

Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 13 October 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam
Mrs J Barclay
Mr C Fraser

Mr A MacKinnon
Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer - Housing and Property
Mrs A Clark, Head of Policy and Reform
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager (Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth), Chief Executive's Office
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure
Mr R Bartlett, Technician, Community Services
Mr D Martin, Area Education Manager
Mr J Holden, Area Housing Manager
Mr T Stott, Principal Planner, Development and Infrastructure
Mr C Baxter, Planner, Development and Infrastructure
Mr D Chisholm, Planner, Development and Infrastructure
Miss S Tarrant, Corporate Communications and Engagement Officer
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector K MacLeod, Area Commander (North), Police Scotland

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulans

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr Graham MacKenzie.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Police – Area Performance Summary Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/008/20 dated 28 September 2020 by the North Area Commander.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members liked the new report layout and appreciated the work undertaken during the challenging Covid 19 period. Members had also welcomed the increase in visible police patrols in the area during the Covid 19 period.
- Information was requested and provided on the new traffic calming measures. There had been an incident involving a bicycle at one of the new traffic calming features in Dingwall unfortunately it had not been recorded on the police system. Commenting on the traffic calming measures outside the police station, he had noticed that traffic tended to speed up to get through the obstacle before traffic from the other direction forced them to stop. Initially when the traffic calming had been set up some informal complaints had been received.
- In response to a question on missing people, Members were advised that the police always preferred to be involved as early as possible, following initial checks by family and friends;
- Input from the police on the road study between Tore and North Kessock would be appreciated, also in the possibility of reducing the speed limit from Arpafeelie junction to Tore from 70 mph to 50 mph.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2017-20 Year 3, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020; and
- ii. **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020 – 23 Year 1, attached as Annex B to this report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 31 August 2020.

4. Roads Maintenance Programme Prògram Càradh Rathaid

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/009/20 dated 5 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment which provided an update on road maintenance operations within the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth area and detailed the impact of Covid-19.

In discussion, the following main points were raised and answered:-

- Members had concerns over gullies in the following locations - Leaniag Road, Conon Bridge; Craig Road, Dingwall; Ross Wynd, Dingwall; Neil Gunn Road, Dingwall and Macleod Place, Dingwall. The gullysucker had been fitted with a GPS tracker and the locations of where it had been operated would be forwarded. The gully on Church Street, Cromarty would be added to the Technical Team Programme for investigation. With

reference to an additional gully sucker for Wards 8 and 9, this would clearly be beneficial but had to be balanced out against the capital cost of purchasing the plant. The situation had improved over the last year or so as Skye, Ross and Cromarty now have their own gully sucker which is well used.

- In response to a question on run off of water onto the roads: The Road (Scotland) Act 1984 placed a duty on land owners to prevent run off onto a road. This is in contrast to the general principle that the downhill land owner has to accept water from the uphill owner. However many land owners are unable to comply with this due to various issues that include: excessive costs in constructing a suitable culvert below roads and land issues as they may not own the downhill land. Where it was clear that a situation cannot be resolved Roads and Transport can often find solutions to problems;
- On a query regarding A832 Vehicle Restraint System at Fairy Glen, the vehicle restraint system or 'safety fence' was damaged when the hillside gave way in a land slide late in 2019. This was caused by excessive rain liquefying the clay soil. Temporary works were undertaken to stabilise the road and the slope but to facilitate this the safety fence was dismantled. Mr Moncrieff recognised the concerns as the safety fence remains dismantled with the onset of winter. Consideration would be given to temporary repairs.
- In response to concerns regarding cyclical road repairs Mr Moncrieff stated that commercial quarries had shut down during the recent Covid restrictions and only cold tar was available in general from the Sconser Quarry. Hot tar was supplied on one occasion but as the plant then needed to cool down to produce cold tar again it was difficult to predict when hot tar could be produced. Hot tar is not normally transported beyond Achnasheen from Sconser due to cooling and separation of the fines and stone from the vibration associated with excess haulage. It was recognised that the delay in undertaking works not considered to be 'essential' had created a back log which would have a financial implication as damage would get worse. Patching and other operations will continue as normal throughout winter subject to driver's hours regulations and the weather.
- In relation to the Capital Programme much of the Capital Programme had been deferred to the next financial year. Some overlay schemes may be able to go ahead between now and the start of winter operations but the time is rapidly running out. Schemes that are deferred will be considered for the 2020-21 Capital Programme. Each year a draft capital programme is prepared which is a snapshot of the repairs needed on the worst roads. As some roads deteriorate faster than others it could not be guaranteed that deferred schemes would automatically be selected for the 2020-21 draft capital programme. Councillors would have the opportunity to discuss the draft capital programme at their Ward Business Meeting before either approving, amending or rejecting the programme at Committee.
- With reference to specific schemes mentioned:
Station Road, Dingwall - Surface Dressing:
 - this surface dressing remedial work was deferred due to Covid 19;

- as the work was weather and temperature dependent it could not now go ahead in the remaining months of this financial year;
- The surface dressing was originally laid properly using trained and competent operatives. However, that day was very warm and there were two incidents on the adjacent trunk roads that forced all traffic through Dingwall which eventually caused a gridlock. The combination of the temperature, both natural, from the cars' air conditioners dumping heat and from engines coupled with the engine vibrations travelling through the tyres caused the surface dressing stone chips to sink into the emulsion;
- At present, Mr Moncrieff did not intend to remove this scheme from his draft Capital programme for next year but note that other roads may be more deserving before the draft programme has been completed.

And in relation to Munro's Nursery Road:

- This scheme has been deferred but there was no intention at present to remove it from the 2020-21 draft Capital programme.
- The fleet review was about to start, and cognisance would need to be taken of new and more efficient plant and vehicles so that with limited resources, efficiencies could be made with better equipment;
- It was recognised that there would be a significant impact on works delivered next year due to competing demands and limited resources. Planning had already started to ensure that seasonally dependent work could be resourced across Ross and Cromarty;
- The Scottish Government effectively stopped all but essential works across Scotland's road network in early April. This meant that only the very worst potholes could be repaired on the most important roads. As restrictions relaxed other works became possible. When the full financial impact of covid 19 became apparent, the Highland Council had a significant budget gap due to lost income and additional covid 19 expenditure.
- The patching budget was significantly affected together with the hired vehicles budget as Mr Moncrieff had implemented a one man per van rule very early on to reduce the transmission rate of the virus and to provide support to concerned staff. Other revenue budgets were affected less as work was deferred.
- In relation to Jet patcher repairs at Drumsittal it was accepted that the road remained in a poor state even after the jet patcher had been working there. The jet patcher only filled in potholes with emulsion and stone chips but didn't resolve the underlying structural problems that often cause the potholes in the first place. Reluctant to put the jet patcher back and the road requires an overlay.
- Under the circumstances Members took the opportunity to recognise the work of staff and thanked everyone involved.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

5. Dingwall Temporary 20 mph Speed Limit and associated Traffic Calming Casg Astair Sealach 20 msu Inbhir Pheofharain agus Socrachadh Trafaig co-cheangailte

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/010/20 dated 9 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment which provided detail on traffic calming measures and 20 mph speed limit in Dingwall.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Retention of the 20 mph speed limit and traffic calming measures would improve road safety and encourage more people to walk and cycle around the town. Many residents live to the North West of Back Road and nearby Maggie's wood is a popular place for people to enjoy a walk. Before the temporary 20 mph restriction, 60% of vehicles were recorded as exceeding the speed limit, this will certainly improve safety.
- We have the ideal opportunity to not only improve the safety of walkers, cyclists and wheelchair users, especially the primary and secondary pupils that use the Back Road route regularly, but this also ties in with the Council's commitment to climate change and cutting emissions.
- The traffic calming measures had resulted in a flood of complaints calling for their removal.
- Experience shows that typically traffic calming measures generate some initial public resistance but this tends to decrease as people get used to them. The temporary measures would clarify whether the 20 mph measures worked effectively. The public will have their say over whether they are retained permanently when formal traffic orders are promoted.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the evidence led design process which determined the 20 mph limit extents and locations of the associated traffic calming in Dingwall; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the retention of the temporary traffic calming features on Back Road and Burn Place, Dingwall.

Mrs M Paterson's dissent was noted.

6. Education Scotland Reports Sgrùdaidhean le Foghlam Alba

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/011/20 dated 27 September 2020 by the Education Quality Improvement Manager which provided details of Education Scotland's inspections at Fortrose Academy during the period 2 – 5 December 2020. Mr D Martin advised that this report had been published in February but due to Covid 19 restrictions, reporting had been delayed.

