

**The Highland Council
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummie on Wednesday, 22 May 2019 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr R Gale
Mrs D Mackay

Mr J McGillivray
Mr H Morrison

Officials in attendance:

Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms A Donald, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Care and Learning Service
Mr M Evans, Head Teacher, Golspie High School, Care and Learning Service
Mr D Cowie, Principal Planner, Development & Infrastructure Committee
Ms J Sutherland, Senior Engineer, Community Services
Mrs M Grant, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in Attendance:

Station Manager J Gardiner, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Ms K Jenks, External Auditor, Audit Scotland

Mr R Gale in the Chair

The Chair welcomed Ms K Jenks, Audit Scotland who was attending the meeting in relation to the Best Value Assurance audit.

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms K Currie and Ms L Munro.

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

Item 8: Mr J McGillivray (non-financial)

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report
Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/07/19 dated 8 May 2019 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members conveyed their thanks to Service for the commitment shown in tackling the recent major wildfires in Durness and Melvich. Members also commended employers for releasing retained duty firefighters for extended periods and the community and businesses for the support and level of welfare provided during these incidents.

Members then raised the following issues:-

- the improved staffing position at Helmsdale was welcomed. The Local Senior Officer confirmed the Service was continuing to focus on promoting recruitment at Bonar Bridge, Lairg, Tongue and Bettyhill stations;
- concern in regard to the continuing challenges around recruitment in the area, and the fact a significant issue was the lack of a suitable pool of potential recruits in smaller rural communities;
- the reduction in the number of road traffic accidents in the area in 2018/19 was welcomed;
- an update was sought and provided on the interventions being undertaken by the Service in care homes and hospitals and other specific premises in the area to reduce the number of false alarms;
- the importance of communicating key messages to the public around heeding the warnings and wildfire notices issued by the Service and being careful whilst in the countryside; and
- concern at the cost to the Service of investigating and identifying the root causes of wildfires. In response to a specific question, the Station Manager advised that it was likely the wildfire in Golspie in the previous year was deliberate, and the indications were that the Melvich incident was accidental.

The Committee following scrutiny, **NOTED** the attached Area Performance Report.

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

There had been circulated Report No SCC/08/19 dated 7 May 2019 by the Director of Care and Learning.

Mr M Evans, Head Teacher, Golspie High School reported on HMle's follow up visit in December 2018 and subsequent report published in March 2019, and thereafter further record of visit. The report acknowledged the work and clear progress made since the original inspection and recognised that the measures being delivered through the improvement plan to raise attainment had not yet had a sufficient period of time to show impacts. In conjunction with the Head of Education and Education Quality Improvement Manager there had been a focus on key statements arising from the HMle report and on developing an improvement plan for each area with the full involvement of teachers.

Mr Evans further reported that:-

- In relation to equity and inclusion, the School had achieved significant improvements since the original inspection moving from 'weak' to 'good' which was encouraging;
- the number of pupils gaining five highers had increased from 15% to 30% in 2018, which represented a significant improvement and was now on a par with the School's virtual comparator used by HMle;
- the figures for literacy and numeracy had improved since 2017 and was above the School's virtual comparator;
- the School had achieved 100% positive destinations in 2017/18;

- it was hoped that the significant work which had been invested in raising attainment in the senior phase would have a positive impact on this year's examination results; and
- there continued to be staffing challenges in the School in maths, English and physics, and one of the Deputy Head Teacher posts was soon to become vacant. Online distance learning had been used as a measure to overcome these challenges but it was not yet known what impact this would have in terms of results.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the School be commended on achieving 100% positive destinations in 2017/18;
- concern was expressed at the attainment figures at the School and an update was sought and provided on both the staffing challenges and the interventions that had been put in place to support pupils and raise attainment particularly in relation to English and maths in the senior phase;
- concern that the recruitment process for the Depute Head Teacher post be progressed in early course;
- it was appreciated the staffing challenges particularly in relation to STEM subjects was a national issue;
- the progress being made in the face of significant challenges and the intensive support being provided by the Head of Education was welcomed. It was important going forward that the right level of support from the Service was maintained;
- in terms of recruitment, the potential for a joined up approach across the public agencies to attract teachers and encourage them to remain in the area, a key issue being the ability to grow talent within the area;
- an update was sought and provided on the latest position in respect of pupils support assistants in the area in the context of the ongoing review of Additional Support Needs provision across the Council; and
- the extension in early years provision was welcomed and information was sought and provided on transport provision to early years centres, confirmation being provided that this tended to be the responsibility of parents.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked the Head Teacher for the improvements being delivered at the School, and asked that Members appreciation be conveyed to all the staff.

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

5. Caithness & Sutherland Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Guidance Ro-innleachd Meadhan Baile Ghallaibh agus Chataibh

There had been circulated Report No SCC/09/19 dated 2 May 2019 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

In discussion, Members welcomed the report and requested that the approach to public consultation include the Sutherland Community Partnership and local development trusts in the area. The Principal Planner confirmed that these organisations were included on the list of consultees. He undertook to furnish Members with the full list of consultees prior to the commencement of the public consultation exercise.

Thereafter, it was highlighted that the Strategy identified the same priorities as set out in the Locality Plan and at a more local level those identified by the 'Vision for Brora' project which was supported by the North Highland Initiative and NC500. In this regard, it was important the consultation on the draft Strategy was aligned to that being undertaken by the 'Vision for Brora' Steering Group. The Principal Planner advised that he was aware of the cross cutting nature of this work and that it would be helpful if he could be furnished with the relevant contacts for the project, and any other relevant information.

