

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair)** held remotely on **Monday, 30 November, 2020 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr J Finlayson
Mr J Gordon

Mr C MacLeod
Mr C Munro

Participating Officials:

Mr Malcolm Macleod, ECO Infrastructure and Environment
Mr Willie MacKinnon, Ward Manager
Ms Jennifer Bruce, Principal Housing Officer
Mr Don Esson, Education Quality Improvement Manager (West)
Mr Gordon MacDonald, Road Operations Manager
Mr Alan Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer
Ms Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

Also in Attendance:

Mr Stuart MacPherson, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)
Mr Mike Colliar, Group Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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 J Gordon – Cathraiche (Chair)

Preliminaries

The Chair paid tribute to David Noble, who had sadly passed away at the weekend. A keen runner, Mr Noble had been Chief Executive of Skye and Lochalsh District Council for 21 years, and the Chief Executive of the Highland Tourist Board, and more recently an independent facilitator for the Sir Lewis Ritchie report. He would be sadly missed by all.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were none.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 7 – Callum Munro (financial)

3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED**, Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 31 August, 2020, which had been approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 10/11 September, 2020.

4. Highlands and Islands Enterprise Presentation Taisbeanadh Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean

Mr Stuart MacPherson, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) gave a presentation on HIE's role in economic recovery in Skye, Lochaber and Wester Ross.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:

- tourism and hospitality accounted for around 32% of jobs in the area;
- in relation to the ambitious programme of house and school construction, information was sought and provided on the impact of Covid-19 on the sourcing and transportation of resources;
- further information was provided on the digital enablement grant, which was a blend of capital and expert support for companies, with examples provided;
- the investment grant scheme for young companies was welcomed as they might struggle in the current circumstances more than more established companies;
- the localism agenda and the developments as part of the Skye & Raasay Investment and Infrastructure Plan were welcomed, including the plans to tackle inequalities. It was suggested that in addition to Portree and Uig, developments in Broadford be added;
- the importance of diversification was emphasised and examples were provided;
- a brief summary was provided of the current situation in relation to onshore developments at Uig harbour;
- reference was made to increases in universal credit claims and unemployment, although some of these could be people on furlough. More information on the situation would be available in Spring 2021 when the furlough schemes came to an end; and
- the importance of fast broadband for rural areas was emphasised and a brief summary was provided on the roll out of full fibre broadband and the voucher scheme for rural areas.

The Committee thanked Mr Macpherson and his colleagues at HIE for their work and **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No SR/8/20 by the Local Senior Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:

- the general low level of incidences reported was welcomed;
- information was sought and provided on efforts being undertaken to increase diversity among SFRS staff, with particular reference to the need to increase the numbers of female officers;

- the encouragement of age 16+ school leavers was suggested and reference was made to a cadet employability scheme that had been paused due to Covid-19 but would hopefully restart when safe to do so;
- the increase in the numbers of people home-working had not so far resulted in the expected increase in incidents in the home, which could be partly due to awareness-raising campaigns in the media. There had been a slight increase in Quarter 3;
- a national directive was investigating the disparity in performance between full-time and retained fire stations, with an aim of lessening the impact on retained officers' primary employment; and
- in relation to recruitment, especially in rural areas, it was important to widen the range of possible candidates though leaflet drops, press releases, posters and open days, once these were allowed again.

The Committee thanked the SFRS staff for their work and **NOTED** the Local Performance Report.

6. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No. SR/9/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- information was sought and provided on the effect Covid-19 had on the availability of officers, with reference to the importance of filling vacancies;
- in relation to homelessness, information was sought and provided on capital programme plans for new Council builds in the ward, and whether there had been an increase in the use of private buildings for homelessness. While this had been the case in the short term, information would have to be sought outwith the meeting on the longer term trends. A brief explanation was provided on shifts in the use of resources to meet homelessness demands and reference was made to the Empty Home Project and various workstreams that were in place;
- concern was expressed at the increases in rent arrears in the preceding two years and discussion took place on the possible reasons for this, including the introduction of universal credit, relationship breakdown, and job losses as a result of Covid-19. The support offered to tenants in this position was summarised;
- information was sought and provided on developments at Woodside (which was with Development and Infrastructure to consider planning options) and Cruachan Place (which had been delayed due to Covid-19 but it was hoped units would be on-site by the end of 2021); and
- the Chair thanked the housing staff for their much appreciated work.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020 and **AGREED** any information available on increases in the use of private buildings for homelessness be provided to Mr Finlayson.

