

**The Highland Council  
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held in Wick Town Hall, Bridge Street, Wick, on Tuesday, 29 August 2017 at 10.00am.

**Present:**

Mr R Bremner  
Mr D Mackay  
Mr W Mackay  
Mr S Mackie

Mr M Reiss  
Mr K Rosie  
Mr A Sinclair  
Ms N Sinclair

**Officials in attendance:**

Mr A Macmanus, Ward Manager, Corporate Development Service  
Mr B Northedge, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service  
Mr J Holden, Housing Manager (North), Community Services  
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Service

**Also in Attendance:**

Chief Inspector I MacLelland, North Area Commander, Police Scotland  
Mr D Kilday, Programme Manager, Police Scotland

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Liesgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There had been circulated Report No CC/12/17 dated 21 August 2017 by the North Area Commander.

In addition to the report, Mr D Kilday, Programme Manager, Police Scotland, gave a presentation on the ongoing review of Area Control Rooms in Scotland during which he advised that a final decision on the review would be taken by the Scottish Police Authority Board on 28 September 2017. He also 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 Chair in regard to the arrangements for this visit.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues in relation to the review:-

- following a request, Mr Kilday confirmed that he would arrange for a copy of the presentation to be circulated to Members;

- concern the figures for discontinued calls in the Highlands and Islands did not reflect that the Inverness Control Room was currently operating with a number of vacancies which equated to one quarter of the full staffing complement; it was therefore important to raise awareness of all the underlying figures and issues in terms of the review;
- it was also important the public be provided with full information and assurances in relation to the review in terms of safety and security;
- the proposed location of the control room in Dundee was not considered to be 'north' from a Highland perspective;
- the rationale for a two site National Database Enquiry Unit (NDEU) in relation to resilience and contingency planning should also be applied to the control rooms;
- concern that the commitment previously given to the Council that jobs would be protected through the creation of a single NDEU based in Inverness would not be delivered;
- it was important all the facts associated with the review were provided to the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) to ensure there was proper scrutiny of the proposals;
- concern that only one option was being recommended to the SPA when there were alternative options that could be considered and which did not involve the closure of the Inverness Control Room;
- there were issues in regard to the Gazetteer in terms of identifying exact locations and recognising place names and concern was expressed that the new system could not replicate the response times of locally based staff with local knowledge;
- an assurance was sought that operators while taking callers through the list of pre-set questions would at the same time be taking action to deploy officers to the incident; in this regard Members were urged to visit Bilston Glen to view the operation at first hand;
- clarification was sought and received in regard to how the quality of responses to calls under the proposals would be monitored to ensure improvements in the service could be delivered where required; the Area Commander advised that further consideration would be given as to how performance information could be presented to Members for scrutiny in future; and
- an assurance was sought in relation to the staff currently employed at the Inverness Control Room; it was confirmed that all staff would be offered a position in the NDEU and if they did not wish to accept that offer then redeployment into another post in the area would be explored.

In conclusion of this item, Members suggested it was important to police by consent and therefore the Scottish Police Authority should take account of the views being expressed in regard to the real risks associated with the proposals and the potentially serious consequences should they be approved. Members therefore urged Police Scotland at this late stage to consider alternative proposals, the Council's preference being for there to be a joint control room for all the emergency services located in Inverness.

Following on from the above, and in discussion on the Area Commander's report, Members commented as follows:-

- it would be helpful if local officers could attend or provide reports to Wick Community Council and others in the area on a more regular basis;

- in regard to the above, the potential for the Association of Caithness Community Councils to be the point of contact for the Police in terms of reporting and disseminating information; the Area Commander advised he would provide an update to the next appropriate meeting in regard to Police attendance/reports to community councils in the area;
- confirmation was sought and received that Police Scotland would be willing to participate in a tourism summit to be held in Caithness to ensure a joined up approach in response to the significant increase in visitor numbers in the area due to the North Coast 500 and other factors;
- clarification was sought on the process following fatal accidents in the area to highlight improvements that could be made in respect of driver behaviour or road engineering;
- the reduction in speeding, seatbelt and mobile phone offences in Caithness was welcomed, however 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;
- concern was expressed at the volume and speed of motorbikes using the North Coast 500 and the importance of there being visible traffic enforcement on the route;
- a point in regard to the benefits associated with dashcams in terms of improving driver behaviour and as a source of evidence in prosecutions;
- the potential for NADIC road signs to be updated to reflect local issues in Caithness; the Area Commander confirmed he would investigate the potential to take this matter forward;
- concerns in relation to speeding on the A9 from Thurso to Scrabster and also on the A836 near Thurso on the Forss straight;
- the potential for there to be more flexibility in relation to the deployment of camera vans so they could target specific locations in communities such as schools, and the opportunity to deploy unmarked camera vans in key locations;
- the potential for Police Scotland to deploy more traffic officers in Caithness to deal with local issues;
- in relation to the North Coast 500, the opportunities to develop an off road track in the area which could be used to educate drivers on road safety; and
- concern at the increasing problem of unacceptable driver behaviour in relation to road rage.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**, following scrutiny the progress report and updates in relation to the 3 Priorities; Road Safety, Antisocial Behaviour and Drug and Alcohol Misuse.

