

**The Highland Council
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drumbuie on Friday, 23 June 2017 at 10.30am.

Present:

Ms K Currie

Mr R Gale

Mrs D Mackay

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison

Ms L Munro

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

Mr J Holden, Housing Manager (North), Community Services

Mr M Dent, Access Officer, Development and Infrastructure Service

Mrs S Tarrant, Public Relations Officer, Chief Executive's Office

Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service

Also in Attendance:

Item 6: Group Manager M Loynd, and Station Manager J Gardiner, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

The Ward Manager took the Chair pending the appointment of the Chair of the Committee at Item 3 below.

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Appointment of Chair of Sutherland County Committee
Cur Cathraiche an Dreuchd airson Comataidh Siorrachd Chataibh**

It was **AGREED** to appoint Ms L Munro as Chair of the Sutherland County Committee.

At this point, Ms L Munro took the Chair.

Thereafter, and in accordance with Standing Order 18, the Committee **AGREED** to consider Items 5-11 first following by Item 4.

5. Member Appointments Cur Bhall an Dreuchd

Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership – Advisory Board Com-pàirteachas Ath-bheothachaidh Ghallaibh agus Chataibh a Tuath – Bòrd Comhairleachaidh

Members were advised that the Council was required to appoint 3 Members to serve on the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership Advisory Board. In this regard, it was confirmed that 2 Members should come from the Caithness Wards and 1 Member from the North West Sutherland Ward.

The Committee was therefore asked to appoint 1 Member from the North West, and Central Sutherland Ward as detailed.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms K Currie to the Advisory Board of the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership.

Dounreay Stakeholders Group Buidheann Luchd-ùidh Dhùnraath

Members were advised that the primary purpose of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group was to be the main interface between the community, the site operator at Dounreay and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) in areas such as programme delivery, safety, environment and security and to play an important role in the economic regeneration of the area. It was part of a network of site stakeholder groups across the United Kingdom with each site group represented at meetings of a national stakeholder group set up by the NDA.

The Council was required to appoint 4 Members to the Dounreay Stakeholders Group comprising 3 Members from the Caithness area and 1 Member from the Sutherland area.

The Committee **AGREED** that Ms K Currie be appointed to the Dounreay Stakeholders Group.

Caithness & North Sutherland Fund Maoin Ghallaibh & Chataibh a Tuath

The Caithness & North Sutherland Fund was established by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd to distribute funding to community organisations for projects that would increase the attractiveness of Caithness and North Sutherland as a place to live, work and invest with particular emphasis on achieving environment, social, culture and infrastructure improvements.

The Fund required 3 Members to be appointed – 2 Members from the Caithness Wards and 1 Member from the North, West and Central Sutherland Ward.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms L Munro to the Caithness and North Sutherland Fund.

Sutherland Local Access Forum Fòram Inntreighadh Ionadail Chataibh

Members were advised that the Council had a statutory duty under Section 25 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 to establish Local Access Forums for its area. There were currently six Local Access Forums in the Highland area which advised on matters in relation to the exercise of access rights, the existence of delineation of rights of way or the drawing up and adoption of the Core Path Plan. In addition, they also offered and gave assistance to parties in terms of the resolution of any disputes in this respect.

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr J McGillivray and Ms K Currie should be appointed to the Sutherland Local Access Forum.

Sutherland Sports Council – Vice Chair Comhairle Spòrs Chataibh – Iar-Chathraiche

The Committee was asked to appoint 1 Member to serve as Vice Chair on the Sutherland Sports Council.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr J McGillivray to serve as the Vice Chair on the Sutherland Sports Council.

Trustees of Recreational Ground in Royal Burgh of Dornoch Urrasairean Talamh Cluiche ann an Baile-margaidh Rìoghail Dhòrnaich

The Committee was invited to appoint 1 Member as a Trustee of Recreational Ground in Royal Burgh of Dornoch.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr J McGillivray to the Trustees of Recreational Ground in Royal Burgh of Dornoch.

