

## **The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Community Services Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday, 15 February 2017 at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

Mr R Balfour	Mr A Henderson
Mrs J Barclay	Mr D Kerr
Mr A Baxter	Mrs L MacDonald
Mr B Clark	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs G Coghill	Mr K MacLeod
Dr J Davis	Mrs B McAllister
Mr N Donald	Mr H Morrison
Mr G Farlow	Mr B Murphy
Mr A Graham	Ms T Robertson
Mr R Greene	

### **Non-Members also present:**

Mrs I Campbell	Mrs M Paterson
Mrs J Campbell	Dr A Sinclair
Mrs M C Davidson	Ms M Smith
Mr D Mackay	Mr J Stone

### **In attendance:**

Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services  
Ms C Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources  
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance  
Mr A Summers, Head of Environmental and Amenity Services  
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport  
Mr D Summers, Principal Transport Officer  
Mr S Graham, Project Manager, Chief Executive's Service  
Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager, Finance Service  
Mr R Gerring, Transport Planning Manager, Development & Infrastructure Service  
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Corporate Development Service  
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 A Rhind and Mr J Rosie.

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

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

Item 6 – Mr B Murphy (financial)

Item 8 – Mr B Murphy (financial) and Mrs L MacDonald (non financial)

Item 12 – Mr R Greene (financial)

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.

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

The following areas of good news were reported:-

- Quality Awards
  - the Biohazard Team, William Aitken and Mick McCann, who won Highly Commended in the Team of the Year award;
  - the Roads and Transport Team who won the Convener's Award for the spray patching project, which quickly and effectively repaired roads and potholes across the Highlands; and
  - Gail Ward, Housing Policy Officer, who won Employee of the Year for her work relating to welfare reform and taking the lead role in housing for the Syrian Refugee resettlement.

- Health & Safety Qualifications

Martin Murphy who had completed his Health & Safety Diploma.

- Northern Joint Collaboration

The Chairman referred to the ongoing work with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils. The aim of these meetings was to identify how Councils could work together to save money. Work was also taking place with Bear Scotland and Transport Scotland looking at where facilities could be shared which would generate savings for each organisation.

The Chairman also referred to his own personal experience of contacting the waste disposal service and to the prompt service he had received. This highlighted the excellent work carried out by staff.

The Committee **NOTED** the items of Good News.

## **4. Revenue Budget Monitoring - 1 April 2016 to 31 December 2016 Buidseat Teachd-a-steach Sgrùdadh - 1 Giblean 2016 gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2016**

There had been circulated Report No 1/17 dated 31 January 2017 by the Director of Community Services inviting Members to approve the revenue budget monitoring position for the period 1 April to 31 December 2016.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- Members asked that the text in paragraph 5.2.1, relating to the level of burial fee income be amended to read “reduction” instead of “shortage”;
- it was acknowledged that the income from weekend charging for the use of the Council Headquarters car park could not be guaranteed;
- when reviewing the opening hours at recycling centres a request was made that this also include evenings. This would encourage people to use recycling facilities and would reduce the amount of waste going to landfill;
- officers at recycling centres were best placed to identify how savings could be made and when peak periods took place;
- communities in some areas, with access to funds otherwise unavailable to the Council, were keen to take over school and public bus service routes. These communities were best placed to identify how these services could operate;
- confirmation was sought, and received, that the year-end estimate for Car Parks included revenue generated through parking enforcement charges. It was requested that future Revenue Monitoring reports detail this separately so Members could see the total amount of income from parking enforcement;
- businesses on Fort William High Street had expressed concerns about the impact car parking charges were having on trade and it was suggested that a Highland wide review of charges needed to take place;
- clarification was sought, and received, as why the Subsidies and Concessionary Fares, Grounds Maintenance and Anti-Social Behaviour headings had, at 31 December 2016, exceeded their budget targets but still projected either a breakeven or underspend at the end of the financial year;
- disappointment was expressed regarding the proposal to review Anti-Social Behaviour Services and partially transferring the cost of it to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Anti-Social Behaviour was a problem not solely confined to Council house tenants and it was therefore unfair that the HRA should pay for this service unless other housing associations were similarly charged. It was confirmed that the current budget reflected a decision of the Council to fund 50% of anti-social behaviour staff costs through HRA and this was appropriate in relation to workloads;
- further information was sought, and received, as to what was meant by the overspend which had arisen in relation to management overheads as a result of unachievable procurement savings allocated as part of the corporate and transformational savings;
- recruitment in fragile remote and rural areas could be addressed by informing Community Councils about vacancies who could then promote these job opportunities in their local areas;
- confirmation was sought, and received, as to staffing level in the Service’s various depots;
- the Director’s visit to Lochinver had been welcomed. However, a number of actions were still outstanding including the relocation of the salt store;
- it would have been beneficial for Local Committees to have had input into the Disaggregated budgets and for these at a local level, to have been broken down into greater detail;
- an update was provided as to what arrangements were being put in place to dispose of residual waste after 31 December 2020. Various options