**In accordance with Standing Order 18, the Committee AGREED to consider Item 5 first, followed by items 4 and 6.**

**5. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2017 to 30 June 2017  
Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais - 1 Giblean 2017 to 30 Òg mhios 2017**

There had been circulated Report No CC/14/17 dated 21 August 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in relation to the percentage of tenancies sustained for more than one year it was confirmed this did not capture the fact that more tenants were opting for the private sector for a number of reasons, details of which were provided, and therefore the status of 'red' was perhaps not a fair measure in a Caithness context;
- clarification was sought in regard to the challenges in meeting the target for the average length of time to complete non-emergency repairs and the need to improve on performance; an assurance was provided that Members concerns on this matter would be fed back to the Repairs Manager;
- it would be helpful if Members had the opportunity to view void properties in Wick to observe at first hand the issues and challenges with those properties and thereafter to consider different options for the use or disposal of those assets;
- a point in regard to the approach and next steps to be taken in relation to the four properties in Wick which had been advertised for sale, concern being expressed at the implications of re-marketing the properties at a reduced price; it was noted this matter would be discussed with Members at their next Ward Business Meeting on 4 September 2017 at which the Head of Housing would be in attendance;
- concern in relation to the number of voids in Thurso and at the length of time taken to re-let some properties and the related loss of income; it was confirmed Members comments would be fed back to the Repairs Manager and that details of void costs would be provided;
- the potential for capital works to be undertaken to properties in response to demand for certain types of properties;
- it was suggested there was a need for more recognition of the specific challenges in Caithness in relation to housing and for a more inclusive approach to be taken to address those issues; and
- in regard to the above there was a need for the lettings policy to be reviewed and consideration given to the potential to introduce more regular inspections of properties.

Thereafter, it was confirmed that Members would have the opportunity to discuss in more detail housing issues and policy in Caithness with the Head of Housing at their Ward Business Meeting on 4 September 2017.

Discussion then followed on the challenges in relation to tenants gardens which were not being maintained to an appropriate standard. It was suggested that consideration be given as to how to better support vulnerable and less able tenants, through the wider Service or community initiatives, taking into account the Garden Aid initiative was fully subscribed. In addition, an assurance was sought and received that robust action was being taken against tenants where appropriate, on the basis this was a widespread problem, and that a considerable amount of staff time was involved in dealing with the issue. It was also reported there were a number of challenges in pursuing successful punitive action against tenants, details of which were provided, and there were also financial implications. It was suggested this item should also form part of the discussion on housing issues at the next Ward Business Meeting.

The Committee **NOTED**, following scrutiny the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2017 to 30 June 2017.

#### 4. Wick Associated School Group Overview Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte

There had been circulated Report No CC/13/17 dated 20 August 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

In discussion, Members suggested that consideration should be given to Additional Support Need (ASN) staff being allocated to the ASG rather than individual schools to allow for more flexibility in the use of the available ASN support and discussion followed on how this could be taken forward. This was in view of recruitment difficulties and the shortage of ASN staff in some schools within the ASG. It was noted this was a Highland wide issue, and the suggested approach was currently being piloted in other areas.

Thereafter, Members commended the Head Teacher of Wick High School and her management team on the significant improvement achieved in respect of positive destinations for 2015/16 which at 95.6% was above both the Highland and Scottish average for the first time. It was suggested this reflected the strong leadership and management at the School and was a good news story for Caithness. The School's performance in relation to positive destinations and the new campus in Wick also had a positive effect in terms of the sustainability of the community going forward.

A number of other points were raised as follows:-

- clarification was sought and received in regard to the reasons Keiss Primary School was rated as 'poor' in terms of suitability;
- an explanation was provided in regard to a range of issues associated with exclusions in terms of the impact on attainment levels and the support provided to individual pupils;
- the increase in visitor numbers at Wick Library since it had been combined with the Swimming Pool was welcomed; these were excellent facilities and the new arrangements had delivered positive benefits for the community;
- the position in respect of visitor numbers at the Caithness Broch Centre was also welcomed.

In conclusion of this item, it was noted the Education Quality Improvement Manager had been appointed to a new post within the Service. Members thanked the Manager for his assistance and contribution over the period and extended him their good wishes for the future.

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

#### 6. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 16 June 2017, which were approved by the Council on 29 June 2017.

The meeting ended at 12.40pm.