

**The Highland Council
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held remotely on Thursday 5 November 2020 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr R Gale

Mrs D Mackay

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison

Ms L Munro

Officials in attendance:

Mr F Malcolm, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care

Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager, Communities and Place

Mr C Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film

Ms A Donald, Education Quality Imp Manager (North)

Mr S Scott, Head Teacher (Cluster)

Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer

Mr R MacLeod, Housing Manager

Ms M Grant, Principal Housing Officer

Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Mr R Gale in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Ms K Currie.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

The Items are recorded in the order that they were taken at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 9.

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

There had been circulated Report No SCC/09/20 dated 26 October 2020 by the North Area Commander.

Due to technical issues, the Chief Inspector had been unable to attend the meeting to provide a formal presentation and it was agreed that the questions raised by Members would be provided to the Chief Inspector for responses and that there be a report on Police Area Performance to the next meeting on 22 February 2021.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- scarce coverage of Police Officers in the North and West was concerning, particularly with the volume of NC500 traffic this year and despite recognition of the challenges with staffing levels it was hoped that this would be addressed before next summer;
- a deeper understanding of police capacity was required given the occurrence of police travelling significant distances to respond to inquiries;
- it was positive that there was a downward trend with most issues, however, it would be useful to discuss the statistics on thefts by housebreaks as it could be suggested that remote areas were having more break-ins as a result of the vast influx of visitors that the North had seen;
- concerns were expressed at the lack of Police presence at Community Council meetings compared to previous years and there was an assumption that this was due to capacity. However, given how valuable their input was, it would be useful to have a summary report if Police representation was not possible;
- the statistics in relation to drug crime were thought-provoking and it was queried whether it would be possible to have a private briefing from the Police on Drugs Misuse to gain their perspective on the situation; and
- it was queried whether the downward trend in crime overall could be linked to lack of Police presence being able to identify crime as it was happening.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan:-
 - a. 2017-20 Year 3, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2019- 31 March 2020; and
 - b. 2020 – 23 Year 1, attached as Annex B to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 30 September 2020;
- AGREED** that the questions raised by Members be provided to the Chief Inspector for responses and that there be a report on Police Area Performance to the next meeting on 22 February 2021; and
- AGREED** that there be a private briefing on Drugs Misuse.

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

There had been circulated Report No SCC/11/20 dated 8 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In support of the report, a presentation was provided by the Cluster Head Teacher (Golspie and Rogart Primary Schools) on the impact of reopening of schools by focussing on the results in Golspie Primary School. It was highlighted that during lockdown there was significant support for pupils and meaningful work by various staff to ensure that the pupils remained engaged. However, since the re-opening of schools, data thus far showed that although the pupil attainment level was higher than local and national levels pre-

lockdown, regression was found post-lockdown. Significantly, there was an impact on attainment with substantial regression showing among pupils in numeracy, writing and reading, with reading being the most significant gap. As a result, the focus had been on strategies to accelerate learning in reading and writing. Reflecting on staff resilience there had been an increase of staff absence through stress and mental health issues compared to previous years, despite support from the Council.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- appreciation was expressed and echoed for the report and presentation being informative, engaging and impactful;
- explanation was sought and provided that staffing numbers were up to capacity and it was an improving picture in all key areas;
- clarification was sought and provided that pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN) were not always included in the Emotional, Behaviour and Social Needs (EBSN) category and vice versa;
- keeping schools open was crucial for children's development given the staggering figures between pre and post-lockdown and the Catch-Up Programme was commended;
- the impact of stress and mental health issues on pupils and staff would be felt for some time;
- it was interesting to note the positive emotional resilience of younger children and the more significant impact of lockdown on secondary school pupils;
- confirmation was sought and provided that mental health support was being provided to secondary school pupils via the Support for Learning Department and Guidance staff within Golspie High School. In addition, extra funding had been made available for counselling and the ASG was in the process of exploring delivery options and determining allocation of funding;
- it was helpful that schools were receiving funding for counselling, however, it was challenging for Head Teachers to compete over services, and there was a responsibility to provide support to Head Teachers to ensure that this was rolled out in a proactive way that supported the child, family, and counsellor;
- the additional monies for mental health was over and above the counselling money and this brought an opportunity to have a significant positive impact;
- lockdown brought a real understanding and appreciation of teaching as a profession and demonstrated that it was a challenge to have young people engaged, attentive and learning;
- further information was sought and provided regarding the high number of placing out requests at Rosehall Primary School; and
- it was requested that a copy of the presentation be circulated to the Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report and that a copy of the presentation would be circulated to the Committee.

