

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held in Talla nan Ros, King Street, Kingussie on Tuesday 23 February 2016 at 10.30 am

Present:

Ms J Douglas
Mr D Fallows

Mr B Lobban
Mr G Rimell

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager
Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey
Ms C McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform, Chief Executive's Office
Mr A Gunn, Head of Revenues and Business Support, Finance Service
Mr C Kemp, Area Community Services Manager, Community Services
Mr S Callan, Assistant Area Community Services Manager, Community Services
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service
Miss J Green, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Also in attendance:

Temporary Chief Inspector B Mackay, South Highland Area Commander, Police Scotland
Sergeant A Courts, Police Scotland

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

Business

1. Appointment of Chair Suidheachadh de Chathraiche

Having been nominated by Mr D Fallows and seconded by Mr G Rimell, the Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr B Lobban as Chair.

Mr Lobban then took the Chair.

2. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

3. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 6 – Ms J Douglas (non-financial)

4. Localism Action Plan Update Plana Gnìomh Ionadaileachd

There had been circulated Report BSAC/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 on work with partners on local community planning arrangements which Members would be involved in during 2016.

In response to a question, the Head of Policy and Reform explained that, at Highland level, the pace of support for local community planning had not been what had been hoped. However, there was a meeting of the Community Planning Board on 18 March 2016 at which partners would be asked to agree that local lead officers start engaging in the necessary conversations. She undertook to work with the Inverness City Area Manager and the Ward Manager with a view to starting and supporting those conversations.

During further discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the offer of support was welcomed and it was suggested that a meeting of local partners be arranged following the Community Planning Board on 18 March with a view to gaining some momentum. Joined-up working at a local level made sense and was what the local community wanted. The District Partnership, currently shared with Nairn and Ardersier, was in limbo and anything that could be done to increase the pace of change would be helpful;
- the redesign of health services in the area and the provision of a new hospital in Aviemore represented an opportunity to develop strong partnership links;
- it was important that the Area Committee became a body that accomplished something and that future agendas included more substantial items; and
- it was suggested that the recommendation at paragraph 6.1 of the report be amended to reflect that further changes were “necessary” rather than “likely”.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the new powers devolved to the Committee, the planned further devolution of powers, subject to Council approval in March 2016, and that further changes were necessary during 2016;
- ii. **NOTED** that further work was required with partners to develop community planning arrangements for Badenoch and Strathspey and that they would be involved in this further in 2016-17; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the Head of Policy and Reform liaise with the Inverness City Area Manager and the Ward Manager with a view to progressing community planning arrangements in Badenoch and Strathspey and that a meeting of local partners be arranged following the Community Planning Board on 18 March 2016.

5. Local Committees – Webcasting Comataidhean Ionadail – Craoladh-lìn

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/02/16 dated 1 February 2016 by the Director of Finance which sought a decision on whether Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee meetings should be webcasted and, if so, the funding source(s) of the additional costs that webcasting would incur.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Highland was a large geographical area and webcasting was of real benefit at Strategic Committees as many people were not able to be present. However, it was difficult to justify the expense and complexity of webcasting Local Committees as they dealt with local issues and were much easier for people to attend;
- support was expressed for holding meetings of the Area Committee in communities throughout the Badenoch and Strathspey Area and webcasting reduced the ability and flexibility to do so;
- the cost of providing webcasting divided by the number of viewers did not represent value for money;
- the Area Committee had a good communication channel through the local paper, which was widely read; and
- it was important to publicise the Area Committee as widely as possible to encourage public participation.

Members having reiterated their aspiration to take the Area Committee to communities throughout Badenoch and Strathspey, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the current service demand for webcasting;
- ii. **AGREED** that meetings of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee should not be webcasted;
- iii. **AGREED** that meetings of the Area Committee should be publicised as widely as practically possible to encourage public participation; and
- iv. **AGREED** that consideration be given to meetings of the Area Committee taking place in communities throughout the Badenoch and Strathspey Area.

