

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held in Wick Town Hall, Bridge Street, Wick, on Wednesday, 20 February 2019 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 L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer, Community Services
Mr R Bamfield, Additional Support Needs 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

**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. 20mph Speed Limit Implementation Wick
Cur an Gnìomh Casg Astair 20msu ann an Inbhir Ùige**

There had been circulated Report No CC/01/19 dated 4 February 2019 by the Director of Community Services.

In discussion, concern was expressed that the public consultation on the proposed 20mph speed limit in Wick had been carried out over the Christmas and New Year period, and as such there was a question as to whether the public had been aware and given a sufficient opportunity to respond given the low number of responses received. A range of feedback was being received from the public, and therefore consideration should be given to allowing a further period of consultation, including drop in sessions in the daytime and evening for members of the public. This would also allow any potential alternative options to be fully evaluated.

Thereafter, a point was raised in regard to the collision statistics for Wick. The Road Safety Officer reported that over the period 2013 to 2016, ten accidents had been recorded one of which had been assessed as 'serious', nine as 'slight', and three of which had involved pedestrians. This was a relatively high number of

incidents compared to other areas in Highland. She confirmed that these figures did not include non-injurious accidents and advised that she would arrange for Members to be circulated with a copy of the statistics.

Thereafter, Members raised a number issues were raised including the following key points:-

- the final four objections highlighted relevant points in relation to the proposal;
- the focus should be on installing more 20mph signs around schools in Wick on the basis that they had been shown to be effective in slowing drivers down;
- highlighting the health benefits associated with the introduction of 20mph speed limits in terms of encouraging more walking and cycling;
- one of the aims of the proposal was to lower the risks for vulnerable road users, however the evidence suggested that 20mph signs would not be adhered to and there was a question as to whether this was the best use of resources;
- the potential to consider other methods of improving road safety such as flashing signs and speed humps;
- inconsistencies in regard to the application of the proposal given there was a proliferation of routes on the Pulteneytown side compared to the other side of Wick where there was a concentration of urban housing around the area of Noss Primary School;
- there were also a number of other routes and areas not included on the map which would benefit from a 20mph limit and therefore an extension to the consultation period would allow these routes to be considered;
- given that average speeds in Wick had been assessed to be in the region of 22mph, there was an argument that the situation was already self-regulating;
- concern as to how a 20mph speed limit would be enforced going forward;
- an acknowledgement that housing schemes had become more desirable to live in as result of the introduction of 20mph speed limits and that safety should be a paramount consideration in relation to the proposal;
- the proposal was a blunt instrument and there should be more focus on targeting schools and housing estates, and installing more speed signs rather than applying a blanket 20mph limit;
- the area around Noss Primary School should be included on the map so that the public could see the full extent of the network in Wick; and
- concern that the scheme would result in a proliferation of signage in Wick.

The Road Safety Officer explained that the area around Noss Primary School was already a designated 20mph limit and therefore had not been included in the map appended to the report. At a recent meeting held locally, agreement had been reached that this area would be signed and lined correctly, and the scheme was currently being designed, details of which she provided. She advised that Transport Scotland had declined the offer to be involved in the scheme in respect of the trunk road.

Thereafter, reference was made to a number of outstanding traffic management and safer routes to schools issues in Ward 2: Thurso and North West Caithness and how these could be addressed through a joined up approach to identify pinch points and potential sources of funding. In response to a question, the Road

Safety Officer confirmed that as a first step she would be willing to meet with the local Members to consider the issues in Ward 2.

Following further discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to:-

- i. note the background to the proposed 20mph speed limit order for Wick and the representations received;
- ii. defer the making of the Road Traffic Regulation Order to allow a further period of public consultation to be undertaken, including drop in sessions for members of the public and
- iii. defer the intention to carry out after speed counts to determine effectiveness of the new reduced speed limit pending a final decision being taken by the Committee on the proposal..

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

There had been circulated Report No CC/02/19 dated 6 February 2019 by the North Area Commander.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the presentation given on Operation Cedar to a recent Caithness Community Partnership meeting and a recent event held at Pulteneytown People’s Project on the issue of drugs were welcomed;
- good progress was being made through the shared approach being adopted by Caithness Community Partnership in relation to drugs issues in the area;
- the importance of raising awareness in the public arena and encouraging the Council and other agencies to discuss the issues around drugs, the substances being used, changing habits and the impact on communities to provide communities with a better understanding of the issues;
- the above approach would help breakdown the stigma around drugs, feed into a better sense of safety and wellbeing in the area and may secure more assistance from communities in tackling the problem. The Chief Inspector advised that going forward he would contact Members in relation to the media opportunities to raise the profile of enforcement successes and other initiatives in the area;
- the importance of focusing on the provision of education for young drivers in the area;
- the good relationship between Operation Cedar and the licensing trade and various ongoing initiatives was welcomed;
- the potential to introduce the successful ‘Best Bar None’ scheme in licensed premises in Caithness;
- the importance of early interventions in terms of education and awareness raising of the issues around drugs in schools and changing attitudes within the community;
- linked to the above further information was sought and provided in relation to the roles of Police Scotland’s Preventions and Interventions Officer and Schools Liaison Officer in the area;
- in terms of reporting issues, the potential to build more local relationships and trust between the public and the Police, while acknowledging that some people preferred other forms of contact such as online or social media channels;