5. **Tourism Infrastructure** **Bun-structar Turasachd**

There had been circulated follow Report No SCC/10/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- Member support for the report and appreciation of the team's effort was echoed;
- the current infrastructure was unable to cope with the influx of "Staycationers" throughout the past tourist season and there was risk that this scenario repeated itself next year without swift action;
- information was sought on what could realistically be achieved prior to the next tourist season that could make a difference particularly with respect to waste disposal from motorhomes. It was confirmed that discussion was underway between waste teams, communities and the North Highland Initiative to problem solve in respect of waste disposal of rubbish. In terms of wild camping, discussions were taking place between Community Services, the Countryside Team and the Northern Highland Initiative to obtain funding for seasonal rangers or wardens to do education and policing in the 'honeypot' areas to resolve waste issues there. In terms of toilet waste facilities for motorhomes, there was no concrete resolution at this time, however, discussions were ongoing about using the core money from the Coastal Communities Fund to put in place a network of sites around Highland focussing on gaps in waste management;
- access to beaches had become an issue and campsites in the North and West were full and there was no avenue to dispose of waste;
- it was emphasized that waste disposal and toileting was a complex issue and priorities varied in each community which was the reason for communities trying to become involved early on in problem solving efforts;
- there was a project underway in Brora to set up chemical waste disposal which had been an enormously difficult and fraught process for reasons well understood, nevertheless there was recognition that the need for these facilities remained;
- implementing a network of waste disposal hubs around the NC500 was viewed favourably and timelines were sought on completion of projects. It was confirmed that Crown Estate funds were being sought and if the bid was successful many projects could be completed by late Spring 2021. It was highlighted that some communities were much more straightforward to deliver the projects than ones where there was no pre-existing infrastructure which could prove to be a significant challenge; and
- concern was expressed about recent news stories that showed Covid-19 effected areas being identifiable by the examination of the sewage works. Explanation was sought on the implications for camping, outdoor toileting and the potential impact of Covid-19 on the soil and animals. It was confirmed that this had been identified as an issue across the country and Nature Scot in combination with VisitScotland had been tasked to do promotion for improved guidance on responsible camping and wild toileting and this was proposed for next year; further, it was

agreed that once launched, a copy of the document would be circulated to the Committee. It was requested that in addition to the document that contact details for each organisation be included.

The Committee: -

- i. **NOTED** the range of tourism infrastructure that was already provided in Sutherland;
- ii. **NOTED** the initial observations of where there might be considered to be gaps in provision;
- iii. **NOTED** whether further gaps existed that should be included in the Tourism Infrastructure Plan;
- iv. **AGREED** that a response be sought from Environmental Health on the impact and potential spread of Covid-19 from wild camping and outdoor toileting; and
- v. **AGREED** that, once launched, a copy of the document 'Campervan and motorhome waste disposal - A guide for independent developments' be circulated to the Committee along with contact details for each organisation.

