

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Wednesday, 20 January 2021 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr M Finlayson
Mr D Louden
Ms P Munro
Mr A Rhind

Ms F Robertson
Ms M Smith
Ms C Wilson

Officials in Attendance:

Alison Clark, Head of Policy
Alan Webster, Regeneration and Employment Team Leader
Helen Ross, Senior Ward Manager
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

Ms F Robertson in the Chair, except for part of Item 3, as indicated in the minutes, during which time Mr A Rhind was in the Chair.

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

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were none.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Ms F Robertson – part of Item 3 (non-financial)
Mr D Louden – part of Item 3 (financial)

3. Town Centre Fund Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile

Ms F Robertson declared a non-financial interest in part of this item as a member of Tain Task Force but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the majority of the discussion but she would vacate the Chair and not participate in the discussion and decision about that particular application.

Mr D Louden declared a financial interest in part of this item as a Director of Tain Heritage Trust and left the meeting during discussion of their application.

There had been circulated Report No ERA/01/21 dated 7 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer: Infrastructure and Environment.

Clarification was sought and provided on the importance of the Committee making a decision without deferment due to the need for the projects to be committed to by the end of March to secure the funding.

A summary was provided of the report and, during discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members were reminded of the previous decision to split the £140,260 funding 50:50 between the two wards;
- information was sought and provided on the need for a building warrant for the Picture House project;
- an explanation was sought and provided for the relatively high cost of the resurfacing work to the Rose Garden path, this including it being in a conservation area and the need for drainage work;
- the importance of the Rose Garden and toilet refurbishment to the local community and visitors was emphasised;
- it was suggested the toilet refurbishment could be undertaken without the additional work in the Rose Garden, and the extra money used to install a lift in the Picture House;
- clarification was sought and provided that if any of the projects came in under budget, there were other projects to which additional funds could be diverted to ensure they were not lost; and
- Members acknowledged there were no concerns with the proposals for Cromarty Firth Ward and these would utilise the allocation for that Ward.

At this point in the meeting, Ms Robertson vacated the Chair as a result of her declaration of interest, and Mr Rhind, as Vice Chair of the Committee, took the Chair. Ms Robertson and Mr Louden did not participate in the remaining decision-making.

In relation to the proposed projects for Tain and Easter Ross, Ms M Smith, seconded by Ms P Munro, **moved** to use £36k for the Tain Picture House and the balance of circa £34k for the toilet refurbishment only.

Ms C Wilson, seconded by Mr M Finlayson, moved as an **amendment** to use the entire allocation for Tain and Easter Ross towards the toilet refurbishment and Rose Garden project, and for Members to work with other projects where possible to help them source alternative funding, with particular reference to the installation of a lift at the Tain Picture House.

Following a vote, the results were as follows:

For Ms Smith's motion: Ms Smith, Ms Munro

For Ms Wilson's amendment: Ms Wilson, Mr Finlayson, Mr Rhind

Ms Wilson's **MOTION** was carried by 3 votes to 2.

At this point, Ms F Robertson returned to the Chair.

It was suggested that in order to maximise the use of the funding, it would be preferable for work on the projects to be undertaken by the Council, even if the Council required to enlist specialist contractors. Any balance on grants budgets following the drawdown of funding for these agreed projects would be available for Tain Picture House project.

The Committee **AGREED:-**

- i. the proposed projects to receive Town Centre Grant as follows:
 - a. Rose Garden, Tain – £70,130 to Tain Task Force and The Highland Council for new surfacing of the Rose Garden paths and refurbishment of the public toilets, *with assistance provided where possible to other projects to source funding, with particular reference to the need for a lift at the Tain Picture House;*
 - b. Shore Road, Invergordon - £50,000 to The Highland Council to provide a traffic and passenger management system for visiting cruise ships;
 - c. Evanton street lighting - £20,130 to The Highland Council to install new architectural lighting columns at the southern entrance of Evanton to improve the amenity, welcome and arrival of the village; and
- ii. that projects should be undertaken by the Council where possible and any balance on grants budgets following the drawdown of funding for these agreed projects would be available for Tain Picture House project.

The meeting ended at 10.55am.

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Wednesday, 17 February 2021 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr M Finlayson
Mr D Louden
Ms P Munro
Mr A Rhind

Ms F Robertson (**in the Chair**)
Ms M Smith
Mrs C Wilson

Officials in Attendance:

Helen Ross Senior Ward Manager, CSER
Mark Rodger, ECO - Property & Housing
Jim Holden, Housing Manager (North)
Robert Campbell, Estate Strategy Manager
Jonathan Henderson, Housing Investment Officer
Iain Moncreiff, Roads Operation Manager
Sara Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

Also in Attendance:

Chief Inspector Jamie Wilson, Police Scotland

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council.

