

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Community Services Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 28 April 2016 at 10.30am.

Present:

Dr D Alston	Mr A Henderson
Mr R Balfour	Mr D Kerr
Mrs J Barclay	Mrs B McAllister
Mr A Baxter	Mrs L MacDonald
Mr B Clark	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs G Coghill	Mr K MacLeod
Mr N Donald	Mr H Morrison
Mr G Farlow	Mr G Phillips
Mr A Graham	Mr A Rhind
Mr R Greene	Mrs J Slater

Non-Members also present:

Miss J Campbell	Mr D Millar
Mrs M Davidson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr D Fallows	Mrs F Robertson
Mr B Gormley	Mr R Saxon
Mr B Lobban	Dr A Sinclair
Mr D MacKay	Ms M Smith

In attendance:

Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Ms C Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources
Dr C Clark, Head of Environmental and Amenity Services
Mr R Evans, Head of Roads and Transport
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance
Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager
Mr R Pope, Roads and Community Works Manager
Mr J MacLennan, Senior Services Support Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Corporate Development Service
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Services
Miss J Green, Administrative Assistant, 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 Committee.

Mr A Henderson in the Chair

Business

1. **Apologies for Absence** **Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Murphy and Mr J Rosie.

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

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

Mr N Donald declared a non-financial interest in any item which related to grasscutting on the grounds that a close family member was employed by a company that might undertake some work for the Council 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 of such items.

In terms of the general dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, Mr G Farlow and Mr D Kerr declared financial interests in any items which might arise during discussion in regard to Council housing on the grounds of being Council House tenants.

2a. **Urgent Additional Item: Petition for a 30 mph speed restriction in Elphin, Sutherland**

The Committee **NOTED** that, in terms of Standing Order 17, the Chairman had decided that this additional item of business, not specified on the agenda, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency in view of the potential delay in implementing any works.

In this regard, the Director of Community Services explained that a petition had been received in relation to introducing a 30 mph speed restriction in Elphin, Sutherland. Elphin was a scattered township on the A835, 15 miles north of Ullapool. There was currently a 40 mph speed restriction in the village but the community's view was that this was regularly ignored by motorists. The current 40 mph signage was poor and the road markings were faded. Accordingly, the community were seeking:-

- a reduction of the speed limit to 30 mph
- installation of a pavement on one side of the road
- replacement of faded road signs
- restoration of road markings
- installation of countdown markers
- resurfacing of road with low noise surface

Having considered the details surrounding the request, the Committee **AGREED** that officers consider measures to slow traffic travelling through Elphin.

3. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

The following areas of good news were **NOTED**:-

- The cremators at the Kilvean Crematorium (Inverness) were due for replacement following the identification of significant repairs required to the plant and more frequent demands on the service for accommodating larger remains, requiring the openings to be enlarged. The inefficiency of the plant was also an issue, the reliance on expensive electricity required replacing which would also achieve savings both financially and

environmentally. Budgetary approval for £500,000 for replacement of the Cremators was secured in the 2015/16 Capital Programme.

The Project, which started in the Autumn 2015, was due for completion on 24 April. It had been a complex project due to the requirement to keep one of the cremators operational at all times.

As local Member, Mr Graham voiced his support for the project.

- Transport Scotland, BEAR Scotland and the Council were collaborating on research by the Scottish Road Research Board relating to the Council's Sconser Quarry on Skye. Hitherto the aggregates produced had not met the specification requirements for Trunk Roads. A key finding was that Sconser aggregate did meet the in situ skid resistance requirements on "non-event" sections of trunk roads on Skye and should therefore be considered for use on these as part of the design process. A testing protocol was to be developed for approving local aggregate sources for use on trunk roads and this, it was hoped, would yield environmental benefits across the North West as less aggregate would have to be imported from outside the area.
- Environmental Health were doing a lot of extra work in relation to the export of live crabs to enable local companies to export again to China. It was a great result to have the two companies, JPL and Scrabster Seafood, being able to export within one week of the Council receiving the new, and pretty complicated, procedures and certificates. The effort had been appreciated by the local companies and was an excellent demonstration of the work the Council did to support fragile local economies.

4. Proposed Amendments to Service Structure below Head of Service Atharrachaidhean a Thathar a' Moladh do Structar Seirbheis

There had been circulated Report No COM/13/16 dated 15 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services seeking approval to amend the Service Structure below the new four Heads of Service level. The report was to be read in conjunction with the previous report on this subject to Community Service on 4 February 2016.

