

## 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 Iasachadh 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 MacInnes 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.