

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 23 February 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baldrey (remote)
Mr J Bruce
Mr J Finlayson (remote)
Mr L Fraser (remote)
Mr R Gale
Mr A Graham
Mr R Gunn
Mrs J Hendry
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)

Mr P Logue (remote)
Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Ms K MacLean (substitute)
Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Ms L Niven (remote)
Ms M Nolan (remote)
Mrs M Reid (substitute)

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)
Dr C Birt (remote)
Mrs I Campbell
Mr A Christie (remote)
Ms S Fanet (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)
Mr S Kennedy
Mr R MacKintosh (remote)

Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mrs B McAllister (remote)
Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr C Munro (remote)
Mrs M Paterson
Mrs T Robertson

In attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Ms C Campbell, Head of Community Operations and Logistics
Ms A Clark, Head of Community Support and Engagement
Ms S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Miss M Murray, Interim Principal Administrator
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Superintendent R Shepherd, Police Scotland

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.

Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr M Cameron, Ms T Collier and Mr M Green.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

The Chair spoke to a number of good news items as follows:-

- Graeme Turnbull, Acting Fleet Coordinator in the Transport and Logistics team, had successfully passed his transport manager qualification and had achieved a Certificate of Professional Competence for Transport Managers in Road Haulage.
- Sara Krzyzanowski, Customer Services Officer at the Dingwall Service Point, had been successful in passing the examination for the Certificate in the Law & Practice of Registration in Scotland. Having another fully qualified Registrar in Highland was to be welcomed.
- Annemarie MacAlpine, Customer Services Operations Manager, had been nominated by fellow members of the Executive Council for the position of Vice President of the Association of Registrars of Scotland and would take up this position at the Annual General Meeting in Edinburgh in May. After a period of two years as Vice President, Annemarie would then take on the mantle of President of the Association.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair offered his congratulations to these three members of staff for their significant achievements and raising the profile of Highland.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4a. Police Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Poileis

There had been circulated Report No CP/1a/23 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

The Chair welcomed Chief Superintendent Shepherd to his first meeting of the Committee since his appointment as Divisional Commander and looked forward to working with him in a full and cooperative fashion.

Chief Superintendent Shepherd introduced himself and expressed thanks to his predecessor, Chief Superintendent Trickett, for his hard work during his tenure. He went on to introduce the Performance Report, explaining that he proposed, in future, to include additional statistics that might be of interest to Councillors and communities, namely, public confidence rating, satisfaction of service users, and 101 and 999 call information. He also provided operational updates on the Local Policing Strategic Demand Review; resourcing and custody provision in Caithness; proposals for a new Police Station in the Alness area; Highland Blues, a six-part

documentary on Highland policing; and the Taser strategy. It was proposed to include similar updates in future performance reports.

During discussion, the following issues were raised and responded to:-

- transporting detainees from one area to another was costly and time-consuming, and a timescale was sought for the review of custody provision in Caithness;
- speeding in built-up areas was a common complaint at Community Council meetings, and it was questioned what could be done to reduce such instances and identify the culprits;
- concern was expressed that demand on policing continued to increase and was likely to be seen in statistics during the coming year;
- the implementation of technology, such as mobile devices, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in Highland was welcomed;
- reference was made to increasing instances of risk-taking driver behaviour and road rage, and the Driver Engagement North initiative was welcomed;
- concern was expressed regarding the increase in acquisitive crime and the long-lasting and profound effect on victims;
- information was sought as to how recruitment was progressing and how this would impact on the Chief Superintendent's plans;
- Local Members were concerned regarding the number of Police vacancies on Skye, despite being in the privileged position of having a Police Hostel;
- it was queried what Chief Superintendent Shepherd's plans were to visit rural areas to discuss issues of concern to local communities. For example, drugs were seen as a serious issue on Skye despite Police reports appearing to suggest otherwise;
- it was questioned whether the condition of roads was a contributing factor to fatal and serious road traffic accidents. Particular reference was made to the A9 which was of concern to many people;
- it would be useful if the New Driver Early Intervention Scheme could be expanded to include school pupils who were approaching driving age;
- further information was requested regarding the decrease in drug possession offences and whether this was linked to the reduction in Stop and Search;
- Members had heard previously about the difficulties the Police had in terms of detaining people with mental health issues, and further information was sought in that regard, including how the Police worked with NHS Highland;
- Members had previously raised concerns regarding having a centralised Armed Response Unit covering the whole of the Highlands and Islands, and the immediate response in terms of having Tasers in every Police Station and training many more officers was welcomed;
- the proposed additional statistics were welcomed, and this would be helpful across all Committees the Police reported to;
- concern was expressed that the statistics did not reflect all crime as many people gave up due to long response times when they called to report an incident;
- in Nairn there was a Police Station but no full-time Police officers, and it was suggested that people had become despondent about reporting crimes as officers had to come from elsewhere;
- people reported crime on housing estates to the Council's Housing Service rather than the Police due to fear of retribution, and there was a need for better

information sharing to resolve issues more quickly, particularly those relating to anti-social behaviour and drugs;

