

**The Highland Council
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held in the Chamber,
Council Offices, Drummuie on Wednesday, 13 September 2017 at 10.30am.

Present:

Ms K Currie

Mr R Gale

Mrs D Mackay

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison

Ms L Munro

Non Members:

Mrs M Davidson

Officials in attendance:

Mr G Cameron, Ward Manager, Corporate Development Service

Mr J Robertson, Programme Manager, City Region Deal, Development and Infrastructure Service

Mr G Mackenzie, Roads Operation Manager, Community Services

Ms J Jennett, Area Care and Learning Manager, Care and Learning Service

Mr B Northedge, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service

Ms R Cleland, Corporate Communications Manager, Chief Executive's Office

Ms K Lackie, Business Manager, Chief Executive's Office

Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service

Also in Attendance:

Mr Bruce McClory, Senior Operations Manager, BT Openreach

Chief Inspector I MacLelland, North Area Commander, Police Scotland

Superintendent A Wright, Police Scotland

**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. Council Programme
Prògram na Comhairle**

The Council Leader was in attendance at the meeting to discuss with the Committee, the Council Programme. In this regard, there was circulated a copy of the draft Council Programme.

The Leader explained that the draft Council Programme which had been agreed by the full Council, was a work in progress and that a second draft would be circulated after further consultation. The aim was to have an action plan in place by the end of October 2017, and it was the intention to refresh the Programme on

an annual basis. She advised that Members were being asked to consider their area priorities and how they could be aligned with the Council Programme.

The Committee **NOTED** progress with the draft Council Programme.

4. Area Priorities Prìomhachasan Sgìre

The Council Leader was also in attendance to discuss with the Committee their Area Priorities. In this regard, there was circulated a copy of the current Area Priorities for Sutherland.

The Leader advised that it was important that there were clear measures and an action plan in place to support delivery of the Committee's area priorities. She suggested that it would be helpful for Members to meet with the Corporate Audit and Performance Manager to have further discussions on this matter.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was suggested 'energy' should be added to the list of area priorities in view of the opportunities to do more to exploit local energy resources in Sutherland, for example through river hydro schemes;
- concern that problems had been experienced with local hydro schemes due to access to the grid being denied in some areas and the need to address this issue;
- there was a need to revisit and refresh the approach taken to community benefit from renewables and to be more demanding in terms of levels of remuneration, and also to consider alternative models such as community ownership;
- there was a need to work in partnership with the Sutherland Community Partnership to deliver on the local priorities given there was a commonality of issues and purpose and to maximise benefits and avoid duplication; and
- it was suggested that capital investment was critical to Sutherland's economy and therefore it was important momentum was maintained in relation to the delivery of the Dornoch Sports Centre project.

Discussion then focused on the need as a priority to develop solutions to improve transport provision in the area to address the barriers which existed in relation to children and young people accessing opportunities and services. This included barriers in relation to attendance at events such as the Highland Youth Parliament, and access to college courses and health services. Reference was made to the importance of a joined up approach being taken with the Sutherland Community Partnership on the basis that based on past experience this was a complex issue and that a more flexible approach was required going forward.

In addition, it was suggested that the potential for the Council's tendered bus services to be reviewed on a more regular basis to ensure they were operating as effectively as possible be discussed with the relevant officers at a ward business meeting.

Thereafter, concern was expressed at distances people in some areas had to travel to access basic health services including pupils within school hours, specific concerns being raised about the removal of dentistry services in Kinlochbervie. Members expressed the view that people in Sutherland had an entitlement to basic

health services and therefore it was agreed to write to the Director of Public Health, NHS Highland on this matter.

Following on from the above, Members commented as follows:-

- concern that in terms of partnership structures any business pertaining to Sutherland should be dealt with in the area; in this regard it was suggested that the Sutherland Community Partnership provide a clear view to the Council on this matter;
- there was also a need to review the Associated School Group boundaries so that all schools in the area were included within the Sutherland ASGs;
- it was important there was a continued focus on the need to develop the facilities and infrastructure along the North Coast 500 route;
- the potential to better support community assets in the area, specific reference being made to play parks which were in a poor state of repair and which would benefit from asset sharing;
- clarification was sought in regard to the for affordable housing in Sutherland, and on provision for homelessness in the area, concern being expressed that this was a hidden problem in the area;
- in regard to the above, it was suggested that Members consider the areas of demand and type and mix of developments required to meet local needs and thereafter have discussions with the Housing Development Team with a view to setting milestones and influencing the Strategic Housing Investment Plan;
- reference to the recruitment difficulties being experienced in the hospitality and care sectors in the area and the need to consider the wider issues such as housing to attract potential recruits into the area;
- concern at the drift of jobs and young people and families out of Sutherland and the resultant drain on the economy and the sustainability of communities; in this regard, there was a need to have forward plan and to work in partnership to attract businesses and investment into the area; and
- it was critical there was a focus on encouraging the delivery of alternative forms of technology to drive forward digital connectivity across the area and to provide a permanent solution in some rural areas.