Members had been pleased to see that the teacher assessment was good and requested details of training for teachers with the forthcoming Covid 19 restrictions relative to all schools in light of the loss of the National 5's testing next year. Teachers had, of course, to upskill and deliver teacher-based

assessments this year where children were unable to sit their end of year examinations. Schools continue to develop teacher based assessments in the light of the cancellation of national 5 exams for next year.

Members expressed their thanks and commended the school for their work in supporting others in the community and with young people and their welfare.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

7. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/012/20 dated 29 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Housing and Property which provided Members with information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators during the period 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Information was requested and provided on repairs in the area and with arrears where there was difficulty in meeting tenants, especially during Covid 19 restrictions. Visits were precluded where people had suspected Covid 19 and a whole different way of working had to be undertaken utilising PPE or where tenants would remain away from the area of the house while the repair was undertaken. Focus was on keeping tenants in their houses and on obtaining the rent that was due for their property and tenants were advised to get in touch if they had difficulties.
- Members expressed disappointment in the lack of “walkabout” events during this time.
- Information was requested and provided on mutual exchanges where these had had to be deferred due to the inability to inspect premises by the landlords.
- Members thanked officers for work undertaken at Brown Square, Dingwall.
- The Scottish Government were to bring in fire, heat and smoke alarm installation by February 2021, this was being monitored and the majority of Council houses already had mains wired smoke alarms installed and investigation would be made into heat and carbon monoxide alarms.
- It was still important, even during this time, to have a once a year visit to tenants to highlight any difficulties within the tenancy and vulnerable tenants who needed support.
- A discussion was undertaken on Council garages and the way forward;
- Members gave a heartfelt thank you to the Housing staff for their work during this challenging time.

Mr M Rodgers appreciated that there were challenges at this time but this area had a refreshing outlook and appreciation for the work undertaken. If officers were struggling to gain access to a property over a period of time, it was worth checking if this was a vulnerable person in need of assistance. Walkabouts were challenging but providing these could be undertaken in a safe, socially distanced

way there was no reason these could not still be undertaken and he would look into facilitating this. Asset management could be taken to the local Ward Business Meetings and he looked to become more involved in these meetings if an invitation to these meetings was forthcoming. Mr Rodgers expressed concerns over no rent increases and the relevant loss of revenue. Garages were a challenge and definitely a potential income that could be investigated.

Members thanked Mr Rodgers and invited him to the Ward Business Meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

8. Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 – Main Issues Report Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh A-staigh 2 – Aithisg Phrìomh Chùisean

There had been circulated Report No BIDS/013/20 dated 29 September 2020 by Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment which sought approval for the Main Issues Report for the second Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan to be published for public consultation. The covering report should be amended at 1.1 to read “Section 4” and not “Section 3”. At item 2.1 ii the reference should be to paragraph 6.1 and not 5.1.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members discussed the affordable housing quotient and also older people looking to downsize their houses and requested the possibility of a requirement for 15-20% housing allocation to elderly living where properties are built to cater for additional wheelchair space and associated accessibility. Mr Stott responded that 5% of the major sites had been requested to accommodate accessible housing from the large developers. As demand grew for these accessible houses, the house builders would react and increase the available houses. There would also be a request for 5% to be designated as self-build plots.
- Information was requested and provided on the timetable for the plan, this report had five area committees to seek approval from, the last being in December, therefore it was likely the consultation would start at the beginning of next year. Neighbour notifications would be sent to people living within 50 m of any of these potential development sites and they would be given a period within which to respond. Due to the current Covid restrictions creative, enhanced online digital methods will be used to better engage with the public and ensure adequate participation and responses. Full details will be provided ahead of the consultation. Following this, representations received from the consultation will be reported back to the five relevant area committees for comment, before being presented to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, for a decision on what the Plan should contain in its Proposed Plan form. At this stage the Plan will represent the settled view of The Highland Council and be re-issued for public consultation.
- Information was requested and given on Active Travel connections and transport links. There was a supporting document on transport which included trunk road schemes.

- Members thanked the planning team for a very comprehensive report.

The Committee:-

- (i) **APPROVED** the Main Issues Report (as applicable to this committee area) to be published for public consultation, accepting that a number of minor presentational and typographical changes will be made prior to publication;
- (ii) **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in paragraph 6.1 of this report; and
- (iii) **NOTED** the important role that the plan will play in addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency, economic recovery, and in taking forward The Highland Council's agreed Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy recently submitted to Scottish Government.

9. Improving Participation and Involvement with Communities A' Leasachadh Com-pàirteachas agus Ceangal le Coimhearsnachdan

There is circulated Report No BIDS/014/20 dated 5 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place which provided an update on the recent community conversation with groups in Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth. It also considered the next steps for the area, including some of the key areas for shared work and focus that are already established within the community, recent developments and potential next steps for improving involvement between the local Committee and community

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Improving community involvement and participation is a core strategic priority of the Council. The onset of covid-19 had resulted in an overwhelming surge in local community involvement which presented a unique opportunity to change how we work together and to develop positive relationships and improve how decisions are made locally. Discussions during this Committee were very positive and there is a real appetite to build on all the good will and new close working partnerships that have developed as everyone has come together to focus on our Covid response. We can learn a lot from recent experiences and use this to better understand local needs and how to set priorities moving forward.
- Members advised that they were content to have a broader workshop involving some of the key community groups and partners without the need for a Member only workshop.
- As many volunteers worked during the day it was important to consider evening meetings for optimum participation.

The Committee:

- **NOTED** the feedback from the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth community conversation; and
- **AGREED** to workshop session(s) with community groups from across the area to consider areas for joint work.

10. Common Good Funds
Maoin Maith Choitchinn

There had been circulated Reports Nos BIDS/015/20 – BIDS/017/20 dated 29 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources and Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place which provided information on the following Common Good Funds:-

- a. Cromarty Common Good Fund BIDS/015/20;
- b. Dingwall Common Good Fund BIDS/016/20; and
- c. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Common Good Fund BIDS/017/20.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter One monitoring statement for each of the Common Good Funds.

11. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee held on 7 July 2020 which were approved by the Council on 30 July 2020.

The meeting closed at 3.05 pm.

The Highland Council Tourism Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the Tourism Committee held REMOTELY on Wednesday, 14 October 2020 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr Gordon Adam	Mr Hugh Morrison
Mr Raymond Bremner	Mr Duncan Macpherson
Dr Ian Cockburn	Mr Struan Mackie
Mr Alex MacInnes (sub for Mr C Fraser)	Mrs Margaret Paterson
Mr John Gordon	Mr Denis Rixson
Mr Allan Henderson	Ms Maxine Smith
Mr Bill Lobban	

Non Members also Present:

Mr Andrew Baxter	Mr Jim McGillivray
Mr Alasdair Christie	Mr Willie Mackay
Mrs Margaret Davidson	Mrs Trish Robertson
Mr John Finlayson	

Officials in attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
Ms A MacNeil, Senior Public Relations Officer
Mr A Maguire, Head of Development & Regeneration
Mr C Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Ms Maxine Smith in the Chair

1. Apology for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr Craig Fraser.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 3 – Mr D Rixson (Non-financial)
Item 4 – Mr D Rixson (Non-financial)
Item 6 – Mr A Baxter (Non-financial)

The undernoted Members declared interests relating to all items on the agenda for the reasons provided but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion:

Financial interests applicable to all items:

Mr G Adam - part owner of two self-catering units

Mr A Henderson – B&B provider

Mr B Lobban - Director of Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd

Mr R Bremner – B&B owner

Mr J Gordon – Air BnB owner

Mr A Baxter – freelance Tour Guide.

Non-financial interests applicable to all items:

Mr G Adam – Director of a glamping business

Ms M Smith – owner of cruise sector company, Thistle Excursion (not trading this year)

Mr J Gordon - Director of Skye Connect

Following a discussion about the number of Members with an interest in tourism, and which interests required to be declared, the Chair proposed and the Committee **AGREED** that an explanatory note be put on future agendas to clarify the situation.

