

**The Highland Council  
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummuie on Wednesday, 30 November 2016 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Mr G Farlow	Mr H Morrison
Mrs D Mackay (by tele-conference)	Mr G Phillips
Mr J McGillivray	

**Officials in attendance:**

Mr G Cameron, Ward Manager, Corporate Development Service  
Mr B Northedge, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service  
Mr G Mackenzie, Roads Operation Manager, Community Services  
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service

**Also in Attendance:**

Item 4: Mr M Crichton and Mr R Geddes, BT Openreach  
Item 5: Mr W Mainus, and Mr A Goodhall, Stagecoach  
Item 6: Group Manager M Loynd and Station Manager G McQuade Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Ms L Munro.

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

Items 10 and 11: Mr G Farlow (financial and non-financial)

**3. Presentation – Roll out of Broadband  
Taisbeanadh – Bann-leathainn ga Sgaoileadh**

The Chair advised that Mr P Guthrie, Highlands and Islands Enterprise was unable to attend the meeting due to illness and therefore the presentation had been deferred until the next meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** that the presentation had been deferred until the next meeting.

**Additional Urgent Items**

The Chair **AGREED** to consider items 4 and 5 below as additional urgent items to allow Members to discuss with BT Openreach their concerns in regard to recent service outages experienced in Sutherland, and to allow Members the opportunity to discuss with Stagecoach proposed changes to bus timetables in Sutherland before the end of the consultation period.

#### **4. BT Openreach – Provision of Services in Sutherland BT Openreach – Solar Sheirbheisean ann an Cataibh**

The Chair welcomed Mr M Crichton, Senior Operations Manager and Mr R Geddes, Local Manager, BT Openreach to the meeting.

The Senior Operations Manager provided an overview of BT Openreach's current service in Sutherland during which he referred to the fact that a significant number of staff had been recruited over the current and previous year which was adding value to the organisation. He explained that in extremely busy periods staff locally were supported by staff from other areas in Scotland. He advised that incremental improvements continued to be made to services and advised that the Company had met its minimum service levels commitments over the past two years which it was required to report to the regulator Ofcom. In response to a question he also provided details on the number of additional engineers recruited in Highlands and Islands and Sutherland areas in the current year.

The Chair expressed concern at the apparent lack of a coherent management model in dealing with recent collective outages where a cabinet in Golspie had been damaged by a lorry and a further collective failure after that cabinet had been rebuilt by BT, which the company had disputed was within their control. He referred to the significant number of complaints he had received locally on this matter.

The Senior Operations Manager apologised for the fact the Company's major incident management process did not appear to have been deployed in this case and undertook to investigate this matter and respond directly to the Chair for wider circulation to Members. In terms of refunds for customers the Senior Operations Manager advised this was a matter for individual service providers.

During further discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was suggested the full implications of Ofcom's recommendation that BT and BT Openreach be legally split required further clarification on the basis it was confusing for consumers with specific reference to the relationship between landline and broadband services;
- concern at the level of broadband coverage and speeds in some areas of North West Sutherland which impacted on local people, visitors and businesses in the area and which it was suggested was stifling development in the area;
- concern at repeat outages being experienced in Scourie and delays in repairs being undertaken and as a general point the need to upgrade exchanges in the area so that they were fit for purpose; the Senior Operations Manager confirmed he would investigate the issues in respect of the Scourie area further and report back to Members;
- a point in regard to the frustration felt by some small communities and businesses which were in sight of cabinets but unlikely to be connected in the foreseeable future due to the prohibitive costs of installing a cabinet;
- reference to the importance of broadband to economic development and population growth in Sutherland and the ability to attract inward investment into the area; it was noted that Members considered this to be a key priority in terms of their priorities for Sutherland;

- the importance of developing alternative technologies to extend the reach of broadband in smaller communities, and the opportunities for some of those technologies to be piloted in Sutherland;
- issues around low broadband speeds being experienced in Sutherland when others had their superfast broadband service switched on; the Senior Operations Manager indicated that he would investigate this matter further and report back to the Chair; and
- a point regarding the importance of establishing and maintaining regular and more formal communications between BT and Members; the Senior Operations Manager and Local Manager confirmed their willingness in this regard and referred to the opportunity to involve BT UK/Highlands and Islands Enterprise at any future meetings of the Committee in relation to some of the issues raised around the roll out of broadband and new technologies.

Thereafter, the Chair thanked Mr Crichton and Mr Geddes for attending the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and that the Senior Operations Manager would respond directly to the Chair on the specific issues raised in discussion and ensure regular communication with Members was established and maintained.

