

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held in Wick Town Hall, Bridge Street, Wick, on Wednesday, 21 February 2018 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, Chief Executive's Office
Ms A Donald, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer, Development & Infrastructure Service (by VC)
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in Attendance:

Chief Inspector I MacLelland, North Area Commander, Police Scotland
Divisional Commander G Macdonald, Highlands & Islands, Police Scotland
Area Inspector M Macdonald, 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/01/18 dated 8 February 2018 by the North Area Commander together with online safety campaign leaflet.

On hearing from the Chief Inspector, Members confirmed they would welcome a presentation from the Roads Policing Unit to the next appropriate meeting. The Chief Inspector advised that Police Scotland's online safety campaign leaflet had been circulated, and he encouraged Members to share the information contained therein as widely as possible.

During discussion, Members welcomed the new format of the report and raised the following issues:-

- it was disappointing that following a clear reduction in drink driving offences immediately after the introduction of the lower legal limit, there was now an upward trend in the number of recorded offences;

- it was suggested the above figures may also reflect more effective and robust enforcement and the fact the public were providing more intelligence to Police Scotland, which should be welcomed;
- a point that community councils in the area considered Police reports and attendance at meetings to be extremely helpful, albeit it was acknowledged there were constraints in terms of Police Scotland's resources in this regard;
- it was suggested there was less awareness and stigma within the community in relation to those who were driving under the influence of drugs than with drink driving and the need to consider how this issue could be addressed;
- the potential to launch a campaign in the area involving premises licence holders to target drink/drug driving. The Divisional Commander advised that he would give further consideration to the opportunities in Caithness in this regard;
- clarification was sought and provided on the figures shown for breath tests carried out relative to the number of individuals reported to the Procurator Fiscal. The Chief Inspector confirmed he would consider how this information was recorded in future reports;
- there was an ongoing problem with drugs in Caithness and further information was sought and provided in relation to the action being taken by Police Scotland to target this problem;
- it was noted the figures recorded for the supply of drugs had reduced while the number of drug related deaths in Caithness had increased, and it was suggested there was a wider issue in terms of the need for more openness and awareness in communities in relation to drug related activity;
- reference to a community safety event held in Thurso and the opportunities to continue to improve education and awareness raising amongst children, young people and adults in relation to the consequences of drink/drug misuse;
- Police Scotland be commended on their success in relation to a recent drugs seizure in Thurso;
- concern in relation to reports on social media of targeted theft whereby individual properties were being identified/marked for this crime;
- further information was sought and provided in relation to the development of third party reporting centres for sexual offences and their proposed location relative to Caithness;
- a point in relation to the importance of sexual crimes being reported by both victims and the community;
- concern at the significant time and resources Police Scotland had to invest in dealing with missing persons in the area, and the opportunity for the Council and NHS Highland to provide more assistance in this regard;
- concern in relation to speeding on the Forss straight on the A836 and the opportunity for a Police Scotland camera van to be deployed on this section of road as a deterrent, and for the Council to improve the signage in this location. The Chief Inspector advised that he had requested that a speed survey be carried out on this road. He also supported the deployment of the camera van in this location, and confirmed he would feedback to Members on progress with both issues;
- the attendance of three senior Police Scotland officers at the Committee be welcomed on the basis this demonstrated a commitment to localism;

- Police Scotland be commended on a recent example of decentralisation whereby a local senior officer had secured a new post which allowed him to continue to live in Caithness;
- clarification was sought on the potential to report on traffic offences by age group to assist with a targeted response in the community. It was explained that current software did not allow for a detailed breakdown but it was hoped this information could be provided in the future;
- it would be helpful to have local reporting on the number of road traffic collisions in Caithness and also in relation to those incidents which had involved a road closure given the impact on the local community. The Chief Inspector advised that Police Scotland were fully aware of the sensitivities around this issue, and advised that reporting of road closures was the responsibility of BEAR Scotland. In addition, there was a Highland wide Road Safety Group which reviewed all information in relation to each serious or fatal road collision and that this information was shared with the Council;
- the opportunities to undertake more awareness raising in communities of online scams particularly with the elderly and more vulnerable in the area; The Divisional Commander reported on the regular messages being issued by Police Scotland on this issue and national work ongoing in this regard. He also emphasised that the whole community was vulnerable to scams;
- a point in relation to the potential for the Caithness Members to have a vehicle by social media to share information locally, for example in relation to the online safety campaign; and
- in the event the Police were aware of any safety issues arising from the condition of the roads in the area, it would be helpful if these could be reported to the Council or BEAR Scotland as appropriate.

In conclusion of this item, the Chief Inspector and Divisional Commander emphasised that information and intelligence from the public should be encouraged on the basis it had been shown to achieve positive results, and that they would further discussions in regard to raising awareness of this issue in communities.

Thereafter, the Divisional Commander reported that the transition from the Police Control Room in Inverness to Dundee had now been completed. He advised that the feedback from operational staff in relation to the transition had been positive but that if Members were aware of any issues they contact either himself or the Area Inspector in the first instance.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** following scrutiny, the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-20 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2017- 31 December 2017; and
- AGREED** that Police Scotland's Roads Policing Unit be invited to provide an update to the Committee at the next appropriate meeting.

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

There is circulated Report No CC/02/18 dated 14 February 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

Arising from the report, the Education Quality Improvement Manager reported that it had not been possible to include an additional column in the staffing table showing vacancies in the ASG as requested at the previous meeting on the basis she had been advised this was a Highland wide report template. However, she reported that currently the Wick ASG had 2.8 FTE class teacher vacancies and 2.8 ASN teacher vacancies. She advised that discussions were ongoing with colleagues in the Service on the recruitment challenges in Caithness and that a meeting was to be held with Head Teachers to discuss potential solutions to this issue, for example the appointment of more probationary teachers.

