

**The Highland Council  
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held in Wick Town Hall, Bridge Street, Wick, on Wednesday, 31 August 2016 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

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

**Non Members also Present:**

Mr A Rhind

**Officials in attendance:**

Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Corporate Development Service  
Mr A Macmanus, Ward Manager, Corporate Development Service  
Ms A Clark, Acting Head of Policy, Chief Executive's Service  
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager, Development & Infrastructure Service  
Mr D Cowie, Principal Planner, Development & Infrastructure Service  
Mr D Chisholm, Planner, Development & Infrastructure Service  
Mr B Northedge, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service  
Ms J Scotson, Business Change Manager, Corporate Development Service  
Mr J Holden, Housing Manager (North), Community Services  
Mr D Gallagher, Business Gateway Service Manager, Development & Infrastructure Service  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service

**Also in Attendance:**

Chief Inspector I MacLelland, Police Scotland  
Inspector S Clark, Police Scotland

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Liesgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr J Rosie.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Caithness Civic Leader  
Cur Ceannard Catharra an Dreuchd**

There had been circulated Report No CC/12/16 by the Ward Manager which advised that Councillor Gail Ross, the current Civic Leader for Caithness, had tendered her resignation. The Committee was therefore invited to appoint a Civic Leader.

In this regard, Mr B Fernie seconded by Mr M Reiss, nominated Mrs G Coghill as Civic Leader.

Mr N Macdonald, seconded by Mr D Mackay, nominated Mr R Saxon as Civic Leader.

On a vote being taken between the two candidates, Mrs G Coghill received 6 votes and Mr R Saxon received 3 votes, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**Votes for Mrs G Coghill:-** Mr D Bremner; Mrs G Coghill; Mr B Fernie; Mr W Mackay; Mr M Reiss; Ms G Ross.

**Votes for Mr R Saxon:-** Mr N Macdonald; Mr D Mackay; Mr R Saxon

The Committee therefore **AGREED** to appoint Mrs G Coghill as Civic Leader for Caithness.

**4. Caithness and North Sutherland Fund  
Maoin Ghallaibh agus Chataibh a Tuath**

The Committee was advised that three Members had been appointed to the Caithness and North Sutherland Fund by the Council on 28 June 2012 (two Members from the Caithness Wards and one Member from the North, West & Central Sutherland Ward). The Caithness Members appointed at that time were Councillor Gail Ross and Councillor John Rosie.

The Committee noted that Councillor Ross had submitted her resignation from this appointment and therefore the Committee was invited to consider and recommend who her replacement should be on the basis this would then be reported to the full Council meeting on 8 September 2016 for agreement.

In this regard, Mr R Saxon seconded by Mr N Macdonald, nominated Mr D Mackay.

Mr B Fernie, seconded by Mr M Reiss, nominated Mrs G Coghill.

On a vote being taken between the two candidates, Mr D Mackay received 4 votes and Mrs G Coghill 5 votes, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**Votes for Mr D Mackay:-** Mr D Bremner; Mr N Macdonald; Mr D Mackay; Mr R Saxon.

**Votes for Mrs G Coghill:-** Mrs G Coghill; Mr B Fernie; Mr W Mackay; Mr M Reiss; Ms G Ross

- \* The Committee therefore **AGREED** to recommend that Mrs G Coghill be appointed to the Caithness and North Sutherland Fund.

## 5. **Developing Local Priorities for Caithness (Caithness Vision)** **Prìomhachasan Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No CC/13/16 dated 28 July 2016 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which provided an update on the local strategic priorities for Caithness.

The Depute Leader of the Council was in attendance at the meeting and discussed with the Committee their key issues and how the Administration could help progress these issues with specific reference to issues around the success of the North Coast 500 and the need to consider improvements to the infrastructure and also in regard to connectivity.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the extension of free Wi-Fi to villages in Caithness be incorporated into the list of priorities;
- the need to work in partnership with the Harbour Boards to help develop Wick and Scrabster harbours and also that some of the smaller harbours in the area be included within the list priorities;
- under the heading of 'Area Promotion'; a line be added to the text to emphasise the Norse culture of Caithness;
- to ensure the most effective targeting of resources appropriate to the needs of individual communities the last sentence under the heading of 'Transport' be amended to read, *'we will also aim to make our towns and village communities safer by introducing 20mph and 30mph zones where considered appropriate'*;
- the list of priorities should be expanded to include the need to work with the UHI, schools and businesses to promote and develop a young workforce, foundation apprenticeships, apprenticeships and training;
- that reference also be made to the need to work collaboratively with the public and private sector, including Dounreay, to use existing skills and to attract and retain talent in the County;
- reference to the importance of delivering enhanced sports facilities in Caithness to nurture and retain the talent which existed in the area; there was also a need for improved facilities to be provided for surfers; and
- reference to the importance of the local priority relating to social equality to address issues of deprivation.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the local priorities for Caithness as set out in the report subject to amendments to reflect the points and themes highlighted above and that arrangements be made for the updated priorities to be circulated to Members.