## **5. Stagecoach – Proposed Timetable Changes in Sutherland Stagecoach – Atharrachaidhean Clàr-ama air am Moladh ann an Cataibh**

The Chair welcomed Mr W Mainus and Mr A Goodall from Stagecoach to the meeting. He advised that Members had only recently become aware of proposed changes to the bus timetables in Sutherland and suggested that the public were unaware of those changes, and therefore the Stagecoach representatives had been invited to the meeting to allow the proposals to be discussed before the close of the consultation period.

Mr Goodall advised that the Council had tendered all of its bus contracts with awards due to be confirmed in August 2016. He explained there had been a delay in the award of those contracts and that some of the contract results had only recently been received. He advised that Stagecoach had lost over half of its contracts in Caithness and its Tain operation had also been affected both of which impacted on routes in Sutherland. Therefore, the current position was that services which were making a loss could no longer be sustained and that this required difficult decisions to be made. In terms of the impact on Sutherland minor changes to timings had been made to the southbound X99 services from Thurso, details of which he provided. The most significant change was that the X99 service from Inverness to Thurso which departed at 9.30am would no longer be operated. However he indicated that it would be possible to extend the X25 service which operated to Tain and Dornoch so that it passed through Golspie and Brora, albeit passengers would be required to change at Tain. In response to a point raised Mr Goodall confirmed he would investigate the potential to extend this service to Helmsdale and report back to Members on this matter.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that there would be no changes to the southbound X98 service in the morning which had been introduced to accommodate the needs of students, with the exception of minor timing alterations;

- issues around the manner in which the consultation had been carried out in Sutherland, noting there had been no face to face public sessions held in the area; Mr Mainus explained that the delay in tenders being awarded had altered the timeline for the consultation process and advised that MSPs, Members and community councils in the area had been consulted in respect of the proposals;
- it was suggested that the proposed changes were not readily accessible on Stagecoach's website and Mr Goodall undertook to investigate this matter further;
- concern that the information on the 9.30am northbound X99 service had not been included in the proposals circulated to Members;
- concern at the proposed significant reductions on the X25 service through to Dornoch;
- issues around Stagecoach services in North West Sutherland and service provision in the area;
- reference to the socio-economic impact the timetable changes may have on people in Sutherland, for example in the ability to attend medical or DWP appointments in Wick; the Commercial Manager advised that under the relevant Transport Act bus companies were required to act in a commercial manner and that services which were socially desirable but not economically viable were the responsibility of local authorities; and
- it was suggested the commercial pressures on Stagecoach and socio-economic pressures on the Council and the tensions this created required to be acknowledged.

During further discussion on this item, Members requested that the implementation of timetable changes be deferred to allow for public consultation with the people of Sutherland. Mr Mainus advised that Stagecoach had met its legal commitments in terms of the publication of the proposed timetable changes. However, he gave a commitment that Stagecoach would undertake face to face consultations with people in Helmsdale, Brora, Golspie and Dornoch in relation to the new timetables during December 2016, prior to their implementation in January 2017.

Thereafter, reference was made to the importance of Members continuing to liaise with Hi-Trans and to request that the organisation progress a strategic review of Sutherland's wider transport needs. Representations on this matter should also be made to Scottish Ministers and to the Council. The importance of regular meetings being held between Stagecoach and Members to improve communication was also emphasised and Mr Mainus confirmed that Stagecoach would be willing to attend future meetings of the County Committee and community council meetings in this regard.

Thereafter, the Chair thanked both Mr Mainus and Mr Goodhall for attending the meeting.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** and welcomed the agreement by Stagecoach to progress further consultation with the people of Sutherland in relation to the new timetables during December 2016 and prior to implementation in January 2017;
- AGREED** to request there be continued regular liaison by Stagecoach with Members going forward;

- iii. **AGREED** that Members continue to liaise with Hi-Trans and to request that the organisation progress a strategic review of Sutherland's wider transport needs; and
- iv. **AGREED** that representations be made at a Council and Scottish Minister level on Sutherland's wider transport needs.