were under consideration, as part of the Council's Redesign process, but, at present, no firm decision had been made. However, if an incinerator was to be built, concern was expressed that this would not be in place within the timescale;

- the landfill site in Inverness was owned by the Inverness Common Good Fund but, to date, no rental had been paid by the Council. It was imperative this was addressed, bearing in mind that the land was now heavily contaminated. Furthermore, the Longman was being considered as a possible incinerator site but there did not appear to have been any approach to the Common Good Fund regarding this. It was important that the City of Inverness Area Committee actively pursue these issues;
- income had been received from the Longman Methane Generator scheme and an update was requested detailing how this scheme was progressing and how much income had been generated; and
- Invergordon would also be suitable as a site for an incinerator given its excellent shipping facilities.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the report and the monitoring statements which showed the revenue position for the period 1 April to 31 December 2016 (including the £27m that was disaggregated) and the actions which had been put in place to manage the budget over the remainder of the financial year;
- ii. **AGREED** to detail the parking enforcement budget separately from car parking; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a review of parking enforcement, following its first year of operation, be provided to Members at a local level.

**5. Capital Expenditure Monitoring – 1 April 2016 to 31 December 2016  
Caiteachas Calpa Sgrùdadh - 1 Giblean 2016 gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2016**

There had been circulated Report No COM/2/17 dated 23 January 2017 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the capital expenditure monitoring position for the period from 1 April to 31 December 2016 for both the Community Services element of the Council's approved capital programme and the HRA capital programme.

During a summary of the report, it was confirmed that, after 9 months of the financial year, net expenditure for Community Services element was £10.957m with a projected underspend of £0.603m and, for the HRA capital programme, there was net expenditure of £20.9m and a forecasted underspend of £5.4m. Both underspends would be carried forward into the 2017/18 capital programme.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- in acknowledging the considerable progress made over the previous two years, information was sought, and received, as to the proportion of housing stock which had not met the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and to the number of properties which still had to be addressed;
- anomalies were still arising and it was hoped that, where poor heating systems were identified, these would be replaced. In this regard, it was suggested that when tenancies changed this provided an opportunity to inspect properties and, where necessary, to carry out remedial work, especially in instances where previous tenants had declined upgrades;

- the SHQS exercise had highlighted the need to review the types of heating options available to ensure better outcomes for tenants. In so doing, the types of windows installed should also be taken into account to ensure energy efficiency in its entirety. In this regard, it was pointed out that properties in Gilbert Street, Inverness had had new heating installed but, two years on, double glazing had yet to be replaced;
- difficulties had arisen with a number of contracts, through no fault of the Council, and contractors were urged to resolve these issues as soon as possible. Related to this, disappointment was expressed at the failure of a contractor to repair a heating system which had broken down and which would have left a tenant, without the intervention of Council staff, without heating over a weekend;
- despite a lower number of Occupational Therapy referrals for equipment and adaptations, there was still a considerable waiting list. It was suggested that, as much of this work was needed urgently, many people had this work done privately;
- the difference in the cost of replacement kitchens in Caithness and Skye was questioned;
- in relation to window and door replacement, capital reports were to be submitted Local Committee which would detail specific locations;
- alternative materials and methods of maintenance should be considered for timber cladding on housing, especially on west facing gable ends, to avoid the need for repainting;
- it was important that salt stores were protected from the elements and an update was sought, in particular, about the provision of a covered salt store in Lochinver. Protecting salt would not only safeguard the wellbeing of gritting teams but would enhance the quality of road gritting;
- the introduction of LED street lighting would generate considerable savings in the long term;
- an update was sought as to the installation of lighting on the Ness bridge;
- information was requested as to what stage the design work had reached for Dores Cemetery and when this project was likely to be completed;
- there were no plans to build houses in Tain, Milton or the seaboard villages and a request was made that officers consider some degree of provision at some stage in future capital programmes; and
- clarification was sought, and received, as to why there had been relatively little money spent on external fabric works in Inverness City and Area despite 30% of work on site being completed.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the capital expenditure monitoring position for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 December 2016; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a review of heating system options be carried out and reported back to Members.