**3. Tourism Infrastructure Plan
Plana Bun-structair Turasachd**

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There had been circulated Report No TC/03/20 dated 18 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Member feedback on the Plan should be sought via Ward meetings, these to be arranged for each Ward, ideally before the end of December 2020;
- Ward Managers should provide Community Councils with the opportunity to express their views on the Tourism Infrastructure Plan, including raising their awareness of what the Council was responsible for and in due course the Plan should be considered by Area Committees;
- engagement should be undertaken with other agencies and partner organisations in relation to tourism infrastructure requirements, ideally by inviting them to participate in Member Workshops;
- it would be helpful if aspirational facilities could be indicated in the Plan, these to be established through local consultation, with a 'bottom-up' approach;
- control and ownership of infrastructure assets could be a potential challenge in some areas;
- problems with excessive numbers of motorhomes were more acute in certain popular hotspots with too little parking. Whilst the majority of visitors were welcomed, some Members considered a stricter approach should be taken in relation to those who behaved inappropriately, such as parking in inappropriate places or leaving litter and toilet waste. Reference was also

made to the potential for implementation and enforcement of Road Traffic Orders and By-laws. Members also spoke of the value of tourism to the Highlands and the importance of continuing to welcome visitors and promote the unique attractions of the Highlands;

- ferry terminal car parks and waiting areas could be considered as possible electric vehicle charging points;
- there was an increasing problem with informal action against poor visitor behaviour, such as locked gates, roadside blockages which could be dangerous, and inappropriate signage;
- it was likely that 'staycations' and motorhome usage would increase in 2021 and therefore prompt action to find solutions to the challenges faced in 2020 was required. Suggestions included allowing landowners and local communities to make land available for overnight stays for a small fee and it was suggested that the Council could facilitate this where possible by identifying and possibly helping to mitigate requirements such as planning, licensing and establishing from SEPA and Scottish Water what the regulations were around the use of chemical toilets and other similar issues. Commercial opportunities should be welcomed, particularly in areas experiencing high visitor numbers and it was noted that this would be further considered at Item 5 on the agenda and also at the planned Ward meetings, and advice would be sought by the Chair from the relevant planning managers on what permissions and/or licences might be required for landowners or private home owners to charge motorhomes for the use of their private land and facilities overnight;
- the importance of consultation with local communities, even on relatively small issues such as signage location, was emphasised;
- in relation to the provision of signage seeking visitor co-operation with issues such as no overnight parking in laybys, it was suggested that a bid could be made for Crown Estate funds to assist with this provision;
- it was also suggested that by-laws or Road Traffic Orders were required to facilitate the enforcement of No Overnight Parking and/or the prohibition of alcohol consumption in certain locations, with examples provided of visitors parking overnight in single track road passing places and other similar anti-social behaviour. Consideration should be given to the introduction of such by-laws, either at a local level, pan-Highland or nationally. It was pointed out that such by-laws would apply to locals as well as to visitors and the Chair, Vice Chair and Principal Traffic Officer would discuss this further in the first instance;
- the challenges around the provision of public conveniences and waste management were highlighted. Local initiatives should be encouraged, noting the capital and revenue funding requirements could be significant;
- the importance of localism was also emphasised;
- there were many types of motorhomes, with some visitors preferring to stay in official caravan parks, while others preferred to park independently, possibly to avoid paying additional charges. Reference was also made to the considerable amounts of money spent by some visitors in the Highlands;
- the importance of engagement with landowners was emphasised;
- the merits of developing a system of 'Aires' (locations designed for short overnight stays) were explained, noting that they ideally needed to be as close as possible to local facilities or attractions;
- work should be undertaken at local level to identify how to extend the tourist season;

- work required to be undertaken with the private sector in relation to the provision of public conveniences and to increase the capacity of camping and caravan parks;
- given the importance of tourism to the Highland economy, it was disappointing that no specific Council budget was allocated to it and there was a need for this and also dedicated staff in this area;
- the problem of visitors parking overnight in cemetery car parks was highlighted;
- the electric charging point in Durness had been out of order for over two years and assistance was requested to facilitate its repair;
- reference was made to the infrastructure improvement work already undertaken on Skye to reduce roadside parking;
- in addition to the need to find short term solutions to ease the immediate problems being faced, a long-term strategy was required and should be developed as locally as possible;
- with regard to capacity, it was pointed out that if 30-40 motor homes were moved on from one area of the Highlands, they would need to find somewhere else to park;
- local community warden schemes would be helpful if funding could be sourced; and
- it was suggested that consideration should be given to adopting a business-like approach to projects, taking calculated risks to raise income and borrow money for required infrastructure in order to reap future rewards.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the range of tourism infrastructure that was already provided in Highland;
- ii. the initial observations of where there might be considered to be gaps in provision;
- iii. and the comments made on how further gaps might be identified and who else might be involved in the process;

and **AGREED**:-

- iv. to consider adding aspirational facilities to the Tourism Infrastructure Plan, these to be established through local consultation;
- v. Ward Managers should provide Community Councils with the opportunity to express their views on the Tourism Infrastructure Plan;
- vi. consideration be given to inviting partner organisations and other relevant agencies to participate in Member Workshops on infrastructure requirements;
- vii. to consider submitting a bid for funding for signage to the Crown Estate;
- viii. to arrange Ward Meetings with Local Members to discuss local facility provision, both current and aspirational, with these to be held in all Wards ideally before the end of December 2020;
- ix. discussion to take place between the Chair, Vice Chair and Principal Traffic Officer on the usefulness and/or drawbacks of Road Traffic Orders, either locally, Highland-wide or nationally; and
- x. that discussions should be undertaken with Planning Managers as to what permissions and/or licences might be required by landowners or private home owners in relation to charging the owners of motorhomes for the use of their private land and facilities overnight.

4. **Visitor Management Plan Plana Stiùiridh Luchd-tadhail**

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Isle of Rum Community Trust and as the Secretary of the Mallaig Heritage Centre but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There had been circulated Report No TC/04/20 dated 23 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was vital that the Visitor Management Plan (VMP) was taken forward at a local level and in this regard attention was drawn to the localism being achieved in Lochaber, with solution-focused community engagement and recognition of the long-term approach required;
- the pros and cons of Road Traffic Orders were discussed and in this regard it was highlighted that there were often objectors and previous attempts had not been taken forward by the Procurator Fiscal. In this respect, the Leader suggested that she would discuss this and similar issues with the Chief Executive before taking them forward to the Procurator Fiscal;
- the input from non-Members of the Committee was valued and helped to implement localism, especially in light of the diverse needs of different areas across the Highlands. It was confirmed that local tourism plans were being taken forward to link into the tourism strategy;
- it was important that the public were given information on the extent of the Council's responsibilities and the agencies with whom they were shared;
- it was also important not to alienate the majority of well-behaved visitors in tackling the minority who did not behave respectfully;
- infrastructure improvement and funding plans should be worked on while VMPs were being developed;
- details of the wide variety of tourist attractions in the Highlands should be incorporated in tourism plans;
- transport into and around the Highlands was a key issue;
- lessons should be learned from good practice in other areas of the Highlands and further afield;
- in relation to lists of facilities and infrastructure, it was important to identify gaps and aspirations;
- key words going forward were robustness and goodwill;
- the need to lobby for additional funding to implement the VMP was vital, noting that tourism brought in tax revenue for the Government, some of which should be re-invested in the Highlands;
- efforts to reduce the bureaucracy around change and improvements, and to improve cross-service working, were welcomed;
- it was felt that the issue of tourism had been neglected by the Council for many years;
- reorganisation of the Council's budget in relation to tourism was urged, including giving consideration to income from parking being retained at a

local level to incentivise local communities to implement parking charges and use the funds to improve their infrastructure and/or facilities;

- additional enforcement officers in relation to parking would be useful;
- a strategic and seasonal approach to preparation for the main tourism season was suggested, similar to the approach to winter preparations;
- the need for local ideas to extend the tourist season should be added to the agenda for the Ward Meetings agreed at Item 3;
- information should be sought on Destination Management Plans in use in Highland as well as those being used by other countries, such as New Zealand and Iceland, and on marketing undertaken in relation to the Outdoor Capital of the UK designation in Fort William;
- it was vital to reconsider the Council's policy in relation to public conveniences and to enhance rather than reduce provision;
- while acknowledging that now was not the time to introduce the Transient Visitor Levy given the problems faced by the tourist industry as a result of Covid-19, it remained something that required implementation in future years and it was noted that an update would be provided at Item 7;
- although some Members were in favour of implementing by-laws in relation to traffic and / or alcohol consumption, it was also suggested that there were other ways of dealing with these issues;
- the Council needed supportive policies, local power and enough staff to implement all the requirements for tourism to thrive. As such, it was suggested that increased staffing levels for tourism could be recouped through the Transient Visitor Levy in due course as a 'pay it forward' initiative;
- it was important for the Council to not put unnecessarily bureaucratic obstacles in the way of progress;
- a review of the Community Services budget priorities to ensure funds were allocated to essential facilities, such as public conveniences, was suggested;
- the Highland tourist industry was providing services and taxation income for the entire country; and
- attention was drawn to the merits of Gaelic culture and music as a tourist attraction, with particular mention of Fèis Rois, the Royal National Mod and Plockton Music School.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the issues identified by each Service in the appendices to the report and **AGREED**:-

