

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held **REMOTELY** on Wednesday 12 May 2021 at 11.30 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam
Mr B Allan
Mr R Balfour
Mr J Bruce
Mr C Fraser
Mr R Gale
Mr J Gordon
Mr A Henderson

Mr A MacInnes
Mr D Macpherson
Mr H Morrison
Mrs M Paterson
Mr I Ramon
Mr A Rhind
Mrs T Robertson

Non-Members also present:

Mrs J Barclay
Mr R Bremner
Mrs H Carmichael
Mrs M Davidson
Mr J Finlayson

Mr B Lobban
Mr J McGillivray
Mr C Munro
Mr P Saggars

In attendance:

Ms C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
Ms A Clark, Head of Policy, Communities and Place
Ms C Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources, Communities and Place
Mr A McKinnie, Senior Waste Manager, Communities and Place
Mr A Yates, Environmental Health Manager, Communities and Place
Mr P Mascarenhas, Community and Democratic Engagement Manager, Communities and Place
Ms R MacKinnon, Principal Policy Officer – Equalities, Communities and Place
Ms L Gray, Chief Registrar, Communities and Place
Mr M Cooper, Transport and Logistics Manager, Communities and Place
Mr S Graham, Project Manager, Communities and Place
Ms E Barrie, Head of HR, People and ICT, Resources and Finance
Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager, Resources and Finance
Miss J Maclennan, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr D Wilson, Local Senior Officer, 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 Committee.

Mr A Henderson in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms K Currie, Mr D MacLeod and Mr R MacWilliam.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 4 – Mr A Henderson (non-financial)
Item 14 – Mr D Macpherson (non-financial)
Item 15 – Mr D Macpherson (non-financial)

3. Good News/Staff Achievements Naidheachdan Matha/Coileanaidhean Luchd-obrach

The Chair highlighted that the mobile Covid asymptomatic testing unit had been based at Council HQ for the past three weeks. 158 tests had been undertaken during that time and feedback from users of the facility had been very positive.

A smaller mobile unit was now in use and a third larger vehicle was nearing completion. All three units could be used for asymptomatic testing as well as supporting the NHS with the vaccination roll out programme.

Plans to take the mobile units out to Highland communities for asymptomatic testing were being worked on and locations would be identified on a weekly basis. Flexibility with planning was necessary to respond to requests from Public Health to attend to areas of concern at short notice, as well as to support the vaccination programme with mobile clinics.

A Community Testing Coordinator, funded by the Scottish Government, had been seconded to the team to manage the roll out of the testing schedule, ensure compliance with Scottish Government operating procedures and coordinate the mobile units between vaccination and testing deployment.

The model being used in Highland was now being looked at as the way forward for other local authorities.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. Community Asset Transfer Requests Iarrtasan Glusad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest in this item as Chair of the B8008 Working Group 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 the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CP/11/21 dated 16 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the decision regarding the lease of Stac Pollaidh Car Park to Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS) was a matter for the Council, and information was provided on the legislative framework. Discussions had taken place with OATS and community groups over a number of months and officers were confident that the community supported the proposal, which would address a pressing problem.

The Committee:-

- (i) **AGREED** the lease of Tougal public toilets and car park to Road to the Isles Facilities Group, for no annual rental charge, subject to the terms of the transfer at section 2.1 of the report;
- (ii) **AGREED** the lease of Stac Pollaidh car park to Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland for £1 per annum, if asked, subject to the terms of the transfer at section 2.2 of the report;
- (iii) **AGREED** to homologate the decision by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place in consultation with the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee to vary terms of the economic development burden within the previously agreed asset transfer of Acharacle Community Centre, limiting it to five years in duration; and
- (iv) **NOTED** the statutory timescale for responding to these transfers required consideration at the strategic committee and future community asset transfer requests could be programmed into the Area Committee cycle in keeping with the changes to the Scheme of Delegation agreed at Council in March 2021. Area Chairs affected by the transfers included in the report had been consulted and were in agreement.