## 6. **Taking Forward Community Partnerships** **Com-pàirteachasan Coimhearsnachd**

There had been circulated Report No CC/14/16 dated 19 August 2016 by the Acting Head of Policy which provided Members with an update on the next steps for establishing a community partnership within Caithness.

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

- it was noted the next Caithness District Partnership meeting was due to be held on 28 October 2016 and that this would be a transition to the new arrangements;
- to ensure the success of the new local community planning partnership it was imperative there was a commitment from all partners to attend meetings; and
- it was important consideration be given to where the minutes/agendas etc of the new partnership would be published given that Highlands and Islands Enterprise would be responsible for chairing and providing the secretariat support for the partnership in Caithness.

The Committee **NOTED** the next steps to taking forward local community partnerships within the Caithness Committee area.

## 7. **Presentation - Digital Inclusion** **Taisbeanadh mu Chom-pàirteachadh Didseatach**

The Business Change Manager gave a presentation on digital inclusion during which she highlighted the benefits which allowed customers access to Council Services anytime, anywhere on any device. To date, nearly 16.5k 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. There were now 91 forms available online and the range of activities these covered were detailed. To help customers to use the system a variety of training and courses were available, details of which she provided to Members.

In discussion, Members welcomed the presentation and raised the following issues:-

- reference was made to the importance of the Council’s Digital Highland’s project in delivering significant savings for the Council going forward and in modernising how young people accessed their education;
- it was important that pressure continued to be applied to ensure that broadband was rolled out as quickly possible to all areas so that access to online services was available across Highland;
- in regard to the above reference was made to the work ongoing within the Council and in partnership to advance broadband across Highland;
- clarification was sought and provided on how the equalities issues around digital inclusion were being addressed; and
- a point in regard to the security measures being taken to prevent the ‘my account’ system being hacked.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

## 8. **Police – Area Performance Summary** **Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No CC/15/16 dated 12 August 2016 by the North 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.

In addition to the report, Inspector S Clark, Police Scotland gave a presentation on border policing.

During discussion, Members welcomed the progress being made in relation to the local priorities and raised the following issues:-

- in relation to border policing it was important there was also a focus on smaller harbours and ports which were also used as a point of entry into the country;
- reference was made to the raft of intelligence available locally from people in Caithness and the opportunities for Police Scotland to utilise this network as a resource going forward;
- a query in regard to the attendance of Police Officers at some community councils meetings; the Chief Inspector advised that he would ensure attendance was monitored going forward as he considered this to be a priority;
- a point in regard to the underlying causes of wildlife crime in the area and a request that the Wildlife Officer be invited to attend a meeting of the Association of Caithness Community Councils; the Chief Inspector confirmed that arrangements would be made in this regard;
- the opportunities to refresh the Driving Ambitions initiative and in particular to update the DVD to make it more relevant to young people; the Chief Inspector advised that work was ongoing in this regard and he would update Members on this matter in due course;
- in regard to road safety concern at the number drivers continuing to use mobile phones whilst driving;
- reference to the excellent work being undertaken locally by the Caithness Alcohol and Drugs Partnership in helping people recover from alcohol and drug addictions;
- it was important that in dealing with the perceived threat of terrorism that that a balance be achieved in terms of respecting the right of an individual to privacy;
- the impact on Police resources in dealing with false information and hoaxes placed on social network sites;
- the potential for the basic causes of road accidents to be publicised to send a message to young drivers in relation to the increased risks of being involved in an accident, for example if using a mobile phone;
- issues around the number of Police officers on duty at any one time and a perceived lack of foot patrols in the area; and
- reference to anti-social driving behaviour in terms of driving and parking in Thurso.