- i. the continuation of the cross-Service Officer Group to identify possible solutions and make recommendations on how to address the issues identified;
- ii. the production of a Visitor Management Plan for 2021 to be presented to the Committee at the earliest opportunity;
- iii. modification of the immediate Plan to consider longer term requirements in a 5-year Visitor Management Plan
- iv. to add to the agenda of the Ward Meetings, as agreed at Item 3, to seek ideas from Local Members on ways to extend the usual tourist season in their areas;
- v. that the Tourism Co-ordinator should seek information on current Destination Management Plans in use in Highland as well as those being used by other countries, such as New Zealand and Iceland, and on

- marketing undertaken in relation to the Outdoor Capital of the UK designation in Fort William;
- vi. that the Chief Executive and Leader should discuss contacting the Procurator Fiscal in relation to support for the Council's aspirations for the future; and
 - vii. to consider a review of the Community Services budget priorities to ensure funds were allocated to essential facilities such as public conveniences.

5. Motorhomes and Wild Camping Dachaighean-motair agus Campachadh Fiadhaich

There had been circulated Report No TC/05/20 dated 23 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- a summary was provided of the history and current situation with regard to the creation of an 'Aire' (a short-stay overnight parking area) at North Kessock. A detailed planning application had been made to facilitate 28-30 motorhomes and it was hoped that this model might be useful for other areas of the Highlands experiencing similar issues, many having been highlighted during earlier items on the agenda. It was suggested the communications team should also publicise the Council's desire to receive expressions of interest from landowners in relation to the creation of more Aires;
- information should be sought from SEPA and Scottish Water on their requirements in relation to the use of chemical toilets on private land in order to advise any private landowners interested in allowing motorhomes to use their land overnight for a small charge;
- while the responsible use of wildfires was permitted under Outdoor Access legislation, it was disappointing that, in some popular beauty spots, unsightly debris was being left behind as a result of irresponsible wildfires whereby there were reports of people cutting down trees or removing fence posts to burn. A code of conduct would be helpful but enforcement was challenging;
- examples were provided of poor behaviour (inappropriate parking, use of alcohol, and littering) observed in known beauty spots, including Glen Etive, Glen Nevis and Applecross, and it was suggested that by-laws were required to assist in tackling this issue. It was also pointed out that by-laws would apply to local people as well as visitors;
- information on the number of motorhomes visiting the Highlands would be helpful and it was hoped that this information might be included in VisitScotland's end of year report, which would be reported in due course;
- in relation to roadside parking, clearway regulations could be helpful but needed to cover grass verges as well; and
- the difference between genuine wild camping and the more recent 'dirty' camping by the roadside was highlighted.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the range of problems reported during Summer 2020 related to informal or “freedom camping” in motorhomes and wild camping in tents;
- ii. the differing legal positions related to these two activities and how this would necessitate differing approaches to identifying solutions;
- iii. proposals for working with partners to find ways of addressing these issues in advance of the 2021 season;

and **AGREED**:-

- iv. to issue communication that the Council was keen to hear from landowners who might be interested in creating an Aire;
- v. to obtain from SEPA and Scottish Water what their requirements would be in relation to the use of chemical toilets on private land in order to advise any private landowners interested in allowing motorhomes to use their land overnight for a small charge; and
- vi. to report VisitScotland’s end of year figures in due course and to note the extent of motorhome usage, if included.

**6. Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund
Maoin Bun-structair Turasachd Dùthchail**

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Baxter declared a non-financial interest in this item as a trustee of the Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Trust but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

A verbal update was undertaken by the Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film as follows:

- from the first two rounds of applications to the Fund, one was complete (Bla Bheinn) and five were expected to complete in the next month or so (Bealach na Ba, Portree car/ motorhome parking and waste unit, Glenfinnan Car park, Cromarty slipways, and Mallaig / Traigh – 2-part project - Traigh element complete, Mallaig due to start late 2020);
- other projects with work taking place on site were:-
 - Storr car park / toilets (Council led)
 - Lochinver
 - Glenfinnan - bridge / footpath work was out to tender and would commence as soon as the car park was finished
 - Cromarty motorhome site – planning decision expected this week
 - Storr paths – work under way
- further projects included Eigg (with tenders well over budget, further discussions on resolution were under way) and Glen Nevis (with the lease of land to Nevis Partnership still to be concluded). Planning issues for the reserve project in Helmsdale still required to be addressed; and
- full applications for Round Three were due by 5pm on 14 October 2020, with 16 Highland submissions expected (66 nationally) and approval likely to be in mid-December 2020.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal update and **AGREED** to distribute to Members the list of Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund applications submitted on 14 October 2020.

7. Transient Visitor Levy Update

At the request of the Chair, the Committee **AGREED** to consider this item of additional business.

It was confirmed that progress with the Transient Visitor Levy (TVL) Scottish Government Bill had been paused in March 2020 because of the Covid-19 crisis and it had not been mentioned in the recently published Scottish Government Programme.

In this regard, the Chair emphasised that while there was no intention of trying to introduce the TVL during the Covid-19 crisis or its recovery period, it was proposed that, in order to plan for future years, a letter be sent to the Scottish Government First Minister, copying the Tourism Minister and Finance Secretary, asking for assurance that the TVL would be taken forward within the coming five years or that the Council be provided with an alternative fund with which to raise the required funds.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was imperative that no additional financial burden be placed on the tourist industry in the immediate future given its fragility, although support was voiced for the TVL in a few years' time, noting that it would be passed on to visitors and not paid for by businesses;
- the VAT reduction to 5% for the industry was valuable and it was proposed that the UK Government should be lobbied to make this permanent; and
- support was voiced for the proposal from the Chair in relation to the process for the TVL but it was requested that the draft letter be circulated to the Committee for input in the first instance.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the update and **AGREED**:-

- i. to lobby the UK Government for a permanent reduction in VAT for tourism businesses; and
- i. to draft a letter to the Scottish Government in relation to the future implementation of a Transient Visitor Levy and to circulate the draft letter to the Committee for comment in the first instance.

The meeting concluded at 2.10pm, having adjourned for lunch from 12.50pm to 1.20pm.

Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 15 October 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mrs I Campbell
Dr I Cockburn

Mr A MacInnes

In attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer - Property and Housing
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr P Waite, Countryside Team Leader, Infrastructure and Environment
Mr S Easthaugh, Access Officer, Infrastructure and Environment
Mr T Stott, Principal Planner, Infrastructure and Environment
Mr C Baxter, Planner, Infrastructure and Environment
Mr D Chisholm, Planner, Infrastructure and Environment
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager (Skye, Ross and Cromarty), Infrastructure and Environment
Mr R MacLeod, Housing Manager (North), Property and Housing
Mr C Sharp, Repairs Manager, Property and Housing
Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer, Property and Housing
Miss S Tarrant, Corporate Communications and Engagement Officer, Chief Executive's Office
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector Kevin MacLeod, Area Commander (North), Police Scotland.
Mr S Macpherson, Head of Strategic Projects, LSWR, HIE.
Mr A Nicolson, Interim Area Manager - Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross, HIE.

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr D MacLeod.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Police – Area Performance Summary** **Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/003/20 dated 1 October 2020 by the North Area Commander.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the report did not cover Lochalsh and it was explained that it was due to the new reporting format, this would be taken forward with a focus on this specific area to include Lochalsh;
- the reporting figures stated that there had been no drug cases when there had been a drugs incident in a disused building next to the station in Strathpeffer in July 2019. This was a mistake in the report and again this would be looked into and an explanation given; and
- there was an ongoing focus on the supply of drugs as there was a worrying increase in the supply of drugs, these drug suppliers preyed on the vulnerable in the community.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2017-20 Year 3, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 1 April 2019- 31 March 2020; and
- ii. **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020 – 23 Year 1, attached as Annex B to this report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 31 August 2020.

4. **West Highland and Islands Amended Core Paths Plan, Wester Ross and Lochalsh Areas** **Plana Phrìomh Cheuman Atharraichte na Gàidhealtachd an Iar agus nan Eilean, Sgìrean Rois an Iar agus Loch Aillse**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/004/19 dated 24 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment which presented the results of the consultation on the Amended Core Paths Plan for the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh area.