5. Progress report on the Framework for Community Participation and Involvement

Adhartas agus gnìomh bhon Fhrèam airson Com-pàirteachas Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated No CP/12/21 dated 22 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was important to highlight that mental health conditions were predominantly non-visible disabilities, and mental health was on a spectrum;
- information was sought, and provided, as to where the 10 Community Support Coordinators would be based, how the posts were being funded and what would happen at the end of the temporary 12-month period; and
- there was overlap between Community Partnerships and Community Resilience Networks and the idea that some of them could be merged was welcomed. Information having been sought on the process, it was explained that it would be up to each area to determine whether to merge groups. The reference in the report related to Caithness, where the Community Partnership and Community Resilience Network had decided that it made sense at the present time given their shared priorities, and the learning from Caithness could be shared with other areas.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the update against the Resilience Group Support Programme which included the ongoing weekly written and virtual briefings, the community resilience networks and the ongoing food support to community groups;
- (ii) the priorities identified in relation to developing sustainable models of food support in communities and the mental health and wellbeing resources under development to support individuals and community organisations;
- (iii) the update on the progress against the participation and engagement framework including the shift in timescales due to the latest lockdown period, with a renewed focus on engaging with equality groups as lockdown lifted;
- (iv) the recruitment of 10 Community Support Co-ordinators and the role these posts would have in supporting a better understanding of our communities and assisting in the identification of local priorities;
- (v) action underway on mental health and wellbeing supports including new signposting of resources, training and other tools for community groups, and that a Member seminar with NHS Highland was programmed for June 2021 with invites to be issued; and
- (vi) an update would be reported to the August meeting of this committee.

6. Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Report 2021 Amalachadh Co-ionannachd agus Toraidhean Cho-ionannachdan

There had been circulated Report No CP/13/21 dated 24 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in relation to Figure 11 – the distribution of all employees by ethnic group in comparison with the Highland population, the figure of 2653 attributed to All Employees was questioned given that the Council had in the region of 10,000 employees. The Head of HR, People and ICT undertook to check the figures and report back to Councillor T Robertson; and
- with regard to bullying, the importance of improving channels of communication between employees, managers and personnel teams was emphasised, and the fact that the Council now had a team of trained staff to deal with concerns about bullying was welcomed.

The Committee **AGREED** the Equality Outcome and Mainstreaming Progress Report for the Highland Council (and incorporating the Education Authority and Licensing Board) as detailed in the report at Appendix 1.

7. Burial grounds and crematorium management rules Cladhan agus riaghailtean stiùiridh luathreachain

There had been circulated Report No CP/14/21 dated 24 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it would be helpful if people received a copy of the management rules when purchasing a lair;
- there were many diverse religions in Highland, each with different ceremonies when loved ones departed and it was necessary to have equal respect for them

all. It having been queried whether this could be included in the management rules, it was explained that there was a clear statement in the bereavement services policy document that such services were for all religious groups and that staff would work with any group if they had any particular requirements. The need to publicise both the policy and the management rules, including on the Council's website, was recognised and it was confirmed that this would be taken forward;

- given the Highland tradition of having pipers at funerals and the comfort this gave people, the deletion of the rule requiring prior notice to play music was welcomed. Similarly, Members welcomed the deletion of the rule requiring prior notice of a large number of attendees;
- in relation to breaches of the management rules, concern was expressed regarding the provision of written warnings and it was queried whether a less formal approach could be taken. In response, it was confirmed that the need to use tact, sensitivity and local knowledge to make an informal approach in the first instance would be included in the guidance to staff. However, it was helpful to set out how matters would proceed on a more formal basis if necessary;
- reference was made to instances of people being unable to purchase lairs due to capacity issues and information was sought, and provided, on the policy in that regard and whether funding was in place to extend cemeteries;
- a report on cemetery capacity across Highland having been sought, it was confirmed that it was intended to present a report to each Area Committee on capacity in local burial grounds;
- it was questioned how the rule regarding burial ground car parks being for legitimate cemetery users was going to be policed;
- whilst recognising the need to prevent hazards to grounds maintenance staff, placing memorial items on graves gave a lot of comfort to people;
- whilst the management rules indicated that some lairs could hold up to three adult coffins, it was understood that it was generally a maximum of two. It was suggested that exceptions should be made in certain circumstances – eg where parents had lost an older/teenage child and wished them to be interred in the same lair as them. Similarly, where a cemetery was nearing capacity and lairs could not be pre-purchased, it was suggested that exceptions should be made if a young person died so that their parents could be buried with/next to them. The Environmental Health Manager undertook to seek further information regarding three-coffin lairs. In relation to the exceptional circumstances described, his understanding was that staff would do everything possible to accommodate such requests but he undertook to confirm the position;
- it was important to recognise the great work carried out by burial ground staff in all weather conditions and the respectful way in which they presented the graves. Members also expressed appreciation to administrative and managerial bereavement services staff for the sensitive role they played;
- the management rules should be communicated at the earliest stage through undertakers, chaplains, celebrants etc;
- concern having been expressed that Tore Cemetery was overrun with rabbits and the need to take preventative steps having been emphasised, the Environmental Health Manager undertook to raise this with the relevant team;
- Members commended the Environmental Health Manager and his team for the work that had been done in respect of the management rules;
- some coastal burial grounds could not accommodate more than one coffin in a lair due to the water table, and it was suggested that it should be highlighted to people that some lairs could accommodate two people but, if they chose to be

