

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held remotely on 7 July 2020 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

Mr J Bruce  
Mrs M Cockburn

Ms P Hadley  
Mr B Lobban

### In attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer – Performance and Governance  
Mr P Senior, Executive Chief Officer Education & Learning  
Mrs C McDiarmid, ECO, Customer & Communities  
Mrs A Clark, Head of Policy & Reform  
Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager (Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey)  
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

### Also in attendance:

Mr M Tate, Chief Executive of Cairngorm Business Partnership  
Ms K Derrick, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey

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

## Mr B Lobban in the Chair

### Business

#### 1. **Apologies for Absence** **Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 3. **The Phased Reopening of Schools and ELC Settings** **Fosgladh Sgoiltean Mean air Mhean agus Suidheachaidhean Tràth-ionnsachaidh is Cùrainm-chloinne**

During a verbal update, the Executive Chief Officer Education & Learning advised that the Council's whole ecosystem was working on the plans and preparations to ensure schools would be ready for reopening on 12 August 2020. He explained that Council services and schools had been working on a scenario-based approach with the primary focus on Option A (100% return with no social distancing) in accordance with the national guidance but that work continued on contingency plans (Option B - 100% return with 1m social distancing and Option C - 50% return with 2m social distancing). However, the primary concern was the safety and wellbeing of pupils, staff and

communities, therefore risk assessments continued and mechanisms were in place to adapt the model dependent on circumstances. Continuing, he advised that one of the key design principles had been co-production which involved a programme of engagement and consultation with key stakeholders such as Head Teachers, parents/carers and partner agencies. In terms of communications, he advised that a dedicated web page had been established on returning to school which also included a Frequently Asked Questions section and a bespoke version of this had been developed for specialist schools.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It had been reported at Education Committee that there would be recruitment, particularly for Head Teachers, over the Summer period and an update was sought on the teaching vacancies within the Badenoch and Strathspey area. It was reported that a communication giving an update on recruitment was due to be issued and the Executive Chief Officer Education & Learning would follow-up on this to ensure it was actioned;
- Further information was sought and provided in regard to the provision of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and it was suggested that communications needed to be issued on this as soon as possible to inform parents on the prospective timetable for delivery of 1140 hours of ELC;
- In addition to teachers, there were a variety of critical roles that contributed to school settings and it was most encouraging that the importance of these were being recognised with a whole ecosystem approach;
- The Scottish Government had given a commitment whereby counselling would be available in all secondary schools from April 2020. With the primary concern being wellbeing during these particularly unprecedented and challenging times, it was queried whether this initiative would still be delivered. It was further queried whether all staff had been advised of the Council's online counselling service that could be accessed; and
- It was highlighted that a significant number of pupils in Badenoch and Strathspey were transported to school by bus and an update was sought in regard to school transport arrangements and also whether pupils would be required to wear face masks on buses.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal report and **AGREED** to follow-up on the communications that was due to be issued on recruitment and ensure that this was circulated to Members.

#### **4. Cairngorm Business Partnership Com-pàirteachas Gnothachais a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh**

There was a verbal overview provided by Mark Tate, Chief Executive of Cairngorm Business Partnership (CBP), on the current impacts on the local economy. Mr Tate advised that at the start of the pandemic, CBP had developed a strategy of 'stabilise, prepare and open'. He explained that the stabilisation phase continued and the massive impact of the situation on the

whole economy across Badenoch and Strathspey was recognised. Unfortunately, it was anticipated that the impact on the economy would continue for quite some time and an increasing number of redundancies was expected particularly as the furlough scheme was phased out. Although a number of businesses were starting to reopen and visitors were returning, this should not disguise the amount of work that still had to be undertaken to support businesses going forward. Mr Tate had been invited to attend the National Tourism Recovery Task Force on behalf of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and a report would be submitted to the Scottish Government in September 2020 advising on how to continue to support the tourism industry particularly through the winter. Over the past two months work had been underway on how to reopen the communities/economy and the whole of the Cairngorms National Park in a way which gave confidence to employees, communities and visitors. As part of this, there had been in depth stakeholder engagement and a framework for communications had been developed based on four key messages - Know the Guidelines; Plan Ahead; Be Flexible; and Be Kind.

