

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held the Caithness House, Market Place, Wick, on Wednesday, 13 January 2016 at 10.00am

Present:

Mr D Bremner	Mr W MacKay
Mr B Fernie	Mr M Reiss
Mrs G Coghill	Mr J Rosie
Mr N Macdonald	Ms G Ross
Mr D Mackay	Mr R Saxon

Officials in attendance:

Mrs C McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform, Chief Executive's Office (by video conference)

Mr D Sutherland, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office

Mr A Bryce, Roads Safety and Safer Routes to School Officer, Community Services (by video conference)

Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service

Also in Attendance:

Item 7: Chief Inspector I MacLelland, Police Scotland

Item 7: Area Inspector N Clasper, Police Scotland

Item 7: Detective Sergeant D Smith, Police Scotland

The Ward Manager took the Chair pending the appointment of the Chair of the Caithness Committee at item 3 below.

**1. Apologies for Absence
Liesgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

Item 10: Mr R Saxon (non-financial)

**3. Appointment of Chair of Caithness Committee
Suidheachadh de Chathraiche de Chomataidh Ghallaibh**

The Ward Manager invited nominations for the Chair of the Committee.

Mr D Mackay seconded by Mr J Rosie moved that Mrs G Coghill be appointed Chair of the Committee.

On there being no other nominations, Mrs G Coghill was duly appointed as Chair of the Caithness Committee.

4. Appointment of Vice Chair of Caithness Committee
Suidheachadh de dh'lar-chathraiche de Chomataidh Ghallaibh

The Chair then invited nominations for the post of Vice Chair of the Caithness Committee.

Mr W Mackay seconded by Mr D Bremner moved that Mr D Mackay be appointed as Vice Chair of the Committee.

On their being no other nominations, Mr D Mackay was duly appointed as Vice Chair of the Caithness Committee.

5. Localism Action Plan Update
Plana Gnìomh Ionadaileachd

There had been circulated Report CC/01/16 dated 23 December 2015 by the Head of Policy and Reform which highlighted the new devolved powers for the Committee and the further powers likely to be devolved in 2016. It provided an update of work with partners on local community planning arrangements which Members would be involved in during 2016.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:-

- it was suggested that in terms of the scheme of delegation, the Caithness Committee should be all encompassing with full devolved powers to decide locally the policies that were best for Caithness;
- the implications section of the report be strengthened so there was a presumption that officers required to present reports to the Committee should use video conferencing, unless the Committee specifically requested the attendance of an officer in person or an officer also had other business in the area;
- it was important to focus on skills development for young people, and in particular the creation of more apprenticeships and targeted support to help young people into employment and to remain in the area; it was hoped the Committee would take this forward in partnership as a priority;
- in regard to the above it was important to build good relationships with local colleges and businesses to develop and maximise the economic opportunities arising from the North Sea;
- it was important the opportunities to better promote and develop closer links between Caithness and Orkney be considered as a priority;
- it was suggested that the current scheme of delegation was a work in progress in terms of devolving meaningful powers to the Committee, for example in relation to Community Services budgets, and developing community planning and localism further in the area;
- in regard to the above it was suggested the output of the multi-agency Community Safety Action Team be reported to the Committee and reference was also made to the opportunities to showcase the work of the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership and also to bring in other partnerships such as the Local Access Forum;

- in terms of developing localism further it was important there be flexibility to allow Members to develop a distinctive approach for Caithness in terms of the scheme of delegation;
- concern at the cost implications associated with the new community planning arrangements to be established in Caithness in a climate of public sector funding reductions and therefore the need for further discussions with partners on areas of overlap and the opportunities to share and maximise resources where possible;
- it was important the Committee had a devolved budget which was allocated on a fair and equitable basis; and
- a point in regard to the approach being taken by community planning partners in regard to the localism aspects of the recent legislation which had been introduced.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. new powers devolved to the Committee and the planned further devolution of powers subject to Council approval in March 2016, and that further changes are likely during 2016;
- ii. work underway with partners to establish community planning arrangements for Caithness and that they will be involved further in this area of work in 2016.

