

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee** held remotely on Tuesday 15 February 2022 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 C Howell, Head of Infrastructure, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mr J Mitchell, Principal Housing Officer, Housing and Property
Ms D Sutton, Amenity Services Manager, Communities and Place
Mr A Webster, Principal Regeneration Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Performance and Governance
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Ms L Coe, Rails to Grantown Project
Mr B Milne, Group Commander Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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

Item 12: Mr B Lobban (Transparency Statement)

3. Rails to Grantown Project Pròiseact Rèilean a Bhaile nan Granndach

There was a presentation by Ms Linda Coe giving an update on the Rails to Grantown Project. The project was seeking a Transport and Works (Scotland) TAWS order to construct and operate the railway from Broomhill to Grantown-on-Spey. Ms Coe explained that this was the first heritage railway to apply for a TAWS order and also the first road and rail application. Ms Coe then proceeded to set out details of the process that had been undertaken to date and explained the impacts and delays as a result of the pandemic. In conclusion, she advised that work was currently underway in respect of developing the full application which would comprise of over 14 key documents but this could not be submitted until Transport Scotland had submitted their application for the road alignment works.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- the Council was supportive of the project and although it could not offer any significant financial support it was willing to help in any other way it could. However, it was indicated that there might be potential for a modest sum of funding to be available as part of a regeneration initiative;
- the complexity of the process and the significant work that had been undertaken to date was recognised;
- further information was sought and provided in respect of the leases of land and the land purchase that would be undertaken as part of the process;
- it was disappointing to hear of the delays but the organisation was commended for their achievements so far which was felt would be inspirational to other groups; and
- the economic benefits that the project would generate to the local area was emphasised as was the need for this to be recognised by Scottish Ministers. In response to the suggestion of the Council writing to the Minister for Transport, it was indicated that this had already been done and there was a need to let due process to be followed.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

4. **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/01/22 dated 19 January 2022 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- requests were made for social media posts in respect of recruitment to be shared with Members to enable wider promotion and also for an additional column to be added to the Station Availability table to indicate what the full staffing complement should be;
- further information was sought and provided on the rollout of smoke and heat detectors. It was also clarified that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had no legal powers in terms of compliance of this and instead provided an advisory role;
- it was noted that there had been a return to home visits and it was queried if this had also been extended to include businesses;
- the importance and effectiveness of youth engagement was emphasised;
- the staff recruitment challenges were acknowledged and it was queried whether a more flexible approach to address this was being adopted; and
- in terms of forestry estates, assurance was provided that there would be ongoing partnership working with a variety of landowner groups to ensure the safe use of the countryside and promotion/awareness of this.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report and that future reports would be amended to include an additional column to the Station Availability table to indicate what the full staffing complement should be.

5. Notices of Motion Brathan Glusaid

The following Notice of Motion had been received by the Head of Corporate Governance –

This Area Committee condemns the cuts to Railway Station ticket offices in Aviemore and Kingussie and additionally wishes to highlight the ridiculously high fares for local train passengers. We agree to write to the Scottish Government Minister of Transport highlighting our concerns.

Signed: Mr B Lobban Ms P Hadley

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- in view of the climate emergency, concern was expressed that barriers were being put in place that would lead to a reduction in the level of service for passengers;
- reference was made to the negative impacts that would result from the removal of functioning ticket offices, particularly when electronic ticketing machines broke down, and the distress and added financial burden this caused to passengers;
- the rail service was too expensive and in order to increase usage, train fares needed to be reduced to a more affordable level;
- concern was expressed at the accessibility issues, both in respect of disability and also in terms of reduced booking options for passengers that did not have access to purchase tickets online;
- this area had a low wage economy and in view of this there was a need to encourage and increase the use of public transport particularly for young people;
- there was a need for more investment and service improvements in railways, with manned facilities, and not a restriction in servicing hours;
- it was proposed that an amendment be added to the Motion in that the proposal should be stopped in its entirety as the new owner, the Scottish Government, would be taking over from April 2022. It was felt that a full assessment with evidence based needs for the services should be undertaken with staff and also through local consultation. It was clarified that consultation had already been undertaken. However, it was indicated that the consultation had been conducted by an operator that had lost the franchise; and
- it was proposed that the words '*and asking that any changes are halted prior to the introduction of the new operator*' should be inserted at the end of the Motion. The Chair indicated that he would write to the Minister for Transport on behalf of the Committee.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the:

- i. following Amended Motion –

This Area Committee condemns the cuts to Railway Station ticket offices in Aviemore and Kingussie and additionally wishes to highlight the ridiculously high fares for local train passengers. We agree to write to the Scottish Government Minister of Transport highlighting

- our concerns and asking that any changes are halted prior to the introduction of the new operator; and
- ii. letter to the Scottish Government Minister for Transport be issued by the Chair on behalf of the Committee.

