

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held REMOTELY on Wednesday, 9 February 2022 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr D Mackay
Mr W Mackay
Mr S Mackie

Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie
Mr A Sinclair
Ms J Tilt

Officials in attendance:

Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mrs H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr M Sutherland, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Ms A Donald, North Area Manager, Education and Learning
Mr S Sandecki, Head Teacher, Wick High School, Education and Learning
Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy & Investment Manager, Housing and Property
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mr M Greig, Project Manager, Education and Learning
Mr F Cameron, Programme Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in Attendance:

Area Commander K Macleod and Sergeant S Mezels, Police Scotland

Mr R Bremner in the Chair

1.	Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan There were no apologies for absence.
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 3 November 2021, which were approved by the Council on 10 December 2021, the terms of which were NOTED .

<p>4.</p>	<p>Matters Arising – Action Tracker Gnothaichean Ag Èirigh – Tracair Ghnìomhan</p> <p>There had been circulated an Action Tracker which detailed the actions arising from previous meetings.</p> <p>On hearing from the Chair, the Committee AGREED that the format of the action tracker be reviewed and an updated version be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Police – Area Performance Summary Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/16/20 by the North Area Commander.</p> <p>During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • road safety was a high priority locally and the deployment of the camera van in locations identified by the public be welcomed; • the potential for the camera van to be deployed close to Watten Primary School. It was confirmed that the Police would continue to seek to influence its deployment into some of the smaller communities; • a plea that Police Scotland’s four-wheel drive vehicle availability in Caithness be improved, particularly over the winter months. The Area Commander advised that he was seeking to have existing vehicle replaced and he continued to make the case for additional vehicles; • the potential for the opening hours of Thurso Police Station to be reviewed, observing that it was a busy station located in the town and on the North Coast 500. The Area Commander undertook to feedback to Members on this issue; • progress with the deployment of high powered cameras in the area to tackle mobile phone use whilst driving. The Area Commander confirmed he would feedback to Mr W Mackay on this issue; • concern at speeding in Thurso and the need for preventative measures to be considered. The Area Commander advised that he would liaise with his officers in regard to this issue; • in terms of preventative work, confirmation was sought and provided that the potential use of visual reality headsets as training aids in communities would be investigated; • the Chair would suggest to the Secretary of the Association of Caithness Community Councils that road safety be included on the agenda of the next meeting of the Association of Community Councils at which Police Scotland and Roads officials would be present; and • Members were aware that Police resources were stretched and there was a need for an open discussion between all parties on the issues around the attendance of police officers at and information provided to local community council meetings. The Chair confirmed he would seek to have this matter discussed at a meeting of the Association of Caithness Community Councils.

	The Committee NOTED progress made against the objectives set within the Highland and Islands Local Policing Plan 2020 – 23.
6.	<p>Wick Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Sgìre Inbhir Ùige</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/02/22 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.</p> <p>During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need to consider measures to address the recruitment challenges being experienced in relation to teaching staff, including the potential for a partnership approach; • an update was sought and provided on recent problems experienced with the heating system at Wick High School. It was confirmed this matter would be referred to the School Estates Section for an explanation; • confirmation that repairs had been made to the external panels at Wick High School which had been damaged during the recent storms, and a structural report was awaited to ensure there was a complete fix. The Chair advised that he had received an up- to-date report on the damage and he would circulate this to Members; • concern at the capacity issues at Wick High School and the accuracy of school forecasts in planning the new school. In addition, the building was not fit for purpose for ASN and PSA delivery. It was confirmed that a meeting had been held with the Property and Facilities Team on how this issue could be taken forward. A technical report was to be completed in relation to building capacity and the additional support for learning environment. In terms of the original forecasts, the positive increase in numbers moving into the area had not been anticipated at that time; • as previously highlighted by Members, the format of the report was not fit for purpose. The report should be more reflective of the current position in relation to education in Caithness. The Chair advised that he would follow up on this matter as an action from the meeting; • concern there was no benchmarking information provided in the report in relation to the full-time equivalent hours for staffing including ASN and PSA staff, by which to assess the adequacy of provision; • there was no information provided in the report as to how the condition and suitability of the school buildings compared to the school estate across the Highlands and in terms of Members consideration of the Council's capital programme going forward; and • the Head Teacher and staff at Wick High School be commended on the high level of positive destinations and an explanation was sought on the figures shown for unemployed not seeking. <p>The Committee following scrutiny, NOTED the content of the report.</p>
7.	<p>HRA Capital Programme 2022/23 Prògram Calpa HRA 2022/23</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/03/22 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.</p>

