

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair)** held REMOTELY on **Monday, 31 August, 2020 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr J Finlayson
Mr J Gordon

Mr C MacLeod
Mr C Munro

In attendance:

Mr M Macleod, ECO Infrastructure and Environment
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport
Mr D Martin, Area Care and Learning Manager
Mr W MacKinnon, Ward Manager
Mr J Henderson, Housing Investment Officer
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant

Also in Attendance:

Chief Inspector I Graham, Police Scotland
Mr S Macpherson, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Ms J Ford, Chief Officer, Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations

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)

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 8 – Mr C Munro (non financial)

3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 2 March, 2020, which were approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 12 March, 2020, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

4. **Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report** **Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba**

There was circulated Report No SR/5/20 by the Area Inspector, Police Scotland.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- There had been a substantial increase in visitors to the west coast of Scotland as more people sought holidays at home. There had been issues with wild camping and litter and the style and focus of Policing during the Covid-19 crises was to educate, encourage and enforce. The Police had been a part of the Highlands and Islands Local Resilience Partnership in which the issue of staycation wild campers had been raised. There was a short term working group looking at this issue, so that plans could be put in place for next year in terms of improved enforcement, parking and toilet issues. The Police did respond to all areas of concern raised on this issue.
- Reference was made to problems with speeding on the A87 Strollamus to Luib and Sconser and a lack of a walkway beside the road. Road safety was a major issue within the Skye area and in other areas, the Police had worked with partnership agencies to put speed sensors in place in order to gather information in relation to speeds and timings to get an understanding of the issues. It would be checked if the local Police had put this in place for areas of road safety concern on Skye. A Road Safety Officer could also be tasked with visiting the sites and speak to local constituents about their views to see if there was a requirement to lower the speed limit.
- A breakdown of areas where drivers had been cautioned or charged in relation to speeding offences would be supplied to Members with a view to giving a better understanding of where speeding offences had been detected and how best to take this information forward with a view to improving road safety;
- In terms of staffing in the local area, there were two secondees appointed permanently and there was only one vacancy in the last month.

Having scrutinised the Local Performance Report, 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 the report, for the period covering 1 April 2019- 31 December 2019;

ii **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-23 Year 1, attached as Annex B to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 30 June 2020;

iii **AGREED** that a list of significant road safety concerns in the area be forwarded to the local Inspector for Police who would work with constituents and Partner agencies on the issues; and

iv **NOTED** that a breakdown of areas where drivers had been cautioned or charged for speeding offences in the area would be supplied to Members.

5. Return to School Update

Fios às Ùr mu Thilleadh dhan Sgoil

The Area Care and Learning Manager was in attendance to provide a return to school update.

It was highlighted that the vast majority of young people had now returned to school full time. Schools had spent the last two weeks preparing young people for the new normal in schools and sharing new procedures and systems in place to keep everyone safe. In particular, the priority had been settling in Primary 1 and S1 pupils. There were a variety of approaches across Highland in relation to early learning and childcare and the status quo prior to Covid-19 crises would continue, albeit it would be reviewed going forward this year. Also, transport solutions were in place and were working well. There was enhanced cleaning in schools and catering services were functioning well and all schools had been opened by 18 August, which was the Scottish Government's deadline. It was confirmed that there were no confirmed cases of pupils contracting Covid-19 in this area and there was no wider community transmission.

Further, SQA examination results were incomplete as results achieved in college still required to be factored in, as did wider achievement successes and more detail would become available for discussion at Ward Business meetings over the coming months.

In discussion, Members thanked all staff in schools and Area and Central support teams for a tremendous job in reopening schools in challenging circumstances. In respect of progress with the transition of P7 pupils to S1 a briefing on this would be forwarded to Members. In terms of staffing, temporary staffing arrangements had been made for Kilmuir and Staffin Primary School due to staff illness. The efforts of staff to fulfil the temporary arrangements had been a success and was commended. The challenges of recruiting staff in this area were limited compared to other rural areas in Highland.

It was advised that today was the first day when pupils required to wear face coverings in communal areas in schools and school transport and so far there had been no problems. This reflected staff efforts to follow Scottish Government guidance.