- it was hoped the Council could support calls for additional Scottish Government funding to aid Police resources in Highland and make it a safer place;
- greater Police visibility and engagement with schools and community groups would increase public confidence. However, it was recognised that time and resources were limited;
- further information was sought regarding blackmailing of vulnerable males; and
- it was queried how confident the Chief Superintendent was that new recruits could be retained in Highland for the duration of their career.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020-2023 Year 3, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2022 - 31 December 2022.

4b. Highland Draft Local Police Plan 2023-2026 – Consultation Response Dreachd Phlana Poileis Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd 2023-2026 – Freagairt Cho-chomhairle

There had been circulated Report No CP/1b/23 dated 6 February 2023 by Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the Council's response to the draft Highland Local Police Plan.

5. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report: 2022/23 Quarter 3 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach: Cairteal 3 2022/23

There had been circulated Report No CP/2/23 dated 8 February 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to whether there were any seasonal or other factors that were likely to significantly impact the final outturn, positively or negatively; what happened in the event of a budget deficit at the end of the financial year; and whether the vacancy rate was expected to increase from the current 11% and if there would be an impact on service provision as a result; and
- reference was made to the issues that had been experienced in some Inverness Wards last year in terms of grass-cutting, and an assurance was sought that recruitment of seasonal staff was taking place sufficiently early to ensure grass-cutting could commence in April/May. The Chair assured Members that recruitment to seasonal posts was already underway. A great deal of thought had been given to the recruitment challenges that had been experienced, and measures such as converting some seasonal posts to permanent positions to make them more attractive to potential candidates were being explored.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the forecasted outturn for the 22/23 Revenue budget for the Communities and Place Service as at Quarter 3 was £1.210m overspend;
- ii. higher costs pertaining to fuel and parts including vehicle components, spares and tyres were placing significant pressures on the budget.

6. Capital Budget Monitoring Report: 2022/23 Quarter 3 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Calpa: Cairteal 3 2022/23

There had been circulated Report No CP/3/23 dated 31 January 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, regarding the slippage in respect of fleet and its impact on service provision;
- a number of public conveniences across Highland had been the subject of vandalism and some were closed as a result. However, there appeared to be a reluctance to install CCTV in certain areas, even where Community Councils had offered to fund it, and it was queried how that could be overcome. The Head of Community Operations and Logistics undertook to try to progress matters in respect of Golspie public conveniences. However, it was questioned whether CCTV would solve the problem;
- there had been a number of successful play park projects across Highland, and the partnership working that had taken place in that regard was commended. In addition, it was questioned whether there had been an explanation from the Scottish Government as to why a large proportion of play park funding would not be distributed until 2025/26;
- on the point being raised, the Chair confirmed that a further Members' visit to Inverness Waste Transfer Station could be arranged once it was operational;
- burial grounds were one of the most important services the Council provided and the need for long-term planning was emphasised, there being a large number with limited remaining capacity. Particular reference was made to Kilvean Cemetery, and it was suggested it was necessary to look for another major cemetery site in Inverness. Reassurance having been sought in respect of the various burial ground projects set out in Appendix 1 of the report, the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place, spoke to the clear governance arrangements in place and confirmed that a report on long-term planning could be presented to a future meeting to provide further reassurance; and
- on the point being raised, the Chair confirmed that a briefing on cemeteries in Nairn could be arranged for Local Members and suggested that Mr L Fraser contact the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, in that regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the forecasted capital outturn for the Communities and Place Service for 22/23 as at Quarter 3;
- ii. **APPROVED** the Play Park funding distribution proposals as detailed at section 4.9 of the report;
- iii. **NOTED** the current forecasts for the major projects in the Communities and Place Service; and
- iv. **AGREED** that a report on long-term planning in respect of burial grounds be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