Board of Golspie Links Trust Bòrd Urras Machair Ghoillspidh

The Committee was asked to appoint **1 Member** to sit on the Board of Golspie Links Trust as a Director.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr R Gale to the Board of Golspie Links Trust.

Highland LEADER Programme - Sutherland

The Committee was asked to appoint 1 Member in respect of the Highland LEADER Programme.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr J McGillivray to the Highland LEADER Programme.

Additional Urgent Item

The Chair **AGREED** to take the following item as an additional urgent item to allow an appointment to be made to the Kinlochbervie Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Kinlochbervie Citizen's Advice Bureau

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr H Morrison to the Kinlochbervie Citizen's Advice Bureau.

6. Scottish Fire and Rescue Area Performance Report 2016-17 Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail na Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn 2016-17

There had been circulated Report No SCC/08/17 dated 5 June 2017 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the improved staffing situation at Lochinver was welcomed as a good news item; however it was important not to be complacent and it was suggested that there was a need to target the station at Bettyhill, given the knock on effect on other crews if they were required to provide cover; in response the Group Manager provided an update on the action being taken which would significantly improve availability at Bettyhill and as a general point advised that he would welcome the support of Members in identifying potential recruits within communities;
- in regard to the above, the Chair welcomed the significant progress made in respect of the retention and recruitment of retained duty staff in Sutherland and requested that the representatives from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service be invited to a Ward Business Meeting to allow for a more in depth and informal discussion on this matter;
- specific reference was made to a wildfire at Lochinver and the potential in future for Police Scotland to have access to a Scottish Fire and Rescue Service radio as a means of improving communications when dealing with such incidents;
- a point in regard to whether there were any concerns in relation to the external cladding of buildings in Highland, following the fire at Grenfell Tower, London; the Group Manager provided an update on this item during which he advised that both the Service and Council were confident that the incident in London could not be replicated in Highland, reference being made to the fact there were no buildings of a similar height or construction in the area;
- the Service be commended on its record in terms of the number of fatal fire casualties in Sutherland and the reassurance this provided and it was suggested this should be highlighted to the public;
- in regard to wild fires and fires on estates, clarification was sought and provided on progress with improving contact between the Service and deer management groups in the area; the Group Manager provided an undertaking that he would continue to take this matter forward;
- clarification was sought in relation to the role of the Service in terms of fire safety and prevention at schools in the area;

- a point in regard to the multi-agency approach being taken in respect of young, newly qualified, and older drivers as a measure to reduce the number of road traffic collisions; and
- the Service be commended on its creative and active role in the Sutherland Community Partnership.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report and **AGREED** that the representatives from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service be invited to attend a Ward Business Meeting to discuss in more detail the issues in relation to retention and recruitment in Sutherland.

7. Caithness and Sutherland Amended Core Paths Plan Plana Atharraichte Prìomh Cheuman Ghallaibh agus Chataibh

There had been circulated Report No SCC/09/17 dated 6 June 2017 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

In discussion, a point was raised in regard to the significant increase in the volume of traffic and cyclists on the North Coast 500 route, specific reference being made to the road safety issues this created on the A9. Reference was made to the potential for an alternative off-road route which followed the North Coast 500 route to be explored to provide for an improved and safer experience for cyclists and walkers, and the opportunity to have discussions with the North Coast 500 and Sustrans on this issue. In this regard, it was suggested that in the first instance the Council's Principal Tourism and Film Officer be asked to attend a Ward Business Meeting to discuss this matter.

During further discussion, Members also sought and received an update on the funding available to landowners to maintain and improve core paths, specific reference being made to opportunities through the Scottish Rural Development Programme. It was also confirmed there was no necessity for landowners to maintain core paths. In addition, reference was made to the opportunity to further develop and promote a coast to coast route in Sutherland, it being noted that such a route was currently passable and the bulk of a coast to coast route was included in the Amended Core Paths Plan.