Members scrutinised the objections one by one as follows:-

- Little Garve to Aultguish (The Fish Road) – an objection had been received from the Forestry and Land Scotland for their section of the route as it may interrupt their management of the site with an inability to give an alternative route during forestry operations. Support for the route was received from Scotways and a neighbouring estate, as it is a long established Public right of way and had been signposted with Forestry Commission Scotland agreement in 2004. The Committee accepted this should form part of the Core Paths Plan and rejected the objection.
- Coulin Pass – an objection had been received from Network Rail – it appeared that any core path proposed over the rail network would be objected to. This is a long established Public Right of Way and supported by Scotways. The Committee accepted this should form part of the Core Paths Plan and rejected the objection.

- Craig to Scardroy – this was similar to the previous item with an objection from Network Rail. This was a crucial crossing point for access to Munros and Corbetts, a long established Public Right of Way and a local walking route. The Committee accepted this should form part of the Core Paths Plan and rejected the objection.
- Strathconon – This was objected to by a private forestry agent in the first Core Paths Plan in 2010 and was upheld by the Reporter given the forestry activity the owners had said they would be taking. They have objected again as they still have work to do and they were unable to provide alternative routes during works. However, much of the forest has been felled and the work is not continuous. The Committee accepted this should form part of the Core Paths Plan and rejected the objection.
- Strathpeffer to Knockbain (part of the Strathpeffer to Dingwall path) – this route was being developed as the Peffrey Way and one landowner on the route objected to the path. There had been 46 comments of support including one landowner and a few organisations. The section is the old railway track bed, raised above the neighbouring fields and fenced although these fences were dilapidated. The objector had stated that he still used this area for grazing. This path was critical to the safe movement of people walking and cycling from Strathpeffer to Dingwall. The community had been working on this for a considerable time and was to be supported, the work already completed to date on other sections was to be commended. The Committee accepted this should form part of the Core Paths Plan and rejected the objection.
- Bottacks to Loch Garve – an objection had been received again from the Forestry and Land Scotland for the same reason given above. However the Committee are disappointed at FLS objections feeling they should be more supportive. In this case the forestry work is not continuous and safe working practices would enable access nearly all the time. The Committee accepted this should form part of the Core Paths Plan and rejected the objection.
- Inverlael Circuit – part of this path was designed as a circular footpath but once again there had been an objection from the Forestry and Land Scotland. The Committee accepted this should form part of the Core Paths Plan and rejected the objection.

The following two core paths had been proposed for modification and these amendments would require to go back out to consultation:

- Flowerdale House in Gairloch – the landowner objected to the original route as he had proposed an alternative route that he was prepared to complete. The original route would remain in operation until the new route had been completed. The Committee accepted this modification should form part of the Core Paths Plan; and
- Dun Canna – there had been an objection over part of the route where there was a deer farm. During calving and the rutting season the area would be sensitive. The Committee reluctantly accepted the objection and the removal of the path from the Amended Core Paths Plan.

In response to a query the Access Manager informed Members that this was the only deer farm he was aware of in our area with a proposed core path.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the Amended Core Paths Plan for the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh area of the West Highland and Islands with outstanding objections on 7 proposed core paths outlined below;
- ii. **APPROVED** modifications to the amended core paths plan to include changes to 1 proposed core path and the removal of 1 proposed core path; and
- iii. **APPROVED** a six-week public consultation on the modifications to the West Highlands and Islands Amended Core Paths Plan.

5. HIE's role in economic and community development across Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh
Dreuchd Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean ann an leasachadh eaconamach is coimhearsnachd thar Ros an Iar, Srath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/005/20 (HIE) dated 30 September 2020 by Alastair Nicolson, Interim Area Manager - Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross, HIE.

During discussion, the following main points were raised and answered:-

- Members were concerned at the figures for Universal Credit. It was difficult to understand from the figures who was unemployed and who was actively seeking employment or who had fewer hours, unfortunately that level of information was not available from the DWP.
- the PACE partnership which involved Skills Development Scotland, local authorities, HIE and DWP comes into action when people are made redundant or if a business creates redundancies and would support the people who have been made redundant. PACE helps transition people from recently unemployed with finding future work;
- this was a new Committee and it was hoped that it could work more closely with HIE. Members held regular Ward Business Meetings and it would be beneficial if HIE could attend. Joint meetings would help in co-ordinating where funding was being given and in creating jobs in the area.
- the Crown Estate Funding would soon become available and in collaboration with HIE the Committee could co-ordinate match funding in projects for common priorities;
- this area was a fantastic area for tourism but this was an already fragile economy and the reliance on tourism was worrying. To keep young people in the area jobs and housing are needed in the area. The recent Covid restrictions requiring people to work from home had shown how in these rural communities people could work from home;
- there was a huge untapped potential for employment in this area, including Kishorn port and coastal areas with fishing where these areas could also be used for leisure facilities; and
- the Highlands had always been a welcoming area but motor home waste disposal areas were needed and with our departure from the Europe Union a lot of the grants would not be there.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the report;
- ii. **AGREED** to have further meetings with HIE to discuss WRSL economy.

**6. Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 – Main Issues Report
Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh A-staigh 2 – Aithisg Phrìomh
Chùisean**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/006/20 dated 29 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment which sought approval for the Main Issues Report for the second Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan to be published for public consultation. The covering report should be amended at 1.1 to read “Section 4” and not “Section 3”. At item 2.1 ii the reference should be to paragraph 6.1 and not 5.1.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on the spatial strategy. Members expressed a view that the Plan should be more encouraging of small scale development within those parts of the Ward that were on the edge of the Inner Moray Firth area. In particular, that the border for the Hinterland policy be moved to the Inverness side of Contin and Marybank. The officer explained that this change would be similar to that requested by Members within Easter Ross and could be included as an option albeit this change may conflict with the aim of addressing climate change and therefore could not be shown as an option preferred by officers;
- Members commented that housing was desperately needed and without growth public transport would not be improved to these areas. The officer suggested that the Placemaking Priorities could be amended to include improved public transport links to these areas; and
- in response to a Member query about the time period that the Plan covers, it was clarified that following a recent meeting with Government officials that this Plan would be progressed under existing legislation which would mean it would be in effect for 5 years.

The Committee:

- (i) **APPROVED** the Main Issues Report (as applicable to this committee area) to be published for public consultation, accepting that a number of minor presentational and typographical changes will be made prior to publication;
- (ii) **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in paragraph 5.1 of this report;
- (iii) **NOTED** the important role that the plan will play in addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency, economic recovery, and in taking forward The Highland Council’s agreed Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy recently submitted to Scottish Government;
- (iv) **AGREED** to add text to the Placemaking Priorities for Marybank, Contin and Garve to reference the need for improved public transport connectivity; and

- (v) **AGREED** the Housing in the Countryside Hinterland policy boundary in the Spatial Strategy section include the option of drawing that boundary in to the Inverness side of Contin and Marybank.

7. **Roads Maintenance Programme** **Prògram Càradh Rathaid**

There had been circulated Report No WRS/007/20 dated 5 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment which provided an update on road maintenance operations within the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area and details the impact of Covid-19.

During discussion, the following main points were raised and answered:-

- on a query as to how much money would come to this Ward from the money approved by Highland Council. Mr Moncrieff stated that he did not have an exact figure but it could be approximately 50% of the money allocated to Ross and Cromarty.
- Bundaloch road. Roads had been in negotiation with hire plant companies and Sconser Quarry. If a hire paver and tar supply can be accessed and with suitable weather, the job might be possible before the winter starts, but plant labour and materials had to line up;
- Traffic Orders – Arnisdale was waiting for a 30 mph sign. The Traffic Orders fall to the technical team. There is one senior technician in Dingwall with fifteen prioritised schemes that they were working on and another 80 schemes for future works. These were not progressing due to resources. Some of the schemes had been sitting for over a year. There might be possibilities other than a Traffic Order to short cut the process that would be looked at.
- the signs leading to Applecross were full of badges and were unreadable. The Tornapress sign was currently with the sign manufacturer who was designing the posts and foundations. The sign had to have higher passive posts so if they are hit they shear rather than damaging cars and the people in them.
- an update on the Glenelg sign would be emailed to Members;
- thanks were extended to Iain Moncrieff and Mackenzie Sutherland for coming to the community council meetings, often in the evenings, and helping the community understand current situation;
- the advertised posts were part of the mix in delivering the winter programme. Into next year this new Committee needed to understand operationally and financially what was needed for this area.
- a big concern this year is if there is another covid outbreak. The drivers were allocated their own lorry and only they used that lorry. The problems arose with refuelling and loading of the gritters. Staff were on training courses across the whole of Ross and Cromarty to get loader training tickets. This would mean dedicated people for loading and refuelling. Recently the Gairloch and Ardelve depots had to be shut down due to possible covid incidents. If everybody in a depot has to isolate it will impact, whether it be a false alarm or a live outbreak. The problem was intensified in this area with the diverse geography and distances involved in the area.
- a robust risk assessment had been undertaken to ensure that there was one man per vehicle and adequate PPE to protect the workers in the workplace;