Members were encouraged to join a SQA workshop to gain insight into how it was hoped to continue to make improvements.

Some families were anxious about sending their children back to school and there had been an increase in the number of families requesting flexi schooling. An update

was also provided in relation to learning support units and children who had been shielding.

Thereafter, the Committee having thanked all staff for enabling young people to return to school, **NOTED** that a briefing on progress with the transition of P7 pupils to S1 would be forwarded to Members.

6. Road Maintenance Update – April to August 2020 Fios às Ùr mu Chàradh Rathaidean – Giblean gu Lùnastal 2020

There was circulated Report No. SR/6/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was confirmed that all the early issues with regard to PPE had now been resolved. All supplies were now in place and there were no shortage issues.
- In terms of vacancies, there were recruitment controls in place at present whilst the Council made efforts to manage its budget gap. It was highlighted that one Roads vacancy in the area had now been approved to be filled. However, recruitment for 4 roads maintenance apprentices remained on hold.
- If the Council did approve to release funding for overlay and inlay projects, this would allow works to proceed. However, some works may require to be deferred given the time of year. In this event, it was hoped that this funding would be carried forwarded into next year. The same process would apply to the surface dressing programme.
- A working group had been set up to address issues regarding increased traffic on Highland roads, not only to provide advice to drivers, but also to aid enforcement. There was a commitment for a significant programme for replacement of road signage and this would be ongoing for the remainder of the year.
- Information on the passing place signage replacement programme would be provided to Members.
- An update on progress with car park provision in the area would be provided to Members.
- It was advised that a white lining vehicle had been purchased through the Spaces for People project. This was good news and would increase the white lining provision in Highland. An update would be provided to Members on progress with the white lining programme and in particular white lining on the Carbost junction.

Following consideration, the Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report and that information on the following issues would be provided to Members:- passing place signage replacement programme; progress with car park provision and an update on progress with the white lining programme for Skye/Raasay.

7. Isle of Skye and Raasay Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2021-2022
Prògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair 2021/2022

There was circulated Report No. SR/7/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The external fabric and environmental improvements budget was of particular importance for Council housing and the funding would be spent on the most important projects. Officers should liaise with Members for suggestions on where the money should be spent in their communities. In this respect, it was queried if there was any scope for additional funding for this budget. It was advised that funding for environmental capital projects on an area basis was best discussed locally as had been done previously at Ward Business meetings. There was no additional funding as this was the area capital allocation for Skye, but there was also revenue funding for environmental works. However, there may be ways to deliver projects in a different way in order to deliver value for money, such as working with the Community Payback Scheme. The commitment to best value in projects was highlighted to make the most out of resources.
- The Council's low carbon ambition was highlighted and it was noted that over 60% of the HRA Capital Programme budget was going on energy efficiency which was welcomed. It was queried if there was a programme for the heating and energy efficiency that would demonstrate how the Council would achieve its low carbon ambition. It was explained that the impact of the measures undertaken was predominately assessed through the energy performance of a particular property. This analysis included, not only the environmental impact, but on the cost impact for tenants when implementing heating and energy efficiency systems.
- There was an increase in rent arrears during the Covid-19 crises and it was intended that the energy efficiency measures planned to be implemented would have a positive outcome for tenant's finances.

Thereafter, the Committee

i NOTED the allocation of resources to Skye and Raasay Area as set out at 4.6 of the report;

ii NOTED the guideline investment priorities as set out in section 4.2 of the report;

iii AGREED the proposed one year HRA Capital Programme for Skye and Raasay 2021-22 as set out in Appendix 2 of the report;

iv NOTED the position relating to 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.

8. Covid-19 Response Freagairt Covid-19

Declaration of Interest – Mr C Munro declared a non financial interest in this item as he was part of Kilmuir community support and this group had received funding from the Strengthening Communities Fund, 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.

i Local Community HUB

The Ward Manager gave a presentation on the Highland Council response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The presentation covered the setting up of humanitarian assistance centres to support key groups in the community who would be vulnerable to Covid; the setting up of a Covid Helpline, Community Hubs; a distribution and virtual Hub. The types of support offered included providing support for food to shielding groups, Pharmacy deliveries, advice and guidance. Specific local arrangements and support for the Skye and Raasay area were also highlighted. Arising from the Council’s response to Covid, key lessons learned and opportunities were detailed.

