

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 23 February 2022 at 11.30 am.

Present:

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| Mr G Adam | Mr A Henderson |
| Mr R Balfour | Mr A MacInnes |
| Dr I Cockburn (Substitute) | Ms M Smith |
| Mr R Gale (Video Conferencing) | Ms J Tilt (Video Conferencing) |

Non-Members also present:

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| Mr R Bremner (Video Conferencing) | Mr D Macpherson |
| Mr J Finlayson | Mr D Mackay |
| Mr B Lobban | Mr W MacKay (Video Conferencing) |

In attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
Ms C Campbell, Head of Service (Community Operations and Logistics), Communities and Place
Ms A Clark, Head of Service (Community Support and Engagement), Communities and Place
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy & Operations, Communities and Place (Video Conferencing)
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health & Bereavement Services, Communities and Place
Ms R MacKinnon, Principal Policy Officer, Communities and Place
Ms K Ellen, Community Food Growing Coordinator, Communities and Place (Video Conferencing)
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 Committee.

Mr A Henderson in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Allan, Mr A Baxter, Mr J Bruce, Ms K Currie, Mr C Fraser, Mr J Gordon, Mr D MacLeod, Mr R MacWilliam, Mr H Morrison, Mrs M Paterson and Mr A Rhind.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

Item 8 – Ms M Smith (Declaration of Interest)
Item 8 – Mr A Henderson (Transparency Statement)

3. Revenue Budget Monitoring for Quarter 3 of 2021/22 Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach airson Cairteal 3 de 2021/22

There had been circulated Report No CP/1/22 dated 4 February 2022 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Chairman pointed out that the financial position had improved and this was against a very challenging savings target. Thanks were expressed to all Officers for the hard work in achieving this.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Quarter 3 position as shown on Appendices 1 and 2 of the report and that the forecasted outturn position was a pressure of £288k;
- ii. that savings forecasted to be delivered this year amounted to £505k against a target of £567k, with £62k at risk of delivery, and were factored into the outturn position; and
- iii. in addition to the underachievement of income remaining a risk for the Service, a review of various budget headings was taking place to help inform targets and other budgets at a subjective level, all within the overall Service budget target into 22/23.

4. Consultation - Review of the Public Sector Equality Duty in Scotland Co-chomhairle – Ath-sgrùdadh air Dleastanas Co-ionannachd na Roinne Poblach ann an Alba

There had been circulated Report No CP/2/22 dated 2 February 2022 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, as to how gender-based budget analysis would be achieved; and
- the emphasis placed on training in the proposed response was welcomed and it was suggested that it should also be included in the response to Question 14.1, which sought views on the proposals set out by the Scottish Government and the further areas explored.

The Committee **NOTED** the Council's draft response to the consultation questions and **AGREED** that it be submitted to the Scottish Government, subject to an addition at Question 14.1 regarding the need for training.

5. Community Food Growing Strategy Ro-innleachd Fàs Bidh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/3/22 dated 3 February 2022 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chairman asked if there was scope for the Council to set an earlier target than the 2027 target specified in the strategy as this would create greater focus;
- there were examples of farmers selling vegetable packs so communities could buy local produce to make soup;
- it was important to encourage communities to participate but the mechanism by which this would be achieved was questioned. There were areas which were keen to explore this but were unclear of the process;
- it was vital that good practice in terms of Community Food Growing Initiatives was shared with others who were keen to participate;
- Invergordon was looking at the prospect of allotments and Birchwood Highland, who had a presence in the town, was supportive of this;
- the Scottish Government had identified Alness and Invergordon as part of a carbon saving initiative and a Community Food Growing Strategy would sit well with this;
- in some areas the difficulty in providing allotments was due to affordable land supply. In many cases such land was used for development instead so the Council might need to consider how it could help when new housing developments came on stream, such as by allocating a portion of land for community food growing;
- there were swathes of land which had been farmed in the past but which were now lying fallow. Farmers needed to be incentivised to recultivate these areas;
- the creation of a Community Food Growing Co-ordinator was welcomed but information was sought, and provided, as to how this and the Strategy was to be funded; and
- reference was made to the excellent work that the Rural Complex in Fort William had achieved in the past where, as part of the Seeds to Supper scheme, local school pupils had been encouraged to come along, sow seeds and eventually eat the produce they had grown.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** and adopted Growing our Future – Highland Community Food Growing Strategy; and
- ii. **NOTED** that an annual update on the progress of implementing the Strategy would be presented to the Communities and Place Committee.