Thereafter, the Committee was provided with a summary of the next steps during which it was suggested that the current area priorities be refined to reflect the points raised in discussion, and consideration given to how the priorities could be aligned with and reflected in the Council's Programme. In addition, it was reported that Service Managers would be undertaking further work to ensure that Service Plans were more responsive to local priorities.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. that the current area priorities be refined to incorporate the additional points identified by Members and to consider further how these can be reflected in the Council Programme;
- ii. to invite the Corporate Audit and Performance Manager to meet with Members to discuss measures to support the delivery of the area priorities;
- iii. to write to the Director of Public Health, NHS Highland to express concern about access to basic local health services in the area, with specific reference to dentistry in Kinlochbervie; and
- iv. that the potential for the Council's tendered bus services to be reviewed on a more regular basis be considered at a ward business meeting, and the relevant officials invited to attend.

5. BT Openreach Update Fios às Ùr mu BT Openreach

Mr Bruce McClory, Senior Operations Manager, Openreach, explained this was a transitional period for BT and Openreach in terms of areas of responsibility and governance. He advised that Openreach delivered services for a range of network providers and was heavily regulated and in this regard equivalence was at the forefront of its business so that providers had equal access to the network.

Mr McClory continued that Openreach had undertaken a recruitment exercise in the Highlands and Islands and that due to challenges in filling some posts there were currently eleven vacancies in the area. He explained that while good progress was being made in delivering the fibre network throughout the Highlands and Islands, and despite the significant investment in Sutherland to date, this would take both time and resources to complete. There were also logistical challenges and cost implications in delivering fibre to premises in remoter communities. He advised that alternative solutions to fibre were also being investigated and the technology in this area was advancing at pace.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was important that alternative technologies to fibre be investigated as a faster and cheaper solution to extending broadband coverage in remote and rural areas;
- further information was requested and received in relation to the Community Fibre Partnership Programme;
- the potential for the Sutherland Community Partnership to establish a short life working group to consider connectivity issues in Sutherland and for Openreach to be represented on that group; the Senior Operations Manager advised that he would check the feasibility of Openreach's involvement with the Partnership;
- a point that there had been a lack of investment in upgrading the network in the area over the past number of years and a query in relation to the planned investment in Sutherland going forward.

Thereafter, the Chair advised that while the Committee recognised the difficulties faced by Openreach, an immediate, medium and long-term plan for resolving problems and improving coverage in Sutherland was required. In addition to the personal wishes of communities, fundamental access to effective broadband connectivity was restricting business and the economy. Therefore, it was important to build relationships with BT and Openreach and to understand their plans and discuss alternative solutions so that a blended approach was taken to connectivity in Sutherland going forward.

In response, the Senior Operations Manager confirmed he was willing to attend future meetings of the Committee and that outwith meetings any issues be raised with him directly via the Ward Manager.

The Committee **AGREED** that arrangements be made for BT Openreach's regular attendance at the Committee and that outwith meetings any issues be raised with the Senior Operations Manager.

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

There was circulated Report No SCC/13/17 dated 30 August 2017 by the North Area Commander.

Arising from the report, the North Area Commander advised that with Members agreement, the Public Protection Unit would be in attendance at the next appropriate meeting to give a presentation on their activities.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in regard to road safety, the potential for more robust action to be taken in relation to the ongoing problem of slow traffic on the A9 given the frustration this caused for other drivers;
- in regard to the Driving Ambitions initiative it was important that all secondary schools in Sutherland and also the Sutherland Members were invited to attend future events; it was also important that consideration be given to how the initiative could be updated and repackaged;
- clarification was sought in relation to the figures detailed in the report for anti-social behaviour, it being suggested the perception was that the number of court appearances for offences had significantly reduced; the North Area Commander confirmed that the figures related to recorded crimes and he was not aware of any decrease in respect of court attendances;
- the potential for there to be a greater focus on more visible deterrents rather than detection as a response to vehicles speeding on the A9 through Golspie village, including the potential for a fixed speed camera to be installed; the North Area Commander advised there were issues in terms of the criteria for fixed cameras and referred to issues with the previous deployment of a camera van in terms of the community response; and
- concern was expressed that the use of mobile phones while driving continued to be widespread, and it was important there was a continued focus on this problem given the potentially fatal consequences.