All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were none.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 5 – Pauline Munro (financial)

3. Police – Area Performance Summary Report Poileas – Geàrr Aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No ERA/01/21 dated 3 February 2021 by Chief Inspector Jamie Wilson, Area Commander (North Highland Area Command).

Following a summary of the report, Member raised the following issues:

- the increases in assaults on emergency services workers, especially police officers, was shocking and Members voiced full support for the Police in tackling this;
- tougher action was urged on the high levels of vandalism and anti-social behaviour, with reference in particular to problems in the Rose Garden toilets, Tain. A summary was provided of action being taken including a

partnership approach between the Police, Education and Youth Services. It was proposed the Senior Ward Manager facilitate a meeting between the Police, Youth workers and Education for Alness, similar to arrangements previously made for Tain;

- information was sought and provided on measures being taken in response to lockdown offences, including large gatherings and people attending second homes. A summary was provided of the levels of evidence required for the Police to take action and the public was urged to continue reporting any unlawful activity; and
- with reference to the recent accident at Evanton junction, Maxine Smith sought and received confirmation that the police could provide statistics on road traffic incidents to facilitate liaison with the Scottish Government on the need for changes to road layouts etc.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 1 for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 30 November 2020; and
- ii. **AGREED** the Senior Ward Manager facilitate a meeting between the Police, Youth workers and Education for Alness, similar to arrangements previously made for Tain.

4. **School Estate Improvements Update** **Fios às Ùr mu Leasachaidhean Oighreachd Sgoile**

An update was provided on School Estate Improvements as follows:

Alness Academy - Phase 1: New School Building - Handed over in October 2020.

Alness Academy - Phase 2: Demolition of School/External Works - Programmed for completion by October 2021, now likely to be November.

Obsdale Primary: Nursery Unit - Building has been handed over, external works to be completed during Easter holidays.

Bridgend Primary: Nursery Unit - At tender stage, due on site from May to July.

Coulhill Primary: Nursery Unit - At tender stage, due on site from May to July.

Kiltearn Primary: Extension/Refurbishment - At initial design stage.

Invergordon Academy: Refurbishment of Toilets - At initial design stage.

Park Primary: Modular Classroom Units and Internal Alterations - Nursery to be operational after Easter; school to be operational from August.

Tain 3-18 Campus: New School Building - to open in 2024; more detailed update to Ward Members on Monday 22nd; meeting of Stakeholder Group to be arranged.

Tain Royal Academy: Accessibility Improvements – Complete.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- confirmation was sought and provided that planning permission for Invergordon Academy has been submitted and there was time to deal with queries;

- Members expressed concern at lack of information on progress with Tain 3-18 campus and it was hoped the stakeholder group would soon reconvene. The target opening date of August 2024 was challenging but a programme had been set out with this aim.

The Committee **NOTED** the update and **AGREED** improved communication in relation to the Tain campus was required.

5. **Area Roads Capital Programme for 2021-22** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean na Sgìre 2020-21**

Declaration of Interest - Mrs P Munro declared a financial interest in this item as her family's business (Pat Munro) was a possible contractor and if contractors were discussed, she would leave the meeting.

There had been circulated Report No ERA/02/21 dated 28 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- concern was expressed by all Members at the poor condition of the Area's roads. Priority should be given to tackling the potholes ahead of the proposed capital programme;
- Members deemed the condition of the roads in Easter Ross to be significantly worse than in other areas of Highland and the current method of road maintenance budget allocation by length of road was unsatisfactory and required discussion with the Leader of the Council and the ECO (Infrastructure and Environment), along with all Members of the Area Committee;
- reference was made to several specific roads where potholes were particularly bad;
- information was sought on why a member of roads staff had been seconded to burials, given the workload being experienced by roads staff. It was explained this had been due to Covid-related staff absence and urgent burial work;
- the method for filling potholes with tar was queried, with Members pointing out how often and how quickly potholes could reopen. Attention was drawn to the inadequacies of the available resources including budget, staff and equipment;
- it was suggested there was no need to include maps with the report as Members were familiar with the Area, however it was pointed out that maps had been requested during consideration of a previous report;
- reference was made to concern being expressed on social media about the poor state of the roads and that it was worrying some Council staff were being targeted on social media and in person;
- in response to queries, it was explained that the disaggregation of Area budgets reduced the flexibility in the use of resources. A summary was provided of the staff and plant available for Easter Ross, and that the number of staff was dictated by the agreed winter maintenance policy;
- it was pointed out that the proposed capital programme had already been discussed with Members at ward business meetings, however Members were unanimous in their desire to use the capital budget primarily for

tackling potholes, especially after the recent cold weather which had made the situation worse; and

- it was important to understand how much work the current roads staff were able to undertake and to consider the use of contractors where necessary. The rules around contract tendering and likely timescales were summarised.