- the Strathpeffer route was run from Greenhill Street and if there was an outbreak in that depot it would have a massive impact across the whole area.
- it was hoped that Ward 5 could be covered within its own area. If part of the Ward was covered by the Greenhill depot the budget would then have to be split. The Moy Bridge had a 7.5 ton weight limit and the gritter therefore could not go over the bridge. This would result in a gritter leaving Silver Bridge and having to travel to Maryburgh roundabout and back to Marybank – adding overtime and fuel costs. This is being looked at, so this is a temporary situation for this winter. Other fleet that could work with the 7.5 ton weight limit is being looked at but this would not be as efficient. There was a possibility to cross the SSE dam. It was unlikely the Moy Bridge would be improved in the near future.
- Mr Moncrieff has experienced workforce in Dingwall and in Lochalsh and needs them to come together for the big capital projects. He was currently trying to have a budget split for his road men so they can each work to their own budget;
- one option was to trade plant and labour between areas with a recharge to be issued against the area;
- the Achilty Quarry in common with most of the other quarries worked mostly for BEAR and with insufficient work to pay their workers during the covid restrictions, the quarries had been shut. The only quarry remaining open was the Sconser Quarry.
- Ferguson and other companies had HGV drivers that were available to help and were well versed in gritting. Mr Moncrieff was looking to get a weekly list of hire drivers available to assist with gritting especially if a depot was to shut down;
- Mackenzie Sutherland was to be praised for his innovative thinking, he has been a great boost to the area. And thanks also to Mr Moncrieff for everything that was being done.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

8. Housing Performance Report **Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/008/20 dated 29 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Property and Housing which provided Members with information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 June 2020. An update was given for the report under tenancy management for table 3, the figure for quarter one for reletting was 41.29 days.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on repair work within houses during the restrictions. Access was gained in most cases. One case where there was suspected covid the trades staff were uncomfortable with the PPE and external contractors had been utilised.
- on a query on responsibility for road repairs on unadopted roads Mr Sharp responded that it was the responsibility of Housing but that they tried to prioritise the potholes which affected the most tenants. Some unadopted

roads leading to Council housing now had no tenants only private occupants. There was a specific pothole at the entrance to Maclnnes Place in Ratagan and Mr Sharp would look at this. The Maintenance Officer for Skye is aware of this issue and will be inspecting at the earliest opportunity. An update will be provided following inspection.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

**9. Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh HRA Capital Programme 2021-22
Prògram Calpa HRA Rois an Iar, Shrath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/009/20 dated 24 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Property and Housing which provided Members with information on the level of HRA capital resources for WRSL for the 2021-22 mainstream Capital Programme approved at Housing and Property Committee on 13 August 2020 and the proposed programme of works for 2021-22.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the allocation of resources to Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area as set out at 5.7;
- ii. **NOTED** the guideline investment priorities as set out in sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed one-year HRA Capital Programme for Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh 2021-22 as set out in **Appendix 1**;
- iv. **NOTED** the position relating the current year HRA Capital Programme; and
- v. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme will continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Local Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee.

**10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 9 July 2020 which were approved by the Council on 30 July 2020.

The meeting closed at 13:25 pm.

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Thursday, 22 October 2020** at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr W Mackay
Mr S Mackie
Mr M Reiss

Mr K Rosie
Mr A Sinclair
Ms N Sinclair
Mr D MacKay

Officials in attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning
Mrs H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr A Macmanus, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer
Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer
Ms A Donald, EQI Manager, North
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Officer
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager
Ms J MacLennan, Principal Administrator
Ms M Murray, Committee Administrator
Ms F McBain, Committee Administrator
Ms M Zavarella, Administrative Assistant

Also in Attendance:

Mr S Parsons, Simec Atlantis
Mr J Donaldson, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
Mr M Thomsen, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Mr E Sinclair, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Mr A Tait, Caithness Voluntary Group

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

Item 8: Mr R Bremner (non-financial)
Item 12: Ms N Sinclair (non-financial)

3. Minutes of Previous Meetings – 19 February 2020 and 6 July 2020

There had been circulated Minutes of the previous Meetings held on 19 February and 6 July 2020 (which had been approved by the Council on 12 March and 30 July 2020 respectively) which were **NOTED**.

4. Matters Arising – Action Tracker

There had been circulated an Action Tracker which detailed the actions arising from previous meetings.

In this regard, and with specific reference to the actions arising from the meeting held on 6 July 2020, the following proposals were presented for consideration in relation to Roles and Responsibilities and Recognition of Community Achievement:-

Roles and Responsibilities:-

Role Description – Vice-Chair and Provost of Thurso

- To act as deputy to the Chair of Caithness Area Committee as required
- To help develop and maintain effective relationships with partner organisations and agencies as appropriate
- To provide strategic advice and input to the Chair relating to Caithness strategy and specifically to Thurso and North West Caithness
- To raise and help manage issues and opportunities with the Chair relating to Thurso and North West Caithness
- To represent Thurso and Caithness on civic and ceremonial occasions to the Provost of Thurso, including on the occasion of visits by Ambassadors and Consul Generals
- To promote Thurso and Caithness by hosting civic events and raising the profile of Thurso and Caithness including through public appearances and the media
- To maintain the highest standards of conduct and ensure public confidence in the functions of the Provostship
- This role is voluntary and will not be remunerated.

Role Description – Vice-Chair and Provost of Wick

- To act as deputy to the Chair of Caithness Area Committee as required
- To help develop and maintain effective relationships with partner organisations and agencies as appropriate
- To provide strategic advice and input to the Chair relating to Caithness strategy and specifically to Wick and East Caithness
- To raise and help manage issues and opportunities with the Chair relating to Wick and East Caithness
- To represent Wick and Caithness on civic and ceremonial occasions to the Provost of Wick, including on the occasion of visits by Ambassadors and Consul Generals
- To promote Wick and Caithness by hosting civic events and raising the profile of Wick and Caithness including through public appearances and the media
- To maintain the highest standards of conduct and ensure public confidence in the functions of the Provostship
- This role is voluntary and will not be remunerated.

Recognition of Community Achievement:-

Caithness was fortunate to have an effective and inspirational voluntary sector and it was suggested that the Area Committee could formalise a process that recognised the outstanding efforts and contributions by voluntary organisations and individuals to the community.

As such, the establishment of a Caithness Community Awards scheme was proposed (on the basis that a similar scheme had been successful in the areas of Skye and Nairn).

Nominations could be made in the following categories - Arts and Sports, Environment, Health, Education, Community, Enterprise and Young People – and in terms of the criteria to be followed all nominees would have to be resident in Caithness, demonstrate that their actions or activities had resulted in a significant benefit to the population of Caithness and as such would be eligible for civic recognition from the Ward and/or be nominated for voluntary effort. Nominations for the award in respect of paid members of staff would not be eligible.

Nomination forms would be considered by Caithness Elected Members, the Ward Manager and Community Representatives for each of the categories listed. The successful nominee would be contacted ahead of a Caithness Area Committee meeting and invited to attend to receive their award. The awards would be presented at the beginning of each meeting of the Committee and winners would be presented with a signed certificate. Each year, one individual would be recognised with a commemorative plaque for their outstanding contribution to Caithness community life.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the proposals in relation to Roles and Responsibilities and Community Achievement as detailed.

It was also **AGREED** that further discussion would be undertaken at a future (separate) meeting in relation to the Community Achievement proposals.

Further, and with specific reference to the current Action Tracker, it was **AGREED** that the actions which had already been completed/superseded could now be removed.

5. Notice of Motion

The following Notice of Motion had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance:-

‘Caithness Area Committee recognises the fundamental strategic importance of Wick John O’Groats Airport to the economy of the region, and the energy, business and tourism sectors in particular.

Caithness Members confirm their full support for the Public Service Obligation and their commitment to working with stakeholders and partners to deliver this as a matter of urgency.