7. Portree Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Phort Rìgh

Declaration of Interest – Mr Callum Munro declared a financial interest in Item 7 as his wife was employed by the Highland Council and worked part-time in a primary school in the Portree ASG. Due to the general nature of the paper and that no decisions with implications for resourcing were involved and, 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.

There had been circulated Report No. SR/10/20 by Interim Area Education and Learning Manager (West).

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- the Interim Area Education and Learning Manager (West) explained that the format of the report was under review, with some of the data to be brought up to date, and this would be taken forward through Ward Business Meetings;
- information was sought on what support was being offered schools in anticipation of school inspections being re-started;
- it was important to update and modernise the school estate and it was hopeful that developments at Broadford and Dunvegan schools would be taken forward;
- Mr Finlayson made several points which were inaudible due to technical difficulties;
- concern was expressed that not all those entitled to were claiming free school meals;
- Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) funding was not being distributed fairly in rural areas and representations should be made to the Scottish Government on this;
- it was important to support staff to fill vacancies wherever possible;
- information was sought and provided on initiatives to provide online parents’ evenings, with a review of pilots anticipated;
- in response to a query about provision for mental health issues, a summary was provided on the various sources of support including the Council, health protection teams, environmental health, NHS Highland, welfare support, psychological services, local Members and the Ward Manager, as well as the process for dealing with any issues;
- the figures in the report provided a useful snapshot but longer term trends and projections would be helpful; and
- in response to a query about falling school rolls and the levels of pupils in Gaelic and English medium education, summaries were provided, although it was pointed out that in rural areas, one family could impact greatly on the percentages due to the overall small numbers.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

8. Area Roads Capital Programme Progress Adhartas Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre

There had been circulated Report No. SR/11/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- it was queried whether any capital underspends could be carried forward into the following year and the importance of keeping all allocated funds in the area was emphasised. However, a decision on this was outwith the remit of the Area

Management, and efforts would be made to ensure the 2020-2021 allocation was spent within the year;

- in response to a query about the availability of equipment to undertake additional work such as ditching when staff were available, it was explained that most additional plant was hired as required although there were aspirations to obtain some local-based plant such as a tractor with a power arm, flail and ditch cleaner;
- the local team were thanked for their work on the shared funding and income-generation schemes, with reference to the usefulness of their local knowledge and the benefits of using local contractors where possible. It was explained that over 90% of the funding for these schemes had been retained within Skye, with a small amount spent engaging a local contractor in Glenelg and hiring welfare units in Inverness;
- the 2021 programme was welcomed, with particular mention of work in the centre of Portree. It was emphasised that priority was given to the areas for which the highest number of complaints were received; and
- the additional pedestrian crossing in Portree was welcomed.

The Roads Operations Manager drew attention to one further issue that was not included in the report, which was recent events in Marishadder where an agreement had been reached with a contractor to repair damage to the road.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

9. Skye and Raasay Investment Plan – Proposed Approach Fios às Ùr mu Bhun-structar agus Tasgadh

There had been circulated Report No. SR/12/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:-

- officers were thanked for their work on the Plan;
- the place-based approach was especially welcomed, as was the bringing together of stakeholders and the clear articulation of desired outcomes, which would all be of significant benefit to local communities. It was vital that ideas generated through community engagement were taken fully into consideration; and
- with the Islands Bill not being of as much benefit to the Isle of Skye as had been hoped, and with the boundary commission considering the reduction of the area's democratic representation, this Plan was of significant importance to the area.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the proposed approach to engagement as outlined in paragraph 6 and the proposal to refer a final draft Skye & Raasay Investment Plan to a future Committee meeting for approval;
- ii. **NOTED** that the outcomes for Skye & Raasay outlined in Section 5 take account of pre-existing priorities and outcomes and would be used to consider the benefits of projects; and
- iii. **NOTED** that it was proposed that all Council ECOs were engaged in this process along with relevant teams, as well partner agencies and representatives of community organisations.

10. Town Centre Fund

There had been circulated Report No SR/13/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members thanked officers for the prompt production of the report and supported the need for a special Committee meeting. While voicing broad support for Option 4, it was felt that Option 1 required further consideration in relation to Broadford.

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** to provisionally award the Isle of Skye and Raasay Town Centre Fund equally to Broadford and Strath Community Company and Portree and Braes Community Trust. On the proviso that they develop an eligible project(s) in accordance with criteria and carry out appropriate stakeholder engagement, including further consideration of Option 1 for Broadford & Strath Community Company; and
- ii. **AGREED** to hold a Special Committee Meeting to agree the final detail of the project.

The meeting ended at 12.40pm