The Committee **AGREED**:

- i. all Easter Ross Members and the ECO (Property & Housing) be invited to the meeting already arranged between the Chair, the Council Leader and the ECO (Infrastructure and Environment) to discuss the Roads budget for Easter Ross; and
- ii. to allocate a minimum of 70% of the Area Roads Capital Budget 2021-22 to dealing with potholes within the Area, with any budget left over from the potholes to be used for the Capital Programme as set out in the report and for authority to be delegated to the ECO (Infrastructure and Environment) in consultation with all Easter Ross Area Members to decide on the detail in this regard.

6. Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2021-22 Prògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais 2021–22

There had been circulated Report No ERA/03/21 dated 2 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, officials were thanked for their attendance at ward business meetings and it was clarified that once a plan was developed for pothole repair, further Member input would be sought via ward business meetings.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the allocation of resources to Easter Ross Area as set out at 5.5;
- ii. **NOTED** the guideline investment priorities as set out in sections 5.2 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed one-year HRA Capital Programme for Easter Ross Area 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.

7. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No ERA/04/21 dated 1 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020 and **AGREED** to provide Ms M Smith

with details of why there was a discrepancy between time taken to complete non-emergency repairs in Cromarty Firth compared to Tain and Easter Ross.

8. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2021/2022 Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2021/2022

There had been circulated Report No ERA/05/21 dated 2 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- reference to Lochaber in the report was a typographical error;
- there were garages that required repair before they could be rented out, but current budgeted funding was insufficient to undertake all the required maintenance;
- there was a need for an overall asset management strategy for garages and to invest in them to create income, with ideas including converting them to storage units, demolishing them to create parking, or using them as small business units. A pilot was being undertaken in Dingwall and once completed the outcomes would be reported to the Committee along with an outline business case for future options which, in due course, could be consulted on with Members, tenants and other stakeholders. All options would be discussed at a future joint ward business meeting in the first instance;
- Members proposed a 2% increase in garage rents in line with inflation and other rental increases.
- Jim Holden was wished well on his imminent retirement and thanked for his many years' service to the Council.

The Committee **AGREED:**

- i. a 2% rent increase to apply to Tain & Easter Ross and Cromarty Firth Garages; and
- ii. the ECO (Property and Housing) attend a joint ward business meeting, to be arranged by the Senior Ward Manager, to discuss issues relating to the future use of Council-owned garages.

9. Use of Cromarty Firth Covid Response Funds Cleachdadh Maoin Freagairt Covid Linne Chrombaidh

There had been circulated Report No ERA/06/21 dated 4 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the use of the Covid-19 Response Funds had already been discussed and agreed by the Council; and
- a post-Covid-19 lunch-club for the elderly was proposed and, following discussion, this would be done through the usual Ward Discretionary Fund application process as long as it would be under £1.5k initially;

The Committee:

- i. **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £15,000 from the remaining Cromarty Firth Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds to support the provision of play equipment in the Cromarty Firth Ward in consultation with amenities staff and local communities; and
- ii. **NOTED** that next steps to progress this work would include confirmation of any match funding available, the type of equipment to be installed based on the budget available and consideration of ongoing maintenance associated with any equipment installed. This would involve the amenities team and communities.

10. Invergordon Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain

There had been circulated Report No ERA/07/21 dated 4 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

During discussion, Members asked that it be made clear to the public that the Invergordon Town Hall required a significant amount of money to be spent on it to avoid it crumbling and decaying, and the only means of raising the necessary money and saving the building was to explore its lease or sale.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Invergordon Common Good Fund Annual Report for 2019/20;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Invergordon Common Good Fund, as shown in the 2020 Quarter 3 monitoring statement;
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2021/22; and
- iv. **AGREED** disposal of the Invergordon Town Hall by lease or sale on the open market should be explored, noting this would require a new public consultation under the terms of the Community Empowerment legislation.

11. Tain Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich

There had been circulated Report No ERA/08/21 dated 4 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Tain Common Good Fund Annual Report for 2019/20;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Tain Common Good Fund, as shown in the 2020 Quarter 3 monitoring statement; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed budget for 2021/22.