## 6. **Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report 2015-16** **Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail na Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn 2015-16**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/21/16 dated 17 November 2016 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland which provided an update on progress against the priorities outlined in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Area Committee Plan for Caithness and Sutherland 2015-2016. The report also contained previously agreed information and performance as requested by Committee Members.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- It was suggested that the Service contact grazings committees to reinforce the message about the dangers of leaving muirburn unattended; the Local Senior Officer confirmed he would take this matter forward on receipt from Members of the relevant contact details for their area;
- it was reported that the Service's personnel were being required to submit timesheets electronically and concern was expressed that issues with broadband coverage and speeds in some areas could make this difficult; the Local Senior Officer confirmed that as a back-up staff would continue to be able to submit their timesheets by post;
- the action being taken in terms of recruitment and the upskilling of staff at Lochinver Fire Station be welcomed;
- the opportunities to encourage more female firefighters to join the Service;
- the potential to work with High Life Highland and employers to promote recruitment in Sutherland, with specific reference to the difficulties being experienced at Lochinver;
- the need to continue to monitor station availability at Bettyhill, noting that a number of potential new recruits had come forward;
- reference to the number of RTCs which occurred in the early morning and late evening and the need for drivers to exercise caution in winter conditions; in this regard the Chair suggested that the Council's Corporate Communications be requested to issue a press release on this matter; and
- the opportunities to target some school leavers in the area to provide them with informal training to give them a focus, and also with a view to young people being trained and available to be deployed as retained firefighters at 18 years of age; the Local Senior Officer confirmed that he would investigate the potential options suitable for the Sutherland area.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Area Performance Report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to request that a press release be issued by the Council raising awareness of the need for drivers to exercise caution in winter conditions.

## 7. Developing Local Priorities for Sutherland (A voice for Sutherland and its People)

### A' Leasachadh Phrìomhachasan Ionadail airson Chataibh (Guth do Chataibh agus Muinntir Chataibh)

There had been circulated Report No SCC/22/16 dated 15 November 2016 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which provided an update on the local strategic priorities for Sutherland.

In discussion, it was requested that a copy of the local strategic priorities for Sutherland be circulated to community planning partners, with particular reference to the priority to encourage and expand employment opportunities through all forms of economic activity and business development throughout Sutherland.

In addition, it was suggested that the implications sections of the report did not adequately reflect the risks of not implementing the priorities set out in the report in terms of the impact on the population and economy of Sutherland. It was important therefore, that full implications were highlighted in reports going forward.

The Committee **AGREED** the local priorities for Sutherland and that a copy be circulated to community planning partners.

## 8. Associated School Group Overviews

### Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidhnean Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

There had been circulated Report No SCC/23/16 dated 14 November 2016 by the Director of Care and Learning which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Dornoch Associated School Group (ASG), and provided useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought on the trends which were being observed in regard to the number of children with additional support needs in Sutherland and whether this was increasing or decreasing; the Education Quality Improvement Manager confirmed that he would seek further clarification from the relevant officer on this matter and report back to the Chair;
- it was suggested that the move to a 3-18 campus in the ASG was a positive step forward and that the Manager, relevant officials and all parties involved be commended on the progress made in this regard and in responding to any concerns which had been raised by parents;
- clarification was sought and provided on the status of the Gaelic medium unit at Bonar Bridge; it was noted the unit was currently mothballed and that its reopening would depend on their being demand from parents in the areas for Gaelic medium education;
- a request that the next report on the Dornoch ASG should include an update on the vocational hub; and
- the potential for a round-up report of ASGs relevant to Sutherland to be presented to the next meeting and in advance of the Council elections in May 2017 be considered at the next ward business meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** that the next report on the Dornoch Associated School Group include an update on the vocational hub; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the ASGs to be included in the report to the next meeting on 22 February 2017 be considered at the ward business meeting.

**9. Winter Maintenance Plan for 2016/17  
Plana Obair-gleidhidh Geamhraidh airson 2016/17**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/24/16 dated 14 November 2016 by the Director of Community Services which provided Members with information on winter maintenance preparations and arrangements for the 2016/17 winter period.

Arising from the report, the Roads Operations Manager provided an update on progress with the recruitment of staff during which he confirmed he would circulate Members with a copy of the adverts due to be published for posts at Durness and Kinlochbervie.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought and provided on the servicing regime in place in respect of the Service's gritters, particularly in advance of the winter season;
- the Manager was commended on a good report and it was suggested that a copy should be circulated to community councils in Sutherland;
- a point that the forecast and camera information used by the Service should be in the public domain to allow people to make informed decisions about road conditions before setting out on their journey; the Roads Operations Manager advised that the Service's action plans and reports were posted online, including on the Council's website, and he undertook to provide the relevant website addresses to Members and also to clarify whether there was public access to the camera sites online; and
- the potential for cameras to be positioned at key locations in the higher areas of Sutherland to be explored further, while recognising this would be a decision for the Community Services Committee; the Roads Operations Manager undertook to explore the feasibility and cost implications in this regard; and

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Winter Maintenance Plan for the Sutherland Area, which includes the priority road lists and maps presented in Appendices B & C;
- ii. **AGREED** that the report be circulated to community councils in Sutherland; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the feasibility and cost implications of cameras being sited on roads at key locations in Sutherland be explored further.