During discussion, comments were made as follows:-

- detailed information on the posts that had been deleted as a result of voluntary severance was requested, broken down by area and by Service. The Chair referred to Appendix 5 which indicated that this work was still ongoing and the Director said he would check what information was permissible to provide to Members in terms of data protection. He referred to a document that had already been issued to some Members showing interim responsibilities across the new 8 areas and offered to ensure it was distributed to all Members;
- it was explained that there were no financial monitoring reports due to the end of year finances being finalised;
- it was hoped that joint working with other Services would continue, and it was acknowledged that this could be affected by the Council redesign;
- assurance was sought that some management jobs would remain located in Skye;

- information was sought on responsibility for Sconser Quarry, particularly in light of the project being mentioned in the Good News item. It was hoped that some of the profit from the quarry would be re-invested in infrastructure on Skye; and
- a Ward-level flow chart showing names and responsibilities for areas of work would be useful.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the structure below Heads of Service, as outlined in Appendices 1-4 of the report;
- ii. the deletion and creation of posts, as outlined in Appendix 5 of the report; and
- iii. that details of interim measures and which officers were responsible for what areas of Service be provided to Members.

5. Local Statutory Performance Indicators 2014/15 Comharran Coileanaidh Reachdail Ionadail 2014/15

Following the report presented at Highland Council on 10 March 2016 detailing the Local Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) 2014/15, there had been circulated Report No COM/14/16 dated 17 March 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided specific information on Community Services performance indicators.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- information was sought on the remedial measures planned to address increases in average time spent in temporary accommodation from 11 to 16 weeks;
- concern was expressed at the increase in the average time taken to re-let Council homes and it was asked if this was due to upgrades and repairs being undertaken between tenants. It was explained that the choice-based letting system had affected some figures as there were significantly longer void periods in particular areas, notably in Caithness. Issues such as popularity of location were outwith the Council's control and options for such properties would be brought back to a future meeting;
- information having been sought about the electricity prices for street lighting, it was explained that the figures in the report were based on prices in 2014-15, and there remained 3 years of a 4 year project to replace street lighting with LEDS, which were expected to impact positively on electricity usage and cost;
- the Housing Officers were commended for their work;
- it was disappointing that some people were still living in sub-standard housing and this should be addressed;
- more smaller housing units would be helpful;
- collaboration on anti-social cases that had been resolved was praised and it was suggested that residents be encouraged to film or record incidents to provide evidence;
- clarification was sought, and received, that temporary accommodation figures in the report included all types, such as HMOs, B&Bs and scatter flats;
- some tenants had spent several years in temporary accommodation;
- a significant increase in the housing stock was the preferred long term solution;

- concern was expressed about the recent breakdown of traffic lights on Ness Bridge, Inverness, and about reports of a house being largely empty over the winter when it was supposed to have had a tenant occupying it;
- detailed guidance on the make-up of the indicators would be provided to Mr Kerr;
- reference was made to the forthcoming clean-up day at Mansefield Estate, Tain which had been planned in conjunction with residents' groups, and it was hoped that more could be done to address the physical environment of run-down areas which were unpopular;
- it was suggested that unpopular Council homes with long void periods should be sold on the open market. Reference was made to a scheme in Liverpool which had involved unwanted Council homes being sold for a nominal fee but with a contract obliging the property to be brought up to standard by the new owners and not sold within a certain period; and
- residents who requested a transfer should undertake a reasonable level of repair to the property they wished to leave.

The Committee **NOTED** the out-turn of SPIs for 2014/15 and, where relevant, their national benchmark position.

**6. Community Services Performance Report – 1 April to 31 December 2015
Aithisg Coileanaidh nan Seirbheisean Coimhearsnachd - 1 Giblean 2015
gu 31**

There had been circulated Report No COM/15/16 dated 11 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how Community Services performed in relation to performance indicators to 31 December 2015.

