

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday, 23 January 2023, at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms T Collier
Mr D Louden
Ms M Nolan

Ms S Rawlings
Mr A Rhind

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property
Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager
Mr I Moncrieff, Roads Operations Manager
Mr J Mitchell, Area Housing Manager (East)
Ms P Betts, Project Officer – Community Regeneration
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator

Also in Attendance:

Mr M Stubbs, Station 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 Committee.**

**Mr D Louden in the Chair
(except for Item 4 when Ms M Nolan was in the Chair)**

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mrs P Munro and Ms M Smith.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 4 – Mr D Louden and Ms T Collier.

3. Fire – Area Performance Summary Report Smàladh – Geàrr Aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No ERA/01/23 dated 11 January 2023 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the reduction in the number of deliberate fires and the improved performance in relation to road traffic accidents were welcomed. Information was sought and provided on work being undertaken, particularly in schools, to tackle antisocial behaviour in relation to fire starting;

- concern was expressed at the poor state and safety of a building in the centre of Tain, which fire crews had recently attended. A meeting was proposed with Building Standards to further consider this; and
- information was sought and provided on the policy for dealing with repeated false alarms, which would include the provision of specialist alarm advice to mitigate against unwanted signals. It was emphasised that alarms would always be responded to despite there having been repeated false alarms.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report and **AGREED** to arrange a meeting with the SFRS and the Council’s Building Standards team to discuss the derelict building in the centre of Tain.

4. Community Regeneration Funding – Application Approvals
Maoineachadh Ath-bheòthachadh Coimhearsnachd – Aontaidhean Iarrtasan

Declarations of Interest:

Mr D Louden declared an interest in this item as a Director of Tain Heritage Trust, and he left the meeting for the duration of the item. Ms M Nolan took the chair in his absence.

Ms T Collier declared an interest in the application from Invergordon Museum due to a family connection, and she left the meeting during discussion of that application.

There had been circulated Report No ERA/02/23 dated 9 January 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

Projects were considered and decided as follows:

Applicant	Project	Grant awarded
Tain Heritage Trust	The Picture House Regeneration Project	£54,131.00
Tain Youth Café YMCA	Children, Youth and Family support	£12,672.20
Evanton Social & Event Group	Winter Lunches for Over 60s	£2,700
Ross Sutherland Rugby Club	Improving External Club Areas	£30,000
Befrienders Highland	Extending Face to Face Mental Health Befriending	£10,825.20
Milton Community Woodland	Solar Panels upgrade	Deferred pending further information on the costs
Milton Community Woodland	Path maintenance	Deferred pending further information on the costs and the length of path.
CCAST	Mansfield Estate support programme	£25,137.78, subject to receipt of a letter of support from the

		<i>Council's Tenant Participation officers.</i>
Change Mental Health - (previously Support in Mind Scotland)	Easter Ross Outreach	Deferred pending receipt of further information, with the project being welcomed in principle.
Royal British Legion, Invergordon	Refurbishment of Legion Hall	Deferred pending receipt of further information. Support should be offered with the application if required.
Invergordon Museum	Heat hub	Deferred pending receipt of further information on the long term viability of the project, with particular reference to ongoing maintenance and replacement costs.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** all applications presented for funding and that 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; and
- ii. **AGREED**, as detailed above, which applications should receive a funding award from HCCF up to the value of the available area allocation.

5. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2023-24** **Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgireil 2023-24**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/03/23 dated 9 January 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the improvements planned for the Dingwall to Evanton Back Road were welcomed;
- it was suggested that the budget be re-prioritised in light of the recent damage caused by severe winter weather, however this would likely cause an unworkable delay and move towards an ad hoc rather than a structured programme. In addition, patching work was generally undertaken after the end of the winter period, due to the need for resources to be used for winter maintenance and the likelihood of patching work failing if immediately followed by severe winter weather. It was also clarified that any additional patching work would have an impact on other budgets, there being a finite amount of funding; and

- information was sought and provided on why liquid tar was no longer used to seal the centre of roads, although the vertical edges of roads were still sealed when appropriate.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed 2023/24 Area Roads Capital Programme for Easter Ross Area.

6. **Place Based Investment Fund Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mun Mhaoin Stèidhichte air Àite**

There had been circulated Report No ERA/04/23 dated 13 January 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Community and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the reallocation of the £3,000 of PBIF monies to the Community Grants stream aimed at addressing the 4 harms of Covid.

7. **Invergordon Common Good Fund** **Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain**

There had been circulated Report No ERA05/23 dated 12 January 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Community and Place.
6539

Members queried the downward revaluation of the Bouchardon Bust and an explanation would be sought from Finance outwith the meeting. A brief summary was provided of the comprehensive statutory process, including public consultation, that would be required to sell the Bust should Members decide to initiate this.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Invergordon Common Good Fund Annual Report and end of year position for 2021/22;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Invergordon Common Good Fund, as shown in the 2022/23 Quarter 3 monitoring statement;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed budget for 2023/24; and
- iv. **NOTED** the current position in relation to the Town Hall and the Bouchardon Bust; and
- v. **AGREED** further information on the downward revaluation of Bouchardon Bust would be provided to Members outwith the meeting.

8. **Tain Common Good Fund** **Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No ERA06/23 dated 12 January 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Community and Place.
7028

Members drew attention to the outstanding action in relation to the possible investment of the fund through the Pensions Committee Investment Sub-Committee, which would be followed up later in the year.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Tain Common Good Annual Report and accounts for 2021/22 and end of year position;
- ii. **NOTED** the position of the Tain Common Good Fund, as shown in the 2022/23 Quarter 3 monitoring statement;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed budget for the Tain Common Good for 2023/24; and
- iv. **NOTED** the outstanding action to investigate whether the Fund should be invested through the Pensions Committee Investment Sub-Committee remained outstanding.

9. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 8 November 2022, which were approved by the Council on 8 December 2022.

10. Garage Rents Màil Gharaidsean

There had been circulated Report No ERA/07/23 dated 17 January 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

It was explained that the Housing Manager would attend a Ward Business Meeting in February to discuss previously raised concerns about the condition and future use of garage stock.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members considered a 7% increase too high whilst in the midst of a cost of living crisis. Discussion took place on the amount of investment that could be raised by a 3% or a 7% increase, and whether the funds raised (approx. £13k on a 7%) was a significant enough sum to make a reasonable difference to the situation. It was clarified that no funding from the Housing Revenue Account would be available to invest in garages and the need for a revenue stream in order to improve them was vital; and
- concern was expressed at the high rate of garage voids (42%) and options to tackle this would be considered in the first instance at the Ward Business Meetings in February 2023.

Mr D Loudon **moved** that a 7% rent increase be applied, as recommended in the report.

Ms M Nolan, seconded by Ms T Collier, moved as an **amendment**, that a 3% rent increase be applied.

Mr Loudon's motion failed to find a seconder and fell, and the Committee **AGREED** a 3% rent increase to apply to Easter Ross Garages.

The meeting ended at 12.10pm.