

**The Highland Council
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held remotely on Monday 16 August 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr R Gale

Mr H Morrison

Mrs D Mackay

Ms L Munro

Mr J McGillivray

Officials in attendance:

Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care

Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager, Communities and Place

Ms A Donald, Area Care and Learning Manager, Education & Learning

Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operation Manager, Infrastructure and Environment

Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance & Governance

Also in Attendance:

Station Commander J Gardiner, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Divisional Commander P Farrell, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Mr L MacAskill, Assynt Foundation

Ms S Edwards, NW2045 Interviewer

Mr R Gale in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Ms K Currie.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report
Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/11/21 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- clarification was sought and provided that the Service's recording system was being revised to ensure domestic garage fires were reflected in the statistics;
- concern the station availability at Tongue was below the minimum requirement required to deploy the fire appliance and the potential to merge Tongue and Bettyhill Fire Stations as a measure to address the availability issues;

- concern that availability had reduced in most of the stations in Sutherland, the main issues being the demographic in some areas and the national standards applicants had to attain. There was a need for innovative solutions to address the recruitment challenges across the area;
- a specific issue in relation to the lack of advance notice a recruit in Durness had been given to attend an initial training course. The Station Commander confirmed he would investigate this matter and respond directly to Mr H Morrison;
- it would be helpful if information could be provided on the number of the Service's personnel in the area at development stages;
- the success of the vaccination programme at Dornoch Fire Station and the potential for this to be repeated in future;
- the Service be commended on the consistent support it provided to partner agencies; and
- the potential for a joint service with the Police in remote and rural areas.

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

4. North West 2045 Our Future Our Choice Gabhail ri Lèirsinn 2045 an Iar-Thuath

There had been circulated Report No SCC/12/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

Mr L MacAskill, Assynt Foundation, Ms S Edwards, NW2045 Interviewer and the Ward Manager gave a presentation on this item.

In discussion, Members expressed support for the NW2045 Vision and raised the following issues:-

- the need for a strategy to progress the six priority areas for action and particularly to identify a lead organisation/group to drive these priorities forward;
- while there were benefits with the range of organisations involved in the Vision working in partnership, there were also potential areas of conflict, for example between environmental interests and economic development;
- the Sutherland Community Partnership's Food Group would welcome the opportunity to share its food strategy and action plan for Sutherland with NW2045;
- the opportunities to learn from the Scandinavian NOMAD project in terms of working digitally from any location, recognising that Sutherland was ideally placed in terms of an excellent work/life balance;
- concern at the injustice of the Islands Bill given that in terms of the relevant comparators, Sutherland was significantly worse than the islands at all levels;
- Sutherland had not benefited from the same level of political support and representation at a national level as the islands and the need for more political lobbying on this issue; and
- concern at the Boundary Commission's proposal to reduce the number councillors for Ward 01: North, West and Central Sutherland and the

impact this would have on the democracy and representation of the area.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** to adopt the NW2045 Vision “North West 2045 Our Future Our Choice”; and
- ii. **NOTED** the development of a Regional Land Use Partnership pilot in NW Sutherland

**5. North West Sutherland Schools Group Overview
Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Iar-Thuath Ghallaibh**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/13/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in relation to its Care Inspectorate report, confirmation was sought and provided that the Kinlochbervie Childcare Centre had successfully transferred to the Council;
- the condition of Scourie Primary School was listed as category ‘C’ and a query in relation to the action required to address this matter. The Area Manager advised this was due the age of the building and that she would liaise with the Head Teacher to check if there were any specific requirements;
- clarification was sought and provided in relation to the exclusion rates at Durness Primary School, while acknowledging that small numbers could skew the figures. The Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care advised that she would be content to have further discussions with the Area Manager and others outwith the meeting on the issues around exclusions;
- the Headteacher and staff be commended on a positive report overall and on the success and forward movement of the Group and positive approach in overcoming any issues; and
- the reduction in the projected school roll at Kinlochbervie High School over the next few years highlighted the depopulation issues in North and West Sutherland and the need for all agencies to work together to tackle this issue.

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

**6. Review of Speed Limit between Ardgay and Bonar Bridge
Ath-sgrùdadh air Crìoch-astair eadar Àird Ghaoithe agus Drochaid a’ Bhanna**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/14/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- the Ardgay/Bonar Bridge community were of the view that the speed of the traffic was excessive and this was reflected in the number of representations received from the local community on this matter;
- it was clear going forward the precedence of traffic over people was not in line with current policy to encourage more walking and cycling;
- the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 legislation was not fit for purpose and the need to be proactive in lobbying to have this legislation reviewed and to approach the Highland MSPs in this regard;
- this item should be deferred for further review and legal advice in relation to the introduction of a 30mph along the entire length of the road and on the basis a report be brought back to the Committee in November 2021;
- confirmation was sought and provided that in the event of a deferral the proposal outlined in the report would remain on the table as an option to be progressed;
- the proposal to extend the 30mph limit as outlined on the report be welcomed particularly as it encompassed the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust's hub; and
- clarification was sought and provided that it would be preferable to progress one traffic order for a 30mph speed limit along the entire length of road rather than progressing, in whole or in part, the recommendations in the report and then seeking a reduction in the 50mph speed limit at a later date.

The Committee **AGREED** to defer this item for further review and legal advice in relation to the introduction of a 30mph along the entire length of the road and on the basis a report be brought back to the Committee in November 2021.

7. **Poverty in Sutherland Bochdainn ann an Cataibh**

The Chair gave a verbal update on this item during which he advised of the importance of maintaining awareness of the issues of poverty across Sutherland. He had been active in seeking a reduction in the distribution costs for electricity given the high percentage of households in Sutherland experiencing fuel poverty. He understood there was a Government fund to help alleviate fuel poverty and there was need to consider how communities could gain access to these funds.

The Chair continued that there was a need for an update on the ongoing work being undertaken across the area to tackle poverty and to ensure this work was aligned and to avoid duplication of effort. The intention was that a report on this item would be submitted to the Committee at its next meeting in November 2021.

In discussion, it was confirmed that the Sutherland Community Partnership's Fuel Poverty Summit which had been postponed due to the pandemic was being held on 8 October 2021, details of which would be circulated to Members. Poverty in the round was at unprecedented levels and the effects on the mental health and life chances of children and families was well documented. The work ongoing locally was addressing the symptoms and the root causes could only be addressed by the UK and Scottish Governments.

Thereafter, concern was expressed that the Covid resilience monies to support food and fuel poverty which had been available the previous winter may not be available this year and that further clarification was required on the level of funding that would be available.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal update and the intention to bring a report on this item back to the Committee in November 2021

**8. Place Based Investment Funds - Sutherland
Maoin Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/15/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed allocations of the Place Based Investment Fund for Ward 4 as follows:

- Support for playparks £80,000
- Support for mental wellbeing initiatives £20,000.

**9. Dornoch Common Good Quarterly Monitoring Report
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Ràitheil Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/16/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. position of Dornoch Common Good fund at the end of the first quarter; and
- ii. update on current Dornoch Common Good issues.

**10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 17 May 2021 which were approved by the Council on 24 June 2021.

The meeting closed at 12.05pm.