During discussion, comments were made as follows:-

- it was clarified there were around 44,000 gullies in Highland and, in response to a request, a breakdown at Ward level would be provided;
- reference was made to the lack of inspections being undertaken of Highland Comfort Scheme (HCS) facilities. Given the number of Highland Council facility inspections that had been unsatisfactory, this was of concern if standards were being replicated. While there was no wish to give further work to staff or to increase the cost of the scheme, some form of closer monitoring was urged, with Community Councils being suggested;
- with only 2 Fixed Penalty Notices having been issued for dog fouling, it was suggested that this required further consideration and that perhaps more covert monitoring of problem areas where fouling was found was required. Another suggestion was for all Council vehicles to be indicated as being possible dog warden vehicles as this could act as a deterrent;
- Members queried whether the financial penalties imposed on grounds and public convenience maintenance service providers as part of their contracts were sufficient to recoup the cost of the administration of the penalties;
- it was suggested that the unpopular properties in Caithness with long void periods could be used as scatter flats for homeless people. However, it was pointed out that relocating homeless people from Inverness or other areas to Caithness could be detrimental given other considerations such as loss of family connections and work opportunities;
- although the average time in temporary accommodation had increased from 11 to 16 weeks, this had occurred during a period when homeless

- presentation had reduced and this anomaly required investigation;
- it was considered unlikely that the target of 60% waste recycling was going to be met, with reference being made to Glasgow City Council also being unlikely to meet the target, even with their less challenging geographic considerations. A strategic waste report was due to be presented to the Committee in August 2016;
- the new glass recycling banks were welcomed and confirmation was sought that the old ones would, where possible, be recycled. Complaints had been received from residents living near to glass recycling banks about late night noise and overspill being left on the ground. It was suggested that stickers should be placed on all new units in the vicinity of residential properties asking that deposits were not made during night time hours or left on the ground when the units were full; and
- information was sought on the use of 'jetpatcher' type vehicles for tackling potholes. Various models had been trialed and a vehicle had been ordered and which would be shared around the Local Committee areas.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on Community Services performance from 1 April to 31 December 2015.

7. Roads Collaboration Programme – Update Co-obrachadh nan Rathaidean a Tuath – Cunntas às Ùr

There had been circulated Report No COM/16/16 dated 13 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided an update on the ongoing development of the Northern Roads Collaboration Forum. Members were asked to note the minutes of the most recent meeting of the Forum including the election of its first Chair and Vice Chair.

During discussion, comments were made as follows:-

- as the Chair of the Committee was also the Chair of the Northern Roads Collaboration Forum, the actions from their recent meeting were highlighted;
- information was sought on whether the sand that was dredged from harbours could be used for other purposes, such as road construction, and issues about spoiling and SEPA involvement were highlighted and discussed;
- consideration could be given to extending collaboration on white lining with Bear Scotland in Ward 6 to include winter maintenance and public conveniences;
- the good working relationship between Bear Scotland, Transport Scotland and the Council was welcomed and the Vice Chair offered to share the programmes of surfacing and other areas of work for the coming year with other Members on request; and
- reference was made to the age profile of the workforce and assurance was sought that adequate plans were in place to mitigate this, especially in relation to roads and traffic management. In response, the Director outlined some of the measures being taken to mitigate the age profile. Members pointed out that the voluntary severance exercise might have altered the age profile as people closer to retirement age were more likely to have left.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. that Cllr Allan Henderson has been elected as the first Chair of the Northern Roads Collaboration Forum and that Cllr David Aitchison of Aberdeenshire Council is elected as Vice Chair; and
- ii. the minute of the 2nd meeting of the Forum on 3 March 2016 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report and, in particular, the actions agreed and reproduced in paragraph 2.4 of the report.

8. Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey 2015 Suirbhidh Staid Càraidh Rathaidean na h-Alba 2015

There had been circulated Report No COM/17/16 dated 15 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services which updated Members on the annual results from the Scottish Road Condition Survey for 2015.