**6. Community Services Performance Report – 1 October 2016 to 31 December 2016**  
**Aithisg Coileanaidh nan Seirbheisean Coimhearsnachd – 1 Luchar 2016 gu 31 Dùbhlachd 2016**

**Declaration of Interest:**

**Mr B Murphy declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds of**

## **being the provider of homeless accommodation and left the room.**

There had been circulated separately Report No COM/3/17 dated 17 January 2017 by the Director of Community Services providing information on how Community Services performed in relation to performance indicators from 1 April 2016 to 31 December 2016.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- the general good performance and trends in the report were highlighted. In particular, the decrease in the number of pothole instructions raised was welcomed, demonstrating the positive impact investment had had. Many areas were now seeing the benefit of this;
- the benefit of jet patchers was well recognised. However, it was acknowledged that it would take time to assess the longevity of these repairs and that potholes highlighted defects in the base structures of roads caused by the impact of heavy traffic;
- potholes on pavements needed to be addressed given the detrimental impact these had on mobility scooters and wheelchair users;
- the quality of reinstatement of carriageways dug up by other service providers was often of poorer quality;
- tribute was paid to the Community Works Officers and the staff repairing roads for addressing problems locally, often with limited resources. In this regard, the pothole on the B862, close to the Torbreck junction, needed urgent attention;
- the percentage of Public Conveniences (PCs) failing inspections was worrying and it was suggested that it might be necessary to revisit the terms of the contract if the contractor was repeatedly failing to meet the required standard. When default notices had been served only a relatively small proportion had been addressed within the prescribed timescale and there should be serious financial penalties in place when this occurred. Other options which could be considered included bringing PC cleaning back in-house, as had been the case with Grounds Maintenance. In response the Director confirmed that all options would be considered;
- the Council needed to have in place a more reactive inspection process of PCs and facilities provided under the Highland Comfort Scheme. The difficulties inspecting PCs, especially in rural areas were recognised but it was suggested Community Services staff could be tasked with undertaking ad hoc inspections in addition to some of their other duties;
- there were instances where PCs had been vandalised and some form of electronic surveillance covering entrances would deter some of this;
- disappointment was expressed about the removal of the housing element of Universal Credit for claimants aged 21 and under and representations needed to be made to reverse this;
- the move to allow claimants on full service Universal Credit to receive Universal Credit payments twice monthly, rather than monthly, was welcomed as this would help them to budget more easily. However, there had been no timescale attached to this proposal;
- the establishment of a staff working group looking at the impact that Full Service Universal Credit was welcomed but there also needed to be a recipients' group to help address the many difficulties encountered when making claims. Universal Credit was fraught with problems and calls were made for MPs and MSPs to address these; and

- rent arrears were now at their highest level since 2012. In some cases, especially where they were not in receipt of housing benefit, taking court action against tenants only exacerbated the problem.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on Community Services performance from 1 April to 31 December 2016.

## **7. Housing Revenue Estimates 2017/18 Tuairmsean Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2017/18**

There had been circulated Report No COM/4/17 dated 6 February 2017 by the Director of Community Services presenting draft Housing Revenue Account estimates for 2017/2018 together with recommendations on the level of increase to be applied to Council house rents, other rents and service charges.