The Education Quality Improvement Manager also provided an update in regard to the Phase 2 of the implementation of the management schools programme in the Wick ASG, with specific reference to consultations undertaken with parents and staff and she provided a summary of the comments arising from the consultation to date. In terms of next steps, a Members seminar had been arranged for 2 March 2018, and a further consultation meeting was to be held with parents and staff during the week commencing 18 March 2018.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was clear from the consultation meetings that there were varying points of view and concerns in terms of acceptance of the management of schools programme and it was crucial that all issues were taken into consideration going forward to alleviate any perception locally that there may be a pre-determined outcome;
- it was important the information requested in relation to staffing and vacancies be included in future reports on the grounds that it highlighted the particular issues and challenges pertaining to the delivery of education in Caithness. Members therefore requested that the report template be amended to incorporate this additional local information;
- the management of schools proposals were likely to be controversial and therefore it was important that Members in their role in working with communities were provided with as much detailed information as possible on the proposed options in advance of the next meeting with staff and parents and in particular it was critical that costings were available; and
- it was important that the Service's officials who had attended the management of schools programme consultation meetings were present at the Members seminar on 2 March 2018 so that they could respond at first hand to Members questions and concerns on this issue.

The Manager confirmed she would feedback the above points to the appropriate officials within the Service.

During further discussion, Members expressed their concerns in relation to ASN provision on the basis it was considered that Caithness did not compare well in terms of the level of provision relative to other areas in Highland. In particular, concern was expressed that Members could not access the link to the report (ACS-33-12) which provided details of the model used to provide an appropriate level of ASN cover to each school within the ASG, which had been approved at the Adult and Children's Services Committee on 26 September 2012. It was suggested the model agreed in 2012 may no longer be fit for purpose given the demands on the Service in terms of ASN provision in the area, and therefore it was important that Members had full information on this matter. It was

acknowledged that ASN provision was a complex issue and could be a subjective matter, however it was suggested there was a need for the current model and processes to be reviewed given the unique challenges in Caithness and to achieve a fairer and more consistent system.

In responding to the points raised, the Manager advised that a review of the process around ASN provision was being undertaken by the Service and that she would feedback to the appropriate officials Members concerns in relation to the challenges around recruitment and ASN provision in Caithness.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to request that the report template be amended so that additional information be provided showing FTE posts advertised but not filled, and also in relation to the number of non-class committed teachers at each school.

5. 20mph Speed Limit Implementation Buileachadh Casg Astair 20msu

There had been circulated Report No CC/03/18 dated 24 January 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

During discussion, Members welcomed the proposals and raised the following issues:-

- it was important the road safety aspects of the proposals be highlighted in response to any concerns which may be expressed by members of the public in connection with the proposed speed limit implementation;
- clarification was sought and provided on the measures to minimise as far as possible the signage required to support the implementation of the speed limits; and
- the fact the proposals did not include speed humps was welcomed on the basis that they had the potential to cause damage to vehicles and were also known to increase air pollution.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed Road Traffic Regulation Order for the implementation of a 20mph speed limit in Wick;
- ii. **AGREED** that officers implement the scheme in the event there were no sustained objections; and
- iii. **NOTED** that a further report will only be brought back to Committee in the event of sustained (relevant) objections.

6. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais - 1 Giblean 2017 to 31 An Dubhlachd 2017

There had been circulated Report No CC/04/18 dated 6 February 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

Arising from the report, the Principal Housing Officer advised that there were nine properties in Thurso and eighteen in Wick in respect of which there had been no expressions of interest, which represented a considerable improvement on previous figures.

In discussion, concern was expressed at the impacts of universal credit and rent arrears on tenants and the Council. It was reported that the key discussions between the Council and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on the impacts were taking place at a strategic/policy level and that a large volume of work had been undertaken on this issue to date. In this regard, it was requested that Members receive a briefing from the Housing Policy Team on the impacts of universal credit on the Council and its finances and their policy considerations on these matters both currently and in the immediate future.

During further discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Service's housing staff be commended on the compassionate, patient and supportive approach being taken in dealing with tenants affected by universal credit and rent arrears and for their prompt responses and actions in dealing with queries from Members on behalf of constituents on this and a range of other housing issues;
- concern was expressed at tenants who were experiencing fuel poverty and were struggling to heat their homes and a point that in terms of the capital programme, the replacement of kitchen/bathrooms which were in a satisfactory condition should not be prioritised ahead of the installation of affordable heating systems;
- it was requested that the Principal Housing Officer and Tenant Participation Officer also be invited to attend the next ward business at which housing maintenance and other housing issues in Caithness were to be discussed to ensure there was collaboration across all aspects of the Service and full knowledge of the issues was available to Members; and
- concern was expressed that the Council was installing air source heating systems which had to be serviced by external contractors at significant cost.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** following scrutiny, the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017;
- ii. **AGREED** that Members receive a briefing from the Housing Policy Team on the impacts of universal credit including on the Council and its finances and their policy considerations on these matters both currently and in the immediate future; and
- iii. **AGREED** to request that the Principal Housing Officer and Tenant Participation Officer attend the next ward business meeting at which housing issues in Caithness would be discussed.

7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated the Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 21 November 2017, which were approved by the Council on 14 December 2017.

Arising from the Minute, it was requested that responses be provided to Members on the actions detailed in the Minutes in relation to Croileagan Inbhir Theorsa's funding and free school meal uptake.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Minutes; and
- ii. **AGREED** that arrangements be made for responses to be provided to Members on the actions detailed in the Minute in relation to Croileagan Inbhir Theorsa's funding and free school meals.

The meeting ended at 12.35pm.