Continuing, Mr Tate advised that a visitor survey had been undertaken the results of which indicated that visitors would return, and therefore businesses and communities needed to be enabled to be as prepared as possible. A new status website (<https://status.visitcairngorms.com>) had been launched which enabled visitors and communities to plan ahead to ensure a positive experience. A video had also been launched and had over 150,000 viewings as well as many shares on community forums. The local economy was reliant on tourism but there was a need to be prepared for visitors to return safely. In conclusion, Mr Tate expressed his appreciation for the support from the Council particularly in regard to distributing the business grants scheme and relaxation of the planning condition whereby lodges had to be closed over winter.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- A number of complaints had been received with regard to anti-social behaviour, e.g. littering from campers in the Grantown-on-Spey area and confirmation was sought and provided that the Ranger Service did not extend to this area. It was felt that there was a need to differentiate between leisure campers and wild campers;
- The visitor survey was welcomed and it was queried whether there had been any engagement with locals;
- Disappointment was expressed that Glenmore camping area would remain closed and there was a need for the Council to lobby for this decision to be overturned as the facility was vital to the whole infrastructure of the area;
- The economy of Badenoch and Strathspey was almost entirely reliant on tourism and further information was sought and provided on how to attract new businesses to the area. It was also further queried whether there had been any industrial promotion of the area. In addition, it was felt that there were people who were attracted to the area due to its rurality and high quality of life and it was queried whether any measures were being taken to capitalise on this;

- The public purse was under extreme pressure and it was queried what actions could be taken now, in the short term, without the need for any additional financial resource; and
- Members looked forward to welcoming visitors back to the area safely.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal report.

**5. Highland Council and Local Community COVID-19 Response  
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd agus Freagairt COVID-19 na  
Coimhearsnachd Ionadail**

i. The Highland Council Community Response

There was a presentation by the Ward Manager on the Covid community response. The Ward Manager explained that humanitarian assistance centres (HACs) had been established as part of the emergency response to support key groups within the community that would be vulnerable to Covid. The presentation provided detailed information on the types of support that had been provided and the local arrangements that had been established; set out the key learning opportunities; outlined the next steps including how the Council would continue to work with local communities; provided financial information on the local funding for community support and how this had been distributed; and provided information on the Business Grant support that had been awarded to businesses across Badenoch and Strathspey.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was requested that a copy of the presentation be circulated to all Members of the Committee;
- It was queried whether the financial Business Grant support that had been provided were grants and not loans;
- The phone support system that had been developed to provide technical support for both mobile phone and IT issues to members of the local community had been an excellent initiative and consideration should be given to continuing this service; and
- Staff were commended for the strong partnership working that had been demonstrated during the local community response.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that:-

- a copy of the presentation would be circulated to Members; and
- confirmation be provided on whether the Business Grant support was a grant or a loan.

## ii. Badenoch & Strathspey Community Response

There was a presentation by Karen Derrick, Chief Officer, Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey (VABS), on the Third Sector and community response in the Badenoch and Strathspey area. During the presentation information was provided on the key community activities that had been provided; highlighted the positive impacts; set out how communities would be supported in recovery; and outlined the key learning points.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The support of the community volunteers had been overwhelming and demonstrated the strong community ethos and connectiveness across Badenoch and Strathspey;
- One of the key reasons Badenoch and Strathspey had been so successful in their response to the pandemic was due to having VABS which had been a great advantage. Members commended them for their role in leading the highly effective community response and felt that the structures that had been established would make Badenoch and Strathspey well placed to cope with any future coronavirus spike or second wave;
- Concern was expressed that demand for community food tables would be ongoing and it was queried how this support initiative could be sustained long term;
- The work of the volunteers was commended but it was highlighted that the lockdown period had occurred during Spring when there were no weather issues. It was therefore queried how the model could be developed to include winter resilience; and
- There was a need to have awareness that people's circumstances and needs would evolve at different times.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

## 6. **Minutes** **Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 11 February 2020 which were approved by the Council on 12 March 2020.

The meeting was closed at 12.12pm.