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. Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Ghallaibh agus Chataibh**

There had been circulated Report No CC/16/16 dated 22 August 2016 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which presented a summary of issues raised in comments received on the Proposed Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) and sought approval for the Council's response to these issues and next steps. In accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, the Committee was asked to consider the report and decide on these matters.

During the presentation of the report it was noted that the same report had been considered by the Sutherland County Committee on 30 August 2016.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- an assurance was sought and provided in respect of the comments made by Bower Community Council to local Members regarding the development potential of Gillock, that the policy framework provided within the Highland-wide Local Development Plan and associated Supplementary Guidance in relation to housing in the countryside enabled assessment of proposals and support to appropriate development;
- reference to comments made by Dunnet and Canisbay Community Council in relation to more emphasis being placed on tourism in their area and also a specific suggestion for a small industrial site to accommodate employment uses specifically using electricity generated by the adjacent Meygen tidal power development; it was confirmed that both these points were covered in general terms, the policy framework of the Plan and Highland-wide Local Development Plan enabling assessment of proposals and support to appropriate development;
- a point in regard to the reasons why land at Milton, Wick had not been included in the Plan as a housing allocation, during which it was observed that it was considered there was a sufficient number of sites already allocated for housing in Wick, that the site was peripheral and that recent correspondence from Tannach and District Community Council indicated non-support for such allocation; and
- it was noted that the proposal was to defend the Plan against the objection of Transport Scotland in terms of the inclusion and safeguarding of the whole route identified in the Plan for the relief road/'bypass'.

Thereafter, Members were advised that two particular decisions were required to be made by the Committee on the site allocations TS04, TS12 and TS14 in Thurso, as outlined in Appendix A to the report. The first related to the presentation of site TS04 and it was clarified that any presentational change would be considered as a minor modification and would allow the Plan to proceed to the Examination stage as detailed in the report.

The second decision related to the three options which were presented in respect of sites TS12 and TS14. These were to (i) include sites TS12 and TS14 as a community and business allocation respectively, (ii) include sites TS12 and TS14 with an amended allocated use on TS14 or (iii) exclude sites TS12 and TS14. Members were advised that any decision to remove these sites from the Plan would be considered a 'notifiable' change to the Plan and would require the Council to prepare and publish for consultation a modified Plan in its entirety. This would introduce delay to progressing to Examination and Adoption of the Plan and have resource implications for the Council.

During discussion on the above, Members commented as follows:-

- concern the proposed sites could have been highlighted more in the report on the results of the Main Issues Report consultation presented to the former Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee or at the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee at which Members had

considered the Plan, the sites only having been recommended by officers for development after the Main Issues Report stage;

- it was suggested that the vista from those sites provided iconic views out to Dunnet Head and Orkney and should be protected and preserved;
- greater weight should be given to the consideration of previous Scottish Government determinations to preserve the sites and the fact this was also a prominent location on the North Coast 500 route;
- it was suggested that the proposed uses identified for sites TS12 and TS14 could be accommodated within the extensive area of land identified as site TS04;
- it was suggested that concerns around the timetable for the Plan and any potential delay caused by making a 'notifiable' change should be secondary to ensuring that the Committee made the right decision in respect of what were regarded as prime sites in Thurso;
- concern in regard to how enforceable developer requirements/brief would be, for example for the siting of a hotel on site TS14 at the planning application stage and which might result in an inappropriate development for that site in future;
- reference was made to the fact there was a play area, football park and a walk along the cliff area in the locality and therefore it was already a public area; and
- the importance of protecting an area within site TS04 as a green space for children.

During further discussion, Members expressed the view that in regard to the presentation of site TS04 the recommendation to progress Decision 1, Option 1 so that the site was presented as a single mixed use allocation be accepted.

In regard to sites TS12 and TS14, Members expressed the view that that Decision 2, Option 3 be progressed which was to exclude site allocations TS12 and TS14 from the Plan.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the comments received on the Proposed Plan;
- ii. **AGREED** to take the comments of Hitrans into consideration and to ask the Reporter(s) holding the subsequent Examination to likewise consider them;
- iii. **NOTED** the issues raised through representations on the Plan and **AGREED** the Council position as recommended in Appendix A (the 'Schedule 4s') and highlighted in Section 3 of the report, subject to an amendment to exclude site allocations TS12 and TS14 from the Plan; and
- iv. **NOTED** the above amendment to exclude sites TS12 and TS14 would require a modified Plan to be issued and further consultation undertaken.