- buried in another part of Highland, they might have to purchase two lairs side by side; and
- reference was made to the ongoing cost implications of maintaining old church/burial ground walls, and the associated impact on the funding available for new burial grounds.

The Committee:-

- (i) **NOTED** the responses to the public consultation;
- (ii) **AGREED** the revised management rules for burials grounds as set out in Appendix 1 of the report should come into force on 1st June 2021 and should, unless revoked, continue in force for a period of 10 years from that date;
- (iii) **AGREED** the revised management rules for Inverness Crematorium as set out in Appendix 2 of the report should come into force on 1 June 2021 and should, unless revoked, continue in force for a period of 10 years from that date;
- (iv) **AGREED** to delegate powers to the Bereavement Services Manager to amend the rules for operational or legislative purposes; and
- (v) **AGREED** that, in keeping with legislation, the next formal review would be undertaken in 2030.

8. SFRS annual performance report – 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 Aithisg choileanaidh leth-bhliadhna SFRS

There had been circulated the Local Performance Report for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the period April 2020 to March 2021.

During a verbal update, all key performance indicators outlined in the report were reviewed and context provided in all areas. It was highlighted that Covid-19 affected the ability of the service to get into schools, businesses and homes, though a partnership-working approach had been maintained throughout. It was explained that once increased engagement was possible more work would be done in schools regarding anti-social behaviour fires.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- Member appreciation was expressed for Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) involvement in Covid-19 testing;
- Members praised the SFRS report and results following a challenging year with the pandemic;
- in response to a question about the reduction in chimney fires, it was suggested that people were choosing different methods for heating such as gas and electrical;
- regarding fire staffing in rural communities, it was explained that a local focus was being used to determine where the most challenging stations were and how online or visual engagement tools could be utilised to encourage a career or volunteer work with SFRS and highlighting the diversity of the service;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Road Traffic Collisions were very high in Badenoch and Strathspey and this was predominantly associated with the A9;
- an update was requested on SFRS involvement regarding falls in homes and it was explained that there was a trial occurring in the Northeast. However, despite national engagement, there was no agreement reached on this matter;

- the delivery of change management and the updated business model in the SFRS was commended; and
- regarding deliberate fire setting in Inshes, police patrols had been increased and it was hoped that, once in-person school engagement was able to resume, this would allow an opportunity for ongoing discussions with young people about being responsible citizens, learning fire skills and safety and getting a Youth Volunteer Scheme launched.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** Local Performance Report for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the period April 2020 to March 2021.