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the positive impact the aids and adaptations budget had on tenants with a medical condition being able to remain in their own home and how to get the message out to tenants in relation to the availability of aids and adaptations. It was confirmed that the potential to include an article in the tenant newsletter would be considered;
- the level of engagement with the tenant forum in relation to identifying local priorities in the development of the Programme was excellent;
- an explanation was sought and provided that if the Council wished to achieve a higher degree of energy efficiency within its housing stock, this would require significantly more investment in future. Discussions and reports to Members would be required going forward in relation to how this was financed and the lobbying that could be undertaken with the Scottish Government and utility companies. A crucial element would be seeking feedback from tenants on their priorities in terms energy efficiency and other capital works;
- the Member led Caithness tenant survey had indicated that doors and windows were a local priority and how this could be reflected in the proposed Capital Programme for the area. It was confirmed that it was within the power of Members to assign the environmental improvements budget specifically for windows and doors;
- on the basis of previous discussions, there was a consideration that the Member led environmental improvements budget was to be increased from its current level. There was a need to evidence there had been a material change in the Programme to reflect the local priorities identified in the tenant survey. Further discussion on this issue would be held with the Housing Policy and Investment Manager at the monthly housing meeting.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the allocation of resources to Caithness Area as set out at 5.7 of the report;
- NOTED** the guideline investment priorities as set out in sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the report.;
- AGREED** the proposed one-year HRA Capital Programme for Caithness 2022-23 as set out in **Appendix 1**;
- NOTED** the position relating to the current year HRA Capital Programme; and
- NOTED** that updates on the HRA Capital Programme will continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Local Committees as requested by local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee.

**8. Area Roads Capital Programme 2022/23
Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2022/23**

There had been circulated Report No CC/04/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the positive transformation in the relationship between Members and officers through the monthly roads meetings had led to a better understanding of the issues and challenges, investment priorities, and the complex relationship between capital and revenue spend;
- reference to the importance of the project being undertaken by the Council's Redesign Board with the remit to achieve the effective, efficient, and sustainable delivery of all engineering and roads operations and to improve the road condition across the Highlands;
- the prioritised area capital programme was welcomed on the basis of the significant improvements it would deliver to the road network in Caithness;
- reference to the importance of investing in footpaths and pavements and the potential for part of the Ward Allocation budgets to be used for this purpose;
- whether the surface dressing on the road at Rumster Forest should be undertaken ahead of the construction of the windfarm in this location. It was confirmed there would be engagement with the developer as part of the planning process to mitigate any impacts and consider opportunities to improve the road going forward;
- the potential implications in relation to the impact of any reduction in the roads spend in the Council's medium term financial plan;
- the challenges faced by Members and officers in recovering the roads position in Caithness due to historic underspends. The fact that the increased capital funding for roads had been spent in the current year and more schemes delivered than in the past with the same level of staff resources be acknowledged and Members appreciation be conveyed to the roads teams;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Head of Infrastructure would take Members on an individual or group basis though the information provided to the Redesign Board's workshops;
- consideration of the Ward Allocation budgets be discussed at a Ward Business meeting/monthly roads meeting;
- an explanation was sought and provided on the process for dealing with the large volume of pothole reports received from the public, Members and officers and a point in regard to the need to raise the profile in the public domain as to how repairs were prioritised;
- reference to a Members seminar being held on 25 February 2022 at which there would be discussion on how community benefit associated with large windfarm developments could be secured towards the Council's strategic responsibilities for roads;
- community benefit should be built into the planning system for any major engineering project and this issue be raised at the Redesign Board. Reference was also made to the damage to the roads caused by the increasing number of heavy vehicles and the potential to secure contributions from haulage companies;
- the need to broaden the public understanding of the issues in relation to roads through improved communication and dialogue and the potential for the Head of Infrastructure and Roads Operations Manager to attend a meeting of the Association of Caithness Community Councils.