The Committee:

- APPROVED** the Sutherland area of the Caithness and Sutherland Amended Core Paths Plan to be published for formal consultation; and
- AGREED** that the potential for an alternative route for cyclists and walkers which followed the North Coast 500 route to be explored be discussed at a Ward Business Meeting and that the Principal Tourism and Film Officer be invited to attend in this regard.

8. Golspie Associated School Group Overview Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Ghoillspidh

There had been circulated Report No SCC/10/17 dated 5 June 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought and provided in regard to the grading of the quality of management and leadership as 'adequate' at Helmsdale Primary and Rogart Primary Nurseries;
- clarification was sought in regard to why four schools within the ASG did not have a travel plan; the Education Quality Improvement Manager explained the requirement for a travel plan was based on need and undertook to investigate this matter further and report back to Members;
- clarification was sought and provided in regard to the information provided on staffing levels within the ASG, it being confirmed that the figures shown represented the full staffing complement for each school;
- an explanation was also sought on the criteria used in grading the condition of buildings in response to which the Manager advised he would arrange for this information to be provided to the Ward Manager for circulation to Members;
- an explanation was sought in regard to the definition of 'positive destinations' as set out in the report, concern being expressed that from the information provided it appeared that any type of employment was considered as a positive destination; the Manager advised he would seek further clarification on this matter from Skills Development Scotland who provided the figures in relation to positive destinations and report back to Members;
- it was suggested there was a need for more clarity in relation to the figures shown for positive destinations and Ms K Currie advised she would seek more information on this matter from Skills Development Scotland and share this with Members;
- the opportunity for more detailed information to be provided in regard to destinations under the heading of 'further education' in terms of the types of courses this involved; the Chair advised that further details should be available through the schools locally and requested that the Manager arrange for this information to be passed to the Ward Manager for circulation to Members, and thereafter Members be given the opportunity to ask any follow up questions at the next meeting;
- issues around the need to improve the take up of free school meals in Sutherland, and also that funding from the Scottish Government through the Pupils Equity Fund was dependent on uptake of free school meal entitlement rather than eligibility and the need to publicise this issue; Mrs D Mackay confirmed she would arrange for this matter to be considered by the Sutherland Community Partnership; and
- a point in regard to the increase in the attendances shown for adult learning as detailed in the report; the Manager indicated he would ask the relevant officer in High Life Highland to provide this information to Members.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** that further information be provided to Members on the specific issues raised in the discussion and detailed above.

9. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017
Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2016 gu 31 Màrt 2017

There had been circulated Report No SCC/11/17 dated 23 June 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought and provided in relation to the number of homeless presentations in Sutherland and issues in relation to overcrowding or unsuitable accommodation which may not be reflected in the figures; the Housing Manager reported on a proposal to identify a Sutherland based officer to deal with homelessness in the area and he advised that any information Members had on overcrowding and related matters should be referred to the Service;
- clarification was sought and provided on the approach being taken to increase the availability of homeless accommodation in Sutherland and the use of bed and breakfast establishments in this regard, it being noted the current approach was to use Council housing stock;
- the opportunity for tenants, with the permission of the Council, to sublet vacant rooms in properties for example to provide accommodation for young people attending further/higher education establishments;
- in regard to the number of void properties in Sutherland, the opportunity to provide information in Council job advertisements on the contact details for the local Housing Office and highlighting the availability of Council housing for rent in areas on the basis this may make posts more attractive to candidates; the Housing Manager confirmed that he would raise the issues in terms of the recruitment process with the Council's HR Section;
- the relevant staff be commended on the relatively low level of rent arrears in Sutherland; however concern was expressed at the impact the ongoing roll-out of Universal Credit would have in terms of an increase in rent arrears going forward;
- concern was expressed that delays being experienced in the payment of benefits to tenants may result in over reporting in terms of the rent arrears figures and the potential to capture this information in future reporting and to take a sensitive approach where appropriate; the Housing Manager advised that a Rent Arrears Working Group was currently reviewing the policy and approach being taken to rent arrears and that this would be subject to a report to Members at the relevant Committee in due course;
- the opportunity to address concerns in regard to the number properties, gardens, fences and surrounds in Council estates which were not being maintained to a good standard and also issues with dogs and the capacity of the Service to deal with these issues, also taking into account some properties were in private ownership; the Housing Manager provided an update on the action Service on this matter including a review of the maintenance and overall appearance of Council estates and advised Members to let officers know of any particular concerns in Sutherland;
- in regard to the above it was suggested this matter be discussed in more detail at a Ward Business Meeting;
- the importance of achieving value for money when undertaking maintenance works by using local contractors where possible to carry out works; and
- clarification was sought and provided on the arrangements for housing support provision in Sutherland, during which the Chair requested that the Principal Housing Officer be asked to attend a Ward Business Meeting to provide an update on this matter.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017;
- ii. **AGREED** that arrangements be made to discuss the maintenance and appearance of properties Council estates in Sutherland and for an update to be provided on housing support provision at a Ward Business Meeting.