9. Registration of Births, Deaths & Marriages – Annual report Clàrachadh air Breith, Bàs & Pòsadh – Aithisg bhliadhnail

There had been circulated Report No CP/16/21 dated 24 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to where burial and registration records were kept;
- lessons could be learned from the Registration Service which had the customer at the centre and was efficient, effective, and caring. Death registrations, in particular, could be difficult for Registrars to deal with and families had high praise for the sensitivity shown;
- despite the pandemic, there had been a reduction in the number of deaths since 2018. In relation to the figures for 2020, it was confirmed that they were accurate but had not yet been examined by the District Examiner;
- Registrars, many of whom worked in Service Points in addition to their registration duties, fulfilled numerous commitments within their working week;
- reference was made to the rise in weddings, particularly in Skye and Lochalsh, and it was suggested that simple things, such as replacing the carpet at Tigh-na-Sgìre where a lot of weddings took place, would make a big difference;
- information was sought, and provided, on what investment the Registration received in terms of staff and whether there were any offices in Highland that dealt solely with registration;
- appreciation was expressed for Registrars who, throughout the pandemic, had had to deal with families whose loved ones had died as a result of Covid, and had done, and continued to do, an incredible job;
- concern was expressed regarding the downward trend in the number of births in Highland and the associated impact on the sustainability of schools in sparsely populated areas and future tax revenue. It was suggested that it was necessary to build more homes, as people would not start a family until they had their own home, and do everything possible to support families;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the figures in the report were specific to the Highland Council area, not the wider NHS Highland area;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the introduction of mixed sex civil partnerships; and
- in relation to Appendix 1 of the report, an overview was sought, and provided, of the type of corrections carried out.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the Registration team of 41.82 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) worked across 22 locations recording around 6000 life events in the Highlands usually comprising around 2000 births, 2500 deaths and 1500 marriages and civil partnerships each year, with around half of these marriages and civil partnerships undertaken by the team;
- (ii) the team undertook other important discretionary and income generating tasks including citizenship ceremonies (96 in 2019), the Identity and Passport Service (800 interviews in 2019/20) and the Family History Search Facility (around 600 annually);
- (iii) significant disruption across all Registrar services occurred in 2020, notably the temporary suspension of birth registration, marriages and civil partnerships and other discretionary services. The backlog of 400 birth registrations built up during the first lockdown was cleared in 4 months of recommencing the service. Arrangements for marriages and civil partnerships continued to evolve. Remote death registration had been introduced through statute and this had proven to be more convenient to bereaved families;
- (iv) sadly, there had been 132 deaths registered in Highland where Covid had been recorded on the death certificate from 1.4.20 to 26.4.21;
- (v) staff had adjusted well to the new ways of working and had ensured Covid secure arrangements were in place for the safety of staff and customers. A review of incentives to encourage more staff to undertake the Certificate of Proficiency in the Law and Practice in Registration in Scotland was underway;
- (vi) there were potential risks associated with achieving the £533,240 income target for 2021/22. This would be monitored in-year and any budget pressures would be reported;
- (vii) service developments underway included preparing for mixed sex civil partnerships from end June 2021 and the new requirements for marriage visas for EU citizens from July 2021. Along with other functions in the Communities and Place (C&P) Service, the team would contribute to the Communities and Place Service Performance Framework to be developed in 2021/22 drawing on a range of data, external reports and a programme of self-evaluation;
- (viii) other potential developments might arise from legislation to enable remote or virtual appointments for both birth and death registration. A new project to digitise burial records was currently being scoped. Options for undertaking a new project to identify new products and services to celebrate and commemorate life events were being considered;

and scrutinised and **NOTED** performance based on the most recently published data which showed that for 2019:

- a. NRS examination of information recorded confirmed 97.4% accuracy, close to the national figure of 97.9% and was well placed within our family benchmark group. The examiner's report for each site was shown at Appendix 1 of the report. As well as providing assurance, this helped to identify good practice and areas for improvement across the region;
- b. the Council's performance was particularly strong given the relative resource invested in the service, as it was placed in the top quartile of all Councils for low cost (ranked 3rd lowest for net expenditure and 8th lowest for gross expenditure) and ranked 2nd lowest cost within its family group of 8 Councils, based on Local Financial Returns data for 2018/19;
- c. in the most recent survey of the Council's Citizen's Panel, the service had been ranked 3rd highest for satisfaction out of 46 Council services, with a net satisfaction score of 73% and this had been consistently high for the past 5 years; and

- d. the team continued to achieve death registration in less time than the statutory period of 8 days of the medical certificate being received from the Certifying Doctor, with 2 days usually achieved.

