

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drumbuie, Golspie on Tuesday 24 January 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr J McGillivray
Mr R Gale (Chair)	Mr H Morrison (Teams)
Ms M Hutchison (Teams)	Ms L Niven

In attendance:

Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care
Mr P Tomalin, Ward Manager
Ms M Grant, Principal Housing Officer
Mr C Sharp, Repairs Manager
Ms P Betts, Project Officer (Community Regeneration)
Miss M Murray, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector S Macdonald, Police Scotland
Inspector C Murray, Police Scotland
Ms W Kelt, Adult and Youth Services Officer, High Life Highland
Ms C Nichols, Chief Officer, Youth Highland
Mr P Faccenda, Focus North Partnership Manager

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 R Gale in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declarations of Interest:-

Item 8: Mr J McGillivray
Item 9: Mr J McGillivray

3. Police – Area Performance Summary Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No SCC/01/23 by the North Area Commander, Police Scotland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- appreciation was expressed to Chief Inspector Macdonald for the thorough report and the work he and his officers did in Sutherland, including his leadership of the Sutherland Community Partnership;
- the implementation of technology such as bodycams was welcomed. However, the impact of budget cuts was recognised;
- some of the high percentages in the report could be misleading, and it was important to remember that the numbers were low;
- the positive change in respect of incidences of sexual crime was welcomed; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the delivery of the “Driving Ambition” road safety initiative for young drivers; ongoing activity to target the supply of drugs; how drivers without insurance were identified; the provision of defibrillators in Police vehicles; and the importance of the Council retaining the Access Ranger posts which had been in place for the past couple of years.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023, for the period covering 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022.

4. High Life Highland – Presentation High Life na Gàidhealtachd – Taisbeanadh

Wilma Kelt, Adult and Youth Services Officer, High Life Highland, gave a presentation on High Life Highland Youth Services in Kinlochbervie, Farr, Ullapool (Assynt), Golspie and Dornoch. Detailed information was provided on staffing, challenges, positives, good news stories, funding, partners, achievement and 1:1 work. Statistics were also provided in respect of engagements, learning hours and programmed activities, and attention was drawn to the Youth Development Facebook page where Youth Development Officers posted updates and information.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on the barriers to the recruitment of staff; the opening hours of the “Big Blue Box” portacabin in Kinlochbervie; learning hours; and, in relation to the youth activities taking place in Kinlochbervie and Farr, the proposed transport arrangements for young people in outlying communities such as Tongue, Bettyhill, Scourie and Durness;
- the Young Leaders initiative was commended;
- Mr J McGillivray requested contact details for the Youth Development Officer in Dornoch;
- the youth activity taking place in Lochinver was welcomed. However, there was still no opportunity for pupils in Assynt to mix with their wider peer group in Ullapool due to the lack of transport after school hours. Similarly, Assynt pupils were not able to take part in sports training sessions and other extracurricular activities. The Chair added that it was well recognised that transport was an issue throughout Sutherland, and indeed throughout Highland, and efforts were being made to address it.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Youth Work in Sutherland – Presentation
Obair Òigridh ann an Cataibh – Taisbeanadh

Clair Nichols, Chief Officer, Youth Highland, gave a presentation during which it was explained that Youth Highland supported a network of voluntary and third sector organisations to work with young people to deliver youth work outcomes in community settings. Details were provided of Youth Highland's vision, values and membership, including the clubs currently supported in Sutherland. Information was also provided on the establishment and impact of The Voluntary Youth Network, area youth hubs evidencing good practice, aligning to regional and national priorities; the funding landscape, potential youth work opportunities in Sutherland; and proposed actions.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the informative presentation was welcomed;
- closer collaboration between High Life Highland and the third sector would be beneficial;
- information was sought, and provided, on staffing, particularly the balance of paid staff and volunteers; and
- recruitment of staff was an issue across the board and was linked to the wider issue of depopulation. If investment in communities and, more importantly, young people, did not take place, depopulation would continue to increase.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

6. Focus North Partnership - Presentation
Com-pàirteachas Fòcas a' Chinn a Tuath – Taisbeanadh

Peter Faccenda, Focus North Partnership Manager, gave a presentation on the Focus North Partnership, formerly the Caithness and Sutherland Regeneration Partnership. Information was provided on the evolution of the Partnership, the new approach and rationale, the reasons behind the new identity, the Focus North Strategic Operational Policy 2023-2026 and the Focus North Partnership Charter.

A paper had also been circulated in connection with this item seeking the Committee's support for the new approach for the Partnership.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the focus on energy, particularly hydrogen production, was welcomed;
- in relation to the decommissioning of Dounreay, information was sought, and provided, as to whether there was a target date for final closure. It was added that Dounreay were still offering high-quality jobs and apprenticeships and it was hoped the work of the Partnership would continue that drive;
- it was necessary to grasp the opportunities that existed in terms of high technology jobs;
- the work of the Partnership could lead the way in a number of different areas;
- information was sought, and provided, as to any potential spin-offs from Opportunity Cromarty Firth and whether there was any way forward in relation to the small modular reactors developed by Rolls-Royce;

- the decommissioning of Dounreay could potentially take longer than the number of years it had been operational;
- on the point being raised, further information was provided on the Focus North Conference which it was hoped Members would be able to attend; and
- the importance of collaborative working was emphasised.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the presentation;
- ii. **NOTED** the recent review and rebranding of the Focus North Partnership; and
- iii. **AGREED** to support the Focus North Masterplan and structure, and the Council's role in the Partnership.

