

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held remotely on Monday 9 August 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr J Bruce
Mrs M Cockburn

Ms P Hadley
Mr B Lobban

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance
Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mr D Wood, Principal Housing Officer, Housing and Property
Mr E McIntosh, Localism and Engagement Coordinator, Communities and Place
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Resources and Finance
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

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

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

1. **Apologies for Absence** **Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

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

Item 4 – Ms P Hadley (financial)

In terms of Standing Order 9, the Committee **AGREED** to consider item 5 at this stage.

5. **Area Roads Winter Maintenance Plan 2021/22** **Plana Obair-gleidhidh Geamhraidh Rathaidean Sgìreil 2021/22**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/12/21 dated 19 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- reference having been made to national delays in obtaining spare parts and materials, information was sought, and provided, on current stocks in Highland and whether a contingency plan was in place;
- information was sought, and provided, on what summer works, such as drain inspections, had not been completed as a result of the challenges the team had

faced, and, given the vagaries of the climate, whether such works would be able to be maintained alongside winter maintenance works;

- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that gully clearances were fairly up to date. The Roads Operations Manager added that it was intended to present a roads programme update to the November meeting of the Committee and he could include an update on cyclical works; and
- Members commended the service for its fantastic work in the face of the various challenges associated with extreme weather and Covid.

The Committee otherwise **APPROVED** the Winter Maintenance Plan for the Badenoch and Strathspey Area in reference to Appendix A of the report.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Area Committee Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Comataidh Sgìreil Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/10/21 dated 11 July 2021 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

The Ward Manager explained that, due to the change of meeting date, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service representatives were unavailable and had given their apologies. Questions on the report had been sought from Members in advance of the meeting and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had responded as follows:

Question - How have staff found dealing with Glenmore/Loch Morlich over the summer season?

Response - Since the beginning of May, Aviemore and Kingussie units have attended Glenmore six times for reports of camp fires and Aviemore/Grantown and Kingussie to the big wildfire above Loch Morlich that was well reported in the press. This has been a massive reduction from the previous year, despite the number of visitors to the area remaining high. Crews from Aviemore, Grantown and Kingussie Fire Stations have also attended Glenmore in partnership working with Forestry and Land Scotland to educate visitors on the no fire/no barbecue rules within the Glenmore Park. This engagement has been well received by the public and combined with the new signage at the sled dog centre and the presence of Forestry and Land Scotland's rangers seems to have heavily contributed to the reduction.

Question - Is there an update on recruitment of fire fighters for the Badenoch and Strathspey Area – what is the position? And are you finding that housing is proving an impediment to recruitment – or is your pool of firefighters generally coming from people who already live and work in the area?

Response - We still have vacancies in all fire stations within the area. However, we currently have a number of applicants going through the recruitment process and our recruitment engagement on both our Twitter and Facebook pages have been well received and widely shared. We have also had a number of new potential applicants come forward in the last few weeks with three for Aviemore alone. We have one new firefighter in Grantown and three in Carrbridge. Our pool is coming from people who already live and work in the area. However, high housing prices mean a high proportion of our younger firefighters are finding it difficult to purchase

a property which has the potential for them to look outwith the area in the future in order to get on the property ladder.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2021 gu 30 Ògmhios 2021

Declaration of Interest: Ms P Hadley declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/11/21 dated 19 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- Members welcomed the substantial improvement in rent arrears and emphasised the importance of getting maintenance back on line;
- thanks were expressed to staff for their diligence in managing services remotely and the number of calls made to clients. In particular, reference was made to the hard work and positive communication in respect of rent arrears;
- attention was drawn to the amber score in respect of the percentage of lettable houses becoming vacant and, on the point being raised, it was confirmed that demand was monitored;
- the pressure on staff dealing with people facing eviction was recognised, and Members were keen to support officers and their teams in whatever way they could;
- reference was made to a recent meeting at which it had been reported that there was a shortage of healthcare workers this summer due to either a lack of availability of accommodation or the cost of property in the area, and information was sought, and provided, as to what Members could do to support officers and ensure their voice was heard;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how well the new arrangements in respect of homeless accommodation provision were working; and
- the need for the Scottish Government to rapidly progress legislation in respect of short-term lets was emphasised and it was suggested that, as soon as the legislation was finalised, the Council should adopt it to its fullest extent, particularly in Badenoch and Strathspey where there was a significant issue in terms of the number of properties that were being converted from permanent homes to holiday accommodation.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021.

6. Badenoch & Strathspey Ward Place Based Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations
Maointean Stèidhichte air Àite Uàrd Bhàideanach is Shrath Spè – Riarachaidhean Maoineachaidh a Thathar a’ Moladh

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/13/21 dated 19 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- Members welcomed the report and hoped that the proposals would bear fruit sooner rather than later;
- it was not just businesses that were being affected by the housing problem in the area, and it was important to consider the needs of all public sector partners, not only those that were members of the Community Planning Partnership;
- it having been queried how the costs of £15,000 for a Housing Needs Feasibility Study and £20,000 for scoping for a Housing for Businesses project had been arrived at, it was confirmed that a response would be provided direct to Councillor Bruce;
- whilst recognising the costs involved in the proposed feasibility study and scoping exercise, the opportunity to take action to begin to address the housing issue was welcomed and long overdue. It was added that the total cost to the population in terms of young people leaving the area and other young people being unable to afford to leave home was significant.