10. Communities and Place Directorate Service Plan Plana Seirbheis

There had been circulated Report No CP/17/21 dated 28 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the Directorate Service Plan for Communities and Place, noting the indicative budget at the present time and that it was subject to review with any changes required reported back to Committee.

11. Progress report on implementing the Visitor Management Plan Aithisg adhartais mu bhuileachadh Plana Stiùiridh Luchd-tadhail

There had been circulated Report No CP/18/21 dated 23 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:-

- frequency of waste collection was key to avoid excess waste near to filled bins;
- in response to a question about utilising Community Payback for communities that were supporting litter picks and roadside litter clearing, it was explained that this service was not fully functioning under Covid-19 compliance;
- it was important that visitors to the area were treating the local community with respect;
- appreciation was expressed to the team for their hard work;
- regarding comfort schemes, there would be continued press releases, social media and support from Members in communicating to their local communities the benefits in spreading the word;
- in response to a question, it was explained that seasonally enhanced services would be provided allowing seasonal staff to free up core staff to assist with additional waste collection in hot spot areas;
- it was positive to see communities embracing the comfort scheme;
- in response to a comment about the need to have a designated park and area for travelling families it was explained that it was a housing service matter;
- it was encouraging to see the Council realising how important conveniences were for tourism;
- it was reassuring to see the Muir of Ord toilets reopening and in response to a question about The Muir Hub reopening, the Officer agreed to determine the response and reply to the Local Member (Councillor Margaret Paterson) directly;
- the Visitor Management Plan was timely and there were already tourists coming into the area. It was positive that campsites were open though there were already some overflowing bins and human waste challenges;
- the Countryside Ranger employed in Sheildaig had already been active in managing a few situations and it was positive to see that the impact that the Ranger service had already made. Appreciation was expressed to all those responsible for the planning and delivery;

- in response to a comment, it was explained that the Countryside Rangers were not managed by the Service but there were 17 Countryside Rangers employed to help clear any debris and mess; and
- the Comfort Scheme Scoring Matrix was excellent and a good model for anyone looking at joining the scheme.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the planned operational deployment of additional resources that year of £60k for public convenience provision by growing our comfort scheme of 37 providers and investing in six of the Council's 75 public conveniences as described in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6 of the report;
- (ii) the planned deployment of £180k for waste management through procuring and siting additional waste bins and increasing the frequency of collections in known hot spots supported by 8 new seasonal staff and supporting community litter picks as described in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.4 of the report;
- (iii) engagement with Members was underway through Ward Business Meetings and would continue throughout the season to deal with service issues and opportunities arising;
- (iv) that the service would apply for Better Places funding administered by NatureScot to enable further response;
- (v) in responding to issues as they arise this could create budget pressures. To date this included additional costs of roadside litter clearing. Any pressures would be monitored, reported and mitigated where possible and if necessary, opportunities for further investment would be submitted as part of the 2nd tranche of one-off investment possible at the Council meeting in June 2021;
- (vi) the service would contribute to the proposed Tourism Infrastructure Plan and this would include the support from the community asset transfer process and reviewing public conveniences previously regarded as surplus to requirements or unaffordable to improve/repair;
- (vii) the service would continue to contribute to partnership and resilience meetings throughout the season; and
- (viii) the Environmental Health team would continue to support business in the tourism sector and in their Covid compliance.

12. Developing the approach to decarbonising the Large Good Vehicle Fleet Dì-carbonachadh a' Chabhlaich Thruim

There had been circulated Report No CP/19/21 dated 23 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

Concern was expressed about the 2030 targets for the Large Good Vehicle Fleet as any vehicle purchased would not get to end of its life before it was out of range. In response it was explained that one of the challenges was that there was no full life costing available on hydrogen vehicles and residual value at the end of the period was unclear.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the national target set by local government to decarbonise fleets of cars and light commercial vehicles by 2025 and large goods vehicles by 2030 with the Council's target for the region to be carbon neutral by 2025;