Thereafter, Members advised it would be helpful for officers to attend meetings of community organisations involved in town centre development work such as the Dornoch Area Community Interest Company and to have a named contact/s within the Service in this regard. The Principal Planner advised that he and his colleague D Chisholm, Planner, would act as first points of contact and that early notifications of any relevant meeting dates would be appreciated.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Draft Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Guidance at **Appendix 1** for the purposes of public consultation;
- ii. **AGREED** to authorise officers to make minor presentational changes prior to publication, in consultation with and agreement from the chairs of the Area Committees;
- iii. **AGREED** the approach to public consultation as set out in section 5 of this report; and
- iv. **NOTED** that issues raised in comments received on the draft Strategy will be reported back to the two relevant Area Committees for their consideration, together with possible amendments to the Strategy prior to completion of procedures leading to its adoption as statutory Supplementary Guidance.

6. Road Structural Maintenance Report 2019/20 Càradh Structarail Rathaidean 2019/20

There had been circulated Report No SCC/10/19 dated 8 May 2019 by the Director of Community Services.

The Chair advised that while Members recognised the financial challenges facing the Service, it was disappointing that only 8 schemes would be completed in Sutherland. He expressed concern about the condition of the single track roads located on the North Coast 500, and suggested that Members be provided with a condition report in respect of the roads on the North Coast 500 located in Sutherland with a view to additional funding being sought to support the maintenance of these routes.

The Senior Engineer confirmed that monthly condition reports could be provided to Members. In terms of the broader spectrum of data such as traffic volumes and the road condition index, this was managed and collated centrally for the Council as a whole and she would seek to extract the Sutherland element.

A further comment related to the fact the Programme was localised which would make it more achievable to deliver best value from the available budget.

During further discussion, Mr H Morrison confirmed for the record he did not support the recommendation to approve the Programme due to the significant deterioration in condition of the single track roads on the North Coast 500 in North and West Sutherland. The North Coast 500 had created the concept but it was unlikely that they or other partners such as VisitScotland would invest in the route. It was therefore unfortunate the Council had been left to bear the costs associated with the increased volume of traffic on the route at a time when budgets were reducing. He suggested that there was an increasing amount of negativity locally in relation to the route.

The Chair advised that the evidence he had requested above in relation to the NC500 would allow a case to be prepared going forward to seek additional funding towards the improvement of these routes.

A further comment suggested that the NC500 had been an unmeasured success and many local people were benefiting from the route. However, the Council was having to react rather than being proactive to its success, and the scale of this issue required Scottish Government intervention.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Roads Structural Maintenance Programme 2019/20 for the Sutherland Area; and
- ii. **AGREED** that Members be provided with a condition report and other relevant data in respect of the roads on the North Coast 500 located in Sutherland with a view to additional funding being sought to support the maintenance of these routes.

7. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019
Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais - 1 Giblean 2018 to 31 Am Mart 2019

There had been circulated Report No SCC/11/19 dated 9 May 2019 by the Director of Community Services.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought and provided on the main factors for the level of rent arrears, including Universal Credit, and it was noted that slow improvements in the position in Sutherland were being observed;
- a key issue in regard to rent arrears was to ensure early intervention with tenants so that the intensive support available from the Council and CAB could be provided in appropriate cases. Reference was also made to the importance of continuing to communicate key messages to tenants in relation to the support available;
- an explanation was sought and provided in regard to the process for classifying foreign nationals as homeless persons; and
- it was disappointing that a main factor for the low demand for properties in North and West Sutherland was the low population.

The Committee following scrutiny, **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

8. Assignment of Lease for Dornoch Caravan Park/Homologation of Lease for Sutherland Agricultural Society
Sònrachadh Aonta-màil airson Pàirc Charabhanaichean
Dhòrnaich/Aontachadh Aonta-màil airson Comann Àiteachais Chataibh

Declaration of Interest:- Mr J McGillivray declared a non-financial interest in this item due to his long standing association with the Sutherland Agricultural Society and left the Chamber for the consideration of the item 'Homologation of Lease for Sutherland Agricultural Society'.

There had been circulated Report No SCC/12/19 dated 8 May 2019 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development and Acting Head of Policy.

The Ward Manager confirmed that in terms of the Council's conditions, the requirement to provide evidence of sufficient funds and specifically the requirement for the prospective tenants to provide a bank reference remained outstanding. The bank reference had been applied for by the prospective tenants and a response was awaited. He also highlighted the key risks of delaying the signing of the lease.

In discussion, the Chair welcomed the positive progress made since the previous meeting in February 2019. In terms of the challenges there had been around communication there was a need to ensure there was direct access to the prospective tenants rather than dealing with third parties. He provided an assurance that the assignment of the lease would not be signed off until such time as the bank reference was in place.

Mr J McGillivray expressed his concern that the assignment would be in the name of a limited company rather than an individual person/s and that this was also a key concern of the local community.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the assignment of the lease for Dornoch Caravan Park to Dornoch Caravan and Camping Park Ltd, subject to the fulfilment of the Council's conditions and the agreement of the Chair, and on any other terms as agreed by the Depute Chief Executive/ Director of Corporate Resources and the Acting Head of Policy; and
- ii. **HOMOLOGATED** the lease of 0.12ha of Dornoch Common Good land to Sutherland Agricultural Society.

9. Sutherland Local Access Forum – Appointment
Fòram Inntrigeadh Ionadail Chataibh – Dreuchd

The Committee **APPROVED** the appointment of Lesley Cranna as a community representative, sponsored by Golspie Community Council, on the Sutherland Local Access Forum.

10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 25 February 2019, which had been approved by the Council on 7 March 2019.

The meeting closed at 12.10pm.
