

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held REMOTELY on Thursday, 12 August 2021 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr D Mackay
Mr W Mackay

Mr S Mackie
Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie

Officials in attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning
Ms A Clark, Head of Policy and Reform, Communities and Place
Ms C Gordon, Quality Development Officer, Education and Learning
Mr R Bamfield, Area Additional Support Needs Manager, Education and Learning
Mr A Puls, Planning Team Leader, Infrastructure and Environment
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in Attendance:

Inspector A Goskirk, Police Scotland

Mr W Mackay, Vice Chair, in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Sinclair.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated for noting Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 22 April 2021, which were approved by the Council on 13 May 2021, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

**4. Matters Arising – Action Tracker
Gnothaichean Ag Èirigh – Tracair Ghnìomhan**

There had been circulated an Action Tracker which detailed the actions arising from previous meetings.

Item 6 - Mr S Mackie advised that he contacted the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in relation to the refurbishment of Thurso Fire Station and would circulate the response once received.

Item 8 (Thurso High School) and **Item 10** (Roads Structural Maintenance) had been actioned.

Item 12 (Wick Common Good) was ongoing. In addition, it was confirmed that a meeting between Members and the Common Good Fund Officer was to be held in the near future.

The Committee **AGREED** the updates to the action tracker.

5. Police – Area Performance Summary **Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil**

There had been circulated Report No CC/16/20 by the North Area Commander.

The Area Inspector extended an invitation to Members to attend a meeting with colleagues in the Service who were reviewing how to support the Police locally and specifically perceptions within the community.

In discussion, Members raised the following main issues:-

- concern at the increase in assaults on emergency services staff and the importance of the courts taking a firm approach to these offences;
- clarification was sought and provided that anti-social behaviour orders continued to be regarded by the Police as a powerful tool in tackling this issue;
- frustration that efforts to have road safety measures introduced on the Forss straight had to date been unsuccessful, particularly given the need to safeguard local residents and respond to their concerns;
- more flexibility was required in relation to the matrix by which the camera van was deployed to allow it to be located in areas where the Police, local Members and community councils considered there was an issue, such as the Forss straight;
- the potential for design improvements and visual speed displays to be implemented as relatively low cost effective deterrents to speeding;
- the need to continue to campaign for a small roads policing unit to be based in the area to reduce the need for officers based outwith the area having to travel significant distances to support local officers;
- the support of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and local community initiatives in tackling speeding in the area be recognised;
- the length of time it took to progress speed limit orders due to the extensive consultation process and tendency for objections to be received;
- the importance of educating drivers in relation to speeding and the potential to use Driver Engagement North in workplace settings for this purpose;
- concern in relation to non-compliance with 20mph zones in Wick and Thurso and the potential for a local campaign to reinforce the reasoning and rationale for these zones;
- to complement the action being taken by the Police, the local community had asked the Council to undertake traffic surveys to provide real data and allow for a more planned strategy going forward;
- the potential for the Council to undertake white lining, for example at junctions where it was considered there was a road safety issue;

- licenced premises in the area be commended on their impressive response to the Covid regulations; and
- the involvement of the Police in the partnership work being undertaken in relation to Caithness Cares was highlighted and welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2020 – 23.

6. Thurso and North West Caithness & Wick and East Caithness (Wards 2 and 3) Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations
Maoin Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite

There had been circulated Report No. CC/17/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main issues:-

- clarifying that the remaining allocation of £25k for Ward 3 was intended to be used to complement other works being undertaken to improve the appearance of the town centre for example painting of lamp posts, railings, and bollards;
- the need to identify an adequate core budget for the repair/replacement of bus shelter infrastructure rather than having to use the Fund for this purpose;
- whilst the one-off funding in local play parks was welcome, it did not satisfy the long-term demand for a sustainable strategy and investment in play parks in the Council area;
- the need for a Council wide playground strategy that considered the needs and expectations of communities and supported the active play, well-being and social activity of children and their families;
- as part of the above strategy there was the need to consider ongoing maintenance requirements and therefore the long term financial implications of the type of equipment being installed in play parks;
- there was an excellent opportunity for a broader approach to be taken to play parks, in terms of creating community spaces for all age groups;
- it was important to engage with local communities in regard to investment in sustainable play areas and to give careful consideration to the most effective means of undertaking that consultation;
- the proposed investment in sports pitches in Ward 2 was welcomed, reference being made to the fact these facilities had been well used by young people over the summer. However, there was a need to consider the provision of all weather facilities that all ages could access over the winter months and opportunities to attract match funding in this regard;
- the difficulties being experienced by communities in securing funding to have brown visitor signs in a poor state of repair replaced for example at Dunnett and Reay, located on the NC500, and it was hoped that place-based investment funds could be used for this purpose if the funding was recurring in future; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that discussions had taken place with Services to ensure they had the capacity to take forward the works identified to ensure the funds were spent timeously.