7. Environmental Health Performance 22/23 and Operational Plan to 23/24 Coileanadh Slàinte Àrainneachdail 22/23 agus Plana Obrachaidh gu 23/24

There had been circulated Report No CP/4/23 dated 3 February 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern having been expressed regarding the increase in dog fouling, the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, sought feedback from Members regarding problem areas and confirmed he was happy to look at where patrols could be increased, improving signage and whether there was any educational material that could be used. In addition, Members raised the issue of school fields being closed to the public after hours due to being unable to control dog fouling, and the the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, undertook to liaise with colleagues in the Education and Learning Service in that regard;
- reference having been made to an abandoned catering van at Loch Lochy, the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, confirmed that local officers were dealing with the matter and undertook to check the current position;
- constituents in Invergordon were concerned regarding the issue of seagulls and information was sought, and provided, as to whether there were any plans to reduce numbers in a safe and humane way. The Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, undertook to provide a Members' briefing on the matter. Members added that seagulls were now a red-listed endangered species, and it was necessary to be cognisant of that and engage with organisations such as the RSPB as to how best to deter them from urban areas without endangering them further; and
- Highland had some of the cleanest air in Britain but there were problem areas such as Academy Street and Telford Street in Inverness. It was confirmed that the annual Local Air Quality Progress Report to the Scottish Government could be provided to Mr A Graham for information.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Environmental Health performance in 2022/23 to date including delivering statutory duties to over 6000 properties on private water supplies, over 5000 food businesses, and responding to 12,000 annual service requests on a wide range of public health, nuisance, licensing, safety, dog control, animal health and incivility issues;
- ii. **APPROVED** the Environmental Health Operational Plan to 31 March 2024 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- iii. **NOTED** that the team was preparing annual reports on local Environmental Health team performance for Area Committees in 2023.

8. Joint Health Protection Plan 2023-2025 Co-Phlana Dion Slàinte 2023-2025

There had been circulated Report No CP/5/23 dated 2 February 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Joint Health Protection Plan 2023-2025.

**9. Highland Community Led Initiatives – Cost of Living Support Fund Update
Iomairtean air an Stiùireadh le Coimhearsnachdan na Gàidhealtachd – Cunntas
às Ùr mu Mhaoin Taic Cosgais Bith-beò**

There had been circulated Report No CP/6/23 dated 1 February 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the fact that the fund had been used so quickly was testament to how much it was needed;
- the number of projects coming to fruition throughout Highland was welcomed;
- it was questioned why there was a disparity in terms of the number of projects across the various areas and what the barriers were to carrying out such projects and applying for funding;
- the difference a local authority could make to people's lives in times of hardship was emphasised;
- the work being done by volunteers across many different kinds of organisations was acknowledged; and
- the need to build resilience and activity within communities was emphasised.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the process established to distribute the Cost of Living Support Fund; and
- ii. the awards made to date, including the range of initiatives supported to help alleviate the effects of the cost of living crisis in their communities.

**10. Update on Waste Strategy
Cunntas às Ùr mu Ro-innleachd Sgudail**

There had been circulated Report No CP/7/23 dated 3 February 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was questioned if there was a plan in place in the event the funding application to Zero Waste Scotland was unsuccessful, and how much financial gain could be expected from an increase in recycling;
- support was expressed for the proposed works at Skye Waste Transfer Station;
- clarification was sought, and provided, concerning the recommendations in the report. It was confirmed that acceptance of the funding included acceptance of the service changes to be funded;
- the provision of an extra bin for every household could put pressure on space in communal areas, especially in blocks of flats, and adaptations to bin storage at Council-owned properties might be required;
- the need to provide education and information to households on the proposed service changes was emphasised;
- more detailed information on the long-term revenue implications of the proposed service changes was requested and the Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations, undertook to provide this at a future meeting of the Committee;

- members of the public had expressed confusion around the rules about bringing trailers and vans with DIY waste to Recycling Centres, and clarification was sought, and provided, in that regard; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that glass recycling banks would continue to be in operation.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
- ii. **APPROVED** the acceptance of funding to enable service change should the Highland Council's application to the Scottish Governments Recycling Improvement Fund (RIF) be successful; and
- iii. **NOTED** the updated position on Waste Transfer Station Infrastructure in Aviemore, Inverness and Fort William.

11. Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group Geàrr-chunntas Buidheann Obrach Ro-innleachd Sgudail

The Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 19 January 2023 were **APPROVED**.

The meeting concluded at 1.00 pm.