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

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/**02**/22 dated 25 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy. In introducing the report, it was indicated that there had been an error on Page 15 of the report where it stated '*Lochaber*' and should have stated '*Badenoch and Strathspey*'. There was also an error in Appendix 1 whereby the total was £35.44m and not £31.44m as had been stated.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- Members expressed their appreciation for the work that was undertaken to maintain the local roads network particularly given the very limited resources available. The need for more investment in this function was emphasised and it was hoped that this would be reflected in the next budget;
- further information was sought and provided on the timeline for a permanent solution for the surface of Ruthven bridge, Kingussie. It was also confirmed that the road would require to be closed for a period of time but that disruption would be kept to a minimum;
- although negative feedback on the condition of the roads was consistently received, feedback on the work of the Council in respect of the fast response to road and tree clearances had been overwhelmingly positive;
- confirmation was provided that the cost of storm damage was lower than winter maintenance. It was also clarified that the milder winter resulted in less costly repairs and enabled more of the budget to be invested in cyclical repairs;
- it was clarified that surface dressing was an important element of preventative maintenance and extended the life of the road by 10 years;
- there was a need to seek more landowner support and collaboration with road repairs/maintenance; and
- reference was made to damaged pavements, particularly from tree roots, and further information was sought and provided on how this would be addressed.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the proposed 2022/23 Area Roads Capital Programme for Badenoch & Strathspey.

7. Badenoch & Strathspey Ward Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations Maoinean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte Air Àite Uàrd Bhàideanach & Shrath Spè – Riarachaidhean Maoineachaidh gam Moladh

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/**03**/22 dated 1 February 2022 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- reference was made to how local communities had been unable to progress their ideas and bring projects to fruition due to a lack of seed funding. However, this funding would enable projects to be progressed and this was welcomed;
- it was clarified that it was proposed that the sum to be awarded to Kincaig & Vicinity Community Council was £9,312; and
- reference was made to the importance of the funding to support feasibility studies and the benefits this provided to enabling communities to have confidence to take projects forward.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **AGREED** to the reallocation and retention of funds as follows:
 - a. Housing Needs Feasibility Study – reallocate the remaining balance of £9,500 via the Community Challenge fund which would increase the funding available for allocation to £64,500;
 - b. Housing for Businesses Project Scoping Project – build upon feasibility studies and business case already developed and targeting the remaining funds of £1,700 in support of concluding the joint work started with the Cairngorm Business Partnership;
 - c. Independent Audit of Empty Commercial Units and Proposals for Potential Solutions - utilising the funding of £10,000 to investigate potential support to local business based on the findings of the audit; and
 - d. The total funding pot for community regeneration projects of £64,500 comprised £50,000 allocated at Area Committee on 9 November 2021, £9,500 reallocated from the housing needs project and £5,000 remaining of the total Place Based Investment Funds;
- ii. following a call for applications to support community regeneration, **AGREED** the proposed allocations of Place Based Investment Funds of £64,500 as follows:
 - a. Aviemore Community Enterprise, Myrtlefield Redevelopment Feasibility Study - £14,500;
 - b. Grantown Initiative in partnership with the Highland Council, Dulaig Playing Area and Pitch Project - £10,000;
 - c. Kingussie & Vicinity Community Council, Glebe Ponds Restoration Feasibility Study - £9,779;
 - d. Badenoch Heritage, Storylands Session - £1,950;
 - e. Kincaig & Vicinity Community Council, Kincaig Community Toilet and Parking Feasibility Study - £9,312;
 - f. Aviemore & Glenmore Community Trust, Dalfaber Land Community Park Feasibility Study - £10,000; and
 - g. Contingency provision for Play and Project Development - £8,959.

