

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **City of Inverness Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Monday 5 June 2023 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr C Aitken	Mrs J Hendry
Mr C Ballance	Ms E Knox (Remote)
Mr B Boyd	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mr I Brown	Mr R MacKintosh (Remote)
Mr M Cameron	Mr A MacKintosh
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Ms K MacLean
Mr A Christie	Mr D Macpherson
Mr D Fraser	Mrs M Reid
Mr K Gowans	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Graham	Mr A Sinclair (Remote)
Mr D Gregg	

Officials in Attendance:

Mr D Haas, Inverness City Area Manager, Communities and Place
Mr G Munro, Revenues Manager, Resources & Finance
Ms L Mateer, Principal Housing Officer, Housing & Property
Mr E Marsh, Principal Repairs Officer, Housing & Property
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance & Governance
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr R King, Station Commander Inverness, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
Mr C MacFarlane, Manager of Victorian Market

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

Mr I Brown in the Chair

Preliminaries

On behalf of the Committee the Chair expressed condolences to Councillor McAllister and Councillor Boyd on the recent sad losses both had experienced within their families.

Praise was also expressed to Inverness Caledonian Thistle on reaching the Scottish Cup final. Although losing against Celtic Football Club, a team who competed at European level, it had been a valiant attempt. Some Members had attended the match and highlighted how well the team had played. They had done the City of Inverness proud and hopefully next season they would be promoted to the Premier League.

Business

- 1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms H Crawford and Mrs B McAllister.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 7: Mr A Christie and Mr Gregg
Item 8a: Mr A Christie and Mr Gregg

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – Area Performance Report Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No CIA/13/23 dated 22 May 2023 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members unanimously thanked and praised the bravery of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) across Highland who had worked tirelessly over the last few days tackling a major wildfire near Cannich. The impact on the village was acknowledged, as was the assistance the community, gamekeepers, local sports clubs and landowners had provided. Firefighters would have experienced physical as well as mental trauma and particular mention was made of the two firefighters who had been hospitalised with the Committee sending their best wishes for a full and speedy recovery. Going forward, with Climate Change and the potential for similar instances occurring, the Committee offered any assistance they could provide;
- the wildfire in Cannich had highlighted the difficulty in recruiting retained firefighters in rural areas such as Cannich and an offer was made of any help Members could give to address this. It was important to increase the availability statistics for Cannich and Members were informed of potential ideas how this could be achieved;
- initial training for retained firefighters was a considerable undertaking and the recent wildfire had demonstrated the commitment of personnel;
- it was important to emphasise to the Westminster and Scottish Governments, despite a relatively low population, the vast geographical size of Highland and that resources were required accordingly;
- many properties had installed interlocked fire systems and Members asked for information as to the direct impact this had had on accidental dwelling fires;
- demographics on age in relation to accidental dwelling fires was also requested and how the elderly could be made aware of how they could contact the (SFRS) for advice and information;
- from 1 July 2023 the SFRS's proposal not to attend automatic fire alarm call outs to commercial businesses was of concern; and
- as a result of a recent road traffic accident it had been necessary to close the A9 and this has caused additional pressure on other roads and confirmation was sought that the consequent impact of these detours were taken into consideration.

The Committee **NOTED** the attached Area Performance Report.

4. Victorian Market Update Cunntas às Ùr mun Mhargadh Bhictòrianach

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/14/23 dated 23 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

A presentation was undertaken by the Manager of Victorian Market, Mr C MacFarlane. During the presentation an update was provided on the progress that had been made with the Victorian Market new development and the strong marketing planning in place such as a renewed website, planned local events and social media advertisements.

Following the presentation and during discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was queried if the Victorian Market had displayed public toilet signage to inform customers of the available facilities;
- it was emphasised the need to accurately measure footfall within the Market to be able to gauge its success with tangible data;
- the continued promotion of the Market on social media platforms was encouraged;
- Members welcomed responses provided to negative reviews and expressed appreciation for the positive reviews on social media as it was felt that this created further engagement. In this regard it was queried if there was a customer comment box placed within the Market;
- it was felt that acoustic live music would benefit from a form of amplification due to the general background noise generated from the restaurant facilities;
- information was sought on what steps were previously taken to try to fill the vacant Retail Units before opening and what work was currently being undertaken to fill the vacant Retail Units within the Market;
- information was sought regarding what could be carried out to make the Church Street entrance area more attractive to customers. In this regard Members requested information regarding the footfall numbers using the Church Street entrance;
- it was queried if the portable space heaters were being paid for out of the Common Good Fund or being paid for from the tenant communal charges;
- an update was requested on how the Market performed during the summer period, what were the plans for the winter period and were there any lessons learned. In this regard it was requested to change the date for the report on the review and associated recommendations to November 2023;
- Members queried what discussions had taken place with the private owners regarding the Queensgate entrance area to remove buckets from the corridor;
- it was queried when the model train would be reinstated within the Market;
- the flexible units were welcomed as it was felt that these would encourage more fledgling businesses to utilise the provision;
- the need to encourage a variety of vendors within the Market was stressed as this would attract more customers;
- it was felt that there was insufficient management information being acquired to lead and direct the Market in the right direction, such as footfall at certain times of the week, the demographics of the visitors and how these were being targeted with strategic advertisements;