7. **Sutherland HRA Capital Programme 2021-22** **Prògram Calpa HRA Chataibh 2021-22**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/12/20 dated 21 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property. After a summary of the report it was anticipated that there would be an update on expenditure against budget on the current 2020/21 capital programme to the next meeting of the Committee.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was confirmed that further information would be provided on the 2020/21 budget for Mainstream Investment and Aids and Adaptation;
- Assurance was sought and provided that a programme of works had been implemented to ensure that the housing stock met the new legislative requirements in terms of Smoke, Heat, & Carbon Monoxide Detectors. In addition, Tenants would be informed of the planned maintenance works through the next Tenant Newsletter;
- In noting that the budget allocation for Major Component Replacement for rewiring in the Sutherland programme was £50,000. Further information was sought and provided on the cost of a full rewire (approximately £8,000 per property) and the average lifecycle (approximately 30 years);
- Further information was sought on the status of the Trades Procurement Framework; and
- Confirmation was provided that the Environmental Improvements budget would be discussed at the next Ward Business Meeting and assurance was provided that Members would be updated on any budget changes.

The Committee: -

- i. **NOTED** the allocation of resources to the Sutherland Area as set out at paragraph 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 Sutherland 2021-22 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- iv. **NOTED** the position relating 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 Area Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee;
- vi. **AGREED** that Members be provided with details of the 2020/21 budget for Mainstream Investment and Aids and Adaptation; and
- vii. **AGREED** that Members be provided with an update on the status of the Trades Procurement Framework.

**8. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2020 to 30 An t-Sultainn 2020**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/13/20 dated 27 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Attention was drawn to the magnificent job and excellent performance of the Housing team, particularly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic which had included implementing new ways of working to support the more vulnerable tenants and homeless applicants through this period;
- Officers were commended for the significant improvement on the target 'Average length of time taken to complete Emergency Repairs' and further clarification was provided on how this had been achieved. In addition, confirmation was provided that Covid had impacted on the average time taken to complete Non-emergency repairs as well as delays in emptying some properties due to travel restrictions during the lockdown period;
- Concern was expressed at the increasing trend of rent arrears and further information was provided on the work that the Service was undertaking to support tenants on reduced incomes and transitioning onto benefits for the first time. Appreciation was expressed to the Housing team for their work in providing much needed help and welfare support to ensure income maximisation for tenants; and
- A request was made for an update on the number and location of empty houses in the North and West of Sutherland.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020; and
- ii. **AGREED** that Members be provided with an update on the number and location of empty houses in the North and West of Sutherland.

**3. Notices of Motion
Brathan Glusaid**

The following Notices of Motion had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance –

- * (i) In view of the constraints imposed upon the Highland Council Capital Plan for years to come, and in view of the undeniable need for indoor sporting facilities to support the well-being of pupils attending the Dornoch 3-18 School Campus, the students attending the North Highland College Campus, and the local community in general, that Sutherland Members support in principle the construction of a low-cost Sports Barn, as per the attached (pp.1-3) generic drawings, to be built on a suitable site located appropriately on the School premises.

Signed: Mr J McGillivray Mrs D Mackay

During discussion, it was highlighted that there was a long history associated to the proposed Dornoch Sports Centre project. Although the limited capacity within the Highland Council Capital Plan was recognised, the community aspiration remained strong and the purpose of this Motion was to keep their ambition alive. It was felt that the provision of a Sports Barn was reasonable to progress and communities should be supported to do so. The County Committee had been consistently supportive of this project, which was important to the community, and it was clarified that support was sought in principle of the concept.

The Committee **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed.

- (ii) Sutherland needs to be prepared to meet the demands of next year's tourist season. The provision of adequate and sufficient waste facilities to support motorhomes has been identified as a priority. The process to develop these is currently uncoordinated, complicated and time consuming. Sutherland County Committee calls on Highland Council to work in partnership with SEPA, Scottish Water, Planning and Funders to develop a co-ordinated resource which can be accessed by our communities in and around NC500.

Signed: Mrs D Mackay Mr J McGillivray

During discussion, Councillor Mackay confirmed that this Motion would be achieved via the publication of the document 'Campervan and motorhome waste disposal - A guide for independent developments' as referred to at Item 5 and this, along with support from the Coastal Communities Fund, would enable communities to take forward plans to develop a network of motorhome waste disposal facilities across the Highlands.

The Committee **AGREED** the terms of the Notice of Motion as detailed and **NOTED** that the release of the document 'Campervan and motorhome waste disposal - A guide for independent developments' (as referred to at Item 5) would achieve this.