7. **Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2023/2024** **Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2023/24**

There had been circulated Report No SCC/02/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

During discussion, concern was expressed that a number of garages and garage sites were still void. In addition, Members had received anecdotal reports of garages being in a poor state of repair and an update was sought, and provided, in that regard.

In relation to the level of rent increase to be applied to garages and garage sites, the Chair commented that he was conscious of the cost of living crisis. Whilst he recognised that the rate of inflation was currently approximately 10%, he did not wish to place any additional pressures on households. He therefore proposed that a 4% increase be applied. Other Members expressed support for the recommended increase of 7%. However, the majority supported the Chair's proposal.

The Committee **AGREED** that a 4% rent increase be applied to Sutherland garages and garage sites.

8. **Community Regeneration Fund – Application Approval** **Maoineachadh Ath-bheòthachadh Coimhearsnachd – Aonta Iarrais**

Declaration of Interest: Mr J McGillivray declared an interest in this item as a Director of Dornoch Area Community Interest Company.

There had been circulated Report No SCC/03/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

In introducing the report, Paula Betts, Project Officer (Community Regeneration), highlighted that paragraph 2.1(ii) of the report should refer to the Community Regeneration Fund, not the Highland Coastal Communities Fund. In addition, it was explained that, within the umbrella term of the Community Regeneration Fund, the Community Regeneration team also administered the community-led Local Development Fund on behalf of the Highland Strategic Local Action Group (LAG). The LAG had agreed the final grant award from this fund, which represented additional investment of £326,008.86 in projects in Sutherland. This had reduced the total grant request from the local funds for a number of projects, details of which were provided.

The Committee was asked to consider all applications presented for funding and agree whether to approve, defer or reject the application. An approval of funding should detail the amount approved and outline any conditions of funding that Members wished to attach to the approval over and above the required technical conditions. A deferral would allow an applicant to resubmit the current application at a future date with updated information or for the project to be approved subject to further funding becoming available. A rejection would mean that the application would not proceed and any future application to the fund should be brought forward initially as a new expression of interest.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that, should all the applications be approved, there would be £69,995.65 remaining in the area budget. The Chair commented that all the projects were viable and worthy of support and proposed that the applications be approved en masse.

Thanks having been expressed to the Project Officer for her efforts, the Committee **APPROVED** all of the applications presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:-

Applicant	Project	Grant awarded
Community Care Assynt Ltd	Arts & Crafts Wellbeing Sessions	£4,866.00
The Highland Council	Achmelvich Beach Car Park and Toilets	£246,678.00
Lochinver Primary School Parent Council	Outdoor Play Equipment Project	£54,000.00
Helmsdale & District Development Fund	Helmsdale Play Space	£70,000.00
The Dornoch Area Community Interest Company	Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)	£63,986.00
Community Care Assynt	Core Management	£16,500.00
Culrain & District Hall Committee	Hall extension, refurb and disability facilities	£45,120.61
Community Care Assynt Ltd	Warm Hub	£4,856.55
Melness Crofters Estate	Affordable Housing in Melness	£18,900.00
Dornoch Area CIC	Community Transport Project	£4,800.00
Farr North Community Development Trust	Farr Goes Community Transport	£36,273.13
Dornoch Firth Group	Cares Counselling Project	£8,778.00
Assynt Foundation	Upgrading and resurfacing of single track road to improve access	£37,345.42
Brora Development Trust	Visitor Information Point	£13,467.00
Kyle of Sutherland Hub Ltd	The Hubs – community resource building	£43,200.00
Brora Development Trust	Town Centre Improvements	£8,800.00
Go Golspie	Fountain Road Hall Improvement Project	£21,042.00
Total		£698,612.58

9. Dornoch Common Good Fund: Annual Report 2021/22, Proposed Budget 2023/24 and Quarter Monitoring Statement 2022/23
Aithisg Bhliadhnail 2021/22, Buidseat ga Mholadh airson 2023/24 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh Cairteil 2022/23

Declaration of Interest: Mr J McGillivray declared an interest in this item as a Director of Dornoch Area Community Interest Company.

There had been circulated Report No SCC/04/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place and the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Chair commented that it was necessary to take the Common Good Fund's liabilities into consideration when making any decisions on spend, and to ensure that any projects funded were sustainable and provided legacy impacts. He emphasised the importance of Members' role as Trustees of the Common Good Fund, and that any decisions taken had to be in the best interests of Dornoch as a whole.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Dornoch Common Good Fund Annual Report and Accounts for 2021/22;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Dornoch Common Good Fund, as shown in the Q3 monitoring statement against budget for 2022/23;
- iii. **AGREED** the Dornoch Common Good Fund Annual Budget for 2023/24; and
- iv. **APPROVED** £50,000 for DACIC Project Curlew Phase 2 – Multi Use Games Area.

10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated, and were **NOTED**, Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 7 November 2022, which had been approved by the Council on 8 December 2022.

The meeting concluded at 1.50 pm.