

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 24 May 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baldrey (remote)	Mr R Gunn
Mr J Bruce	Mrs J Hendry
Mr M Cameron	Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)	Mr S Kennedy (substitute)
Mr J Finlayson	Mr P Logue (remote)
Mr L Fraser	Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr R Gale	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr A Graham	Ms L Niven (remote)
Mr M Green	

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Dr C Birt (remote)	Ms K MacLean (remote)
Ms S Fanet (remote)	Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Mr K Gowans (remote)	Mr D MacPherson (remote)
Ms M Hutchison (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Ms L Johnston (remote)	Mr D Millar (remote)
Mr B Lobban	Mrs T Robertson (remote)

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, Contact and Engagement
Ms E Barrie, Head of HR, Resources and Finance
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Ms P Sheldon, Senior Environmental Health Officer
Ms I Percy-Bell, Principal Waste Management Officer
Ms K Ellen, Community Food Growing Coordinator
Ms S Miller, Corporate Performance Business Partner
Ms M MacDonald, HR Business Partner
Ms M Murray, Interim Principal Administrator
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr M Humphreys, Local Senior Officer for Highland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr M Czerniakiewicz, Detective Superintendent, Highlands and Islands Division, 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 Ms M Nolan and Mr W MacKay.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

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

Community Operations and Logistics

Ryen Campbell, Play Technician, and Nicole Hardie, Operational Support Officer, had both been successful in achieving the Silver Award in the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Rising Star Awards. All Silver Award Rising Star nominees for the Parks, Grounds and Streets category would be competing for the Gold Award. Presentation of all the awards would be made at APSE's Fleet, Waste and Grounds Services annual seminar which was being held the following day in Aviemore.

Highland Council's Staff Recognition Awards

Ryen and Nicole had also both been shortlisted in the Highland Council Employee of the Year category as part of the Council's annual Staff Recognition Awards, the winners of which would be announced on 9 June.

Other shortlisted applications that included the Communities and Place Service were:

- Cost of Living Support Fund
- Rewilding
- Electric Vehicle Management
- Business Waste
- The Comfort Scheme
- Ukrainian Refugee Resettlement

The Chair extended his congratulations to all involved and thanked them for their outstanding work.

Burial Grounds

Officers were continuing to progress the programme of burial ground extensions and site works were now complete at the new extensions for the Proncynain burial ground

in Dornoch and the Chapelhill burial ground in Easter Ross. Both the new extensions should provide capacity for their communities for at least the next 50 years. A report on the progress of the burial ground extension programme would be taken to the Committee later in 2023.

The Committee **NOTED** the Good News.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No CP/08/23 dated 24 May 2023 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

The Chair highlighted that, since the last meeting, a visit to Invergordon Fire Station had taken place to see the latest recruits go through their training programme, and he looked forward to similar visits in future.

In relation to the Motion to Full Council in December 2022, a letter had been written to the SFRS Board asking for a meeting. To date, a reply had not been received. However, efforts would continue to arrange a meeting and the proposers of the Motion would be invited.

The Local Senior Officer for Highland, SFRS, then introduced the report, highlighting some key areas including the new report format which included sections on questions and community engagement; the numbers of dwelling fires and road traffic accidents; the changing procedure in respect of unwanted fire alarm signals; and the availability of appliances, particularly in rural areas.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the new report format was very helpful;
- the joint mobilising process was welcomed, and it was queried whether this had been utilised in Tongue and Bettyhill, both of which had low availability figures. It was added that it was necessary to increase the use of joint mobilisation, particularly in rural areas;
- the delivery of Fire Skills Courses was welcomed;
- information was sought on the requirement for firefighters to requalify and whether this had impacted on availability;
- concern having been expressed that solar panels on some Council buildings had had to be switched off for fire safety reasons, it was explained that the Fire Safety Team would be able to provide advice on individual premises;
- in relation to Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS), concern was expressed regarding the new procedure, particularly its impact on schools given that teachers and staff often did not live near the schools in which they worked. In addition, information was requested on the procedure in respect of UFAS at commercial properties below or adjacent to residential properties, the action taken in respect of habitual UFAS, and the potential for a licensing scheme with penalties. The Chair commented that the new procedure would present challenges for the Council as a landlord and solutions were being actively explored, and the Local Senior Officer for Highland offered to have an additional meeting to discuss Members' concerns;
- information was sought regarding servicing of defibrillators, and the importance of school visits was emphasised; and

- the impact of the installation of linked domestic smoke alarms was queried; and
- attention was drawn to the diversity of the SFRS and the advantages to employers of having volunteer firefighters on their staff.

The Local Senior Officer having responded to the points raised, the Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report.

5. Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026

There had been circulated Report No CP/09/23 dated 24 May 2023 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

Detective Superintendent Czerniakiewicz, Highlands and Islands Division, Police Scotland gave a summary of the report, drawing Members' attention to several key areas including road safety, drug misuse, the 101 service and communication with the public.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Chair confirmed that representatives from the 101 service would be invited to attend a future meeting given this was an area of particular concern to Members;
- information was sought on the effects of budgetary constraints on local policing, particularly the reduction in overtime;
- concern was expressed regarding increasing incidents of vandalism, particularly in public conveniences, and information was sought as to how the Local Policing Plan would help to address such anti-social behaviour;
- information was sought on Police Scotland's approach to dealing with recurring incidents involving adolescents;
- the reference to Police visibility in the report was welcomed;
- information was sought on how Police Scotland planned to improve engagement with Elected Members and the public going forward as a lack of feedback had resulted in apathy towards reporting incidents. Superintendent Czerniakiewicz undertook to arrange for officers covering Nairn to contact Ward Members to discuss their concerns in that regard.

Superintendent Czerniakiewicz having responded to the points raised, the Committee **AGREED** the Highland Local Policing Plan for 2023-2026.

6. Workforce Planning Report Aithisg Planadh Feachd-obrach

There had been circulated Report No CP/10/23 dated 24 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- upon concern being expressed at the lack of detail in the report it was explained that it was intended to be a high-level strategic document. Detailed operational action plans sat behind it and progress updates would be taken to future meetings of the Committee;
- more information was requested on the numbers of staff at different pay grades and in different departments; what solutions could be found to address the issue of the age profile within the Service; what could be done to reduce dependency

on temporary and agency staff; and the challenges within the Service and how they were going to be addressed; and

- it was recognised that the budgetary decisions made by the Council in the coming years would have an impact on workforce planning.

The Committee **NOTED** the Communities and Place Service Workforce Plan for 2023–2026.

7. Communities and Place – Service Performance Reporting for Q4 – 1 Jan 2023 – 31 Mar 2023
Coimhearsnachdan agus Àite – Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson C4 – 1 Faoilleach 2023 – 31 Màrt 2023

There had been circulated Report No CP/11/23 dated 24 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, staff were commended for their approach to dealing with issues and responding in a timely manner, and attention was drawn to the significant amount of work undertaken by the Communities and Place Service, with particular reference to the Freedom of Information requests received.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service’s performance information.

8. Public Conveniences and Comfort Scheme Agreements 2023–2026
Goireasan Poblach agus Aontaidhean Sgeama Cofhurtachd 2023–2026

There had been circulated Report No CP/12/23 dated 24 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the expansion of the Comfort Scheme to include sites that had previously been funded by the Visitor Management Fund was welcomed;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how many of the 76 Council-operated public conveniences were currently closed due to vandalism, what steps had been taken to re-open them and when the public conveniences in Thurso were likely to re-open. In relation to the latter, there was a need for facilities for tourists and, whilst a Comfort Scheme alternative was available, its opening hours were limited;
- Members commended the Head of Community Operations and Logistics and her team for the work they did under extremely difficult circumstances and their positive and innovative approach;
- the Comfort Scheme was essential given anticipated visitor numbers in places such as Skye, and it was important that officers continued to engage in a positive way with providers. It was a low-cost alternative for the Council, and businesses that operated Comfort Scheme facilities benefited from additional footfall;
- thanks were expressed to officers for supporting a community group to build toilet facilities in Elgol and Broadford, and the partnership working that had taken place to ensure that Council public conveniences remained open until the community facilities were ready was commended;
- it was highlighted that staff had been nominated for a Staff Recognition Award in relation to the success of the Comfort Scheme, and Members wished them all the best;

- concern was expressed regarding recent incidents of vandalism in public conveniences throughout Highland. On the point being raised, it was explained that there was no recommendation in the report in respect of public conveniences as there were no proposed changes in that regard. However, there was no doubt that vandalism was a significant issue and it was necessary to put a marker down. Public convenience provision was a non-statutory service that the Communities and Place Service aimed to continue but there would come a point where the repairs would be unaffordable. It was emphasised that everyone involved was disappointed in the behaviour taking place and officers were doing all they possibly could to reduce the level of vandalism and keep facilities open. Members commended the resilience of staff in the face of the issues being experienced;
- in response to a question regarding Comfort Scheme provision at Dores, it was explained that the pricing matrix was based on the facilities offered rather than footfall; and
- in relation to the recent closure of Ballachulish public conveniences due to vandalism, information was sought, and provided, as to whether more could be done in terms of community-led surveillance and webcam provision. It was commented that the village hall had tried to offer an alternative but the £200 payment was not sufficient given the demand on the facilities due to Ballachulish being on the A82 and a key stop for tourists and tour buses. The village hall relied on volunteers, and it would be helpful if the Council could redeploy cleaning staff whilst nearest public conveniences were closed. In addition, advice from the Council on matters such as insurance would be appreciated as opening the village hall toilets to the public would be an opportunity for the community to raise revenue. The Head of Community Operations and Logistics undertook to ask the local Manager to contact Councillor Fanet regarding the local issues raised.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the number of Comfort Scheme providers to increase from 42 to 55;
- ii. the expansion of the scheme to include sites that had been funded by the Visitor Management Fund for the past 2 years;
- iii. three-year agreements to provide the Comfort Scheme had been issued to previous providers wishing to continue to participate in the scheme; and
- iv. the results of the survey undertaken with Comfort Scheme providers.

