

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, The Court House, High Street, Nairn on Wednesday 10 June 2015 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms J Douglas
Mr D Fallows
Mr L Fraser
Mr S Fuller

Mr M Green
Mr B Lobban
Mrs L MacDonald
Mr G Rimell

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager
Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey
Mr S Carr, Principal Policy Officer – Climate Change, Chief Executive's Office
Mr C Kemp, Area Community Services Manager, Community Services
Mr R Porteous, Assistant Area Manager, Community Services
Mr S Callan, Assistant Area Manager, Community Services
Miss M Murray, 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 the Committee.

Mrs L MacDonald in the Chair

Business

Preliminaries

The Area Leader welcomed Councillor Fuller to his first meeting of the Area Committee.

In relation to the review of Area Committees, it was clear that more powers needed to be devolved through the Council's Scheme of Delegation or another method needed to be found to involve local communities in decision making. The reinstatement of Area Committees was the first step in delivering more accountable local democracy and it was hoped that more powers would be devolved to local communities over the next few years.

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 6 – Mr L Fraser (non-financial)

3. Carbon CLEVER Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Chàrbon CHIALLACH

There had been circulated Report No NBS/09/15 dated 27 May 2015 by the Head of Policy and Reform which provided details on the Carbon CLEVER community grant fund that related to Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey, the CORE Nairn project and the installation of solar powered real time bus stop displays in Badenoch and Strathspey.

During discussion, the following issues were raised in relation to the Carbon CLEVER Community Grant Fund:-

- additional publicity was required to ensure that local community groups were aware the deadline for applications was approaching. Local Members also had a responsibility to raise awareness when attending Community Council meetings and other local forums;
- information was requested on whether schools were eligible to apply;
- some opportunities had been missed as the deadline for applications was too far ahead and it was necessary to find a way for the fund to be accessed more readily to facilitate community groups using it effectively;
- information was sought regarding the two applications received in other areas and the types of project that might be viable. In response, it was explained that a guidance document was available on the Council's website which included a number of examples of what would qualify as capital expenditure. It was requested that a link to the document be circulated to Members for information;
- discussions had taken place regarding the Nairn Common Good Fund accessing some of the fund to install an electric stance at the Links for the use of the travelling fair when it came to Nairn and it was hoped that this project could be taken forward; and
- when community groups applied for funding it was likely that they were going to have to contribute and so information on the level of return expected would be helpful.

The installation of solar powered real time bus stop displays in Badenoch and Strathspey was welcomed. However, it was important to ensure that local communities were aware of the project and that the audio worked. In addition, it was suggested that HITRANS liaise with the local Access Panel. Furthermore, it was suggested that consideration be given to installing displays in rural areas where there were few buses and real time information was even more important.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the application deadline for the Carbon CLEVER community grant fund with respect to Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey and that a future report would be presented to the Area Committee with regards to funding projects;
- ii. **NOTED** the progress to date with the CORE Nairn project;
- iii. **NOTED** the progress with the installation of solar powered real time bus stop displays in Badenoch and Strathspey; and
- iv. **AGREED** that a link to the Carbon CLEVER Community Grant Fund Capital Expenditure Guidance be circulated to Members of the Committee for information.

4. Update on Nairn Town Centre Action Plan Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlana-gnìomh Meadhan Baile Inbhir Narann

It was explained that, following approval by the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee, officers carried out a consultation on the draft Nairn Town Centre Action Plan (TCAP) up to 15 May 2015. The draft TCAP set out details of a range of projects, identified in collaboration with the community, aimed at maximising footfall and delivering town centre regeneration. The TCAP document was aimed at providing a useful framework for making applications for funding towards town centre improvements. Potential projects included environmental improvements, making better use of land and buildings and improving access and movement networks.

During the consultation on the draft TCAP, officers held a workshop with representatives of the community on 24 March 2015. The aim of the event was to prioritise projects and investigate the partnership working required – particularly for the projects that could be taken forward by the community – and to identify actions for delivery. This work also highlighted the potential for community organisations to play an important role in working alongside other partners in taking forward projects and priorities identified. This prompted an offer from Highlands and Islands Social Enterprise Zone (HISEZ) to facilitate a further event with the community to discuss what steps residents and community groups could take together to deliver improvements for the town centre. Those in attendance were keen to pursue this opportunity.

The follow-up meeting led by HISEZ was held on 12 May 2015 and was attended by representatives of all three Nairn Community Councils, Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE) and Nairn Economic Initiative (NEI) as well as Elected Members and residents. The event looked at ways of developing more effective partnerships to improve the prospects of seeking and securing funding for regeneration. It highlighted that there was a major opportunity for the various community groups in Nairn to work collaboratively to deliver improvements and these groups were understood to be considering how to put in place the appropriate arrangements for partnership and governance.

In terms of the TCAP document, feedback from the consultation and follow-up events was now being considered and later this year the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee would be asked to consider a final Nairn Town Centre Action Plan for adoption as non-statutory Supplementary Guidance.

During discussion, Members referred to the positive meetings that had taken place and explained that a “town team” had been established to address local issues. However, concern was expressed that community representatives, Elected Members and officials were putting a lot of time and effort into something that was not resourced. Inverness, which was a role model in terms of the vibrant projects taking place, did not appear to have to wait for funding. Neighbouring Moray was also well resourced through Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). Nairn did not appear to be receiving its fair share of funding and a commitment from HIE was required, over several years, to resource local projects.