**10. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2016 to 30 September 2016  
Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais - 1 Giblean 2016 gu 30 Sultain 2016**

**Declaration of Interest: Mr G Farlow declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission for Scotland, remained to participate in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/25/16 dated 17 November 2016 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 30 September 2016.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in relation to the update on the status of the HRA Capital Programme 2016/17 for the Sutherland area attached as Appendix 2 to the report, it would be helpful if a breakdown could be provided on the locations where the works were to take place;
- a point as to whether Members could have sight of those contractors included on the Council's procurement list on the basis there may be spend to save opportunities in having local contractors undertake works in the area rather than using contractors from outside the area; the Principal Housing Officer confirmed that she would feed Members comments on this matter back to the Housing Policy and Investment Manager;
- reference was made to areas in Sutherland which were identified as being deprived area under the SEP Index, these being north Brora, Golspie and Helmsdale and a point that it would be helpful if the Service could provide further information on what that deprivation consisted of to help inform actions in the locality plans which the local community planning partnership required to develop; and
- the potential as a spend to save initiative for regular cyclical maintenance to be undertaken to the exterior of wooden clad properties; in this regard the Chair suggested it would be helpful if the Housing Policy and Investment Manager attend a future ward business meeting to discuss this matter further and any other specific issues Members wished to raise.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2016 to 30 September 2016; and
- ii. **AGREED** that Members be provided with more detailed information on the locations of the works to be undertaken under the 2016-17 HRA Capital Programme attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

**11. Local Authorities International Environmental Organisation (KIMO) – ‘Pick up Three Pieces Initiative’  
Buidheann Àrainneachd Eadar-nàiseanta nan Ùghdarrasan Ionadail – ‘Iomairt Tog Trì Pìosan’**

**Declaration of Interest – Mr G Farlow, as a member of KIMO declared a non-financial interest in this item, but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.**



There had been circulated Report No. SCC/26/16 dated 17 November 2016 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which presented a brief summary of the activities of KIMO and focused on the 'Pick up Three Pieces' initiative.

Discussion followed on the main activities highlighted in the report during which reference was made to the benefits being derived at ports and harbours in Sutherland from KIMO's involvement in the Fishing for Litter Scotland and Net Recycling Scotland schemes. In addition KIMO's involvement in the campaign to retain an Emergency Towing Vessel in UK waters and to lobby for a second vessel, which potentially could be located in the Minch, was welcomed.

Thereafter, reference was made to KIMO's 'Pick up Three Pieces' initiative which highlighted the impact of marine litter and aimed to encourage visitors to beaches to collect three pieces of litter on each visit. In this regard reference was made to the opportunity for KIMO to engage with schools in Sutherland in relation to the initiative with particular emphasis on North and West Sutherland.

Further discussion then followed on where responsibility for KIMO sat within the Council and it was suggested that in addition to the Director of Development and Infrastructure, the work of the organisation should be highlighted to the Director of Community Services and Director of Care and Learning.

The Committee:-

- I. **NOTED** the work of KIMO, particularly the success of the Pick Up 3 Pieces project in Orkney and **AGREED** to express support for its launch in Sutherland;
- II. **AGREED** that this work and the opportunity to involve all schools in Sutherland in the above project with particular emphasis on North and West Sutherland be highlighted to the relevant Service Directors; and
- III. **AGREED** to extend an invitation to the KIMO UK Co-ordinator to make a presentation to a future meeting of the Committee.

**12. Dornoch Common Good Fund – Monitoring Report for Second Quarter 2016/17 and Five Year Financial Plan**  
**Maoin Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich – Aithisg Sgrùdaidh airson Dàrna Ràithe 2016/17 agus Plana Ionmhasail Còig Bliadhna**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/27/16 dated 15 November 2016 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which invited Members to scrutinise the Dornoch Common Good monitoring statement to September 2016. Members were also asked to consider the Fund's five year strategy.

In discussion, Members welcomed the report and requested that Dornoch Area Community Council be provided with a copy for information.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Dornoch Common Good Fund – Second Quarter, 2016/17 Monitoring Report;
- ii. **NOTED** the financial strategy set out in the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a copy of the report be provided to Dornoch Area Community Council for information.

**13. Minutes**  
**Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 30 August 2016 which were approved by the Council on 8 September 2016.

The Committee **NOTED** the minutes.

The meeting ended at 1.25pm.

---