- the reduction in the number of offences for speeding, mobile phone and seat belt offences was welcomed;
- clarification was sought on the figures shown for stop/searches. The Chief Inspector advised that there had been a significant increase on the previous year and undertook to ensure the information was more clearly presented in future reports;
- concern at the number of drinking driving offences recorded over the period with numbers returning to the levels prior to the drink driving limit being reduced;
- clarification was sought on the measures being taken by Police Scotland to tackle rural thefts in the area and to encourage the public to report suspicious activity;
- clarification was sought and provided in relation to the increase in the shop lifting statistics and any links with self service tills and food banks;
- the potential to have a small road traffic/drugs unit located in Caithness. The Chief Inspector reported that he would report back to Members on this issue; and
- an assurance was sought and provided that the Retail Park in Wick would be included in more patrol routes.

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

5. Wick Associated School Group Overview **Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Inbhir Ùige**

There had been circulated Report No CC/03/19 dated 12 February 2019 by the Director of Care and Learning.

In discussion, Members welcomed the improvements being achieved and sustained at Wick High School. In particular, the School was significantly below the national and Highland averages for exclusion rates and this reflected the work undertaken to ensure accessibility to educations for all pupils. In terms of the destinations of pupils, the number of pupils going on to further education was above the Scotland and Highland averages. In addition there was a zero figure for the numbers of unemployed not seeking. This was a good news story and Members commended the Head Teacher, staff and pupils on their continuing success.

During further discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- further information was sought and provided in relation to the context of the exclusion rates at Newton Park Primary School and the strategies being adopted in response;
- the need to update the status of the condition and suitability of the buildings at Wick High School and concern that the condition of some primary schools within the ASG may be deteriorating. The ASN Manager advised that he would ask the Education Quality Improvement Manager to respond to Members on these issues;
- the transfer of music tuition services to High Life Highland was a success story in terms of the numbers of pupils and instructors involved and had surpassed expectations as to what could be achieved including the potential

to self-fund extra tuition. Accordingly, more detailed information on music tuition should be reflected in future reports;

- the significant increase in the number of customer visits to the East Caithness Community facilities which were formerly Wick Swimming Pool and Wick Library was welcomed and should be flagged up as good examples of change when consulting with communities on any future proposals to transform services;
- the need to follow up on concerns expressed by the ASN Manager that the new Wick campus did not have suitable accommodation for pupils who required to be educated separately from the mainstream setting and more generally the lack of accommodation for children with significant additional support needs of families moving into the area;
- the fact the quality of management and leadership at early years centres continued to be assessed 'good' or 'very good' was welcomed; and
- clarification was sought in regard to whether the early years centres could accommodate the number of applications for placements. It was confirmed that the Education Quality Improvement Manager would be asked to report back to Members on this issue;

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

6. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2018 to 31 December 2018 Aithisg Dèanadais Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2018 to 31 Dùbhlachd 2018

There had been circulated Report No CC/04/19 dated 20 February 2019 by the Director of Community Services.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an explanation was sought and provided for the spike in the average time to complete emergency repairs in Quarter 1 of 2018/19, it being confirmed this had been due to staff absence;
- concern at the significant impact the number of void properties was having on housing performance figures for Caithness, noting this was an issue unique to Caithness;
- a proposal that the Committee request the Council to agree to an independent feasibility study being commissioned to identify the housing stock requirements in Caithness over the next 5 to 10 years and then review the options to address the issue of surplus stock, including the potential to sell those properties and allocate the monies to the HRA Capital Programme;
- Members would have the opportunity to have in depth discussion on the issues around void properties with the Head of Housing at their next Ward Business Meeting and therefore that the proposal for a starred item to the Council as detailed above be deferred pending those discussions;
- concern that the current number of voids was impacting on the ability to have new Council housing built in areas of demand in Caithness; and
- the need for a more joined up approach between Services in terms of the allocation of properties for example families moving into an area with children with significant additional support needs and demand for housing for probationary police officers/ Council employees.

The Committee **NOTED** following scrutiny, the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2018 to 31 December 2018.

**7. Modified Core Paths Plan (Caithness and Sutherland) Amended
Plana Phrìomh Cheuman Mion-atharraichte (Gallaibh agus Cataibh)
Atharraichte**

There had been circulated Report No CC/05/19 dated 28 January 2019 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

The Committee **AGREED** to:-

- i. the submission of the amended Core Paths Plan to Scottish Ministers with outstanding objections to proposed core paths CA07.16(C) – John O’Groats – Ness of Duncansby (**Appendix 3**) and CA01.05(C) – Altnabreac – Forsinard (**Appendix 4**);
- ii. the modification of the amended Core Paths Plan to include further core paths CA10.18(C) and CA10.19(C) as shown on Map CA 13c Swiney Hill (**Appendix 2**); and
- iii. undertake a month long public consultation on the modifications to the Core Paths Plan (Caithness and Sutherland) Amended.

**8. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 20 November 2019, which were approved by the Council on 13 December 2018.

The meeting ended at 12.40pm.