During discussion, comments were made as follows:-

- whilst the results showed that the Council was not well placed, it was also not the worst Local Authority in Scotland;
- it was important to acknowledge the results showed that the Council had consistently failed to invest sufficiently in the road network over several years and it was questioned why, despite the undertaking of projects and allocation of additional capital funding for roads maintenance, the road network was continuing to deteriorate more rapidly than other rural Councils who were facing the same pressures;
- the Northern Roads Collaboration Forum would provide the opportunity to learn how other Councils had improved their road network;
- it was queried whether the change in the Road Condition Indicator was due to the 50% of roads that were surveyed in 2015 being more peat based;
- assurance was sought regarding the extent of the coverage of all unclassified roads during the survey period and it would be helpful to receive routine feedback on this matter;
- people were reliant on the road network and a significant amount of investment was required to modernise it especially where there was an increase in use by articulated lorries from various heavy industries;
- consideration should be given to the appropriate level of funding for the Community Services budget;
- the Scottish Government had a responsibility to the Council and trunk road network;
- there were equality impacts for disabled people who had reported that some roads and footways were trip hazards due to their poor condition;
- in relation to Planning Gain, it would have been more beneficial to have windfarms pay a levy into one single fund to use towards the maintenance of roads;
- alternating the direction of the survey was not necessary for single track roads;
- vehicle flow and volume were important factors influencing the condition of roads;
- resurfacing work was required before carrying out relining, though it was acknowledged this was not always possible;
- information on the number of roads in Highland coded as Amber and Red, broken down by the classification of road type and, where possible, to Local Committee level, was requested;
- it was good that the report was independent and Scotland wide which

- provided a credibility that perhaps would not have been available from an in-house survey;
- comparable costs were provided for surface dressing, recycling and complete resurfacing;
- it was important that when surface dressing was put down that it stayed down to avoid wasting money; and
- an analysis of the skills and experience of manual workers carrying out road repairs was requested.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the results of the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey for 2015;
- ii. **AGREED** that information as to the number of roads in Highland coded as Amber and Red, broken down by the classification of road type and, where possible, to Local Committee level, be provided to Members.

9. Distribution of Road Maintenance Budget – 2016/17 Riarachadh Buidseat Càraidh Rathaidean – 2016/17

There had been circulated Report No COM/18/16 dated 15 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the distribution of the Road Maintenance Budget for 2016/17 between the eight Local Committee Areas.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- concern was expressed in relation to distributing the winter maintenance revenue budget based on historical spend and the large disparity in the allocation of primary and secondary routes in each Local Committee area;
- assurance was sought that the winter maintenance policy was being applied fairly and equally across the Local Committee area and in this regard it was proposed that the approval of the allocation for winter maintenance be deferred until the next meeting to allow for an assessment of how the current policy was applied in terms of allocating primary and particularly secondary routes;
- the work for pot holes should be proportional to the area of road surface and not the length of the road to accommodate for the variances in single and dual roads and ensure the correct measure was used to establish relative need;
- an explanation was sought of the basis for the split between road length and population in determining the allocation for cyclic maintenance;
- when determining the allocation of funding an allowance should be made for road usage;
- an update and a meeting with Local Members were requested regarding the maintenance that was essential on the B862;
- it was hoped that there would be an underspend in the current year's Winter Maintenance budget due to the mild Winter which could, it was suggested, be re-allocated to the Road Maintenance budget;
- concern was expressed in relation to the extent and impact of invasive species, particularly Japanese Knotweed, in water courses;
- information was sought, and received, on the process for bidding for the Water Course Maintenance allocation;
- concern was expressed that similar issues were being raised on an annual basis, particularly the issue of increasing volume of traffic and its effect on

- the roads;
- clarification was sought on whether the measurements were made on the length of individual carriageways, to take single and double track roads into consideration;
- concern was expressed that the Skye allocation had been reduced, following the separation of its budget from Lochalsh. It was suggested that the roads in Skye were not in as good condition as indicated by the road condition survey and detailed assurance was sought that Skye was being treated equitably and that there would be sufficient local staff for the work required;
- some roads were of greater economic significance than others and this should be taken into consideration;
- the categorisation should not be done in isolation and prior to the winter maintenance being allocated for the following winter, the Council should have the opportunity to consider an audit or assessment of some kind on how the policy has been implemented across different areas, including the extent to which historical spend levels had been taken into consideration, and paying particular attention to secondary routes; and
- consideration was given to the definition of community and the split of funds between individual communities should be decided by Local Members.

Accordingly, Mr A Henderson, seconded by Mr R Greene, **MOVED** the approval of the recommendations as outlined in the report.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Baxter, seconded by Mr B Clark, **MOVED** the approval of the distribution of the Roads Maintenance Budget for 2016/17 between the Local Committee areas on the basis of need, with the exception of the allocation for Winter Maintenance, which would be deferred until the next meeting to assess how secondary routes were allocated.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 14 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 4 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Dr D Alston, Mrs J Barclay, Mrs G Coghill, Mr G Farlow, Mr R Greene, Mr A Graham, Mr A Henderson, Mrs L MacDonald, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr K MacLeod, Mr H Morrison, Mr G Phillips, Mr A Rhind, Mrs J Slater

For the Amendment:

Mr A Baxter, Mr B Clark, Mr N Donald, Mr D Kerr

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the distribution of the Road Maintenance Budget for 2016/17 between the Local Committee areas on the basis of need, the details of which were contained in Appendix 1 of the report.