6. Webcasting Options Roghainnean Craoladh-lin

There had been circulated Report No. CC/02/16 by the Director of Finance which sought a decision on whether the Caithness Committee meetings should be webcasted and, if so, the funding source/s of the additional costs that webcasting would incur.

During discussion, Members raised the following comments:-

- it was suggested that meetings of the Caithness Committee should not be webcast due to the costs involved at a time when the Council faced significant budget pressures and had to make extremely difficult decisions in regard to service provision;
- that notwithstanding budget pressures the meetings should not be webcast due to the low number of live viewers for the previous Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee as detailed in the report;
- it was suggested that adequate coverage of the meeting would be provided through the minutes of the Committee which would be available for public viewing on the Council's website and also through press coverage of the meeting; members of the public would also attend the meeting for any items of significance and interest to them;
- it was suggested that it would be a retrograde step not to webcast meetings and that webcasting was affordable on the basis that it required only a small contribution from each ward discretionary budget;
- it was suggested that as a compromise the webcast could be recorded and streamed on the Council's website after the meeting, if that would achieve a saving;
- that a correction be made to the appendix 2 of the report to clarify that video conference facilities were available both at Caithness House, Market

Place and the Town Hall, Wick, with the latter being the preferred venue for meetings;

- it was suggested that an alternative option would be for the meeting to be recorded via a single fixed camera and thereafter uploaded to the Council's website on the basis this would not require any degree of technical capability or staff time and therefore would be a cheaper option; it was confirmed that a briefing for Members on the feasibility of this option would be arranged; and
- Members should be mindful that if the Committee agreed to proceed with some form of recording the costs per ward may increase as a result of potential changes in wards by the Boundary Commission.

Thereafter, the Mr R Saxon seconded by Mr N Macdonald **MOVED** that meetings of the Committee continue to be webcast and that the options for doing so be further investigated.

Mr B Fernie seconded by Mr J Rosie moved as an **AMENDMENT** not to webcast meetings of the Caithness Committee due to the low numbers viewing the previous Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee and the financial cost associated with webcasting.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 2 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 8 votes, and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the motion: Mr N Macdonald; Mr R Saxon

For the amendment: Mr D Bremner; Mr B Fernie; Mrs G Coghill; Mr D Mackay; Mr W Mackay; Mr M Reiss; Mr J Rosie; Ms G Ross.

Decision

The Committee **AGREED** not to webcast meetings of the Caithness Committee due to the low numbers viewing the previous Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee and the financial cost associated with webcasting.

Thereafter, and following further discussion the Committee **AGREED** that a briefing for Members be arranged on the feasibility of meetings being recorded by a single fixed camera and thereafter for this recording to be uploaded to the Council's website.

7. Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets Update

Fios Às Ùr air Rothaireachd, Coiseachd is Sràidean nas Sàbhailte

There had been circulated Report No CC/04/16 dated 18 December 2015 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which invited Members to approve the projects delivered through the Scottish Government funding for Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets (CCWS) for the Caithness Committee, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report which related to a project to install cycle storage at Dunbeath Primary School at a cost of £9005.