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

i. **Ward 2**

Up to £60,000 towards the infrastructure projects to carry out drainage works at Sir Georges Park, Thurso (aka The Dammies) along with pitch improvements at Ormlie Park. Both these areas had been identified by local stakeholders and members as key projects in the Ward.

Up to £40,000 towards play park refurbishment/repairs/improvements with an emphasis on those parks in a rural setting. It was noted that match funding would be sought from local grant providers and local groups to complement this allocation.

ii. **Ward 3**

Up to £35,000 towards an infrastructure project to replace/relocate bus shelters around the Ward. This had been identified by a number of local communities as a priority and in discussion with Ward Members.

Up to £40,000 towards play park refurbishment/repairs/improvements. It was noted that match funding would be sought from local grant providers and local groups to complement this allocation.

The Committee **NOTED** that further work would be undertaken to develop the Wick town centre project and a report brought to a future meeting in relation to this item.

* Thereafter, the Committee welcomed the place-based investment funds which had allowed local Members to allocate one-off funding that would support long awaited investment in local play parks. Whilst this was very welcome it did not satisfy the long-term demand for a sustainable strategy and investment in play parks in the Council area and therefore, the Committee **AGREED** to request that the Council creates and implements a Council wide playground strategy that considers the needs and expectations of communities and supports the active play, well-being and social activity of children and their families.

7. **Wick Associated School Group Overview**
Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Sgìre Inbhir Ùige

There had been circulated Report No CC/18/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Quality Development Officer and Area Additional Needs Support Manager provided an update to the report.

The ECO Education and Learning provided an update on the excellent SQA examinations results achieved at Wick and Thurso High Schools.

Members commended pupils and staff on their outstanding achievement in relation to the SQA examination results, recognising this had been a difficult period for schools due to the pandemic.

In discussion, it was suggested that the format of the report was essentially not fit for purpose, this matter having been raised by Members previously. The data provided was out of date and therefore a material change in reporting was required so that Members were provided with relevant 'live' information in a narrative form.

The ECO Education and Learning advised that officers been working with Members in relation to how attainment was reported and it was intended to roll out plans in this regard in November 2021 in respect of the Thurso ASG. In addition, interviews for two Heads of Service posts would be held early in September and those recruits would be working with Area Managers on a new format of report.

Thereafter, concern was expressed at potential future trends in relation to positive destinations and whether this had been recognised and interventions were being put in place. The ECO Education and Learning provided an update on the range interventions that had been put in place by the Directorate over the past year in relation to positive destinations.

Members then raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought and provided on progress with the disposal of the site for the former Wick High School, and it was confirmed the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property would be asked to provide an update; and
- the need to actively consider the disposal of former school sites and their use once sold in terms of whether they enhanced the environment. It was confirmed that the input of the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property would be sought on this issue and a response provided to Mr R Bremner.

The Committee following scrutiny, **NOTED** the content of the report.

8. Draft Wick Pulteneytown Conservation Area Appraisal and Conservation Area Management Plan
Inbhir Ùige Sgìre Glèidhteachais Pulteneytown Measadh is Plana Stiùiridh

There had been circulated Report No CC/19/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members welcomed the report and raised the following issues:-

- the summary of discussions with Wick Harbour Authority as part of the consultation set out at section 6 of the report was highlighted and welcomed;
- concern that the Conservation Area should not be restrictive in terms of individual development proposals given the challenges the town faced in being able to diversify and improve both its appearance and the wellbeing of its residents. It was confirmed the intention was to revitalise

Pulteneytown through sensitive and appropriate development, including reviving redundant and derelict buildings, to attract people and businesses back into the area;

- Wick Heritage Centre be commended on their key role in the development of the Conservation Area appraisal and management plan;
- an update was sought on the timeline for a report on Thurso conservation area to be brought forward to Members. It was confirmed that Thurso would be the first priority of the new part-time conservation area projects officer once in post, and it was hoped to bring a report to the Committee early in 2022.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the public comments and the Council response; and
- ii. **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** that the Infrastructure, Environment & Economy Committee formally approve and adopt the Wick Pulteneytown Conservation Area Appraisal (**Appendix 1**) and Management Plan (**Appendix 2**), including the amended conservation area boundary, at a forthcoming meeting.

The meeting ended at 12.30pm.