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

- the lack of progress concerning the financial burden on local authorities of housing debt was disappointing. This money could be better used to develop new council housing and it was important that future Administrations continued to lobby Government;
- caution was expressed regarding the need to increase borrowing from 2019/20, given the likelihood of interest rates increasing. It was suggested, in the long term, that this would be unsustainable;
- the increase in staffing focussing on front line preventative work on rent arrears and the increased investment to improve housing estates were welcomed;
- a more effective approach was called for to address rent arrears at an earlier stage before these arrears reached unmanageable levels;
- the end of the Council Housing Right to Buy initiative provided the Council with an opportunity to stabilise its housing stock and, in the longer term, to provide more homeless accommodation. At present, many houses were bought at heavily discounted prices and then rented out privately at exorbitantly high rates which tenants were unable to maintain;
- the continued difficulty in letting garages was acknowledged and alternative ways to address this were explored. It was suggested that they could be sold on the open market or, taking into account any potential parking issues, that they be used as house sites. Many were in a dilapidated state and attracted anti-social behaviour and ideally therefore they should be phased out. In addition, given that most were rented by non Council house tenants for storage and/or commercial/business use, there was a commercial opportunity open to the Council to increase the rent in these cases for garages and garages sites by more than the proposed 1%;
- in welcoming the increase in 2017/18 of 50 properties which could be used as temporary accommodation, it was important that these were also sensitively located; and
- ideally young people should be taken out of homeless accommodation as soon as possible and provided with permanent tenancies.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. a 1% increase for council house rents for 2017/2018;

- ii. that this percentage increase was applied to all HRA rents, to all service charges and to Gypsy/Traveller site pitches;
- iii. that non-HRA rents for leased property should increase as stipulated in existing contracts;
- iv. that the repairs budget would be increased by £750k for 2017/18 with this additional budget ring fenced for additional estates works prioritising repairs and improvement to fencing, pathways, bin storage areas and repairs to other hard landscaped communal areas;
- v. that the estimated HRA surplus of £3.344m in 2017/2018 be applied as Capital from Current Revenue to fund HRA capital investment; and
- vi. a review of the use of garages and garage sites be undertaken.

The meeting adjourned for lunch at 1.00 pm and resumed at 1.45 pm

## **8. Local Housing Strategy Ro-Innleachd Taigheadais Ionadail**

### **Declarations of Interest:**

**Mr B Murphy declared a financial interest in part of this item on the grounds of being the provider of homeless accommodation and left the room during discussion of that element of the strategy.**

**Mrs L MacDonald declared a non-financial interest in this item as a private sector landlord but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No COM/5/17 dated 30 January 2017 by the Director of Community Services presenting the Council's Draft Local Housing Strategy for the next 5 years. The report summarised the background to, and content of, the Strategy. The full draft Strategy had been attached as an Appendix to the report.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- in relation to the housing supply targets detailed in the report for Lochaber it was important to take into account the special requirements needed as a result of proposed industrial developments in the Fort William area and which would generate a considerable number of jobs and a consequent demand for housing;
- having been identified as a priority for affordable housing, clarification was sought, and received, as to what was meant by Fort William's neighbouring communities. Not everyone wanted to live in Fort William itself and therefore there was a need for affordable housing in these other communities;
- the report emphasised the need for small discreet investment to support the sustainability of the Ardnurchan peninsula's rural communities. This was not solely in relation to affordable housing but, it was argued, included the need to resolve the various issues around the Corran Ferry. However, appreciation was also expressed that, for the current year, there was no proposed increase in fares;
- support was expressed for bridging the Corran Straits, to open up opportunities on the Ardnurchan peninsula. However, it was pointed out this lay along a major geological fault line;



- affordable housing also needed to be provided in sparsely populated areas to encourage people to live there, an approach which had been successful in northern Scandinavian countries. There was a danger otherwise that traditional Highland industries such as forestry, tourism and crofting would die out. However, with the expansion of broadband and the success of the North Coast 500, it was hoped this would encourage people to live in such areas and to start businesses;
- the city of Inverness had the greatest need for affordable housing and yet there was limited land on which this could be provided. Most available land was bought by developers and the small private rented market was often unaffordable. Consequently, a different approach was needed as to how housing could be provided. For example, recognising the demand for single person accommodation, shared tenancies in larger properties could be considered;
- there was considerable pressure on schools, in terms of capacity, in some areas and it was essential developer contributions were made to provide new schools;
- with an increasing aged population there would be greater demand on sheltered housing. It was suggested that prefabricated units, with one communal garden, could be used;
- Ullapool had been identified as a high priority for affordable housing. However, Ullapool was surrounded by a lot of outlying rural communities where land was available for housing;
- some properties had undergone specialist alterations but demand was so great in some areas that these should be brought back into mainstream use; and
- the pilots using modular units to provide accommodation and/or adaptations to Council properties was welcomed.