The Committee adjourned for lunch at 1.10 pm and resumed at 2.00 pm.

**10. Update on Homelessness Initiatives
Fios as Ùr mu Iomairtean Dìth Dachaigh**

There had been circulated Report No COM/19/16 dated 18 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided an update on the following initiatives which aimed to improve the lives of homeless people in Highland:-

- the Temporary Accommodation Re-provisioning Project;
- the Housing Support Service; and
- the Housing Options Service.

The report provided an update on the impacts of Welfare Reform changes on how temporary accommodation was provided in Highland and some of the challenges this presented in relation to affordability for clients, as well as proposing a strategy to meet these challenges. The report also presented a draft Housing Options policy for approval.

Following a summary of the key issues in the report, Members made the following comments:-

- the Housing Policy Officers were praised for giving early attention to the difficult situation ahead as a result of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit. It was anticipated that rent arrears would increase and the Housing Options Model was commended. A fundamental issue across Scotland was that insufficient new houses were being built and the Government should be challenged to offer more support in this regard. Having the housing debt written off would be a significant help with the situation, as would resolution of land availability issues. In summary, a long-term solution was required because current levels of spending on homelessness were not sustainable;
- reference to the 'person centred service' was welcomed, as was early intervention policies to avoid people becoming homeless in the first place;
- it was welcomed that homelessness organisations were working together;
- more accommodation units were required in Inverness;
- there could be confusion about the classification of homelessness in relation to claiming Universal Credit, particularly for homeless people who were employed;
- some Members considered that Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) should remain largely located in the city centre, while others felt that saturation point had been reached in relation to HMOs in the city centre;
- concern was expressed that some clients were not being given adequate support from contracted Housing Support Providers and assurance was given that the matter was being addressed; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, on 20-year rent to buy schemes.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress on the Temporary Accommodation Re-provisioning Project;
- ii. **NOTED** the challenges presented by the Welfare Reform agenda on the current model of temporary accommodation provision;
- iii. **AGREED** that the Council should move to a model where the majority of temporary accommodation was provided in Council owned HRA properties, with a rent structure that was affordable within the welfare benefits system with a small number of units sourced at affordable rates from the private sector to allow emergency cover and flexibility of approach;
- iv. **NOTED** progress on the re-tendering of the Housing Support Service;
- v. **APPROVED** the Housing Options Policy and Standards as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report; and

- vi. **NOTED** that a further report on temporary accommodation costs and charges would be provided to Committee in August.

11. **Tenant Satisfaction Survey** **Suirbhidh Luchd-màil Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No COM/20/16 dated 18 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services which summarised the findings of a comprehensive satisfaction survey undertaken earlier this year.

Following a summary of the report, the following comments were made:-

- the high response rate of 34.3% was welcomed and the Tenant Participation Officers were commended;
- information was sought on the age profile of respondents and it was pointed out that younger people might respond better to an online survey;
- improvement was required in relation to complaint handling;
- antisocial behaviour should be tackled in an integrated manner, not only the bigger more extreme incidents, but also the smaller less significant but nevertheless unpleasant issues such as dog fouling, especially in communal areas;
- the response rates and nature of responses in different areas were worth further investigation given the importance of providing a fair and equitable service across the Highlands. Attention was drawn in particular to an example of relative dissatisfaction with houses in Lochaber;
- the level of detailed information in the survey was a valuable resourcing tool that would help officers plan future services. Information was sought, and provided, on follow-up actions planned. It was clarified that complaint responses were of the most concern and would be tackled;
- the positive responses were helpful to Members who often tended to only hear about the more negative issues; and
- projects to encourage tenants to maintain their own properties were considered with garden competitions being cited as one example which had seen considerable success in some areas.

The Committee **NOTED** the results of the Tenant Survey.