8. **Place Based Investment Programme (PBIP)** **Prògram Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/04/22 dated 3 February 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:

- these projects would be transformational for local communities;
- those projects that were not recommended for approval (Newtonmore Play Park, Burnfield Garden and Newtonmore Village Hall) would be eligible to reapply for future funding. It was requested that support mechanisms be put in place to help communities to understand the work that had yet to be done to enable the projects to be progressed for future funding support; and
- appreciation was expressed for all the work that had been undertaken in respect of assessing the applications. It was welcomed that this would be recurring funding which could help communities to have flexibility with a phased approach to projects.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the applications submitted and **AGREED** the projects to be offered a Place Based Investment Programme grant and the value of funds to be offered as follows;
 - a. Kingussie Shinty Club - £50,000;
 - b. Kingussie K6 Memorial Project - £20,706.40;
 - c. Burnfield Public Convenience Project - £23,900;
 - d. Woodland Wheels Pump Track Floodlights - £10,000;
 - e. Dulaig Play Park - £15,000;
- ii. **AGREED** authority be delegated to the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy, in consultation with the Area Committee Chair, to allocate any uncommitted PBIP grant to approved PBIP beneficiaries in the event that additional investment was required.

9. Playpark Provision Solar Phàircean-cluiche

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/05/22 dated 8 February 2022 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities & Place.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the funding available and the funding already committed to invest in play parks in the Badenoch and Strathspey Area;
- ii. **NOTED** a further £55m was to be awarded to Scottish Councils over the lifetime of the parliament;
- iii. **AGREED** that the Scottish Government funding be used to replace key items of play equipment with any remaining balance to be carried forward for spend in 2022/23;
- iv. **AGREED** the remainder of the Ward 20 Covid fund, £21,463, be repurposed as required for essential repairs to play equipment and delegated to the Amenities Manager for allocation in consultation with local Members; and
- v. **AGREED** to homologate the repurposing and spend of £7,084.50 of Covid Ward Funds in support of replacement of an item of equipment at Campbell Crescent, Kingussie.

**10. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2022/23
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/06/22 dated 27 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the Chair proposed a rent increase of 1% for council house tenants and 1.5% for non-council house tenants and this was supported.

The Committee **AGREED** a rent increase of 1% for council house tenants and 1.5% for non-council house tenants be applied to Badenoch and Strathspey Garages.

**11. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2021 to 31 December 2021
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 An Giblean 2021 gu 31 An Dubhlachd 2021**

There had been circulated Report No BSAC/07/22 dated 27 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, reference was made to the considerably improved performance in respect of repairs and further explanation was sought and provided to the reason for the substantially reduced rent arrears.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 December 2021.

**12. Grantown Common Good Asset Register
Co-chomhairle Clàr So-mhaoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile nan Grandach**

Transparency Statement: Mr B Lobban made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item in that he had a connection to this item as an advisor to the Board of Grantown Museum. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare. He requested that this Statement be recorded in the Minutes.

There had been circulated Joint Report No BSAC/08/22 dated 18 January 2022 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, reference was made to the potential for a shared income stream for the Common Good Fund and the Council if car parking charges were implemented. There was a need to promote awareness that the Register was not closed and to encourage questions to which responses would be provided.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the Asset Register in the format for publication as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the content of the document titled “Grantown on Spey Common Good property consultation representations and responses” (Appendix 2);
- iii. **AGREED** to the publication of the Common Good Asset register for Grantown on Spey 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 the reactivation of Grantown on Spey Common Good Fund; and
- * v. **AGREED to recommend** to the Council that, due to the financial position of the fund, Grantown on Spey Common Good property would continue to be maintained by Highland Council for the foreseeable future.

13. Kingussie Common Good Fund – consultation on proposal to dispose, by Community Asset Transfer lease, of Market Stance Playing Field to Kingussie Camanachd Club

Maoin Math Coitcheann Cheann a' Ghiùthsaidh – co-chomhairle mu mholadh faighinn cuidhteas, le aonta-màil Glusad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd, de Raon-cluiche Stansa na Margaid gu Club Camanachd Cheann a' Ghiùthsaidh

There had been circulated Joint Report No BSAC/09/22 dated 17 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as detailed in paragraph 4 of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** the proposal to dispose, by Community Asset Transfer lease, of Market Stance Playing Field, Ruthven Road, Kingussie to Kingussie Camanachd Club; and
- iii. **NOTED** that, if agreed, it would be necessary to seek Sheriff Court consent in respect of the disposal.

**14. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee held on 9 November 2021 which were approved by the Council on 10 December 2021.

Prior to closing the meeting, the Chair expressed his appreciation for the help and support provided to Members from staff and external partners.

The meeting concluded at 12.25pm.