9. Community Food Growing – Annual Report Fàs Bìdh Coimhearsnachd – Aithisg Bhliadhnaid

There had been circulated Report No CP/13/23 dated 24 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed that implementation of the Food Growing Strategy might stall when the fixed-term Community Food Growing Coordinator post came to an end in July 2023 and information was sought, and provided, as to whether any other funding streams had been explored; and
- it was important to provide more allotments to meet the substantial unmet demand, and attention was drawn to the Council's aim, as set out in the current Allotment Policy, to provide allotments within walking distance of as many residents as possible. It was confirmed that these points would be incorporated into the review of allotment provision.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made to implement the food growing strategy and deliver the community food growing action plan to date and the subsequent benefits to the Highland region.

10. Equality Mainstreaming and Equality Outcomes Progress Report 2023 Aithisg Adhartais Àbhaisteachadh Co-ionannachd is Toraidhean Co-ionannachd 2023

There had been circulated Report No CP/14/23 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Chair paid tribute to Rosemary Mackinnon, Principal Policy Officer – Equality, who had retired from the Council at the end of April after 20 years' service. On behalf of the Committee, he thanked her for her hard work in providing advice and support to officers and Members and wished her a happy retirement.

Having commended the significant amount of work that had gone into the Progress Report, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Equality Outcome and Mainstreaming Progress Report for the Highland Council (and incorporating the Education Authority and Licensing Board) as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the addition of a new equality outcome as outlined at section 9.4: *Increase the Council's understanding of Children's Rights (UNCRC) and how to implement a rights based approach by embedding the articles within it across all Council services.*

11. Private Water Supply Improvement Grants Tabhartasan Leasachaidh Solar Uisge Priobhaideach

There had been circulated Report No CP/15/23 dated 12 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, information was sought, and provided, on the timeframe over which water scarcity was measured and whether site visits would be carried out in respect of applications for enhanced grants.

The Committee **APPROVED** the amended policy as shown in Appendix 2 of the report.

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

There had been circulated Report No CP/16/23 dated 24 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

In introducing the report, the Chair commended the Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations, and his team for the meticulous way in which the application to the Recycling Improvement Fund had been put together. It was unusual for an application to be accepted in full, and the award was one of the highest in Scotland.

In addition, he highlighted that a number of Members had taken up the opportunity to visit the new Inverness Waste Transfer Station before it came into use. Now that the facility was operational, a further visit had been arranged on 28 June 2023 and he hoped as many Members as possible would take up the invitation.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- with regard to the forthcoming waste collection service changes, education and communication were vital and the emphasis thereon in the report was welcomed;
- in relation to long-term waste management, there was an issue with capacity and it was necessary to consider the amount of waste being transported outwith Highland via the A9 or by rail. In that regard, the Chair, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place, and Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations, had met with the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity. A productive conversation had taken place, and she had accepted an invitation to visit Highland;
- clarification was sought, and provided, regarding the proposed bin collection arrangements;
- a small incinerator in Highland would considerably reduce the amount of waste being transported outwith the area. It having been queried whether this remained an option, it was explained that, whilst an independent review on the future of Energy from Waste (EfW) capacity in Scotland had concluded there should be no new EfW facilities, there were some exceptions. It was understood Highland fell within the exception category and establishing an EfW facility was still worthwhile pursuing as an option;
- the improvements that had been made in respect of charging for garden waste bin collection were welcomed; and
- in relation to the recent press release on waste composition analysis, it was confirmed that the figures were by weight, not volume.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the contents of the report;
- ii. that the application to the Recycling Improvement Fund had been successful and would enable investment in collection services to improve recycling within Highland;
- iii. the updated position on waste transfer station infrastructure in Inverness and Fort William;
- iv. that Highland Council support funding for mobile shredders for treating bulky waste had been approved; and
- v. that work was underway to provide an updated perspective on the feasibility and viability of long-term waste management options for The Highland Council.

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

The Committee **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 24 March 2023.

The meeting concluded at 12.50 pm.