10. Bank of Scotland Mobile Banking in Sutherland Bancaireachd Gluasadach Banca na h-Alba ann an Cataibh

There had been circulated Report No SCC/12/17 dated 31 May 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought and provided that the Bank of Scotland had proposed the locations set out in the report; officers were content with the proposals in terms of their accessibility for customers; there had been no community consultation on the proposals to date, and the potential impact on post offices which offered banking services in the area had not been assessed to date;
- concern was expressed in regard to the closure of branches in terms of disadvantaging communities in North and West Sutherland and the need for further discussions to be held with the Bank of Scotland on the need for a wider geographical spread of its mobile banking services to mitigate against the impact of the closures and to meet the needs of communities across the whole of Sutherland;
- it was suggested therefore that the application be approved for a temporary period of four months to ensure the communities in the proposed locations set out in the report were not disadvantaged and also to allow for further discussions to be sought with the Bank of Scotland on the wider provision of its banking services in the area; this would also allow for consultation to be undertaken with those communities affected by the bank closures;
- it also be made clear in writing to the Bank of Scotland that Members deplored its decision to close branches in Sutherland; and
- it was suggested that further legal advice should be sought in relation to a charge being applied for the use of the Council's car parks for this purpose.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the application by the Bank of Scotland to park their Mobile Banking Unit in the proposed locations set out in the report for a temporary period of four months;
- ii. **AGREED** that a letter be sent to the Bank of Scotland on behalf of the Committee confirming the above, expressing concern at its decision to close branches in Sutherland and seeking further discussions on the wider provision of its banking services to communities across Sutherland;
- iii. **AGREED** that further legal advice be sought in relation to a charge being applied for the for the use of the Council's car parks;
- iv. **AGREED** that arrangements be made for community consultation to be undertaken on the proposals.

11. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 22 February 2017 which had been approved by the Council on 9 March 2017.

4. BT Openreach Update **Fios às Ùr mu BT Openreach**

The Ward Manager confirmed that representatives of BT Openreach were not in attendance to give an update on this item.

In this regard, Members expressed their dissatisfaction and disappointment that representatives from BT Openreach had been confirmed to attend this and the previous meeting but had failed to turn up on both occasions. It was suggested that this was unprecedented and concern was expressed at the lack of advance notice or apologies received. In addition, reference was made to the fact that Members (as elected representatives of the people of Sutherland) had not had the opportunity to discuss issues and concerns in relation BT Openreach's services in the area. It was therefore requested that this item be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

Following further discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to request that a press release be issued highlighting Members' concerns on this matter and that a letter be sent to BT Openreach in similar terms, together with a request that the organisation's Chief Executive attend the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 12.50pm.