

**The Highland Council  
Sutherland County Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland County Committee held remotely on Monday 22 November 2021 at 10.30am.

**Present:**

Ms K Currie  
Mr R Gale

Mr J McGillivray  
Mr H Morrison

**Officials in attendance:**

Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care  
Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Ms A Donald, North Area Manager, Education & Learning  
Mr M Evans, Head Teacher, Golspie High School, Education & Learning  
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Dr S Andrews, Flow Country World Heritage Bid Coordinator, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy  
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Performance and Governance  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance & Governance

**Also in Attendance:**

Chief Inspector K Macleod, Police Scotland

Mr R Gale in the Chair

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs D Mackay and Ms L Munro.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. 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/17/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Council's speed limit policy required to be revisited as a matter of urgency as it was out of date and did not reflect current traffic volumes, particularly the increase in heavy goods vehicles;
- national policy also required to be reviewed on the basis communities should have the ability to change how traffic flowed through their localities;
- there had been a fatality and a number of near misses on the stretch of road between Ardgay and Bonar Bridge and the need to improve road safety in this location;
- concern that many heavy goods vehicles were travelling faster than the national speed limit on this section of road and the need to raise this issue with the Police;
- the potential for a compromise solution and a proposal that the remainder of the national speed outwith the proposed 30mph limit between Bonar Bridge and Ardgay be reduced to 40mph;
- confirmation was sought and provided that a 40mph speed limit could be imposed in accordance with the current speed limit guidance on the basis traffic calming measures be undertaken. It was explained there were cost implications associated with traffic calming and that while such measures tended not to be popular with the travelling public, they were proven to be effective in slowing down vehicle speeds;
- it was important for Members to represent the views of the local communities and to place the safe travel of the significant number of pedestrians and cyclists using the route as a priority. It was hoped that a compromise solution as proposed would be recognised and supported by the local communities; and
- it be referred to officers to determine the traffic calming measures to be included in the Traffic Regulation Orders without the requirement to report back to Members.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to the promotion of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in respect of a reduction in the 60mph speed limit to 30mph by extending the Bonar Bridge 30mph speed limit by 270m or thereby generally westwards towards Ardgay; and
- ii. that the TRO also include that the remainder of the national speed limit between Bonar Bridge and Ardgay is to be reduced to 40mph with appropriate traffic calming measures.

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

There had been circulated Report No SCC/18/21 by the North Area Commander.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- in relation to the narrative for the figures for the number of breach of the peace/threatening and abusive behaviour crimes, the Chief Inspector confirmed he would report back to Members on this matter;
- an explanation was sought and provided that the Council was responsible for taking the lead in terms of anti-social behaviour orders

in respect of private tenants/homeowners and reference to the challenges involved in progressing orders;

- the fact Police stations in North and West Sutherland were now fully staffed was welcomed; and
- the importance of the Police and partners continuing to be proactive in their response to increasing traffic levels on the North Coast 500.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 2 for the period covering 1 April 2021 – 30 September 2021

**5. Golspie Associated School Group Overview**  
**Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Ghoillspidh**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/19/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Head Teacher of Golspie Primary School and Rogart Primary School was thanked for the excellent work undertaken during his time in the post;
- an update was sought and provided in regard to staffing levels and the impact of Covid-19 and the ongoing challenges in this regard;
- concern that the school roll projections reflected a wider depopulation issue across Sutherland and the need for the Scottish Government and the Council to take early action on this matter;
- the need to deliver a programme of repair and maintenance for schools to ensure they continued to be fit for purpose given the Council's ability to build new schools going forward would be constrained due to budgetary restrictions; and
- an update was sought and provided on the positive progress made in relation to attainment at Golspie High School over the period from 2019 and the Head Teacher and staff be commended on this achievement.

Thereafter, it was reported that both Golspie Primary School and Dornoch Primary School Parent Councils had expressed concern at the situation which has arisen over PSA provision. It was proposed that the Committee calls on the Council to reinstate the lost PSA hours in Schools across Sutherland. The impact of the lost hours was having a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable children and a knock on effect for the schools as a whole. From information received from Parent Councils, and former PSA's who were dismissed without notice, there had been no consultation on the reduction of PSA hours and parents have not been informed. In addition when approached to ascertain how many hours have been lost staff have declined to answer on the grounds that they feared for their own position. Given all of the above it was the opinion of the Committee that PSA hours should be reinstated with immediate effect.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** following scrutiny, the contents of the report; and

- ii **\* AGREED** to call on Highland Council to reinstate the lost PSA hours in Schools across Sutherland. The impact of the lost hours was having a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable children and a knock on effect for the schools as a whole. From information received from Parent Councils, and former PSA's who were dismissed without notice, there had been no consultation on the reduction of PSA hours and parents have not been informed. In addition, when approached to ascertain how many hours have been lost staff had declined to answer on the grounds that they feared for their own position.

Given all of the above it was the opinion of the Sutherland County Committee that PSA hours should be reinstated with immediate effect.

6. **Sutherland Place Based Investment Fund and COVID 19 Ward Discretionary Funds**  
**Maoin Stèidhichte air Àite Chataibh agus Maointean COVID 19 fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/20/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In discussion, Members welcomed the benefits the proposed allocation of funds outlined in the report would bring to the area and raised the following main points:-

- whether the budget of £31,000 for repairs and maintenance of existing playparks and equipment in Ward 4 was robust. It was confirmed that the estimates had been costed and that clarification would be sought from Amenities as to whether a contingency would be appropriate and the information shared with Members in considering applications; and
- whether the additional £8,900 from other sources to complete the repairs to existing play parks and equipment in Ward 1 had been identified. It was confirmed that to date no other funding sources had been identified but that further clarification would be sought from Amenities on this matter and shared with Members.