12. **Public Convenience Strategy and Review of Highland Comfort Scheme** **Ro-innleachd Ghoireasan Poblach a' gabhail a-steach Sgeama Cofhurtachd na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No COM/21/16 dated 13 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services which updated Members on progress in securing the agreed savings from the public conveniences budget and how this would be applied. It also invited Members to approve recommendations for a strategy to deliver agreed savings, modifications to the Highland Comfort scheme (HCS) and that Local Committees take decisions on where secure payment facilities should be installed.

Prior to the commencement of debate Members were reminded of the decision of the Highland Council to reduce the public conveniences operational budget for 2016/17 by £250k with a further reduction of £344k agreed for 2017/18. This would leave a budget thereafter of £639k. Accordingly, it would be necessary to consider how public convenience facilities would be provided in the future.

Following a summary of the report, the following comments were made:-

- disappointment was expressed that, when the public toilets in Kinlochleven had been closed, there had been no public consultation and the local community had not had the opportunity to consider or suggest alternatives. It was important that a proactive approach was taken with local communities before any final decision was made;
- it was suggested that the criteria used for HCS should have more of a bias towards local community groups. This was because there was a natural hesitancy for the public to use facilities when they were located in hotels, cafes etc and because recently there had been a number of businesses withdrawing from the HCS. Community run facilities were also likely to be more sustainable as they would, having charitable status, be able to reduce their overheads by avoiding paying water rates etc;
- clarity was sought as to the aim of the strategy. In this regard, it was pointed out that a year-to-year approach could not be adopted and savings had to be looked at as a whole. Even with the proposed strategy in place there was a danger public toilets would have to close;
- the Castle Wynd toilets were funded by the Inverness Common Good fund and therefore the proposal that it be one of the sites for cash collection was challenged. These toilets would also have an important part to play in the redesign of the Castle area and an automated door entry system might not therefore be appropriate;
- concern was expressed that, as the provision of public conveniences was not a statutory function, there was a danger, in the redesign of the Council, that they would be under threat;
- the proposal to increase the charge from 20p to 50p was felt excessive and there did not appear to have been any research done to justify this and there was therefore a suggestion that the report be deferred;
- the decision of the Council relating to public conveniences was clarified;
- reference was made to possible use of Community Challenge Funding for some public conveniences but it was pointed out this funding was no longer available;
- information was sought as to how HCS facilities were signposted. In addition, it was questioned which HCS payments were made all year round and which were made on a seasonal basis;
- information was sought, and received, as to who ran the A9 North Kessock Southbound toilets;
- information was sought as to what measures were in place if a HCS facility did not have a disabled toilet;
- automated door system entry involving cash collection would have the added benefit of cutting vandalism. It would also enable toilets to be used 24hrs per day;
- clarification was sought, and received, as to where the level of charging could be considered; and
- further discussion of proposals needed to take place at Ward level where specific issues could then be flagged up.

At this juncture, to consider a way forward, the Committee adjourned at 3.40 pm and resumed at 3.55 pm.

The Committee **AGREED:-**

- i. to seek to achieve the agreed savings without closing public toilets, with a report back to the Community Services Committee before the end of 2016/17 on progress as it might yet be necessary to close toilets in 2017/18 to realise the savings agreed by Council;
- ii. that the terms of the Highland Comfort scheme be amended to broaden the payment range to facilitate increased up-take;
- iii. to consult with local communities regarding a 50p payment for using public conveniences; and
- iv. that secure payment facilities be installed where practicable and with agreement of Local Committees.

13. Scottish Shared Scientific Services Proposals
Molaidhean a thaobh Seirbheisean Co-roinnte Saidheans na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No COM/22/16 dated 20 March 2016 by the Director of Community Services which detailed proposals for the creation of the Scottish Shared Scientific Services and invited Members to agree in principle to further preparatory actions being undertaken.

The Committee **AGREED** in principle to the following actions being undertaken by the Scottish Shared Scientific Services Project Board:-

- i. determining the full financial impact on each local authority partner;
- ii. developing a detailed Business Plan for the new service;
- iii. drafting and concluding all necessary legal agreements; and
- iv. continuing consultation with relevant staff, Trades Unions, and other stakeholders.