	The Committee APPROVED the proposed prioritised Area Roads Capital Programme for the Caithness Area.
9.	<p>Place Based Investment Programme Prògram Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/05/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.</p> <p>During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members and officers be commended on working collaboratively to bring forward the proposals set out in the report; • clarification that the capital funding was ring fenced with specific conditions attached and could not be used for other purposes such as funding for roads; and • concern at the level of parking close to the bus stance which was impeding buses, and the need for double yellow lines on the road approaching the bus stance. The Area Roads Manager confirmed she would feedback to the Principal Traffic Officer the concerns raised on this matter. <p>The Committee:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. NOTED the appended PBIP proposals and AGREED to invest £75,000 in the Sir Georges Park, Thurso (aka The Dammies), infrastructure project, thus reversing the Caithness Committee decision on 12 August 2021 to invest £60,000 of the Council's Place Based Funds in the project; ii. AGREED to investing £89,000 in the Whitechapel Road, Wick, Public Convenience project; and iii. AGREED to investing £14,123 in the redesign of the bus stance, Riverside, Wick.
10.	<p>Reallocation of Highland Council Place Based Investment/Covid Funds Ath-shònrachadh de Thasgadh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd A-rèir Àite/Maoin Covid</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/06/22 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.</p> <p><i>On the motion of the Chair seconded by Mr K Rosie, the Committee AGREED to suspend standing order 35 in relation to this item.</i></p> <p>During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concern there had been negative press in relation to the Sir Georges Park Project and the opportunity for further engagement to help with the understanding and provide a resolution to the issues. More positively there was a real opportunity to work with sports clubs and the third sector to develop and improve the facility; and • the benefits of the proposals in terms of health and wellbeing and links with third sector organisations in the area.

	<p>The Committee AGREED:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i to reallocate the £60,000 Ward 2 Highland Council Place Based Funds previously allocated to the Sir Georges Park Project; ii to reallocate the £15,000 covid funds previously allocated to the Sir Georges Park Project; iii to allocate the £60,000 remaining Place Based Funds from Ward 2 as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Create a £20,000 grant fund to develop active travel related community projects; o £30,000 to previously agreed projects highlighted in the Thurso Active Travel Plan with agreed match funding from the Active Travel Capital budget; o £10,000 to investigate the creation of a community amenities equipment scheme. iv to allocate the remaining £15,385 Ward 2 Covid Investment Funds to a grant fund to address the 4 harms of covid; v to allocate the remaining £6,246 Ward 3 Covid Investment Funds.
<p>11,</p>	<p>Highland Coastal Communities Fund – Assessment of Applications Maoin Choimhearsnachdan Cladaich na Gàidhealtach Measadh Iarrtasan</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/07/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.</p> <p>The Committee:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. AGREED that the £98,823.71 that was ringfenced for Member-led strategic investments be made available for the projects under consideration, should they be approved; ii. APPROVED funding as follows:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>High Life Highland - Wellbeing for Resilience</u> APPROVED £49,882.85 <u>Highland Council - Wick Whitechapel Public Convenience Refurbishment</u> APPROVED £50,000.00 iii. AGREED the shortfall in funds available through the current allocation of £1,059.14 be drawn these funds from the new HCCF allocation for 2022/23.
<p>12.</p>	<p>Additional Urgent Item Wick Street Design - Sustrans funding</p> <p>The Chair AGREED to consider an additional urgent item on the grounds that it had been recently announced that Wick Street Design had secured Sustrans funding for the phase 3 design stage and to allow Members to be updated on this</p>

	<p>item before the pre-election period, recognising that the funding was time limited and the need for the Council to progress the scheme.</p> <p>The Project Manager confirmed that funding of £150k had been awarded by Sustrans from its 'Places for Everyone' fund. This was to allow the project to progress to the full design stages and the funding had to be utilised by March 2023. In terms of next steps, the Royal Burgh of Wick Community Council would continue to be key stakeholders in the project and work was underway to identify other key stakeholders. A part-time project manager was to be recruited locally to work with stakeholders and to ensure the project met its objectives. There would be ongoing consultation with the community, surveys, street trials, and regular communications through the website, social media and the local press. It was hoped to hold the first liaison engagement sessions in Wick at the end of the month at which the public would be brought up to date on progress and have the opportunity to ask questions. On completion of the stage 3 design the project would then proceed to a technical design stage and tenders issued. At this stage, an application for stage 5 and 6 funding would be submitted to Sustrans, the Council having to provide matchfunding for this element.</p> <p>Thereafter, the Chair welcomed the update and the potential for significant investment for the benefit for Wick as a good news story.</p> <p>The Committee NOTED the verbal update in relation to the funding secured from Sustrans from its 'Places for Everyone' fund in respect of the Wick Street Design.</p>
	<p>The meeting ended at 1.00pm</p>