

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on 19 August 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mrs I Campbell
Dr I Cockburn

Mr A MacInnes
Mr D MacLeod

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr D Esson, Area Care and Learning Manager – West Area, Education and Learning
Mr R MacLeod, Housing Manager (North), Property and Housing
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mr C Simpson, Tourism Co-ordinator, Development and Infrastructure
Miss S Tarrant, Corporate Communications and Engagement Officer, Chief Executive's Office
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Group Commander A McKinley, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/011/21 dated 29 July 2021 together with the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Performance Report by the Local Group Commander for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

The Group Commander requested that Members complete a survey on the HIFRS website on reducing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals.

During discussion, the following responses had been given:-

- Although the formal strategy for supporting the Scottish Ambulance Survey had not been ratified HIFRS currently support the Scottish Ambulance Service in various roles supporting vulnerable people in the community and carrying defibrillators to respond to cardiac arrests where necessary;
- in relation to retained fire fighters, at the moment the guidance states you should be able to respond to a call within eight minutes. In very remote areas if we are struggling to recruit firefighters we can extend this to 15 minutes as we would rather the late arrival of an appliance than no appliance at all;
- there are currently five members of staff in Achiltibuie and we will and are always looking for staff. Banners advertising recruitment have recently been purchased for displaying in communities and there is an active social media campaign; and
- four firefighters per appliance was the bare minimum permitted to respond to a call for safety reasons.

The Group Commander welcomed Members continued support for raising the awareness of the work of the RDS Team and for raising their profile. The Group Commander also thanked the full-time employers of the retained fire station staff and appreciated the time given to the retained firefighters to attend incidents.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

4. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/012/21 dated 19 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer – Property and Housing.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

5. Visitor Management in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Stiùireadh Luchd-tadhail ann an Ros an Iar, Srath Pheofhair agus Loch Aillse

An overview was provided of the current Visitor Management arrangements in Ward 5 including improvements funded from the additional £1.5 million budget made available in the current financial year.

An outline was given on Road and Parking Improvements; Car Parks, Seasonal Access Rangers; Public Conveniences; Enhanced Waste Services; Motorhome facilities; Engagement and the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

During discussion, the following responses had been given:-

- an update was sought and would be provided to Members on the sign for Shiel Bridge to advise motorists not to go to Letterfearn to see the Castle;
- the counter at Dornie toilets was simply to gauge how often toilets are used so the counter is merely to count the number of people entering the toilets;
- in terms of cemetery car parks there is an intention to restrict the use of overnight parking in these car parks and we are looking into options including enforceable traffic orders;

- in relation to the query on the Tornapress challenges, an update would be provided to Members;
- although there was no indication of a change to legislation, there was a willingness at a national level to look at the guidance in relation to the Outdoor Access Code;
- the intention behind the Ullapool waste facility was to provide a template that could be used in other locations; and
- although there was appreciation for the rangers, Members had to keep fighting for infrastructure improvements and the associated facilities.

The Committee fully supported the ranger service and were appreciative of the reduction in complaints and the reduction in wild fires attributable to the rangers.

The Committee thanked Mr C Simpson for a very helpful report.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

6. Winter Maintenance Plan 2021/22 Obair-glèidhidh Geamhraidh 2021/22

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/013/21 dated 3 August 2021 by the Interim Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following responses had been given:-

- gritting from Silverbridge to Lochcarron had previously been operated from Silverbridge, the only difference is that this instruction now comes under Mr M Sutherland's control rather than the control of the Dingwall office;
- these squads only now come down as far as Achnasheen;
- there were footpath tractors, previously there had been one footpath tractor covering Ullapool, Gairloch and Lochcarron, three footpath tractors for these areas would be required and this would be looked at;
- weed killer is still being utilised on the Japanese Knotweed growing in roadside verges and footpaths, it is understood the legislation is changing during 2022/2023 when the chemical glyphosphate will no longer be permitted. At present there is not a comparable solution; and
- if anyone wants to be involved in gritting in their community they should form a group and get in touch with Mr M Sutherland. We require people's names and points of contact to enable them to be covered by Council insurance.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Maintenance Plans.

7. Area Capital Programme 2021-2022 Progress Report and approval of Ward Discretionary Budget and additional schemes Aithisg Adhartais Prògram Calpa Sgìreil 2021–2022 agus aonta Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird agus sgeamaichean a bharrachd

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/014/21 dated 28 July 2021 by the Interim Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Environment and Economy. An update was given on the report.

During discussion, the following responses had been given:-

- Glenelg STTS funding had not yet been approved, the deadline for works was February. An update would be provided to Members;
- in relation to the concrete barriers at Ardnarff, the Highland Fencing and Barrier Contractors had been contracted and had visited the site. As this area bounded onto Network Rail land, Network Rail had to be consulted. It was intended that this be completed in October but there are supply problems. As a road closure would be required, collaboration would be required to find the best time for undertaking this work and for notification, it was likely to be undertaken during night time working;
- an update on the second phase of the Stromeferry road would be sent to Members;
- the South Erradale road, will look for confirmation but believe this has been completed;
- the Ardnarff project would include the collapsed verges; and
- the capital budget is split between Ross and Cromarty areas dependent on the road length, the budget had not been disaggregated.

The Committee thanked Mr Sutherland and the Roads Team for the extent of the work they had been able to undertake, it had been transformational and appreciated by the local communities.

The Committee further stated the benefits of a separate Area Committee where the road budgets were set fairly, it was a huge benefit to the roads in the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh area.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the progress on the 2021/22 Road Maintenance Programme for the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh area;
- ii. **APPROVED** the proposed 2021/22 Roads Maintenance Programme schemes funded by the Additional Roads Ward allocation; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the additional capital schemes funded from Capital Budget.

8. **Place-based Investment Funds** **Maointean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte Air Àite**

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/015/21 dated 2 August 2021 by the Interim Chief Officer – Communities and Place.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed allocations of Place Based Investment Funds as follows:

- a. Investment in footpaths - £40,000
- b. Investment in community-led projects which offset the harms of Covid - £60,000
- c. Total = £100,000

9. Gairloch Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Gheàrrloch

There had been circulated Report No WRSL/016/21 dated 21 July 2021 by the Interim Director of Care and Learning which provides details in relation to the schools within the Gairloch Associated School Group.

During discussion, the following responses had been given:-

- in relation to the new building at Gairloch Primary School – the English Medium nursery had now been completed and children are now attending the nursery;
- Highland Council follow Scottish Government guidelines regarding the assessment of school buildings, as we move forward we move on a rolling programme and there can be further building work done; the details on line are the current details that are on file, in line with the national standards;
- Shieldaig Primary School and nursery works began at the start of the summer term and the building works for both will provisionally be completed in November. The nursery children are currently decanted into the Church Hall, where Highland Council had undertaken works to ensure compliance with the Care Inspectorate guidelines;
- in relation to the Gairloch Primary, the Gaelic nursery, at times there may be no demand for the Gaelic nursery. The Gaelic medium nursery will re-open in January for one pupil.
- in relation to issues at Kyle Nursery, following further detail, Mr D Esson would liaise with the Estate Service;
- the numbers at the school were small but Highland Council would support the continued opening of the school. This would have to be reviewed carefully. There would require to be Statutory Consultation if there was to be a closure. There were no plans at present to close the school; and
- in relation to school pick up points at Inverasdale, these were dependent on the location of the children and this was determined by the transport provider. Transport would be provided locally to the new school.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee held on 26 April 2021 which were approved by the Council on 13 May 2021.

The meeting closed at 12:30 pm.