During discussion, Members raised the following comments:-

- advice was sought and received on how those schools in Caithness which may not have storage space for bicycles should approach applying for funding for safer routes to schools projects;
- clarification was sought on the Road Safety Unit's involvement with planning officials in regard to the layout of new housing developments to existing towns and villages; in this regard concern was expressed that the concept of 'shared space' was being favoured in respect of new developments where there was a mix of cars and pedestrians which it was suggested raised concerns in terms of road safety;
- an update was sought on progress with a project at Mount Pleasant Road, Thurso on which Ward Members had recently been consulted; the Road Safety Officer confirmed the interim solution presented to Members to improve safety was to proceed, and it was hoped to progress the works in the current financial year; in the meantime work to identify and agree on a long term solution would continue, it being noted that the preferred option to upgrade to a lights controlled crossing had not met the relevant crossing assessment matrix requirements;
- in regard to the above there were real concerns regarding road safety at Mount Pleasant Primary School arising from the persistent problem of speeding vehicles on the main road outside the School and therefore and in accordance with the new localism agenda any decision on the best scheme going forward should be taken at a local level, irrespective if it met the matrix requirements;
- the opportunities for Members to be more proactive in assisting schools to overcome the challenges they experienced in relation to developing and submitting a travel plan;
- a point in regard to the potential for additional funding to be obtained through Sustrans for safer routes to schools and community projects in Caithness;
- it was noted that a team within the Development and Infrastructure Service was currently looking at larger community projects for shared cycling and walking routes and that the Road Safety Officer would provide the Ward Manager with further information on what was planned in the Caithness area for circulation to Members;
- the potential to introduce zoned areas around schools, whereby vehicles were not permitted for a period in the mornings and afternoons, noting that successful experiments in this regard had been carried out in other areas of Scotland;
- concern that parents required to be more reassured that it was safe for their children to walk or cycle to school; in this regard there was a need to introduce more speed limits on routes to schools and in conjunction with Police Scotland for more action to be taken to enforce existing speed limits; and
- the opportunities for the underspend on the Carbon CLEVER Capital Fund to be allocated to road safety schemes to encourage walking and cycling to schools, and thereby also reducing carbon emissions.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the CWSS/SRTS projects detailed in Appendix 1; and
- ii. **NOTED** that the Road Safety Unit will continue to work with schools to develop further SRTS Projects for future years.

8. Police – Area Performance Summary

Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No CC/03/16 dated 5 January 2016 by the North Highland Area Commander which provided a local summary update to Committee Members on progress with reference to the local priorities within the Highland 2014-2017 Policing Plan.

An update was also provided on Safer Caithness which it was reported was a new pilot initiative, based on a similar project in Inverness and tailored to address public and private space issues in communities. The initiative involved a partnership based approach which combined local resources to deliver better outcomes and value for money.

In discussion, Members welcomed the initiative and that the focus of the Team was on prevention and early intervention with the recognition that tackling low level antisocial behaviour could reduce the number of such incidents which could often escalate into more serious cases.

During further discussion, Members raised the following comments:-

- the Driving Ambitions project be welcomed and it was suggested there was an opportunity for a good news story in regard to the lack of young people who had been through the scheme involved in serious road traffic accidents;
- concern was expressed at the increase in the figures for road safety in respect of drink/drugs driving detections and also detections for speeding, seatbelt and mobile phone offences;
- in regard to the above a contrary view was expressed that Police Scotland should be commended on detecting more of these crimes and it was suggested the figures reflected the benefits of the additional resources which been invested in increasing the number of road police officers in the North Division;
- a point in regard to the potential for more of the additional road police officers which had been deployed to be stationed in Caithness;
- that while Police Scotland relied on the support of communities in supplying them with information to disrupt the supply of drugs, it was suggested that members of the public may not report information to the Police for fear of repercussions from those involved in these activities;
- concern that alcohol misuse was common thread running through the three priorities of road safety, alcohol and drug abuse/misuse and antisocial behaviour;
- the mechanisms by which more specific information could be provided in regard to where black ice was located on roads in Caithness and how road conditions in general could be better communicated to the travelling public, for example through social media;
- that the reduction in the figures for vandalism in each of the Caithness wards be welcomed;
- an assurance was sought that the Police continued to exercise their powers at an early stage when necessary in dealing with antisocial behaviour caused by noise disturbance;
- discussion around the potential for a partnership approach to be taken for example through Safer Caithness to move a vulnerable householder such as a drug user out of a property when it had been targeted and vandalised by suppliers;

- the reduction in the figures for common assault in Thurso and the increased willingness of the public to report domestic assaults be welcomed; and
- that in considering the Council's budget for 2016/17, it was important to minimise the impact on the preventative work being carried out in conjunction with Police Scotland in relation to community safety; this was on the basis the preventative work saved the Council money in the long term and it was important not to undermine the good partnership work that currently existed.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the progress report and updates in relation to the 3 Priorities; Road Safety, Alcohol and Drug Abuse/Misuse and Antisocial Behaviour.