The Committee:-

- APPROVED** the draft Strategy for public consultation subject to the proposed amendments detailed during discussion; and
- NOTED** a further report would be provided on the outcome of consultation and any changes proposed to the Strategy in advance of formal submission to Scottish Ministers.

## 9. **A96 Dualling – Response to the Publication of Draft Orders**

### **Dùblachadh A96: Foillseachadh Dhreachd Òrdughan – Freagairt na Comhairle**

Following on from a report to the Planning, Development & Infrastructure Committee on 25 January that included a response covering strategic matters and principles arising from the A96 Dualling between Inverness and Nairn, including a Nairn Bypass, there had been circulated Report No COM/6/17 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure dealing with the specific roads matters relating to the detrunking of the existing A96 and new side roads. A draft response was provided for Committee to consider, and subject to any comments or additions, to approve for submission to Transport Scotland.

Following a presentation in support of the report, Members made the following comments:-

- the Chairman acknowledged the significant amount of work which would

- be involved for the Council with this project;
- caution was expressed that the Council might take on responsibility for roads which would consequently be blocked off. These pockets of road could prove attractive for travelling people to use;
- where roads were no longer adopted there would be an impact for individual properties in regard to waste collection;
- support was expressed for the representation made in relation to the Blackpark-Grigorhill-Newmill Road (U3310). This provided access to Industrial sites and the recently constructed cemetery and it was important that there was a sustained connection for all modes of traffic. Otherwise, if this road was closed off, it would result in a considerably long detour;
- in relation to a 0.9km section of the existing A96 (Auldearn-Station-Drum Road) the response suggested that it be Stopped Up. However, a request was made that this section of road be adopted, in its current state, by the Council. For motorists leaving Nairn and traveling to the east of Auldearn this would avoid the need to drive through the village, protecting the village environment by keeping it clear of traffic and making it pedestrian friendly;
- the A96 Dualling had been discussed in detail at the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee. Whilst welcoming this development, the Council would become responsible for more than 40km of roads and it was important to emphasise the need for ongoing dialogue between the two road authorities to identify an appropriate work programme prior to the handover date;
- the early delivery of the Nairn Bypass was supported;
- it was hoped that, particularly in the vicinity of Balloch, that screening was incorporated; and
- for roads which fell out of use a plea was made for the land to be reinstated.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the background to the A96 Dualling Scheme, the publication of Draft Orders;
- ii. having considered the proposed response to Transport Scotland, **AGREED**, in relation to a 0.9km section of the existing A96 trunk road between point AZ and the Auldearn-Station-Drum Road, that this be adopted by the Highland Council; and
- iii. **AGREED** to delegate to the Director of Community Services to submit the response, including any changes requested by the Committee.

## 10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **APPROVED** circulated Minutes of the Harbours Management Board of 9 December 2016 and 27 January 2017.

## 11. Exclusion of The Public Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely

disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**12. Award of Bus Service Contract  
Buileachadh Chùmhnantan Seirbheis Bus**

**Declaration of Interest:**

**Mr R Greene declared a financial interest in part of this item, as it related to a specific contract, on the grounds of being distantly related to the contractor and intimated that he would not take part in any discussion or voting relating to that contract.**

There is circulated to Members only Report No COM/7/17 dated 3 February 2017 by the Director of Community Services presenting further information, and the outcome of discussions with contractors, as instructed by the Committee on 7 December in relation to five bus service contract routes.

The Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

At this juncture, arising from a decision taken at the Special Meeting of the Community Services Committee on 7 December 2016, the Committee **AGREED** to suspend Standing Order 20 to allow the Arnisdale-Kyle of Lochalsh service to be re-considered.

The Committee **AGREED** to award a one service per week for this route at the recommended price.

**Valedictory**

The Chairman paid tribute to the Director, Community Services staff and his Vice Chairman for their support. He too expressed his appreciation to his fellow Members for their collaborative approach to matters during the previous 2 years.

The meeting ended at 3.05 pm.