## 10. **Associated School Group Overviews** **Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte**

There had been circulated Report No CC/17/16 dated 19 August 2016 by the Director of Care and Learning which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Wick Associated School Group (ASG), and provided useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

In addition to the report, the Education Quality Improvement Manager circulated information and provided an update on the management of schools project in respect of the ASG.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in terms of inspections of early years centres by the Care Inspectorate it was important that significant improvements be achieved in regard to those areas which had been classified as 'adequate' to ensure children had the best start and learning environment possible;
- concern that in terms of the figures for leaver destinations for Wick High School in 2014/15 and the need to understand the reasons for the figures and improve the destinations of those young people;
- concern at the number of exclusions and the need to consider how this issue could be tackled through a partnership approach to prevention;
- the Head Teacher of Wick High School be commended on removing the deficit on the School's budget and reference was made to the opportunities to share this good practice to managing the budget with other schools in the area;
- reference was made to the opportunity for additional resources to be made available to the new Wick High School and other schools located in areas with issues of multiple deprivation to address the figures around leaver destinations/exclusions/absenteeism; the Education Quality Improvement Manager advised that he would raise this matter with the Head of Education;
- the opportunities to direct more support to extend the Bookbug scheme in areas of multiple deprivation given the demonstrated benefits of the scheme for both children and parents; and
- that regular update reports on progress with Wick High School be provided to the Committee as a standing item on the agenda to allow Members to consider the matter in public.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to request that regular updates on progress with Wick High School be provided as a standing item on the agenda for future meetings of the Committee.

**11. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2016 to 30 June 2016**  
**Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No CC/18/16 dated 31 August 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 June 2016.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the relevant Housing staff be commended on the performance information as set out in the report;
- the decision by the Community Services Committee to declare some properties surplus and available for disposal was welcomed; it was



suggested this would allow for the disposal of properties which were distorting the performance figures for Caithness;

- in regard to the above it was important that those surplus properties were marketed as soon as possible on the basis there was a significant demand for temporary accommodation from workers coming into the area;
- issues around a reasonable market value being placed on the properties taking into account the ongoing costs to the Council in the event these properties remained vacant and the opportunities for properties to be marketed as a block where appropriate;
- in terms of the redesign of the Council any measures that would allow the performance reporting to be done in a simpler way and with less resource implications be progressed;
- concern was expressed around cases where there had been delays in emergency repairs being carried out by contractors from outwith the area;
- an explanation was sought in relation to the delay in removing barriers which had been erected around a specific garage site at Ormlie Terrace, given the cost implications for the Council; the Housing Manager (North) advised that he would investigate and respond directly to Mr D Mackay on the matter; and
- reference to a specific case involving an assessment conducted in regard to a tenant's heating system; the Housing Manager (North) advised that he would investigate and respond directly to Mr W Mackay on the matter.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2016 to 30 June 2016.

#### **ADDITIONAL ITEM**

The Chair **AGREED** to consider the following item as an additional item to allow Members to be updated on business development activity in Caithness during the first quarter of 2016/17.

### **12. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT: CAITHNESS UPDATE**

There had been circulated Report No. CC/19/16 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which updated Members on the performance of the Council's business development services in Caithness. It summarised the delivery of the Business Gateway over the first quarter of 2016, and informed Members on progress with Council involvement in local business development activity in Caithness during the first quarter of 2016/17.

In discussion, reference was made to the shared service arrangement the Council had entered into with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils in relation to procurement and the importance of ensuring that small and medium sized businesses were able to access the procurement framework and tender for contracts. Accordingly it was crucial that local businesses received training and assistance in this regard. A point was also raised in relation to problems experienced by small businesses in meeting the procurement criteria.

A further point was raised in regard to ERDF funding and the importance of there being a mechanism for dealing with enquiries and concerns around Brexit and future funding arrangements.

The Committee **NOTED** the Business Development Service performance in Caithness for the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter of 2016/17.

**13. Minutes**  
**Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 25 April 2016, which were approved by the Council on 29 June 2016, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

The meeting ended at 3.40pm.