Caithness Area Committee further calls on Highland Council to identify financial support to secure the onward sustainability of the Airport.’

Signed: Ms N Sinclair Mr S Mackie

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- Wick Airport had always been important nationally and not least at present in light of the circumstances around the current pandemic;
- it was important to acknowledge the previous work which had been undertaken on the Business Case in respect of the Public Service Obligation (PSO) which meant that it was now ready to be released;
- issues in relation to the PSO, including the annual subsidy, passenger numbers and potential economic gain for the Caithness area, were highlighted;

- this had to be viewed as a catalyst for future local jobs and as such the importance of recruiting to (and retaining) such jobs in Caithness was stressed;
- in relation to renewable and emerging technologies, investment in the Airport represented an investment in decarbonisation;
- the unanimous support and commitment from all Members of the Committee in respect of the Motion was welcomed;
- it had to be recognised that the Airport was an integral asset for the area in terms of rebuilding and taking advantage of future opportunities where issues around connectivity would be key;
- the value and importance of regular, scheduled and on-time flights for the area in future could not be underestimated;
- considerable work had been undertaken and it was now time to present the business case to those who could fund it;
- this could be a key part of the recovery process from Covid-19 and it was obvious that geographically Caithness was now best placed to take this forward in line with what had already happened in other areas;
- the funding required represented a relatively small sum compared to other projects and not least in light of the potential economic return for Caithness and the Highlands as a whole;
- the appreciation and thanks of all Committee Members were conveyed to the Officers concerned for the extensive work which had been undertaken with a view to establishing a sustainable air route for the area;
- it had to be acknowledged that a number of challenges had already been tackled by the Caithness Transport Forum, including issues in regard to connectivity with larger hubs in other areas;
- all Members of the Committee were in full agreement that lobbying of the full Council needed to be undertaken now in terms of the support required; and
- it was a matter of pride that Wick was the only town in Scotland which could be reached by road, rail, sea and air.

*Thereafter, the Committee unanimously **AGREED to RECOMMEND** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

6. Scottish Fire & Rescue Local Performance Report

There had been circulated Report No CC/07/20 dated 9 October 2020 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- an update on recruitment was sought, and provided, particularly in relation to Stations in the more outlying areas and it was confirmed that advertisements were continuing to be placed across all platforms;
- disappointment was expressed at the continued delay to replace/refurbish Thurso Fire Station and it was confirmed that there was widespread support for this project to be accelerated. In this regard, it was noted that progress had been impacted by Covid-19 over recent months;
- the contribution that the Fire Service gave to local communities was commended and in particular reference was made to recent charitable events which had been well supported by Fire Service personnel; and

- information about the increase in deliberate fires was sought and provided. In this respect, it was suspected that this could have been due to the burning of rubbish/waste but further information would be provided in due course.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the terms of the Local Performance Report as circulated; and
- AGREED** to continue to support the refurbishment of Thurso Fire Station by including it on the Action Tracker in order to monitor future progress.

7. Presentation - SIMEC Atlantis

A Presentation was undertaken at the meeting by Mr Sean Parsons, Simec Atlantis, during which he provided an update on recent activity at Nigg where delivery of the world's first subsea hub had been completed on time by an incredible team and would allow multiple tidal turbines to be connected to a single power export cable.

As such, this was now being shipped to Japan and it was expected to be installed by the end of the year. It was hoped that more orders would follow and in this respect the Members of the Committee were thanked for their interest and for visiting the site in person to view the project and talk to the team which had been greatly appreciated by all concerned.

Meygen was the largest tidal stream project in the world but those who had worked on it now wanted to take it further and it was envisaged that this could be accomplished through a Phase 2 project. However, there had been barriers to this in that the UK Government had withdrawn funding for tidal stream projects and as such lobbying was currently being undertaken to enable Meygen Phase 2 to be 'unlocked' in order that the benefits for local areas could be achieved.

Overall, it was vital to now take forward digital infrastructure projects which represented an area of huge opportunity and potential expansion for local communities in the future. Also, and whilst acknowledging that these projects could often be 'energy hungry' at present, it was highlighted that identification of renewable links in this regard was currently being investigated in order to alleviate such issues.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the enthusiasm which had been relayed during the presentation was warmly welcomed as was the potential for investment in the Caithness area in future;
- it was noted that whilst many projects were classed as the 'technology of tomorrow' that was not true for this project. Further, it was envisaged that a project such as 'Meygen 2' could deliver now for the Caithness area;
- it was essential to keep jobs in the UK wherever and whenever possible and as such Nigg was ready now to undertake and complete further projects;
- details of the many opportunities and also challenges faced in developing this type of technology were requested and provided;
- tidal energy had enormous potential to generate jobs locally and this was in contrast to the situation with wind farms;
- there was disappointment at the news which had been received earlier in relation to the BiFab Yard;

- it would be important to take every opportunity to change the perception that tidal energy was expensive as the industry had identified economies of scale and successfully reduced costs;
- it had to be highlighted that tidal energy was much easier to control and predict than either wind or solar power;
- in outlining the environmental approach undertaken by Simec Atlantis, it was understood that perhaps only one type of bird could dive deep enough to be affected by this type of project (black guillemots). In view of the number of tourists who visited Caithness to see its rich birdlife, it was therefore agreed that this would be investigated and further information provided in due course as to whether this was accurate;
- it had to be recognised that the impact of good energy production had a direct and beneficial impact on local communities;
- it was not acceptable to have local people in fuel poverty when such a valuable resource was available close by;
- the Data Centre proposal would help to diversify the Caithness economy and develop local skills and as such was strongly supported;
- the Motion which was to be put forward from the Committee was vitally important and especially in terms of lobbying the UK Government for a 100MW minima for tidal energy in the next CFD auction round; and
- the benefits from these projects would have a direct impact on local communities and as such it was vital that this was widely publicised

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the terms of the presentation as detailed.

*It was also unanimously **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** the terms of the following Notice of Motion:-

“Caithness Area Committee recognises that the MeyGen project has positioned Caithness and Scotland as a world leader in the development and deployment of marine energy. The award winning and pioneering project has already produced more tidal stream power than anywhere else in the world, creating highly skilled jobs both direct and throughout the supply chain.

Caithness Members confirm their full support for the development of the project to realise its full potential in terms of tidal energy generating capacity and the establishment of the McCloud Data Centre creating an integrated subsea, terrestrial, data centre and renewables project to provide Scotland with world class digital infrastructure and the necessary tools to attract Hyperscale availability zone requirements.

Caithness Area Committee further calls on Highland Council to lobby the support of the UK Government for a 100MW minima for tidal energy in the next CFD auction round”.

8. Covid-19 Response Update – Caithness Voluntary Group/Caithness Community Partnership

Declaration of Interest - Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest in this item as Chair of Thrumster Community Development Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Mr Allan Tait, Caithness Voluntary Group (CVG), provided an update on this item during which it was explained that, over the summer, there had been a reduction in support provision by community groups in comparison with the spring. Many groups had been working on a one-to-one basis to help people become more independent. However, much of that work had now stalled due to the reintroduction of restrictions as infection rates increased. There were also indications that people were becoming more anxious, especially those who had been in isolation earlier in the year.

Discussions had taken place with the groups that had been involved during lockdown and everyone was willing to support their communities over the winter. Groups were better prepared than they had been in March and systems were in place but that did not mean it would be straightforward and work had taken place to increase knowledge and contacts and address issues identified by the volunteers. Some issues could be resolved by better communications and networking, such as facilitating access to social care, organising access to food for groups via Community Food Initiatives North East, checking on school meal provision for the families that relied on it and supporting village halls to reopen so support groups could resume. The major issues which had been identified included mental health and wellbeing, food and fuel poverty and poor digital connectivity.

CVG was fortunate in that, with support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), more Aspiring Communities funding had been secured for 21 months from July 2020. A part-time co-ordinator and two full-time officers had also been appointed to work on projects to tackle inequalities in the area and much of the work taking place centred around mental health and wellbeing. An action group had also been established with input from a range of partners including NHS Highland, Police Scotland, Elected Members, practitioners and relevant community groups. In addition, a focus group of people with lived experience had been set up to sense-check the working taking place. Initial findings from a survey that had been carried out were that crisis support was lacking, there were long waiting lists, specialist treatment was not available in Caithness and there was a lack of information on what services were available. Significant progress had however already been made by the action group which was looking at two initiatives, namely a listening project and an interactive resource hub, further information on which would be provided in the next few months.