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

- i. Up to £15,000 for a Housing Needs feasibility study. Funding to be delegated to the Head of Development and Regeneration to progress;
- ii. Up to £20,000 for scoping for a Housing for Businesses Project. Funding to be delegated to the Head of Development and Regeneration to progress; and
- iii. Commissioning an independent audit of empty commercial units and bringing forward proposals for potential solutions – up to £10,000;

and **NOTED** that reports would be brought back to this Committee as required for future budget allocation in terms of the additional priorities identified and outlined at section 8 of the report.

7. Community Asset Transfer Request: Kingussie Market Stance Pitch Iarrtas Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd: Làrach Margaidh Cheann a' Ghiùthsaidh

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/14/21 dated 19 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, unanimous support was expressed for the proposal which would benefit the community, Kingussie Camanachd Club having both the resources and skills to develop the pitch. Members also commended the officers involved for their efforts in developing the proposal, which was an exemplar of how to progress Community Asset Transfer requests going forward.

The Committee **AGREED** the lease of Kingussie Market Stance Pitch for £1 per annum to Kingussie Camanachd Club subject to the consideration of the findings of a public consultation and the terms set out in section 2.1 of the report.

8. Kingussie and Grantown on Spey Common Good Funds Maointean Math Coitcheann Cheann a' Ghiùthsaidh is Bhaile nan Grandach

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/15/21 dated 19 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

In introducing the report, the Common Good Fund Officer explained that the Committee would require to decide whether to extend the duration of the proposed consultations, as had been the case for the Kingussie Common Good Asset Register consultation, or, given that Covid restrictions were easing, revert back to the statutory consultation periods - ie 12 weeks for the Grantown on Spey Common Good Asset Register and 8 weeks for the disposal of the Market Stance Pitch, Kingussie.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- in response to a question, it was explained that Grantown Burgh Council, at its final meeting in 1975, had donated the Provost's chain and robes to the museum therefore they were not considered to be a Common Good asset; and
- the Chair having sought views on the duration of the proposed consultations, the majority of Members supported extending both consultations by two weeks given that it was still the holiday period and Covid restrictions were only just beginning to ease.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the Kingussie Common Good Asset Register in the format for publication (Appendix 1 of the report);
- ii. **NOTED** the content of the document titled "Kingussie Common Good property consultation representations and responses" (Appendix 2 of the report);
- iii. **AGREED** to the publication of the Common Good Asset Register for Kingussie and the representations and responses document on the Council website;
- * iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the reclassification of the property included in the Asset Register and reactivation of Kingussie Common Good Fund;
- * v. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that, due to the financial position of the fund, Kingussie Common Good property would continue to be maintained by Highland Council until such time as the fund recovered sufficiently to sustain Kingussie Common Good assets;
- vi. **NOTED** the contents of the list of property proposed to be included in the Common Good Asset Register for Grantown on Spey (Appendix 3 of the report);
- vii. **AGREED** the commencement of the public consultation on the list of proposed property for Grantown on Spey in accordance with section 102 of the 2015 Act, and that the consultation period be extended by two weeks to fourteen weeks;
- viii. **NOTED** the position regarding the Community Asset Transfer request in respect of the Market Stance Pitch by Kingussie Camanachd which had been detailed in the report elsewhere on the Committee agenda and the

- requirement to conduct a consultation under section 104 of the 2015 Act as this would constitute a proposal to dispose of a Common Good Asset; and
- ix. **AGREED** the commencement of the public consultation in respect of the proposed disposal by Community Asset Transfer of the Market Stance Pitch, Kingussie, and that the consultation period be extended by two weeks to ten weeks.

9. Use of Ward Covid Response Funds Cleachdadh Mhaointean Freagairt Covid Uàird

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/16/21 dated 19 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In introducing the report, the Ward Manager explained that, the Chair having queried how the additional patrols had been going, the Area Inspector, Police Scotland, had reported that the view from the partners was essentially that the additional patrols were going well and had been a timely addition to the visitor management pressures in the Glenmore area. Two individuals had been charged with lighting fires in dangerous circumstances and dedicated patrols were able to be provided at peak times when otherwise officers on standard shift would be pulled away to deal with other matters. The extra patrols were taking place on Friday and Saturday evenings until 11.00 pm and were due to end with the termination of the local school holidays.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the report was seeking formal approval of the funding that Members had lent their support to in principle during the recess;
- it was queried whether there was a degree of flexibility and the situation could be monitored in case there was not a reduction in visitors at the end of the local school holidays. The Ward Manager confirmed that she would feed this back to the Area Inspector;
- the additional patrols were not a perfect solution but had taken the pressure off the rangers. It was suggested that some of the rangers working later in the evening would be a better solution. However, a police presence had made a significant difference.

The Committee **AGREED** to allocate up to £3,000 of funding from Covid-19 Ward Discretionary Funds to support the partnership approach to additional policing for the Glenmore area as outlined at paragraph 6.1 of the report.

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 25 May 2021 which had been approved by the Council on 24 June 2021.

The meeting concluded at 11.30 am.