6. Response to Scottish Government’s Consultation – National Litter and Fly Tipping Strategy
Freagairt do Cho-chomhairle Riaghaltas na h-Alba – Ro-innleachd Nàiseanta Sgudail is Sitigidh Mhi-laghail

There had been circulated Report No CP/4/22 dated 3 February 2022 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Environmental Health Team were commended for their work;
- particular issues had arisen regarding fly tipping in Wester Ross as a result of the influx of tourists, some of which had caused distress, and the enforcement element was therefore to be welcomed;
- it was recognised that the public needed to dispose of waste goods. Whilst the bin collection worked for smaller items, larger items needed to be taken to

Recycling Centres but these had restricted opening hours, particularly at weekends;

- examples of how other countries dealt with the issue were mentioned, with both positive and negative outcomes, and there was merit in looking at best practise in other Scottish local authorities;
- a lot of fly tipping was due to criminality, with bogus firms setting up and agreeing to dispose of waste from householders for a fee to then fly tip the waste. The Council then had to dispose of the refuse;
- there was a role for Countryside Rangers to support education;
- there was less likely to be littering and fly tipping in areas where there was no debris;
- the more support that could be given to volunteer litter picks the better;
- reference was made to a significant degree of fly tipping which had taken place at an Inverness public play park. It was important that as much intelligence as possible was provided in such instances, such as CCTV, licence number plates etc, to allow a prosecution to proceed. Those who had been charged with fly tipping should be made an example of;
- the cost of waste disposal was a disincentive to responsibly deal with it; and
- clarification was required in relation to Questions 10 and 11 regarding litter hubs to avoid any possible contradiction.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the consultation carried out by the Scottish Government on the National litter and flytipping strategy including the proposed potential actions to tackle litter and flytipping in Scotland; and
- ii. **AGREED** the response prepared by the officers within the Communities and Place Service as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, subject to the responses to Questions 10 and 11 being clarified to avoid any contradiction.

7. Community Asset Transfer Requests Iarrtasan Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/5/22 dated 9 February 2022 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the proposal from Dunbeath and District Centre to develop a new health and wellbeing centre would provide significant community benefits which would considerably outweigh the potential capital receipt. 52 responses had been received during the notification period, the majority of which welcomed the proposal. 10 responses were against the proposal, highlighting concerns about awareness of it. However, Dunbeath was a small village so it was difficult to understand how a lack of awareness could be the case. The current centre had been operating since 1992 and had been well received, and tribute was paid to how it had operated during the Covid 19 pandemic and responded to local power outages. In assessing the application, community benefit, capacity to deliver and sustainability had all been graded as very strong;
- it was disappointing that the Community Council was not in support given the benefits it would generate and the good work undertaken over the last two years and before. The proposal was to expand what was already provided in what

was a rural community. The Council was looking to support such initiatives and this application was exemplar;

- turning to the sale of the Lochcarron Playgroup Cabin to Lochcarron Leisure Centre, this building was very much at the heart of the community. Many people had and would benefit from this facility and it was important it remained part of the village; and
- assurances were sought, and provided, that there were different arrangements in place to ensure with each Community Asset Transfer that the Council were not disadvantaged if assets were sold on with a view to profiteering.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the sale of the Lochcarron Playgroup Cabin for £1,000 to Lochcarron Leisure Centre, subject to the terms of transfer set out in section 2.1 of the report; and
- ii. the sale of Land South West of Neil Gunn Place, Dunbeath for £1, to Dunbeath and District Centre, subject to the terms of transfer set out in section 2.2 of the report.

8. Blue Badge Petition Athchuinge Bhaidseachan Gorma

Declaration of Interest:- Ms M Smith declared an interest in this item as she was a Blue Badge holder and, in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, left the meeting.

Transparency Statement: Mr A Henderson made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item by reason of having a relative in possession of a Blue Badge. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare. This was because any decision to abolish the reapplication charge would be a recommendation to Full Council and was so remote that he would not benefit in any way. He had requested that this Statement be recorded in the Minutes.

There had been circulated Report No CP/6/22 dated 2 February 2022 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in response to a question it was confirmed that the £20 administration fee represented full cost recovery. If a decision was taken to abolish it then money would need to be found from elsewhere;
- Members were assured that there was a process in place to identify people applying for a Blue Badge who weren't eligible;
- it was necessary to reapply every 3 years to comply with Scottish Government legislation, the reasons for which were explained,
- due to cessation of knee and hip operations during the Covid 19 pandemic there might be some who needed a Blue Badge at the moment but who would have recuperated and would no longer require a Blue Badge when the time came to reapply;
- removing the £20 administration fee could result in a deluge of applications; and

- there was only one other local authority in Scotland who did not charge. Removing the £20 administration fee across all Councils would cost a significant amount of money.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED:-**
 - a) the contents of the petition;
 - b) that it has been accepted as compliant with Council procedure;
 - c) the current volume and full cost recovery for processing Blue Badges
 - d) the budget pressure implication of removing the charge for the reapplication of blue badges; and
- ii. **AGREED** to keep the £20 administration charge for reapplications.

The meeting ended at 12.55 pm.