

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held in Wick Town Hall, Bridge Street, Wick, on Tuesday, 28 August 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 M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Mr M Dent, Access Officer, Development & Infrastructure Service
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in Attendance:

Chief Inspector I MacLelland, North Area Commander, 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 Nos CC/09/18 and CC/10/18 dated 20 August 2018 by the North Area Commander.

The North Area Commander reported that due to operational matters, Detective Chief Inspector M Sutherland was unable to attend the meeting but was keen to meet with Members to discuss the issues around serious organised crime. He confirmed he would liaise with the Ward Manager on the arrangements for this meeting.

In discussion, Members raised the following key issues:-

- the joint approach being progressed with the Police in relation to licensing in the area was appreciated by licensees and was welcomed;
- following discussion with the Area Inspector, it would be helpful if community events in Thurso around drug misuse could be arranged as soon as

possible, and reference was made to a proposal to establish a short life working group on this issue;

- confirmation was sought and provided that it was appropriate for Members to share the Area Performance reports with community councils and on social media. The Chief Inspector advised that he would also consider placing the reports on Police Scotland's Facebook page and investigate the formatting of the reports to allow them to be more readily uploaded onto social media;
- the increased visibility of Police officers in the area, particularly at the weekends was appreciated by the local community and Members were encouraged to take up the offer to accompany the Police while out on patrol;
- advice was sought on the works required to make the former Wick High School safe following recent acts of vandalism. The Chief Inspector confirmed that he would arrange for officers to carry out a site visit and for Ms N Sinclair to be contacted directly on this matter;
- information was sought and provided on the correlation between drug dealing and thefts by housebreaking and the action being taken locally to address this problem and recent successes in this regard;
- reference to Police Scotland's role in tackling littering with specific reference to plastics which was a rapidly growing area of public interest and the opportunity for the Police to further highlight this issue by pursuing prosecutions;
- the Chair provided an update on his recent positive discussions with the Chief of Roads Policing, Police Scotland in relation to the additional workload associated with the North Coast 500, and Members wish to have extra roads policing in the area; and
- the interventions being progressed by Police Scotland in relation to new and repeat offenders in the area.

During further discussion, Members raised a number of issues in relation to drug misuse in the area. The Chief Inspector advised that a particular concern was the misuse of prescribed drugs being ordered online and delivered through the post. Police Scotland had a good relationship with the mail services in terms of interventions to tackle this problem and intercepting these drugs. It was also important to raise awareness and to communicate key messages to the public about the dangers of taking prescription drugs. Members were encouraged to report any intelligence they may have directly to the Chief Inspector/Area Inspector.

Thereafter, discussion followed on the issues of anti-social behaviour associated with drug misuse in Caithness and community concerns on this matter. In response, the excellent work being undertaken by Safer Caithness on this matter was highlighted. It was also important to recognise the good support and help that was available in the area for those people in the community who were often in a vulnerable position due to a drug addiction problem. In particular, the work of the Caithness Drug and Alcohol Forum, Police Scotland, Council officers, and other agencies should be commended. The ongoing work of the Caithness Partnership to tackle deprivation in Caithness should also be recognised. It was suggested that communities in Caithness were tolerant and reference was made to the importance of engaging with them to ensure a better understanding of the issues for the benefit of all.

The Committee following scrutiny, **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2017-20.

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

There had been circulated Report No CC/11/18 dated 24 August 2018 by the Director of Care and Learning.

Members welcomed the outstanding progress being made in respect of the destinations of pupils on leaving Wick High School in recent years. Specifically pupils going on to positive destinations between 2013/14 and 2016/17 had increased from 88.1% to 95.6% which was now above the Highland and Scotland average. The figures also showed that pupils going on to Higher and Further Education had increased over two years from a total of 54.4% in 2014/15 to 60.6% in 2016/17. In addition, the number of pupils unemployed either seeking or not seeking employment had fallen from nearly 10% in 2014/15 to less than 1% in 2016/17.

Members congratulated the Head Teacher, management team, staff and pupils on this outstanding achievement. It was suggested the success of the School should be highlighted in the public domain and therefore arrangements be made for a press release to be issued and for this good news story also be highlighted to the local press. The Education Quality Improvement Manager confirmed she would feedback Members comments to the School.

During further discussion, it was suggested that the sustainable schools review in the area had been handled well to date, particularly in relation to communication and engagement with communities. Information was sought and provided on the next steps, in view of some concerns expressed by Newton Park Primary School. In response to a question, the Manager provided a summary of the range of work being undertaken through the Eco Schools initiative.

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

5. Annual Area Capital Report Cunntas às Ùr mu Chalpa Sgìre

There had been circulated Report No CC/12/18 dated 6 August 2018 by the Depute Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services.

The Chair advised that the report was intended to provide a general summary of the capital projects the Council was engaged in the area and that if Members had detailed questions on the projects then the relevant contact officers were listed in the report.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. expenditure on each project in this Council area in 2017/18; and
- ii. budget for each project in this Council area in 2018/19.

6. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2018 to 30 June 2018
Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais - 1 Giblean 2018 to 30 An t-Og Mhios 2018

There had been circulated Report No CC/13/18 dated 14 August 2018 by the Director of Community Services.

In discussion, Members raised the following key issues:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that the Housing Team had a good relationship and was working as closely as possible with the local CAB in dealing with the increased workload associated with the impacts of Universal Credit;
- the challenges associated with the current situation whereby the Council did not know if tenants were in receipt of Universal Credit unless advised by the customer and the importance of the DWP sharing more information in this regard, albeit it was recognised there were data protection constraints;
- the local Housing Team be commended on the range of good and positive work being undertaken in the area and on the level of assistance being provided to tenants impacted by Universal Credit. The Principal Housing Officer advised that she would feedback Members appreciation to staff;
- the challenges in respect of void properties in Caithness and rising rent arrears was also an issue for the wider Council and this should be taken into account in relation to any targets set and in allocating resources;
- in regard to the above, it was clarified that the performance indicators referred to in the report were set by the Scottish Housing Regulator; and
- information was sought and provided on the significant proportion of tenants in rent arrears as a result of Universal Credit and also in fuel poverty and the action being taken by the Service in seeking to address this issue.

The Committee following scrutiny, **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2018 to 30 June 2018.

7. Caithness Local Access Forum - Appointments
Fòram Inntreighadh Ionadail Ghallaibh – Cur an Dreuchd

There had been circulated Report No CC/14/18 dated 31 July 2018 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

The Committee **APPROVED** the appointment of those members of the public (as set out in **Appendix 2** of the report) that had applied to be new members of the Local Access Forum in Caithness.

8. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 16 May 2018, which were approved by the Council on 28 June 2018.

The meeting ended at 11.35am.