- (ii) from 2012/13 – 2019/20, emissions arising from Council fleet vehicles' use of petrol, diesel and gas oil had decreased from 9,166tCO₂e to an estimated 8,454tCO₂e, a reduction of just under 8%. There had been a corresponding reduction in consumption of diesel by the fleet of approximately 315,000 litres, or 10%, over the same timeframe;
- (iii) the Council had taken part in a study with other Councils and public sector partners to assess the optimum vehicle type for our various operations. This showed a shift to EV and hydrogen fuelled vehicles would be suitable for operations, although some petrol/diesel vehicles were likely still to be required due to distances travelled and rural challenges;
- (iv) the challenges around greening the LGV fleet were:
 - a. higher costs of procuring Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) LGV. The cost of LGVs powered by electric and hydrogen remained prohibitively high. Generally, electric vehicle (EV) costs were double and hydrogen costs were treble the cost of diesel vehicles;
 - b. many manufactures were still at the prototype stage and this made whole life costing, including estimating residual value of vehicles, difficult to predict;
 - c. while costs were expected to fall as technology improved and take up increased, budget provision and external funding were not yet identified to meet decarbonisation targets. However, work was underway to quantify the costs for a phased replacement programme and to identify all potential funding sources to inform future budget setting; and
 - d. identifying a sustainable and secure supply of hydrogen was at an early stage. Potential providers were testing the market, trying to understand and estimate demand, before committing to investing in the region, although much work was being done by various organisations to produce, transfer and supply hydrogen; and
- (v) the opportunities being pursued to support greening the LGV fleet were:
 - e. through the Council's Transformation Programme, a 2-year post of Climate Change Coordinator (Transport) had been approved and was being recruited to bring in a level of expertise, and a programme management approach, approach including lobbying, to take the changes to fleet forward. The post holder would sit within the Climate Change and Energy Team to ensure decarbonising the fleet sat within the wider Council climate change strategy;
 - f. funding from Transport Scotland was provided to assist in installing infrastructure for publicly accessible charging and dedicated fleet charging. This amounted to £75,000 for fleet infrastructure in 2020. Implementing this would be an early priority for the post above.
 - g. learning from Aberdeen City Council as a European leader in hydrogen ambition and accepting their offer of supporting the retrofit of hydrogen fuel tanks to Highland Council vehicles, depending on national funding being made available;
 - h. building and developing partnerships with commercial operators and fuel providers to ensure the ULEV option was a viable one moving forward;
 - i. taking a joint approach to procurement with partner organisations in terms of vehicle demand to help the supply chain with manufacturers and fuel providers and through our shared procurement service with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils; and
 - j. work was underway to develop a hydrogen strategy for the Council and the links were being made with the feasibility into an Energy from Waste

plant including the potential to convert energy generated to hydrogen for Council and other fleet use as part of the development of a hydrogen strategy for the region.

13. Minutes of Waste Strategy Working Group Geàrr-chunntas Buidheann-obrach Ro-innleachd Sgudail

The Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 23 April 2021 were **APPROVED**.

14. Waste Projects Update Fios às Ùr mu Phròiseactan Sgudail

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Macpherson declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that a relative owned one of the potential sites for a waste transfer station in Fort William, and left the meeting for the duration of the item.

There had been circulated Report No CP/20/21 dated 23 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Chair had met the manager of one of the sites for the Fort William Transfer Station earlier in the week and, as discussion evolved, it did look like the Lochaber Aggregate site might be offered.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the positive progress in awarding two contracts to construct waste transfer stations in Inverness and Aviemore;
- (ii) the continuing efforts of officers to provide the opportunity to develop similar infrastructure in Fort William;
- (iii) the parallel efforts of officers to secure a new lease for the Household Waste Recycling Centre in Fort William; and
- (iv) that the Members' Waste Strategy Working Group was updated on these matters on 23rd April 2021, as reported separately in the minute to this Committee meeting.

15. Approach to appraising the options for the long-term management of residual waste Dòigh-obrach a thaobh a bhith a' measadh nan roghainnean airson rianachd fad-ùine sgudail iarmadaich

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Macpherson declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds that a relative owned one of the potential sites for a waste transfer station in Fort William, and left the meeting for the duration of the item.