14. Benchmarking of the Winter Service and Winter Policy Review
Bun-tomhas air Ath-sgrùdadh Seirbheis a' Gheamhraidh agus Poileasaidh a' Gheamhraidh

There had been circulated Report No COM/23/16 dated 15 April 2016 by the Director of Community Services which presented the results of a benchmarking exercise which compared the principal activities and resources of Highland Council's winter service with other rural authorities in Scotland and made recommendation on some changes to the policy aimed at improving the service.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- referring to the review of the Winter Service Policy, the Chairman drew attention to various amendments which had been made to take into account issues which Members had raised. These included that new contracts for school transport would require vehicles to be fitted with all-weather tyres, addressing cross area anomalies and precautionary salting;
- some Members had lobbied for an earlier start time for gritting and the proposal was that, on a limited number of routes, this could commence at 5 a.m. It was also welcomed that determination of these routes would be made at Local Committee level although it was clarified that any changes would have to be contained within available local budgets;
- the costs of implementing the earlier start time was to be off set and this too was welcomed. However, it was important not to lose sight of the possibility of applying an earlier start time of 5.30 a.m. to all morning

routes, at a cost of approx £80,000, at some time in the future. This should be discussed as part of the ongoing work considering the redesign of the Council;

- it was pleasing to see that the definition of community remained unchanged and, again, that it would be for Local Committees to determine what they defined as “communities”;
- the allocation of winter maintenance resources was questioned. For example, it was highlighted Lochaber had only 2 mini tractors for footway clearance while Caithness and Sutherland had 8 each. In this connection it also appeared that Nairn had none. It was important that a reallocation took place to ensure resources were fairly allocated and that consideration be given to the purchase of additional plant;
- if people were to be encouraged not to use cars, it was important that pavements were kept clear of snow and ice. Across Highland, there were 44 tractors available and it was vital that they were all operational and teams were in place to use them. In this regard, confirmation was sought, and received, that all in Inverness were operational;
- it was suggested that the use of quad bikes, adapted as necessary, might clear pavements quicker;
- the proactive approach to reallocate staff during winter weather was welcomed but it was hoped this was not limited to just Community Services staff;
- whilst the report acknowledged that some schools started at 8.40 a.m., staff and pupils (who did not live on a school bus route) had to reach school before that, often on untreated roads. It was hoped therefore that Local Committees would have the ability to decide the “routing” of priority routes to ensure that schools were able to be treated before they opened. It was again clarified that any local changes would need to be delivered within available local budgets;
- the possibility of exploring schools opening later should be considered;
- instructing operators of school transport vehicles to use preferred routes had potentially a cost implication;
- the redefining of the winter period from 1 October until 30 April to 14 October until 14 April was questioned. In some areas, snow regularly fell outwith these dates. If milder weather was experienced mid April, weather reports from the Met Office would cease but there was then a danger that the Council would be unaware of impending inclement winter weather at a later date. This would have a considerable impact on some areas, Badenoch and Strathspey being cited as an example as it had the highest roads in Highland. Some of these roads, if closed, would have a significant economic impact. It was important therefore that some flexibility was built in for such Wards;
- disappointment was expressed that not all Ward Business Meetings had had the opportunity to consider the review;
- information as to the location of the 3 spare gritting vehicles was sought. In addition, it was important that they were fitted with all-weather tyres;
- clarification was sought, and received, as to the treatment of diversion routes; and
- in relation to the involvement of 3rd parties in winter maintenance, it was felt that the lack of response could be attributed to the amount of bureaucracy involved in tendering for such work and which deterred farmers/contractors from coming forward.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the outcomes from the benchmarking survey;
- ii. **NOTED** the operational changes at sections 5.6, 8.4 and 13.6 in the report;
- iii. **AGREED** that future contracts for school transport services include the requirement that vehicles be fitted with all weather (mud and snow) tyres; and
- iv. **APPROVED** the updated winter policy (Appendix A) and in particular:
 - a change to the winter period within the policy from 14 October to 14 April each year; and
 - the removal of the term “school bus route” from the policy and to introduce a preferred route system for school transport vehicles.

15. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **APPROVED** circulated Minutes of the Harbours Management Board of 26 February 2016.

Arising from the minute, the Chair drew Members’ attention to the project to redevelop facilities at Uig Harbour to accommodate the new larger ferry for the Uig-Tarbet-Lochmaddy triangle. Work was already commencing at Lochmaddy and Tarbet and the Highland Council would therefore have to consider how it would undertake the necessary work. The redevelopment would, however, provide an opportunity to also address issues regarding the layout.

The meeting ended at 4.50 pm.