The Committee **AGREED** the:-

- i. proposed allocations of the Place Based Investment Fund for Ward 1 as follows:
  - a. Support for playparks £50,000
  - b. A grant fund to support mental wellbeing initiatives £40,000.
  - c. A grant fund to support provision of defibrillators £10,000;
- ii. proposed use of both Ward 1 and Ward 4 allocations for playpark funding as set out at sections 5.7 and 5.8 of the report; and
- iii. proposed allocation up to £10,000 from each of Ward 1 and Ward 4 COVID 19 Discretionary Funds to address fuel poverty.

7. **Visitor Management Car Parking and Motorhome Provision**  
**Parcadh Chàraichean Rianachd Luchd-tadhail is Solar Dhachaighean-motair**

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that the Council could legally prohibit motorhomes from parking in its off-street regulated car parks;
- concern at the potential for pay machines to be vandalised and how this was to be addressed. It was confirmed that the machines were smart meters and would alert officers to any issues;
- the potential to restrict overnight parking at Dornoch Beach car park to restrict wild camping on the beach;
- confirmation was sought and provided that mandatory payment for parking to respect the interests of the Dornoch Caravan Park would require a full statutory and road traffic order consultation;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the scope of the Council's powers in respect of the proposed regulation of the Dornoch Airfield Car Park within the Off-Street Traffic Regulation Order; and
- the need for prior consultation to be undertaken with the local community council in respect of the proposal for invitation to pay in Durness Village and that this location be removed from sites identified in Section 8.1 of the report meantime.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the locations proposed subject to Durness Village being removed and to the immediate delivery of Invitation to Pay at the locations in section 8.1 of the report *subject to Durness Village being removed pending consultation with the local community council* and charging to be voluntary at this stage;
- ii. **AGREED** the approach to motorhome parking at sites identified in Section 8.2 of the report;
- iii. **APPROVED** the recommendations regarding Dornoch Beach traffic management in section 9.1 of the report: and
- iv. **APPROVED** the regulation of the Dornoch Airfield Car Park within the Off-Street Traffic Regulation Order as per section 9.2 of the report.

## 8. Highland Poverty Strategy

The Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care gave a verbal update on this item during which she advised that the Council was developing a Highland Poverty Strategy and was in the process of recruiting an officer to map the current approaches across all service areas that helped to reduce poverty inequalities. This information would then be analysed to help assess the effectiveness of the approaches and inform the corporate approach to poverty and a strategy going forward. She outlined the range of targeted support being delivered across Services within the Council and through the Scottish Attainment Fund and implementation of the Cost of the School Day Toolkit. Currently, Highland wide data was collected but the aim was to have this data narrowed down to local areas to help inform Local Committees in terms of taking action within their local area.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- concern that while it was recognised there was significant work ongoing, this was not addressing the issues around poverty in rural areas;
- an issue in relation to the lack of access to services in Sutherland for children with a disability and the need to target this significant issue going forward. It was confirmed that this issue was actively being considered in conjunction with colleagues in the Education and Learning Service;
- it was important that in gathering data, this did not duplicate data that had already been collected by other organisations;
- information was sought and provided on the equalities perspective of the Strategy to ensure there was a focus on gender, disability and other areas of equalities and to learn lessons from the pandemic in terms of hidden harms; and
- an assurance was sought and provided that best practice across other local authorities was being considered in terms of providing support and access to services.

The Committee **NOTED** the update.

**9. Flow Country World Heritage Site Nomination - Update**  
**Ainmeachadh Làrach Dualchas na Cruinne do Dhùthaich nam**  
**Flòbhaichean – Fios às Ùr**

There had been circulated Report no SCC/22/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Members commended those involved in taking the bid for World Heritage site status forward and that the value of the Flow Country was being fully recognised, particularly in the context of climate change.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

**10. Dornoch Common Good**  
**Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich**

**(a) Dornoch Common Good Quarterly Monitoring Report**  
**Aithisg Sgrùdadh Ràitheil Math Coitcheann Dhòrnaich**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/23/21 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.

**(b) Consultation on Proposal to Dispose, by Sale, of Land at 1 River Street, Dornoch and Well Street, Dornoch**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/24/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Finance and Resources.

In discussion, support was expressed for the disposal of land at 1 River Street, Dornoch as it involved a small area of land and there was an opportunity to correct the anomaly explained in the report and therefore it was considered special circumstances applied in this case.

In relation to Well Street, concern was expressed at the potential onward sale of this larger area of land in future for potential personal benefit and at the precedent this may set for potential future requests to purchase Common Good land. This area of land should continue under a lease arrangement and officers should also consider the case for an economic development burden if a request to purchase this area of land came forward in future.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as contained in the analysis at **Appendix 1**;
- ii. **APPROVED** the responses to the issues raised in connection with both proposals set out in **Appendix 1** for publication;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposal to dispose, by sale, of 49m<sup>2</sup> or thereby of land at 1 River Street, Dornoch;
- iv. **NOTED** and assessed the representations received in connection with the proposal to dispose of 164m<sup>2</sup> or thereby of land at Well Street, Dornoch and **AGREED NOT** to proceed with the sale.

## 11. Minutes

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 16 August 2021 which were approved by the Council on 9 September 2021.

The meeting closed at 12.40pm.