- it was highlighted that the advertisement colour scheme for newspaper advertisements did not lend itself well to newsprint. In this regard it was suggested that the advertisements be reviewed and consider adding additional colour and brightness;
- it was suggested that recycling the heat from the cooking facilities be considered to heat other areas of the facility, potentially providing hot water for the public toilets. In this regard it was also suggested that additional solar panels could be considered for the pyramid roof;
- it was queried if a deposit return scheme unit would be considered for the Market, as it was felt that this would attract additional footfall;
- regarding the food court opening at the Eastgate Shopping Centre, it was queried what impact this has had on the Victorian Market food court opening;
- as the UHI facilitated professional cookery classes, it was queried if UHI had been approached to discuss potential use of the vacant stalls to give experience to students in a commercial setting; and
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that the Market Manager was based in an office at the Victorian Market.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the progress in respect of the work agreed through the Victorian Market Action Plan since the last report to the City Committee and the work ongoing to progress the letting of all new units in the Market;
- AGREED** that the current management arrangements were extended for a further year to enable a review to be undertaken to establish future management and commercial development requirements; and
- NOTED** that a report on the review and associated recommendations would come to the City Committee by 20 November 2023.

5. **Inverness Wards Repurposing COVID-19 Fund** **Maoin Ath-adhbharachaidh COVID-19 Uàrdan Inbhir Nis**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/15/23 dated 15 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the repurposing of the following COVID-19 funds:-

- **Ward 12 – Aird & Loch Ness**
£1,145 to support Amenity Services with repairs and improvements to play parks in the Ward.
- **Ward 14 – Inverness Central**
£2,000 to support Amenity Services with repairs and improvements to play parks in the Ward.
- **Ward 16 – Inverness Millburn**
£1,800 to support Amenity Services with repairs and improvements to play parks in the Ward
- **Ward 17 – Culloden & Ardersier**
£10,350 to support Amenity Services with repairs and improvements to play parks in the Ward.

**6. City of Inverness Ward Discretionary Budget Approvals
Aontaidhean Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird Cathair-bhaile Inbhir Nis**

**a) Ward Discretionary Budget Applications Approved - 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023
Iarrtasan Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird air an Aotachadh – 1 Giblean 2022 gu 31 Màrt 2023**

There had been circulated, for noting, Report No CIA/16/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place detailing the Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved since 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The Committee **NOTED** the Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved since 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

**b) Ward Discretionary Budget Applications Approved since 1 April 2023
Iarrtasan Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird air an Aotachadh bho 1 Giblean 2023**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following City of Inverness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 1 April 2023:-

Ward 12

- Orchard Play Park Beauty - £864.80
- Glen Urquhart Men's Shed: Purchase of Laser Cut / Engraving Machine - £500

Ward 13

- Charleston Academy Community Complex: Gala Fun Day - £1,500

Ward 14

- Inverness Royal Academy: Outward Bound Targeted Intervention and Nurture Course - £420
- 12th Inverness Boys Brigade (Dalneigh): National Table Tennis Final Travel & Accommodation - £372

Ward 16

- Inverness Royal Academy: Outward Bound Targeted Intervention and Nurture Course - £420

Ward 15,17 and 19

- No spend to date

**7. Housing Performance Report –1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2022 gu 31 Màrt 2023**

Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg made Transparency Statements in respect of this item in their capacity as General Manager and Board Member of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau respectively. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the item and any personal connection, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CIA/17/23 dated 5 June 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- further clarification was sought, and provided, as to the assistance provided by the local housing team to offer advice and assistance to tenants signposting them to specialist services to prevent rent arrears getting out of control;
- it was queried if the increase in rent arrears was impacting on the ability to carry out repairs;
- with regard to rent arrears it would be useful to see historic trends as well as a protectory looking forward so resources could be planned to meet demand. In addition, additional information would enable greater analysis of the root causes of rent arrears and to refocus work;
- information was sought as to the number of tenants who were in arrears for one month, two months etc as well as the number who had been helped to pay off their arrears;
- it was difficult to engage with some tenants who might not want to admit they were in debt, given the stigma that was attached, but the earlier the intervention the better the outcome was;
- the pattern of rent arrears was sadly mirrored elsewhere in Scotland;
- often those presenting as homeless had no connection to Highland;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how homelessness data was gathered;
- the Housing Team were commended for their work in supporting people who were often in crisis;
- concern was expressed at reports of illegal entry to properties in Inverness to change electricity meters;
- it was suggested future housing performance reports could focus on specific topics;
- clarification was sought if the average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs over each Quarter was cumulative. In this regard, it was noted that the time taken to complete emergency repairs in Quarter 4 was considerably less than that in Quarter 3. Quarter 3 figures were, in fact, markedly higher than all the other Quarters and it was queried if this had occurred in previous years;
- the definition of what constituted an emergency repair was sought;
- the Scottish Housing Network (SHN) target to complete emergency repairs was 4.2 hours while the Highland Council target was 14. In comparison, the time taken to complete non-emergency repairs, particularly in Quarter 3, was ahead of the SHN target, Whilst this was to be commended, it was important that the emergency repairs were targeted for improvement;
- details as to the number of emergency and routine repairs were requested;
- information was sought, and provided, as to the process followed when a property was re-let to ensure repairs were carried out as quickly as possible. Where there was a delay in re-letting a property, it was important to inform Ward Members as they were often as by constituents what was happening;
- at times individuals were reluctant to move into properties until they were able to afford basic furnishings and it was important that these were directed towards the Council's Welfare team;
- in regard to a query it was confirmed that the Council was, where appropriate, buying properties back at the valuation price; and