In addition to the report, Superintendent A Wright, Police Scotland, gave a presentation on the ongoing review of Area Control Rooms in Scotland. He advised that the strategic direction had been set by the Scottish Police Authority and his role was to provide information on how the proposed changes would be delivered safely and securely.

Following the presentation, Members commented on the proposals as follows:-

- an assurance was sought and received that in addition to the Gazetteer, officers would have access to other forms of technology such as Google maps to ensure that locations could be identified as quickly as possible;
- it was vital Police Scotland ensured that officers had good communication skills when dealing with emergency calls and the importance of using of plain english was reinforced;
- the potential for a public stress test of the Gazetteer to be undertaken and the importance going forward of ensuring the intelligence of the system was developed going forward;
- issues around the ability to use calls from mobile phones to assist officers identify locations; and

- the preferred option would be for the Inverness Control Room to be retained, on the basis the new system could not replicate the response times of locally based staff with local knowledge; however the work undertaken by Police Scotland to date in developing the new system and to make it as accessible and user friendly as possible was acknowledged.

Thereafter, Superintendent A Wright issued an invitation for all Members to visit the Service Centre at Bilston Glen to view systems at first hand. It was confirmed the Area Commander would liaise with the Ward Manager in regard to the arrangements for this visit.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED**, following scrutiny the progress report and updates in relation to the 4 Priorities; Road Safety, Substance Abuse/Misuse, Antisocial Behaviour and Public Protection; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a presentation from the Public Protection Unit be arranged for the next appropriate meeting.

7. Inverness City and Highland Region Deal Cùmhnant Baile Inbhir Nis agus Roinn na Gàidhealtachd

There was circulated Report No SCC/14/17 dated 30 August 2017 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- concern was expressed at the lack of positive destinations for young people with a disability and also young carers and care experienced young people in Sutherland, and the opportunities through the Skills and Employability project to tackle these issues through a joined up approach would be welcomed;
- in regard to the above, it was noted that discussions were being progressed with the Scottish Government on the need for a localist approach to be adopted and in relation to funding for the project which had not yet been secured;
- it was critical the Digital project considered delivering alternative forms of technology to fibre as a mechanism to extend digital coverage across the area;
- there was no information on objectives or outcomes in relation to the projects and therefore it was difficult to grasp what benefits would be delivered in Sutherland; it was confirmed this information was contained in the business cases for each of the projects which could be made available to Members and that the majority of projects were pan Highland;
- concern at the lack of assistance received from the City Deal to support transport costs for pupils to attend courses organised by Golspie High School and Dornoch Academy to promote the demand areas in Sutherland of tourism, care sector and STEM; the Programme Manager confirmed he would feedback Members concerns on this matter to the Economy and Regeneration Manager, while reiterating that funding had yet to be secured for the Skills and Employability project;
- an assurance was sought that the rurality of Sutherland would be taken into consideration to ensure young people in the area had access to the Science Skills Academy project; the Programme Manager confirmed that he would feedback Members comments to Highlands and Islands Enterprise, advising that the location of three of the Newton Rooms had yet to be determined and that funding was being sought in relation to transport costs;

- the investment through the City Region Deal was welcomed, however it was important the Committee continued to challenge the spend and priorities on the basis it was not clear how the Programme fitted with the area priorities for Sutherland and the expectations of constituents;
- it was suggested that Sutherland was ideally placed for the development of a care and hospitality faculty in response to the challenges for both sectors in rural areas; and
- clarification was sought and received in regard to the best way for Members to feed into the Affordable Housing project in relation to Sutherland.

In conclusion of this item, it was confirmed that regular progress reports on the City Region Deal were provided to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee, and that the Programme Manager would act as the link for Members in respect of the Programme going forward.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** that Members be circulated with a link to the business cases for the individual City Deal projects.

8. **Elphin Speed Limit Cuingealachadh Astair Ailbhinn**

There was circulated Report No SCC/15/17 dated 30 August 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought and received that there was unlikely to be a requirement in future to reduce the speed limit further, it being noted that the imposition of a 20mph limit was designed for more built up areas;
- clarification was also sought and received in regard to the cost implications of the signage associated with the proposals it being noted this would be in the order of £1,000 to £1,500;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed the proposals would include improvements to the road signage in the area, details of which were provided and the installation of two permanent solar powered “smiley faces” at each end of the village; and
- it was requested that the operation of the new speed limit be monitored and reviewed in 12 months time.