The Council had also worked with communities and there had been an impressive community response to the crises through volunteering. Funding to community groups in Highland was highlighted as was the business grants awarded for the area.

In terms of contingency planning for a possible 2nd wave of the virus, it was advised that local community hubs were still operating albeit at a reduced level and should be able to step up its operating capacity should this be necessary. Discussions were being held with High Life Highland to ensure that support was available in the longer term and the Ward Manager would also liaise with the Chief Officer, SLCVO on this.

The Committee thanked the Ward Manager for his tremendous effort in responding to the Covid crises, along with appreciation to staff for their work which was crucial for members of the community in Skye and Raasay.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation on the Highland Council Covid Community response.

ii Community Response Funding

Mr Stuart Macpherson, Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) gave a presentation on the Strengthening Communities Fund. The Scottish Government had asked HIE to deliver this fund across all of the Highlands and Islands due to the Covid-19 crises. The objective was to distribute financial support into communities, families and individuals, alongside the remarkable volunteering effort which had helped so many people. For Skye and Raasay £165k of funding had been made available across 8 main community organisations. These funds helped with activities such as food preparation, food provision, foodbank equipment and volunteer travel expenses. HIE had worked closely with The Highland Council to ensure there was no duplication of

effort and that funds were prioritised to areas of greatest need. The fund would cease at the end of September, 2020.

Concerns about sustainability of support if there was a further outbreak of Covid were raised as volunteers were now back to work and the job retention scheme would end in October. There was already concern regarding fuel poverty in the area and this would be a concern over the winter period. It would be up to the Scottish Government as to what happens next with the Strengthening Communities Fund, but measures to try and mitigate unemployment particularly amongst young people were being made.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the Strengthening Communities Fund.

iii Third Sector

Ms Jo Ford, Chief Officer, Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations (SLCVO) highlighted that the SLCVO along with the Third Sector Interface carried out a survey on behalf of the Scottish Government to assess the Third Sector response to the Covid-19 crises. The data showed that 45% of Third Sector organisations ceased services during the outbreak; 36% modified services and 19% changed their services. Details were provided of the support given to Third Sector organisations in the area and in turn the help given by these organisations to communities. Almost £70k in fundraising had been received for the Skye community response initiative which was a great achievement. Third Sector social services provision continued during the outbreak.

The main areas of support in the survey, identified the following key areas for Third Sector groups – funding and fundraising; managing volunteers, digital support; HR and recruitment; Networking and events and capacity building. The main concerns highlighted in the community were loneliness, increased poverty and mental health issues.

The digital support required for volunteers, families with school age children and older people, was access to digital devices and training on using the devices.

In preparation for winter, there had been a huge volunteer and community effort during Covid and there was a need to develop localised emergency response plans along with funding for a food sharing and food preparation service.

The Chairman on behalf of the Committee thanked the Third Sector for all the help and effort they had provided to communities in these challenging times. The pandemic had brought the best out of communities in supporting each other which was a tremendous effort. Front line staff were also commended as they had worked tirelessly to ensure vital services continued to operate.

Thereafter the Committee **NOTED** the update from the Third Sector.

iv Recovery Phase

The Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment highlighted the need for rebuilding and strengthening communities post Covid. The Skye area had set the

standard in putting measures in place for supporting the tourist industry. There was now an opportunity to enhance visitor facilities in consultation with communities.

Continuing, there had been discussion with Members regarding recovery activity on Skye and key projects would be identified to take forward, that would reflect the Scottish Government's Programme for Government. This was likely to include partnership working, focusing on digital services and digital infrastructure that would be needed for areas like Skye and Raasay, given the new ways of working. Low carbon initiatives would be required in delivering infrastructure projects.

The next step was to produce a Skye and Raasay plan and making the case for other funding that might be available.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the recovery phase and that an Isle of Skye and Raasay plan would be produced.

The meeting ended at 1.00 p.m.