- similarly to private landlords, the Council aimed to carry out yearly inspections of its properties.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

8. Inverness Common Good Fund (ICGF) Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Nis

a) Inverness Winter Payments 2022/23 Pàighidhean Geamhraidh Inbhir Nis 2022/23

Mr A Christie and Mr D Gregg made Transparency Statements in respect of this item in their capacity as General Manager and Board Member of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau respectively. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the item and any personal connection, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/18/23 dated 10 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In the previous two years one-off increases had been made in recognition that some individuals were struggling but it was acknowledged that this might not be possible to replicate. It was important to ensure the Inverness Common Good Fund was sustainable going forward but it was suggested that a review could take place at the next meeting of the City of Inverness and Area Committee on 20 November 2023 to gauge if there was any underspend that could be reallocated.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to provide an Inverness Winter Payments Discretionary Scheme for 2023/24 having regard to the financial support available from the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland as set out in sections 6 and 7 of the report;
- ii. to accept applications from 1 December 2023 to 29 February 2024 inclusive;
- iii. to provide a budget of £0.200m for the 2023/24 Scheme noting that payments for Landward Areas would be sourced from available income within the Inverness Benevolent Funds first, with the ICGF being utilised for the Landward Areas, in the event that officers decide it financially prudent to do so;
- iv. to apply a Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase to the original £97 award rate for 2022/23 in order to determine the 2023/24 single tier payment rate;
- v. to apply a CPI increase as set out in (iv) above, agree to use the annual CPI of 8.9% (March 2023 rate), noting this would establish the 2023/24 award amount at £106 for eligible applicants;
- vi. that the criteria utilised for the 2022/23 scheme as set out in paragraphs 9.2 to 9.6 of the report be used as the basis for the 2023/24 Scheme;
- vii. that this discretionary scheme was to be made available to residents in the City of Inverness and the Landward areas of the seven City Wards;

- viii. that BACS payments were to be used for this discretionary scheme as this was the most secure method of payment for recipients of the payment and the Council alike
- ix. to re-review the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme at its meeting on 20 November to look at repurposing any underspend in the Inverness Common Good Fund into an increased payment award for the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme as done in the previous two years.

**b) Grants Applications over £10,000
Iarrtasan Tabhartais thar £10,000**

There had been circulated Report No. CIA/19/23 dated 22 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place. In this connection, there had been circulated separately a copy of supporting documentation as Booklet A.

1. FLOW Photofest

The Committee **APPROVED** a grant of £12,100.

2. Highland Third Sector Interface

The Committee **NOTED** that this application had been withdrawn

3. Flexible Childcare Services Scotland

The Committee **REFUSED** a grant of £15,578 noting the potential for a precedent to be set which could not be sustainable for the ICGF.

**9. Appointments to Outside Bodies
Cur an Dreuchd gu Buidhnean air an Taobh A-muigh**

i. Highlanders Museum – Board of Directors

Following a request from the Highlanders Museum Board of Directors, the Committee **AGREED** to appoint the Provost as a Board Director.

ii. Inverness Women’s Aid Board of Directors

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Ms E Knox to the Inverness Women’s Aid Board of Directors.

**10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

The following Minutes were circulated for noting or approval as appropriate:-

- i. **NOTED** the City of Inverness Area Committee held on 13 February 2023 and 23 March 2023 for noting;
- ii. **APPROVED** the Inverness Events and Festivals Working Group held on 27 February 2023, 23 March 2023 and 13 April 2023 for approval. In relation to the Red Hot Highland Fling it was highlighted that information was still awaited as to the breakdown of the number of attendees;

- iii. **APPROVED** the Inverness Common Good Fund Grants Sub-Committee held on 6 March 2023 and 15 May 2023 for approval; and
- iv. **APPROVED** the Inverness East Sports Facilities Working Group held on 21 March 2023 for approval.

The meeting ended at 12.15pm.