Thereafter, and in response to questions the Roads Operation Manager confirmed he would provide Mr J McGillivray with details of the process to seek a licence to occupy in respect of a play park in Edderton. In addition, a point was raised in regard to the opportunity to display postcodes or numbers on laybys in Sutherland to assist drivers and the emergency services in identifying locations. The Manager undertook to investigate this matter further.

Thereafter, a point was raised in regard to the proposals for winter maintenance plan and clarification was sought as to whether there would be a reduction in the gritting fleet in Sutherland in 2017/18. The Manager provided an update on this matter and advised that the winter plan was currently in preparation and that no decision had yet been taken on this matter. He advised that the final analysis

would be to ensure winter maintenance in Sutherland was undertaken in accordance with Council policy.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. a reduction in the 40mph speed limit to 30mph over the stretch of road from the current western limit of the 40mph speed limit to just east of the Abhainn a' Chnocain bridge;
- ii. the remainder of the 40mph speed limit is not reduced to 30mph;
- iii. that the 40mph speed limit is not extended 650m to the east of the existing 40mph limit;
- iv. that an engineering investigation should be carried out to investigate the construction of a level verge footpath along the length of one side of the A835 to connect houses to the phone box, post box and Community Hall to encourage healthy life styles and reduce isolation; and
- v. that a review of the operation of the new speed limit be undertaken in 12 months time.

9. Dornoch Associated School Group Overview Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Dhòrnaich

There was circulated Report No SCC/16/17 dated 23 August 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

In discussion, Members commended staff, officers and parents on their work and commitment in delivering the 3 to 18 campus within the ASG. It was suggested that while there had been challenges with the transition, this had been a positive experience for all those involved and the campus represented an excellent model for other ASGs.

The Committee **NOTED**, following scrutiny the content of the report.

10. Proposals for Changes to the Governance of Education Molaidhean airson Atharrachaidhean do Riaghladh Foghlaim

There was circulated Report No SCC/17/17 dated 31 August 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- concern was expressed at the review of the General Teaching Council for Scotland's functions as part of the proposals and any changes which would impact on what was a sound and long standing system of teacher education and registration;
- it was suggested this was one initiative too many and that Members should hesitate to support the centralisation aspect of the proposals;
- the consultation had been set up in good faith in response to concerns about the widening of the attainment gap and standards in literacy and numeracy; however concern was expressed that these challenges would not be resolved through changes to the governance structures;
- it was suggested there were wider issues to be considered in terms of addressing the above challenges and concern was expressed that separating out education may impact on the good progress being made with the integration of Children's Services in Highland and therefore any

proposals which would threaten this joined up approach should be resisted; and

- in terms of recruitment difficulties there was a need also to take a systematic approach to increasing the pool of teaching staff, particularly head teachers, and therefore to consider the wider issues to make the area more attractive to potential recruits, for example through the provision of housing.

During further discussion, it was suggested that Members in addition to their individual views on the review, had a responsibility to listen carefully to their communities and parent councils, and to ensure that where there was a disparity of views these were reported back as part of the consultation process.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the Council has agreed to seek to work with Government, including through CoSLA, the Northern Alliance and other fora in an endeavour to influence these proposals in a more positive and constructive direction; and
- ii. **AGREED** that Members seek views on the proposals through discussions in their communities and particularly through discussions with their respective Parent Councils.

11. Street Naming – New Housing Developments Ainmeachadh Sràide - Leasachaidhean Ùra Taigheadais

There was circulated Report No SCC/18/17 dated 4 September 2017 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development.

The Committee **HOMOLOGATED** the naming of the new development in Dornoch as Royal Golf Gardens.

12. Dornoch Common Good Quarterly Monitoring Report Aithisg Sgrùdadh Ràitheil Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich

There was circulated Report No SCC/19/17 dated 28 August 2017 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development.

In discussion, it was highlighted that there was an understanding that funding of £100k from the Common Good Fund would be made available towards the Dornoch Sports Centre project at the appropriate time.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of the Dornoch Common Good Fund, as shown in the Quarter 1 monitoring statement.

13. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated for noting Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 17 June 2017 which had been approved by the Council on 29 June 2017.

The meeting ended at 3.00pm.