**12. Tain Common Good – Disposal consultation, Wild Life Pond Kiosk, Tain Links
Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich – Co-chomhairle Chuidhteachaidh,
Bothag Lochan Fiadh-bheatha, Machair Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/09/21 dated 2 February 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as contained in the analysis at Appendix 1;
- ii. **AGREED** the proposal to change the use of the Wildlife Pond Kiosk to a café outlet subject to the consent of the Sheriff Court being obtained; and
- iii. **NOTED** that other permissions might be required relating to planning and environmental health in connection with the operation of the business however, these were separate processes and procedures to those required under Community Empowerment legislation.

**13. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 5 November 2020.

The meeting ended at 12.50pm

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the special **Easter Ross Area Committee** held **remotely** on Wednesday, 7 April 2021 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr M Finlayson
Mr D Louden
Ms P Munro
Mr A Rhind

Ms F Robertson (**in the Chair**)
Ms M Smith
Mrs C Wilson

Officials in Attendance:

Helen Ross Senior Ward Manager, CSER
Mark Rodger, ECO - Property & Housing
Fiona Cameron, LEADER Programme Manager
Martin Culbertson, LEADER Development Officer
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

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

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were none.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 3 (Tain Picture House Lift Works) – Mr D Louden (financial)

3. Highland Coastal Communities Fund (HCCF) – Assessment of Applications Maoin Coimhearsnachdan Cladaich na Gàidhealtachd – Measadh Iartasan

Declaration of Interest - Mr D Louden declared a financial interest in this item, as a Director of the Tain Picture House, and left the meeting during discussion of this item.

There had been circulated Report No ERA/10/21 dated 7 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer: Infrastructure and Environment.

Prior to consideration of each application, the LEADER Programme Manager and Development Officer gave a brief summary of each project. They explained that although some applications had amber or red-ragged criteria, which indicated a concern or requirement for a condition, all applications presented were eligible for the funds.

The Committee agreed the total amount of £108,107.84 should be split equally between Wards 6 and 7.

Applications were considered as follows:

Ward 6 - Saltburn & Westwood CC- Coastal Defences

This application had been withdrawn by the applicant as they wished to undertake further development work. Members were supportive of the project in principle and suggested that any remaining amount for Ward 6 be ring-fenced for this project pending the resubmission of their application with updated information to a future meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee. Clarification was sought and received that there were no time constraints on allocating the funds.

Ward 6 - Clubhouse Development Project: Phase 2 Viewing Balcony

Members voiced support for this project and proposed allocating the original requested sum of £33,058.24. They considered the revised request for £48,909 to be excessive given the total amount of funds available for Ward 6, and suggested the Rugby Club be advised in writing to apply to the central strategic fund for the remainder, noting that the detail of strategic fund allocation was to be considered by the Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee in May 2021. It was explained the applicant was also seeking funds elsewhere and was investigating cost reduction measures for the project.

Ward 6 - Evanton Station Reopening Feasibility

Members voiced support for this project and approved £5,000.

Ward 7 - Conveniences For All

Members voiced support for this project and approved £23,980.

Ward 7 - Tain Picture House Lift Works

Members voiced support for this project and approved £26,073.

Ward 7 - Inver Bay Seating

Members voiced support for this project despite it being for less than the recommended minimum of £5,000 and they approved £4,000.

Members voiced concern that the system used by the Council to allocate HCCF funds to the Areas had been unfair and had not adequately taken into account industry impact criteria, with reference made to the considerable sea-based and coastal industry in Easter Ross. The Chair would write to the Council Leader on behalf of the Area Committee detailing the Committee's concerns and asking that the allocation method be revisited, with one option being the use of the strategic HCCF to redress the imbalance in Area allocation.

The Committee **AGREED**:

- i. the area allocation of £108,107.84 be split equally by ward, with each receiving £54,053.92;
- ii. the following funding awards from HCCF:
 - a. Evanton Station Reopening Feasibility: £5,000 approved;
 - b. Clubhouse Development Project: Phase 2 Viewing Balcony: £33,058.24 approved;
 - c. Saltburn & Westwood CC- Coastal Defences: deferred and the remaining £15,995.68 for Ward 6 be ring-fenced for them pending the

- resubmission of their application with updated information to a future meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee;
- d. Inver Bay Seating: £4,000 approved;
 - e. Conveniences For All: £23,980 approved; and
 - f. Tain Picture House Lift Works: £26,073 approved.

The meeting ended at 10.40am.