6. Police – Area Performance Summary

Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

Declaration of Interest: Ms J Douglas declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of Inverness Women’s Aid but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/03/16 dated 11 February 2016 by the South Highland Area Commander which provided a local summary update on progress with reference to the local priorities within the Highland 2014-2017 Policing Plan.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Badenoch and Strathspey was fortunate to have dedicated Police Officers who shared Members’ goal of making communities safer and thanks were expressed to both Police and Council staff for their help and efficiency during the recent flood events;
- information was sought on current staffing levels in Badenoch and Strathspey and the arrangements for providing information to Community Councils. It was appreciated that it was not possible to have a Police Officer present at every Community Council meeting. In relation to the reports provided to Community

Councils, the format had been criticised and a more relevant local report would be preferable. It was confirmed that contact details for Community Council Secretaries could be provided to the South Highland Area Commander;

- concern was expressed regarding the significant increase in breach of the peace/ threatening and abusive behaviour and Members questioned the reasons behind it;
- the use of speed guns, particularly at Kincaig and Newtonmore Primary School, was welcomed;
- the appointment of a new Chief Constable and of Andrew Cowie, who had previously been a Sergeant in Aviemore, to the post Assistant Chief Constable with responsibility for the North Area was welcomed;
- concern was expressed in relation to proposals to cut funding to Women's Aid; and
- information was requested on the difference between vandalism and malicious mischief.

The South Highland Area Commander having responded to the issues raised, the Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the progress report and updates in relation to the three Priorities - Road Safety; Antisocial Behaviour; and Dishonesty; and
- ii. **AGREED** that contact details for Community Council Secretaries be provided to the South Highland Area Commander.

7. Housing Performance Report – 1 April to 31 December 2015 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean gu 30 Dùbhlachd 2015

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/04/16 dated 10 February 2010 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 up to 31 December 2015.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed regarding the impact of Welfare Reform on rent arrears and it was requested that information in that regard be included in the next Housing Performance Report;
- the fact that rent arrears had risen as a consequence of not having full Housing Management Officer coverage in Badenoch and Strathspey was a powerful argument for filling the staffing gap and an assurance was sought, and provided, that this would be expedited;
- in relation to Table 8 - Key Outcomes of Closed Cases, the fact that only one of eight Homeless applications in Quarter 3 had led to the applicant being rehoused appeared to indicate there was a shortage of private rented accommodation as well as Council properties;
- Members commended staff for the significant reduction in the length of time taken to complete emergency repairs and it was hoped the downward trajectory would continue;
- tenants had expressed frustration regarding contractors calling to carry out repairs when they were not available and information was sought on what steps were taken to ensure that contractors were flexible and made as much effort as possible to call/return at a suitable time. It was suggested that information on

failed appointments, by both contractors and tenants, be included in the next Housing Performance Report;

- it was necessary to be sensitive to the fact that tenants in rent arrears did not have the option of moving to a smaller more affordable property; and
- biomass heating systems were unpopular with tenants, broke down regularly and took an unacceptable length of time to repair, leaving people without heating for lengthy periods or with temporary electric oil heaters. If they were to continue to be installed, it was essential to address the issues and ensure they were installed on a similar basis in each property. In addition, a number of tenants were unhappy with the manner in which the installation process had been carried out.

In relation to biomass heating systems, the Area Community Services Manager explained that a review of the installation programme would be carried out and the information made available to Members. The surveys to date indicated an 80% satisfaction rate. However, Members commented that that meant 20% of tenants were dissatisfied which was a significant proportion.

It was further explained that new installations were subject to a contractual warranty period and information on response times for repairs during the warranty period could be made available.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2015; and
- ii. **AGREED** that, so far as practicable, the next Housing Performance Report provide information on the impact of Welfare Reform on rent arrears and the number of failed housing repair appointments by both contractors and tenants.

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

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/05/16 dated 10 February 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on the status of the Housing Revenue Account Capital Projects for 2015/16 and 2016/17 within the Badenoch and Strathspey Area.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was understood that a large number of tenants had opted out of having a new heating system installed and it was requested that information on the numbers in Badenoch and Strathspey be circulated to Members of the Committee; and
- information was sought and provided on the reasons for the underspend on the Equipment and Adaptations budget and what steps were taken to ensure that people were aware that funding was available and that it was spent locally. Discussion took place regarding the capacity of Occupational Therapists to carry out assessments and it was suggested that this be explored at the District Partnership to establish current waiting times.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the current position of the Capital projects for 2015/16 and 2016/17;
and
- ii. **AGREED** that information on the number of tenants that had opted out of having a new heating system installed be circulated to Members of the Committee.

The meeting concluded at 11.35 am.