- (iii) Maintaining and improving good mental health has been identified by our communities as a key priority. This has been a particularly difficult year for those dealing with mental health issues, with these exacerbated by COVID, and the related issues including isolation, financial worries and job insecurity. We ask that Sutherland County Committee works with Sutherland Community Partnership to collectively better understand the issues and to enable community based solutions to be developed and implemented.

Signed: Mrs D Mackay Mr J McGillivray

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it was explained that Mental Health had been exacerbated by Covid with people having to deal with a range of issues and, although short-term measures had been implemented, there was a need to have a better understanding of the long-term needs for Sutherland. The Committee was advised that the NHS Highland Head of Health Development had been commissioned by the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to work with communities to ascertain their needs in in terms of Mental Health, determine what support existed locally, and identify any gaps in provision. The outcome of this work would be reported to the CPP on 18 December 2020 and the NHS Highland Chief Executive would also be in attendance at this meeting. Therefore, this was an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the range of issues facing communities in Sutherland and to work collaboratively with partners to determine sustainable solutions of support for communities;
- Concerns had been received regarding the reducing facilities for senior people at Migdale Hospital and that New Craigs was becoming the centre for treatment for this age group;
- It was acknowledged that the Covid pandemic was having an enormous impact on Mental Health and Members felt that working with the CPP was a good way in which to connect existing organisations that were already providing support across Sutherland; and
- Confirmation was provided that the schools counselling was year on year funding and that the Mental Health funding would come forward next financial year. Reference was made to the importance of taking a responsible but creative approach to developing community-based solutions.

The Committee **AGREED** the Notice of Motion subject to working collaboratively with the Community Planning Partnership to take this forward.

- (iv) In March COVID restrictions led overnight to a dependency on digitalised services. Arctic Digital Nomads (ADN) is an international collaboration whose objective is to promote its regions as a work destination for people who are not office bound but who can work remotely anywhere. Sutherland has so much to offer in terms of environment, lifestyle and work/life balance. We ask that Sutherland County Committee examine the experience of ADN to look at how we can increase our economic diversity and become a destination of choice

for individuals and organisations around the world seeking a quality environment in which to live and work.

Signed: Mrs D Mackay Mr J McGillivray

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- It was explained that this Motion referred to Sutherland competing and succeeding in the workplace for the future. In particular, Covid had led to significant numbers of people working from home which presented an opportunity for people to work from anywhere provided they had access to WiFi connection. ADN was a collective network of remote rural communities working together to promote co-working and co-living in accommodation hubs of varying sizes. The employment status of Digital Nomads varied but they were usually young, therefore this was an opportunity to attract young people to Sutherland, an area of outstanding beauty with a wide range of qualities and attractions, and help local communities to flourish;
- There was an interesting concept and any opportunities to strengthen the local economy and retain young people were welcome; and
- Access to WiFi was crucial to the economic development and diversity of the area and it was proposed that the Motion be amended slightly to enable it to be progressed by utilising the resources of the Community Planning Partnership and Development Officers from the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust.

The Committee **AGREED** the Notice of Motion subject to working collaboratively with the Community Planning Partnership and Development Officers from the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust to take this forward.

**9. Dornoch Common Good - Quarter 2 Monitoring Statement 2020/21
Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich - Aithris Sgrùdaidh Cairteil 2020/21**

There had been circulated Joint Report No SCC/14/20 dated 22 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officers Communities and Place and Resources and Finance.

It was highlighted that COVID-19 had had no impact on rental income, and all rent had been paid up to date to the Dornoch Common Good Fund. It was further reported that two large applications had been accepted by the Community Council and by local Members, and the details of this would be reflected in the next financial monitoring statement.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the position of the Dornoch Common Good Fund, as shown in the Quarter 2 monitoring statement.

10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 24 February 2020 and 9 July 2020, which were approved by the Council on 12 March 2020 and 30 July 2020 respectively.

The meeting closed at 12.32pm.