There had been circulated Report No CP/21/21 dated 19 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

Whilst this was a major piece of work, it would also bring many opportunities. However; assurances were sought, and provided, that it would be possible to connect the power generated to the grid. In this connection, the Chair advised Members that

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks was in the process of designing a substation.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) the Council currently invests approximately £11m per annum on waste disposal, including internal, external and landfill costs. Compared to other Councils our costs were relatively high (Highland Council were ranked 20/32 for low cost performance), the amount of household waste per person sent to landfill was the 2nd highest of all Scottish Councils at 0.27 tonnes per person. This created 297,808 tonnes of CO2 emissions and placed Highland Council 5th highest for carbon impact per person, with 1.26 tonnes of CO2 emitted per person. (Source: SEPA, Scottish Household Waste – Summary Data 2019);
- (ii) costs had already increased this year with additional budget of £405k agreed at the Council meeting in March 2021. These would continue to increase annually unless a sustainable long-term solution could be found for Highland residual waste;
- (iii) four studies had now been concluded and three options remained for managing local authority collected waste: continue landfilling; contract with service providers in other parts of Scotland or in England to receive and treat Highland waste; or develop an Energy-from-Waste (EfW) facility to serve the Highlands;
- (iv) appraising these options would involve cost comparisons, with assumptions clarified given uncertainty on prices, markets and funding models, along with wider legislative and climate change duties and the scope for the Council to derive value from regional waste, contributing to economic recovery, asset management and poverty reduction;
- (v) Members of the Waste Strategy Group would participate in study visits to one or two operating EfW sites in Tayside and Lothian as soon as possible and ideally during June if that could be made Covid secure; and
- (vi) alongside the study visits a desk-top review of how EfW plants in the UK had been funded to date would be commissioned. Different funding models and external funding could make this option more feasible or affordable and needed to be clarified;

and **AGREED**:-

- (vii) Appendix 1 of the report, agreed by the Member Waste Strategy Group, which set out:
 - a. the framework for critically appraising the pros and cons of the options; and
 - b. the proposed timeline for governance this year to decide on the preferred option.

16. Recycling Improvement Fund **Maoin Leasachadh Ath-chuairteachaidh**

There had been circulated Report No CP/22/21 dated 23 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- (i) that the Recycling Improvement Fund had been launched by the Scottish Government with the first call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) by 19 May 2021. The fund was a five-year programme of £70m and it would operate on a rolling basis for Expressions of Interest (EOI) forms and Stage 2 applications from local authorities;
- (ii) the objectives of the fund, the funding availability and eligibility and the process for applying as described in sections 5-7 of the report;
- (iii) the Council required support to improve recycling infrastructure given relative performance on recycling rates, waste landfilled and associated green-house gas emissions. The public showed high satisfaction with refuse collection and recycling facilities and they were regarded among the most important services provided to the public. If successful in gaining funding the Council would be able to improve services further, particularly in areas where services could be levelled up;
- (iv) the initial list of proposals as set out in section 8 of the report. These were considered in the Members' Waste Strategy Working Group on 23 April 2021, as reported separately in the minute to this Committee meeting. Feedback from the Committee had been sought on the initial list of areas for improvement as set out in paragraph 8.1 of the report. Not all would be ready for the first EOI;
- (v) discussion with Members in Ward Business meetings would be programmed over the period of the Fund to consider other potential service improvements and discussion on developing any stage 2 applications; and
- (vi) the Waste Management team would complete and submit the first initial EOI that was consistent with the eligibility criteria for the fund, with future updates brought to the Committee.

17. Response to the Scottish Government's discussion paper on the criminal law dealing with dangerous dogs
Freagairt do Phàipear Deasbaid Riaghaltas na h-Alba mun Lagh Eucorach a' Dèiligeadh ri Coin Chunnartach

There had been circulated Report No CP/23/21 dated 23 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee:-

- (i) **NOTED** the background information on dangerous dogs, dog control and roles of the Council and Police Scotland; and
- (ii) **AGREED** to homologate the attached response of the report to the Scottish Government consultation on the criminal law dealing with dangerous dogs.

The meeting ended at 3.50 pm