoking a Community Council Scheme. Advice from Legal Services is that any changes must be considered and approved by a full meeting of the Council and cannot be delegated to an alternative committee e.g. an Area Committee.
- 1.2 The last full review of Community Council boundaries was undertaken during the Scheme Review in 2010/11. Since then whilst there has been discussion in some communities regarding potential boundary changes, none have progressed to date. Guidance to Community Councils within these circumstances is clear: that each situation is unique and shall be considered on its own merits.
- 1.3 The Council was approached by Nairn Suburban and Nairn West Community Councils in May 2014, with a proposal to merge the 2 Community Councils into one. This report provides Members with the background to this proposal, what the 2 Community Councils have done to date to progress the merger and how they propose to operate in the future.

2. Community Councils in Nairn

2.1 There are 3 Community Councils currently operating in Nairn – Nairn River, Nairn Suburban and Nairn West. Appendix 1 provides a map of the boundaries of the existing Community Councils.

2.2 The populations¹ of the 3 Community Councils are as follows:

- Nairn River – 5505
- Nairn Suburban – 3372
- Nairn West – 1123

2.3 During the creation of the current Community Council Scheme in 2010/2011, representations were received to merge all 3 Community Councils however this was not progressed at that time due to a lack of interest from the public and also that Nairn River Community Council indicated clearly their wish to continue to represent their defined area. Nairn River is not involved in this latest proposal.

2.4 In May 2014, Nairn Suburban and West Community Councils contacted the Council to ask how they could merge to become one Community Council. At this time they noted their common purpose, shared interests and that they could be more effective as one Community Council.

2.5 The Community Councils were advised that they needed to submit a proposal to the Council outlining the reasons for this proposed merger, including:

- Why the Community Councils wish to merge
- What benefits a merger would bring
- How working together would bring benefit to the 2 communities
- How would they ensure the whole area continues to receive equal representation
- That the merger must have been discussed and agreed at the meetings of each individual Community Council

It was also noted that some form of public consultation would be required to gauge support for the proposal locally.

3. Formal Proposal from Nairn Suburban and Nairn West Community Councils

3.1 Nairn Suburban and Nairn West Community Councils submitted a joint statement to the Council at the end of January 2015. This statement addressed the points outlined in paragraph 2.5, a summary of which is outlined below. The Ward Manager and Inverness City and Area Manager met with the Community Council in February to discuss the statement submitted and the way forward.

¹ Updated populations at June 2015 based upon the 2013 Mid Year Population Estimates

3.2 *The case and benefits of merger*

- 3.2.1 The Community Councils note that a merger between their 2 Community Councils would be more effective and efficient. They note that similar sized towns have a single Community Council, and whilst recognising that there is not the will for this in Nairn at present, believe that a merger between the 2 Community Councils would provide greater cohesion and consistency locally. They believe that this would provide them with a strong voice, more able to influence and put forward a collective view.
- 3.2.2 The Community Councils note shared common interests; in terms of the future of the town, availability of amenities, quality of infrastructure and development. They note a holistic view to the needs of their community would be of benefit and a more joined up approach to tackling local issues would be of benefit to the local community.
- 3.2.3 It is noted that a merged Community Council would be able to avoid duplication of effort, engage wider with agencies and Councillors and increase the capacity to undertake the role of a Community Council more effectively. It is also reported that a merged Community Council would be better placed to take on the tasks that could be devolved from the Council.
- 3.2.4 The Community Councils also note that there would be no increased costs to the Council as a result of a merger.
- 3.2.5 The Community Councils outline the success they have had to date working together; through joint meetings, sharing of work and engaging on major issues. The paper making the case for a merger has been agreed by all members of Nairn Suburban and West Community Councils who believe the proposal reflects a sensible, constructive and pragmatic change which will improve community representation and deliver a more effective Community Council.

4. Local Member and Community Views

- 4.1 All 4 local Members recognise the rationale behind the merger from the local community and are supportive of the community's choice in this matter.
- 4.2 Although there has been extensive discussion about the proposed merger at the meetings of the individual Community Councils and the joint meetings that have been held, officers regarded it important that the community at large were provided with an opportunity to have their say on the potential merger of the 2 Community Councils.
- 4.3 A public meeting was convened on the 21 May 2015. The meeting was chaired by the City and Area Manager, attended by the 2 Community Councils, 2 local Members, Ward Manager and members of the public. Both Community

Councils had the opportunity to outline the benefits of merger and how they intend to jointly represent the area. Key points noted included:

- Rosemary Young, Chair of Nairn West Community Council, highlighted that Nairn West had been in abeyance and had been brought back into being through the need to campaign on a local issue. Having worked well with Nairn Suburban on a number of key local issues, the benefit of a strengthened joint Community Council had been demonstrated.
- Dick Youngson, Chair of Nairn Suburban Community Council, advised that the two Community Councils shared many common interests, had shared concerns on similar issues and that joint meetings had made sense. The benefits of collaborative working had already been established. Mr Youngson also noted that the merger would be within the existing boundaries.
- Clear intent to merge the 2 Community Councils was demonstrated by the respective Chairs.

4.4 All present at the meeting were supportive of a merger between the two Community Councils.

5. Conclusions

5.1 There has been consistent local commitment and drive from Nairn Suburban and Nairn West for a merger between these 2 Community Councils. A good case, outlining the benefits and rationale for merger has also been made. Members of both Community Councils are supportive of the merger; there is support from local Members and also the wider community.

5.2 Members are asked to agree the merger between the 2 new Community Councils. Members are also asked to agree that the Highland Community Council Scheme of Establishment is amended to reflect:

- The new Community Council – Nairn West and Suburban - will operate from November 2015, following elections to this new Community Council.
- As per the membership formula in the Scheme, the new Community Council will have a membership of 11, based upon the updated populations at June 2015.
- The Community Council grant will be recalculated as per the formula agreed by Council in June 2011 to reflect the merger.

6. Implications

6.1 Legal and risk Implications:

Members are asked to agree the amendment as per the provisions contained within the 1973 Local Government (Scotland) Act and within Highland's own Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils.

- 6.2 Equalities Implications:
The Community Councils have outlined how they propose to represent the whole of their area and population within it.
- 6.3 Climate Change/ Carbon CLEVER Implications:
There are no Climate Change/Carbon Clever Implications.
- 6.4 Gaelic Implications:
There are no Gaelic implications
- 6.5 Rural Implications:
There are no rural implications.

6. Recommendations

Members are asked to agree:

- A merger between Nairn Suburban and Nairn West Community Councils.
- That the Highland Community Council Scheme of Establishment is amended to reflect:
 - The new Community Council – Nairn West and Suburban - will operate from November 2015, following elections to this new Community Council.
 - As per the membership formula detailed within the Scheme, the new Community Council will have a membership of 11.
 - The Community Council grant will be recalculated as per the formula agreed by Council in June 2011 to reflect the merger.

Designation: Head of Policy and Reform

Date: 25 May 2015

Authors: Alison Clark, Principal Policy Officer
Liz Cowie, Ward Manager

Nairn Community Councils

