

The Highland Council

Minute of Meeting of the **Ross and Cromarty Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on Wednesday 27 April 2016 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mrs I McCallum
Mrs B Campbell	Mrs M Paterson
Dr I Cockburn	Mr A Rhind
Mr C Fraser	Mrs F Robertson
Mr R Greene	Dr A Sinclair
Mr G MacKenzie	Ms M Smith
Mrs A MacLean	Mr J Stone

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Dr R Bain, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Mr G Hamilton, Head of Environment and Development, Development and Infrastructure Service
Ms J Scotson, Business Change Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Mr G MacKenzie, Assistant Area Manager (Ross and Cromarty), Community Services
Mr J Holden, Interim Housing Manager (North), Community Services
Mr A Puls, Archaeologist, Development and Infrastructure Service
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Corporate Development Service

Also in Attendance:

Mr D Wilkie, Group Manager (Highland West), Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr R Dibble, Station Manager (Ross and Cromarty), Scottish Fire and Rescue 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 M Paterson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr D Alston, Mr M Finlayson, Mr A MacKinnon and Mrs C Wilson.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no Declarations of Interest.

8. Tain Common Good Fund – Tain Mussels Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich – Feusgain Bhaile Dhubhthaich

In terms of Standing Order 18, the Committee **AGREED** that agenda item 8 be considered at this juncture.

There had been circulated joint Report No RC/017/16 dated 15 April 2016 by the Head of Development and Infrastructure and the Director of Finance concerning the recent performance of the Tain Common Good mussel fishery and options for the future.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- confirmation was sought, and received, that Tain Community Council had been consulted on the options. However, there were still issues which needed to be resolved;
- Tain Mussels had generated a considerable amount of money for the Common Good in the past and this had funded many projects benefiting Tain;
- during the 1980s the mussel fishery had been leased to local operators. This had worked well and it was hoped this could happen again. If operators from the south took it over it was feared they would use dredging methods, thus damaging the sea bed;
- the remaining assets were the boat and licence and these could be used again in there was local interest to take the fishery on. The Local Members were therefore keen that the option to lease the fishery but to retain the boat (and licence) in the Council's Lochinver Harbour was considered. Should no local interest be forthcoming in the next two years the situation could then be reviewed;
- it had been suggested that the costs of moving the boat to Lochinver for storage was around £8k and this was queried;
- all costs associated with the fishery needed to be cancelled out as it was accepted that it was unsustainable for it to continue to lose money from the Common Good;
- it was acknowledged that part of the problem was that farmed mussels were cleaner and had a higher meat yield. Rotation of the mussel beds would help to improve quality;
- it was vital that responsibility for the Tain Mussel Fishery was allocated to an appropriate officer;
- if the boat was maintained there were potential costs involved in terms of repairs and improvement costs. However, the estimated £30k was an approximation as this would not be known for sure until it was dry docked. This expenditure could be deferred until it was established if there was local interest;
- Members, as Trustees, had a responsibility to protect the interests of the Common Good and therefore, whichever option was adopted, it was essential that it was viable;
- an explanation was sought, and received, as to the comparisons between the graphs depicting the volume of mussels landed and the contributions the fishery had made to the Common Good Fund; and
- if the mussel fishery operation was to cease assurances were given that all Council property would be removed. In this connection it was pointed out that the Council had leased the pier and the building on the site and it was therefore not in the Council's ownership.

* Thereafter the Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the following be agreed:-

- i. the current operation be ceased in favour of a fishery leased to 3rd party operators;
- ii. the fishing boat, licence and ancillary equipment be kept in Lochinver until local interest was gauged, with the position being reviewed in 2 years; and
- iii. a programme of sampling and stock assessment be agreed for implementation during 2016/17 and allowance made for this work within the Common Good Budget annually.

At this juncture warm tribute was made to Mr Hamilton who was about to leave the Council's Service. Appreciation was expressed for his hard work in regard not only to the Tain Mussels but also to the wider Highland area. He had carried out his duties with great diligence and he was wished well for the future

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Area Committee Performance Report for 2015-16 Aithisg Coileanaidh Comataidh Sgireil Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson 2015-16

There had been circulated Report No RC/013/16 dated 4 April 2016 by the Local Senior Officer for Fire and Rescue providing an update to Committee Members on the progress against the priorities outlined in the Area Committee Plan for Ross and Cromarty 2015-2016. The report also contained previously agreed information and performance as requested by Committee Members. A copy of the Area Performance Report was circulated separately as Booklet A.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- appreciation was expressed to the local employers who supported crew members enabling them to leave their primary employment;
- the ongoing home fire safety visits were commended. These visits often highlighted risks that householders were unaware of;
- the 1st appliance availability in Dingwall, at 100%, was praised; and
- there was interest in Balintore for their Retained Unit to be expanded to cover other incidents such as house fires. It was hoped to hold a public meeting soon to explore this in more detail and the Group Manager and/or the Station Manager were invited to attend.

The Committee scrutinised the Area Performance Report.

