

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held in Wick Town Hall, Bridge Street, Wick, on Tuesday, 21 November 2017 at 10.00am.

Present:

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

Mr M Reiss
Mr A Sinclair
Ms N Sinclair

Officials in attendance:

Mr A Macmanus, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms A Donald, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Community Services
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Mr G Mackenzie, Roads Operations Manager, Community Services
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in Attendance:

Group Manager M Loynd, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

**1. Apologies for Absence
Liesgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr K Rosie.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report 2017-18
Aithisg Dèanadais Sgìreil 2017-18 na Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn**

There had been circulated Report No CC/15/17 dated 9 November 2017 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In addition to the report, the Local Senior Officer gave a presentation on the consultation that was about to commence on Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Transformation.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- an explanation was sought in regard to the proposal to refine the station footprint as part of the transformation and the potential implications for stations in Caithness. It was confirmed this was mainly an issue for the central belt and that the station footprint in the Highlands was considered to be one of the Service's strengths;

- it would be helpful if the Service used plain English in respect of the consultation;
- the proposals to use different technologies and mid-sized vehicles and to introduce more flexible crewing models be supported on the basis this would help improve availability within the area;
- clarification was sought and provided in relation to the circumstances whereby the Service would assist NHS Highland in responding to incidents involving uninjured falls where no medical response was required;
- in a climate of reductions in public sector funding, the Council was of the view that sharing Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue and Scottish Ambulance Service control rooms would save money going forward;
- the potential to offer more training courses locally as a measure to address the recruitment challenges at some stations on the basis the feedback being received was that potential recruits were reluctant to give up the time involved in attending courses outwith the area;
- a point in regard to whether the Service planned to organise a Hi-Fires event in the area, reference being made to the success of the previous event held in Thurso and the importance of engaging with young people as potential future recruits. The Local Senior Officer confirmed he would discuss this matter with the Station Manager and report back to Members;
- it was important that pressure continued to be applied to have Thurso Fire Station upgraded as a priority and that Members concerns on this matter once again be reported back to the Service;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed the main causes of fires in domestic dwellings were electrical and cooking related;
- in relation to prevention and awareness raising, clarification was sought and provided in relation to the strategy and media campaign undertaken by the Service over the festive period;
- an update was sought and provided in regard to two recent fatal fires in Caithness; and
- an explanation was also provided in relation to the work of the Service and in partnership to provide communities and those people who were vulnerable and difficult to reach with the appropriate advice and support, and the challenges in this regard.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report and the presentation on the consultation on Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Transformation.

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

There had been circulated Report No CC/16/17 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- to allow for further Member scrutiny, it was requested that additional columns be included in the staffing table in future reports showing FTE posts advertised but not filled, and also in relation to the number of non-class committed teachers at each school;
- it was encouraging that staff had indicated they were content with the condition of the buildings at Thurso High School; however there were issues

with security due to the lack of a perimeter fence and also safety in terms of the management of traffic through the School;

- in regard to the above and while it was recognised the Council's capital funding was limited, there may be the potential for more a modest and cheaper refurbishment to be carried out at the School;
- the staff be commended on the excellent ASN work being undertaken across the ASG;
- it was requested that further information be provided on Croileagan Inbhir Theorsa's funding to allow Members to consider any correlations that may exist between its budget, staffing levels and the outcome of assessments;
- it would be helpful if Members could be provided with a more detailed analysis of ASN provision across Caithness to assist in their consideration of the issues in the area;
- a point in regard to whether there was a plan or initiative to improve the uptake of free school meal entitlement at Thurso High School. The Education Quality Improvement Manager confirmed she would discuss this matter further with the Head Teacher;
- it was suggested the term free school meals carried stigma and was distinctive and out of date and there was a need for an entirely different approach to be taken to the provision of meals for all in schools and other establishments; and
- there was also an issue with pupils purchasing fast food meals outside the High School, including those pupils with an entitlement to a free school meal, and reference was made to potential issues in relation to the quality of school meals and social factors in this regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED**, following scrutiny the content of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** that additional columns be included in the staffing table in future reports showing FTE posts advertised but not filled, and also in relation to the number of non-class committed teachers at each school;
- iii. **AGREED** information be provided in relation to Croileagan Inbhir Theorsa's funding; and
- iv. **AGREED** that Members be circulated with a more detailed analysis in relation to ASN provision in Caithness

5. **Winter Maintenance Plan 2017-18** **Obair-gleidhidh Geamhraidh 2017-18**

There had been circulated Report No CC/17/17 dated 27 October 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

In discussion, reference was made to the potential for Loch Street, Wick to be treated on the basis that the road could be extremely icy in winter and many of the residents living in the area were elderly. The Roads Operations Manager confirmed he would investigate this matter further.

Thereafter, reference was made to the issues and challenges around the lack of uptake of the Council's 'Winter Resilience' scheme by community councils in the area. It was confirmed the scheme was still 'live' and that applications from communities would be welcomed. In discussion, it was proposed that a press

release be issued to raise awareness of the scheme in an effort to improve uptake in the area.

During further discussion, Members raised the following additional points:-

- the potential for road safety signs to be installed at Hill of Forss, Caithness in view of a recent incident in this location; and
- the potential to extend the principle of the winter resilience scheme to the summer months to assist volunteers to carry out works in communities. The Manager confirmed he would consider any such requests received in this regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Winter Maintenance Plan for the Caithness Area, which includes the priority road lists and maps presented in Appendices B & C; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a press release be issued to raise awareness of the 'Winter Resilience' scheme in Caithness.

6. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017
Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais - 1 An Giblean 2017 to 30 An t-Sultainn 2017

There had been circulated Report No CC/18/17 dated 3 November 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- a request that Members be provided with a briefing paper on the main issues in regard to the bedsits at Strathy House, Thurso;
- clarification was sought and provided on the targets for new build housing in Caithness set out in the Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2018-2023 which had been approved by the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee on 8 November 2017;
- it was important the Housing Team and Members continued their discussions to develop a local housing strategy to address difficult to let properties and low housing demand in the area in the longer term;
- in regard to the above, it was suggested that in addition to considering new build and possible selective demolitions, it was important also to explore alternative options such as the potential for low demand properties to be adapted to meet the demand for certain sizes of properties or to upgrade properties so they were more attractive to potential tenants;
- the potential to allocate low demand properties to prospective tenants who may be on waiting lists in other areas in Highlands;
- the proactive and early intervention approach being taken by the Council in relation to rent arrears associated with universal credit be welcomed;
- clarification was sought and provided in respect of the process whereby the Council could apply for an alternative payment arrangement for some tenants so that the rent was paid directly to the local authority;
- a point in regard to whether the Service relied predominately on in house or external contractors for repairs, reference being made to a specific case

where there had been a delay in the replacement of an external door at a property. The Principal Housing Officer advised that she would investigate this particular case and report back to Mr S Mackie on this matter;

- a request that the Repairs Manager be invited to discuss issues in respect of repairs and maintenance in Caithness in more detail; and
- a point in regard to the underlying trends in relation to homeless presentations on the basis there may be a perception locally that homelessness in Caithness was increasing. In response, it was confirmed that no overall increase in homelessness was being observed at the current time.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED**, following scrutiny the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017;
- ii. **AGREED** that Members be circulated with a briefing paper in relation to the bedsits in Strathy House, Thurso; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the Repairs Manager be invited to attend a future Ward Business Meeting to discuss issues in respect of repairs and maintenance in Caithness.

7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 29 August 2017, which were approved by the Council on 7 September 2017.

The meeting ended at 11.30am.