9. Participatory Budgeting- Caithness Buidseat Compàirteachaidh – Gallaibh

There had been circulated Report No CC/05/16 dated 29 December 2015 by the Head of Policy and Reform which sought to review the recent participatory budgeting event held in Wick and agree the way forward for future events.

In presenting the report the Ward Manager confirmed that match funding of £20,000 from the Scottish Government was available for future events in Caithness in 2016.

In discussion, Members welcomed the success of the experimental event held on Saturday 21 November 2015 in the Pulteney Centre, Wick noting that it had been extremely well organised and attended, and that the feedback from participants had been overwhelmingly positive with constructive comments having been received. Members also agreed to proceed with future participatory budgeting events, it being suggested that these be held in May and October 2016.

During further discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- It was suggested that the simplicity of the application process had contributed to the success of the event on the basis that groups felt comfortable and confident in applying for funding;
- the participation of a range of groups had helped to bring communities across Caithness together and had highlighted the level of volunteering and community spirit which existed in Caithness;
- it was important going forward that the event be handed over to communities as far as possible so that it was considered an inclusive community event rather than a Council event;
- to welcome the match funding received from the Scottish Government;
- it was suggested that those groups which had not been successful in securing funding at the first event be encouraged to reapply;
- in response to the feedback received it was important that future events be held at different locations around Caithness to encourage communities across the area to participate in these events;
- it was suggested that consideration be given to the potential for organising an online participatory budgeting event in the future;
- it was important to closely monitor the events in 2016 to ensure they maintained their impetus and were sustainable going forward; and

- it was important that in agreeing the frequency and the overall level of funding to be allocated to future events that the Committee then remit it to the Steering Group to take forward the detail of the arrangements for the events in 2016.

Further discussion then followed on the level of funding to be allocated for the events in 2016 and Members heard from the Ward Manager in regard to the criteria which applied to the use of the available Scottish Government funding. Thereafter it was suggested that a total sum of £60k be allocated to be split equally between the two events based on an allocation of £40k from the Ward Discretionary Budget 2015/16 and funding of £20k received from the Scottish Government.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- to proceed with future participatory budgeting events on the basis that two events be held in 2016, in May and October;
- that a total sum of £60k be allocated for participatory budgeting in Caithness in 2016 to be split equally between the two events based on an allocation of £40k from the Ward Discretionary Budget 2015/16 and funding of £20k received from the Scottish Government;
- that future events should be held at different locations around Caithness; and
- that it be remitted to the Steering Group to take forward the detail of the arrangements for the events in 2016.

10. Twinning – Wick- Klaksvik Baile Càirdeis – Inbhir Ùige – Klaksvik

Declaration of Interest – Mr R Saxon declared a non-financial interest in this item as a member of the Thurso-Brilon Town Twinning Committee, 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 him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CC/06/16 dated 29 December 2015 by the Head of Policy and Reform which sought to consider the current twinning status between the towns of Wick in Caithness and the town of Klaksvik in the Faroe Isles.

The report advised that the local Members for Ward 3: Wick had been approached by a number of their constituents and had also received representations from individuals outwith the area raising concerns regarding the annual practice of "grindadráp" in the Faroe Isles which involved the culling of whales. The three local Members had written to the mayor of Klaksvik voicing their opposition to this practice, which it was explained was non-commercial and organized on a community level on the basis they did not consider that the practice was acceptable and accordingly wished to discontinue the twinning arrangements under the current circumstances.