Mr Eann Sinclair and Mr Martin Thomsen, both HIE, provided an update on behalf of Caithness Community Partnership during which tribute was paid to CVG for the way in which it had organised a group of responsible and accountable organisations at short notice to deliver a range of vital services. Some support had been provided via the Scottish Government grant scheme administered by HIE and there was now a further grant programme which was open until March 2021.

The thematic issues raised, such as mental health provision, digital and physical connectivity and fuel poverty, had already existed but the pandemic had brought them to the fore and it was now even more vital that they be taken forward. In relation to the Community Planning Partnership structure, there had previously been a disconnect between the work taking place locally and at a strategic level. However, a new structure had been put in place that was now beginning to work and, over the winter months, the issues raised would be developed at ground level and then taken up through the CPP in the knowledge that they would be addressed. There was an opportunity to reinvent community planning on the ground in a productive way and the community-led efforts needed to be the springboard for the work that would take place over the next six

months. It was added that, due to the great work of CVG and the many community groups in Caithness, the Community Partnership now had a closer connection with the people who were experiencing inequalities.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- Members commended CVG and Caithness Community Partnership, not only for the work carried out during the initial lockdown and over the summer but for the strategic approach now being taken. It was wonderful to be part of a resilient community like Caithness and that resilience had been recognised in other areas of Highland;
- better networks had been established as a result of the resilience work that had taken place and the CVG had played a pivotal role;
- it was important to note how quickly community groups had become organised and had then been able to move on and begin discussing many of the issues raised during the updates. Times of adversity tested communities and Caithness had passed with flying colours, community groups having been determined to work together to minimise the effects of the pandemic;
- mental health was a topical issue in Caithness at present and it was encouraging that issues had been identified and work was taking place. In that regard, it was confirmed that NHS Highland would be visiting each Community Partnership area to do a specific piece of work on mental health provision and it was suggested that there should be a joint Caithness and Sutherland approach as the issues being experienced were almost exactly the same. NHS Highland representatives would be attending the Sutherland Community Partnership meeting in December and it was suggested that it would be useful if the Caithness Community Partnership was also part of that conversation;
- the resilience programme had been a learning process as well as a delivery process and, as highlighted during the updates, had improved connections between the Community Partnership and the people who were experiencing the issues it was there to address;
- Covid-19 had caused, and continued to cause, many families huge distress and funding had been essential. In that regard, thanks were expressed to Martin Thomsen for his work in facilitating help which had been hugely welcomed by communities;
- concern was expressed regarding the potential for more lockdowns and volunteer fatigue;
- it was not known what the next few months would hold but the winter would provide different challenges to the summer months and it was important to manage them so that an effective resilience programme could still be delivered in the future;
- it was important that agencies were made aware of the people who had been identified as having particular needs and that there was continuation of provision;
- fuel poverty would become more of an issue during the winter and it was expected that the winter flu bug and Covid-19 would be more prevalent. If people could not visit each other's houses, loneliness/social isolation could be a significant issue, especially in rural communities;
- it was hoped that the Community Partnership could be consolidated and strengthened going forward;
- after a difficult start, this had been a transformational year and Members were proud to see Caithness being held up as an example of best practice and what could be achieved when everyone worked together; and

- there was a vibrant and successful third sector in Caithness and the Community Partnership was working well alongside it. The Caithness Committee wanted to work more closely with the Community Partnership going forward and the Chair sought views as to how that might best be achieved. In this regard, it was suggested that there should be a standing item on the Committee agenda with a different focus for discussion each time – this should be a practical discussion as to how the Committee was helping the Community Partnership and taking actions forward. The Chair also confirmed that she had had a discussion with Martin Thomsen as to whether she (or another Committee Member) could meet with Community Partnership leads to keep informed on the work taking place.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the updates which had been provided as detailed; and
- ii. **AGREED** that there should be a standing Community Partnership item on future agendas.

9. Thurso Associated School Group Overview

There had been circulated Report No CC/08/20 dated 6 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was a need to highlight the considerable improvements at Wick and Thurso Secondary Schools in recent years and also to thank the senior management teams and teachers in this respect;
- the recent attendance at a Committee meeting by Secondary School Head Teachers had been welcomed and it was hoped that Primary School Head Teachers would also attend in future;
- information was sought and received on possible mitigation required in relation to the impact of lockdown on attainment standards. In this respect, attention was drawn to the considerable benefits of Chromebooks during this period and the excellent levels of ICT support which had been provided. It was also noted that teachers were assessing the requirements of pupils in order to identify any gaps in provision and that National 5 exams had been cancelled for 2021;
- teachers were also thanked for the additional out of hours work which they had undertaken during lockdown to try to keep in touch with pupils and for 'small touches' such as displays of bunting to welcome children back into schools;
- information was sought and received in relation to the ability of the ASN Programme in Caithness to meet requirements and it was confirmed that there had been no change in the current year to staffing support, with Workshops planned for Members on allocation and resources;
- in relation to 'positive destinations' and direct employment, Caithness was performing well against the Highland and Scottish averages and all staff, pupils and families were thanked for their efforts;
- the advantages of Members attending Parent Council meetings were highlighted;
- in response to concerns about mental health issues, attention was drawn to plans to introduce a Mental Health SQA Qualification for all S3 pupils and it was suggested that something similar should be considered for adults;

- the commitment to Gaelic Medium Education was emphasised;
- attention was drawn to the figures in the report on the provision of different levels of ASN provision and because it was difficult to know how this related to levels of need, an improved presentation of the data in the report to reflect this was requested, including general staffing unfilled vacancies (particularly long term) and whether there were gaps in ASN provision. An ASN-specific report, which cut across both Associated School Groups, was requested for a future meeting; and
- it was suggested that the Caithness Executive Chief Officer should consider attending a Caithness resilience meeting and/or a Thurso High School Parent Council meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the terms of the report as circulated.

It was also **AGREED** that an ASN-specific report, which cut across both Associated School Groups, be presented to a future meeting.

10. Caithness HRA Capital Programme 2021/22

There had been circulated Report No CC/09/20 dated 7 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the updated content and approach in the report was welcomed and reference was made to the value of localism, tenant consultation and joint working at all levels;
- both Officers and Members were thanked for their work on the programme; and
- with particular reference to renewable energy, the benefits of bringing together expertise for a project from a range of sources was highlighted.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the allocation of resources to the Caithness Area as set out in Section 5.7 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the guideline investment priorities as set out in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed one-year HRA Capital Programme for Caithness 2021-22 as set out in Appendix 1;
- iv. **NOTED** the position relating to the current year HRA Capital Programme; and
- v. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme would continue to be provided through Ward Briefings and at future Local Committee meetings as requested by Local Members, in addition to reporting to the Housing and Property Committee.

11. Housing Performance Report – 1 April to 30 June 2020

There had been circulated Report No CC/10/20 dated 8 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the team was commended for their hard work and dedication with respect to repair times and it was commented that this was an impressive result, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis;
- it was recognized that this was a challenging time for all housing teams and the housing service in Caithness was applauded for their efforts in adapting and delivering services effectively in such difficult circumstances;
- with respect to revenues, this situation was not reflective of a Caithness issue but rather a Highland-wide and national issue; and
- it was an obligation and statutory duty for the Council to provide housing for people who presented as homeless and housing units were required by necessity and this was important for the community to understand.

Thereafter, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period from 1 April to 30 June 2020 as detailed.

12. Wick Common Good Fund – Asset Register

Declaration of Interest - Ms N Sinclair declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of Wick Development Trust (also known as ‘Wick’s Heart’) but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Joint Report No CC/11/20 dated 12 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place and the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the work undertaken to investigate and compile a list of Common Good assets in Wick was warmly welcomed and gratitude was expressed in relation to the dedication and effort by the team in this regard;
- this was the beginning of the process and the public would now have an opportunity to engage;
- it was queried as to how income generation would be taken forward once the process reached conclusion. In response, it was advised that once the consultation process had reached a conclusion (and there was a list of Common Good assets) there would have to be a decision made (potentially through Strategic Workshops) to determine how best these assets could start generating income for the fund;
- it was noted that it was intended to undertake a similar investigation for Thurso as time and resources permitted; and
- it was incumbent upon the Council to ensure that the process was structured effectively and undertaken in close consultation with the public. In this regard, it was suggested that Officers consider an opportunity for a virtual public meeting to be held, alongside compilation of a ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ document.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the list of property proposed to be included in the Common Good Asset Register for Wick as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** the commencement of the public consultation on the list of proposed property in accordance with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 as detailed.

The meeting ended at 1:35pm.