The Area Leader explained that HIE had given a presentation at a previous meeting of the Committee and suggested that consideration be given to a follow-up presentation. Greater investment from HIE and the development of more business units would be welcomed. In addition, she thanked officers for their involvement in Nairn over the

past year. The facilitated events had brought the community together and it was hoped that more positive working would take place in the future and that barriers that had existed previously could be broken down in order to achieve better outcomes for Nairn.

The Inverness City Area Manager having confirmed that the Council's Executive Leadership Team recognised the importance of the activities taking place in Nairn and that the issues raised would be taken up with the Economy and Regeneration Manager, the Committee **NOTED** the position.

5. Area Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges Prògram Cumail Suas Sgìreil airson Rathaidean is Dhrochaidean

There had been circulated Report No NBS/10/15 dated 20 May 2015 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the Maintenance Programmes for Roads and Bridges for the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area for 2015/16.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- clarification was sought regarding the change to a two year cycle for surface dressing and resurfacing;
- at the last Resources Committee, it had been agreed to recommend that some of the Council's overall budget underspend be allocated to roads and information was sought on whether a plan was ready to implement if additional funding became available locally;
- concern was expressed that routine checking of traffic crossing lights had been stopped as a budget savings measure and information was requested on the rationale. In response, the Area Community Services Manager undertook to look in to the matter and report back to Councillor Rimell;
- thanks were expressed to the Area Community Services Manager for his assistance in identifying local road maintenance issues which had now been fed in to the budget process and would be addressed as resources allowed;
- reference was made to a recent factual briefing on roads maintenance and a number of Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey statistics were provided which demonstrated the deterioration in Highland's roads network. There had been massive underinvestment over the past three years and the maintenance backlog was currently an estimated £156m. Roads and infrastructure were the way out of poverty and concern was expressed regarding the devastating impact on tourism and business if the situation was not reversed. In response, the Area Leader explained that this was a matter for the Resources Committee or the full Council;
- concern was expressed regarding the condition of the hammerhead at Laing Gardens, Nairn and it was requested that this be addressed if there was funding available. In response, the Area Community Services Manager undertook to look in to the matter and report back to Councillor Fraser; and
- there had been issues regarding the footpath between Nairn and Broadlea and it was requested that the possibility of incorporating it within the Nairn to Howford Bridge surface dressing works be explored.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Maintenance Programmes for Roads and Bridges for the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area for 2015/16; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the possibility of incorporating the footpath between Nairn and Broadlea within the Nairn to Howford Bridge surface dressing works be explored.

6. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2014 gu 31 Màrt 2015

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/11/15 dated 26 May 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators during 2014/15.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed that the length of time taken to complete emergency and non-emergency repairs in Badenoch and Strathspey was still significantly higher than the Highland average. Some Members questioned whether it was reasonable to expect repairs to be carried out within 24 hours given the rural nature of Badenoch and Strathspey and the travelling times involved. However, it was highlighted that there were many rural areas in Highland. By contrast, Nairn was well below the Highland average and Members commended Housing staff for the improving picture. However, rent arrears in both Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey had increased by five percent over the past year; and
- in relation to homeless prevention, clarification was sought regarding the total number of prevention team cases received and the total number of closed prevention cases.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

7. Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No NBS/12/15 dated 27 May 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on the status of the Housing Revenue Account Capital Projects within the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area and sought agreement for the area priorities for additional discretionary Capital spend in 2015/16.

During discussion, Members welcomed the report and raised the following issues:-

- the significant investment of £11.648m in 2015/16 in housing stock in Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey was welcomed;
- in relation to the installation of biomass boilers in Badenoch and Strathspey, a number of issues and inconsistencies had been experienced during the initial project and it was hoped that lessons had been learnt. Using different contractors created a mixed picture, with various types of unit being used, and it was essential

to supervise the projects properly and support and communicate with tenants, particularly regarding the appropriate type of pellets. In addition, the need for a watertight store for pellets was emphasised. Some tenants had lost the use of their airing cupboard to make way for a boiler and it was important to be sensitive to these issues and consider whether there were any alternatives. However, overall the projects were welcomed and, given that mains gas was not available in Badenoch and Strathspey, they were one of the main ways to stop tenants from descending into fuel poverty. The importance of obtaining tenants' views was emphasised and, the Area Community Services Manager having confirmed that a tenants' survey would be undertaken, it was requested that this go back to the first installation; and

- thanks were expressed regarding the inclusion of three outstanding kitchen upgrades in Cromdale in the capital programme.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the status of current Capital projects contained in the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Area priorities for additional discretionary Capital spend in 2015/16.

8. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 18 March 2015, as approved by the Council on 14 May 2015.

9. 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.

10. Nairn Common Good – Former Marine Road Public Conveniences, Nairn Maoin Math Choitcheann Inbhir Narann – Goireasan Poblach Seann Rathad na Mara, Inbhir Narann

There had been circulated to Members only joint Report No NBS/13/15 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure and the Inverness City Manager in relation to the former Marine Road toilet block, Nairn.

The Committee **AGREED** the recommendations.

The meeting concluded at 11.20 am.