Thereafter, an update to the report was provided to the meeting during which it was reported that the Mayor of Klaksvik had offered to meet with Members to have discussions and an exchange views on the matter.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was suggested that a decision on this matter be deferred until talks could be held between Caithness Members and the Mayor of Klaksvik regarding shared values and possible conflicts in relation to the twinning link;
- while the Mayor should be thanked for his invitation to Members to visit the Faroe Isles, given the significant budget reductions faced by the Council that any discussions should be held in Caithness or by video link;
- the decision to write to the Mayor had been taken jointly and with equal weight by the three Wick Members following receipt of a significant amount of representations received through written correspondence, social media and video footage from constituents and parties outwith the area, details of which were provided;
- in regard to the above and given the volume and nature of the representations and footage received, the Wick Members had taken the collective view it was not appropriate for Wick to be associated with what they considered to be an unacceptable practice;
- an apology for the fact that Wick Community Council had not been consulted prior to the decision to write to the Mayor; it was noted that on subsequently considering and taking a vote on the matter there had been an equal split of views within the Community Council in regard to the future of the twinning link;
- it was suggested that pending discussions with the Mayor of Klaksvik on shared values and potential conflicts that the twinning link be suspended meantime;
- concern was expressed that the Wick Members had had no authority to seek to discontinue the twinning link and overturn a decision taken by the former Caithness District Council in 1995 to enter into a twinning arrangement with Klaksvik; this should have been a Council decision involving all of the Caithness Members on the basis the twinning arrangement impacted on the whole of the area;
- concern in regard to the process followed on this matter and advice given and that this should be subject to further investigation including by the Standards Commission;
- concern at the economic impact any dissolution of the twinning link may have on the area, reference being made to the links which existed between the fishing industry in the Faroe Isles and the port at Scrabster;
- concern that the action taken may have a detrimental impact on the future of the twinning arrangement between Thurso and Brilon which pre-dated the arrangement between Wick and Klaksvik;
- that it was not for Members to dictate to the population of the Faroe Islands in regard to the "grindadráp" on the basis this was part of their culture and history;
- that the advice the Wick Members had received from officials was that the action they had taken was competent on the clear understanding that any decision on the future twinning arrangement would require to be taken by the relevant Area Committee;
- a report on the future of the twinning arrangement was due to have been considered by the Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee in September 2015 but that the item had been withdrawn on the basis that it had been considered the matter would be better dealt with solely by Caithness Members at the new Caithness Committee as part of its remit under the Scheme of Delegation;

- it was suggested that to allow Members to make an informed decision which was in the best interests of the whole of Caithness there was a need to seek further information in regard to the "grindadráp and whether the practice was essentially a cultural event or also an essential source of food and materials for the islanders and also to understand the full impact in terms of the conservation and management of the whale population;
- it was important to engage in dialogue with the Mayor in an amicable manner and in a spirit of friendship on the potential to re-energise and explore further the benefits twinning could bring to both areas and also possible conflicts;
- in regard to the above the opportunity should also be taken to express concern that this was a part of the Faroese culture which Members disagreed with and to express the hope the islanders would move away from this practice;
- it was suggested that there were sporting practices taking place in Scotland which involved the culling of animals which were unacceptable and needed to be reviewed; and
- queries in regard to the timeline in regard to the official advice given in regard to this matter and the copies of correspondence being made available to all Members, and around the decision taken to withdraw a report on this item from the agenda of the Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee in September 2015; the Ward Manager provided further clarity in this regard.

Following further discussion, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to defer a decision until talks can be held between Caithness Councillors and the Mayor of Klaksvik regarding shared values and possible conflicts and to then make the decision to keep or serve the twinning link; and
- ii. that in the meantime the twinning arrangement remain in place.

The meeting ended at 1.15pm.