4. Digital Inclusion Com-pàirteachadh Didseatach

A presentation was given by Jenny Scotson, Business Change Manager on Digital First and Digital Highland projects. In particular, she highlighted the benefits which allowed customers access to Council Services anytime, anywhere on any device. To date, nearly 11k customers had signed up to "myaccount" to use this facility and this generated savings not only in staff time but also improvements to process times. 87 forms were now available online and the range of activities was to be collated into a poster which would be displayed as Service Points etc. To help customers to use the system a variety of training and courses were available, the details of those taking place in Ross and Cromarty being provided to Members, and Members were encouraged to promote these in their local community.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- constituents were often encouraged to contact their Local Councillor through the Council's website as this generated a reference number and a receipt;
- some potential customers had security concerns about using online facilities and it was important they knew precisely how the information they provided was used;
- the 4 buttons on the Council's Home webpage (Pay, Report, Request, Myaccount) had been a big improvement;
- Digital Skills Courses could be promoted through Community Councils;
- information was requested as to where the training course in Lochcarron had been held and what the uptake had been; and
- details were sought, and received, as to what percentage of the Councils' customer base used the "Myaccount" facility.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Strathpeffer Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan Consultation Sgìre Glèidhteachais Srath Pheofhair

There had been circulated Report No RC/014/16 dated 27 April 2016 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure setting out the Strathpeffer Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Consultation Draft (circulated separately as Booklet B).

Strathpeffer was designated a Conservation Area in 1974 and no formal re-assessment had been undertaken since, hence the production of the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan Consultation Draft before Members. Local Members had had the benefit of considering the Draft at their Ward Business Meeting and there would be others who would wish to contribute. As many Groups as possible should be involved in the consultation and assurances were sought that it would be well advertised. Strathpeffer was unique and it was important that this was preserved.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Strathpeffer Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Consultation Draft (Booklet B) for public consultation.

6. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2015 Aithisg Dèanadais Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2015 gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2015

There had been circulated Report No RC/015/16 dated 24 March 2016 by the Director of Community Services providing Members with information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 December 2015.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- an explanation was sought, and received, as to the possible reasons for the 11 long term voids in Ross and Cromarty. In particular, details were requested about the location of those in the Cromarty Firth Ward;
- the reasons for the long re-let time in the Tain and Easter Ross Ward were explored. In many incidents properties were of a good standard but applicants were deterred by the environment. A Clean Up Day was scheduled to take place in Tain on 16 May and which the Director of Community Services would attend and it was hoped that this would go some way to address this;

- the local staff had a key role to play and the Tenant Participation Officer in Tain and Easter Ross was, in particular, commended. There was considerable engagement with residents and the Officer had been instrumental in organising the Clean Up Day;
- it was suggested that the difficulties in meeting repair targets could partly be attributed to the difficulties some contractors had with the Council's Procurement process. In addition, there were fewer contractors on the West coast who were immediately available to carry out repairs;
- partnership working with local housing associations in rural areas could help address the delay with repairs. In addition there was potential for synergy with other Council Services;
- confirmation was sought that the 6 properties needing renovation were included in the Capital Programme;
- confirmation was sought that those tenants with rent arrears were directed to other agencies who could assist them such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Income Maximisation. In addition, information was sought, and received, as to the process leading up to Court action and eviction; and
- appreciation was expressed to the Senior Maintenance Officer whose action had resolved a tenant dispute on the Black Isle from escalating.

The Committee scrutinised the information provided on housing performance in the period up to 31 December 2015.

7. Ross and Cromarty Local Road Maintenance Programmes Prògraman Càradh Rathaidean Ionadail Rois agus Chromba

There had been circulated Report No RC/016/16 dated 13 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services providing Members with the proposed Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges for the Ross and Cromarty Area for 2016/17. In addition to the proposed Programme, Members were informed of amendments in relation to Ward 9 (Dingwall and Seaforth) in regard to the structural repairs needed to the road from the 30mph sign to the Mineral Bridge, Dingwall and to the Balvraid Road, nr Muir of Ord.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was felt that the Programme needed further consideration and disappointment was expressed that Ward Business Meeting had not had the opportunity to consider it, as had happened in previous years. Local Members were best placed to advise of where repairs were needed, Bundaloch nr Dornie being cited as an example. In this regard, Local Members sought an opportunity to discuss priorities with officers;
- the surface dressing programme needed to be completed in May while the structural overlay/inlay works could take place later. Accordingly, there would be an opportunity for Members to further consider the Programme at its next meeting;
- confirmation was received that other stretches of road would also receive attention;
- the Road Condition Survey was carried out every year on a percentage of the routes and, accordingly, a Road Condition Survey was now available for nearly every road in Highland. However, the view was expressed that these might not take into account some country roads which had deteriorated over the past year. In this regard, Members were reminded that ordinary maintenance, such as potholes, was ongoing;

- Members were encouraged to inform officers of stretches of roads where repairs were needed, both in their own Wards and elsewhere. Some Members already did this with the aim of assisting officers, not as criticism;
- there were no Bridge Maintenance proposals for Ward 9 and 10 and the officer undertook to confirm that this was because there were no repairs required in those Wards;
- when gullies were emptied it was important that blockages in the pipe work were also cleared;
- confirmation was sought, and received, that short stretches of machine patching would continue. It was not possible at this stage however to provide a timescale but attendance at Ward Business Meeting would enable Community Council feedback to be reported;
- the proposed programme was backed up with good survey work;
- the deterioration of road surfaces had taken place over a period of time and had been affected by heavy timber lorries and the lack of maintenance as a result of Roads budgets being eroded. Additional resources would be necessary to drive the programme forward; and
- it was suggested that when carrying out machine patching it be considered as capital expenditure rather than revenue. However, in response it was explained that there were restrictions on what capital money could be used for.

The Committee **APPROVED** the amended Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges for the Ross and Cromarty Area for 2016/17 in the knowledge that other projects might still come forward.

8. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Ross and Cromarty Committee held on 3 February 2016 which had been approved by the Council on 10 March 2016.

AOCB

It was suggested that future agendas be structured in such a way to allow officers to return to their duties as soon as possible. Enhanced video conferencing facilities would also assist in maximising best use of officer time.

The meeting ended at 12.40 pm.