

## **The Highland Council**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Dingwall on 22 May 2023 at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

Mr S Kennedy  
Mr G MacKenzie

Mrs A MacLean  
Mrs M Paterson

### **In attendance:**

Mr M Rodger, Executive Chief Officer – Housing and Property  
Ms D Agnew, Ward Manager (Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth), Communities and Place  
Mr R MacLeod, Service Lead Housing Investment/Building Maintenance, Housing and Property  
Mr D Manson, Principal Housing Officer, Housing and Property  
Mr J Henderson, Policy Assistant - Empty Homes & PRS Liaison, Housing and Property  
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance

### **Also in attendance:**

Group Manager R Dibble, 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 the Committee.**

**Mr G MacKenzie in the Chair**

### **Business**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no Declarations of Interests/Transparency Statements.

#### **3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/6/23 dated 30 April 2023 together with the Ross and Cromarty Performance Report by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). In particular, Members' attention was drawn to the new proposal from SFRS to reduce unwanted fire alarm signals. From 1 July 2023, SFRS would stop attending automatic fire alarm call outs to commercial businesses and workplace premises unless a fire had been

confirmed. Control room operators would ask anyone reporting a fire alarm to check if there was an actual fire before sending the nearest appliance. This would however not apply to sleeping premises such as hospitals, care homes, hotels or domestic dwellings. This initiative would significantly cut down journeys, thus reducing carbon emissions and improving road safety.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members expressed their appreciation to Group Manager Dibble who was leaving his current post to take up another within the Service. There had been significant improvements locally and these were to be commended;
- a recent Member visit to Invergordon had highlighted the pride that fire personnel had for their stations;
- businesses had expressed concern regarding the SFRS's proposal not to attend automatic fire alarm call outs to commercial businesses. Whilst it was acknowledged that businesses needed to take responsibility for their premises, it was felt that this could put individuals at risk and result in delays in tackling fires before they got out of control. This was seen as a continuation of cuts to the emergency services;
- approximately 40% of call outs were false alarms and could use an appliance which was needed elsewhere;
- the introduction of the new proposal would act on the lessons learnt elsewhere but it was reassuring that it would be assiduously monitored;
- the performance of Dingwall Fire Station was to be welcomed, especially appliance availability with the 1<sup>st</sup> appliance showing an impressive 99.83%;
- the recruitment of a female fire fighter was to be applauded;
- it was disappointing that the family centre at Dingwall Fire Station had yet to materialise although it was acknowledged this was due to the Highland Council;
- the refurbishment of Dingwall Fire Station, due to start in September 2023, demonstrated the SFRS's commitment;
- when Highland Council designed properties the location and type of fire and smoke alarms needed to be taken into consideration, although it was pointed out that this was a matter for Planning and Building Control to advise;
- the type of call outs had changed over time. There were now much fewer chimney fires but a higher number of traffic collisions; and
- the SFRS was due to report to the Communities and Place Committee later in the week and it was hoped Dingwall Fire Station's excellent performance could be highlighted.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Ross and Cromarty Performance Report; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a letter be sent to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service commending the excellent performance of the Dingwall Station and expressing Members' appreciation of Group Manager Dibble.

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

There had been circulated Report No DSA/7/23 dated 12 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- information was sought, and provided, regarding the arrangements surrounding visits to tenants to carry out maintenance;
- the condition of some void properties was poor and the cost of repair often fell to the Service. Where possible it was hoped that these repairs could be recharged to tenants but, when doing so, there were a number of factors to take into consideration;
- whilst 372 homeless presentations were made across Highland at the end of 2022/23, 74 of which were in Ross and Cromarty, it was not possible to break this down to Ward level;
- in response to a question, it was explained that a homeless person/family might or might not wish to be rehomed in the same area for a variety of reasons;
- information was sought, and provided, as to what other support was available to vulnerable tenants;
- similarly information was sought, and provided, as to the number of properties in rent arrears, the average of which was £513. It was important to engage with tenants in rent arrears as soon as possible and to signpost them to the Welfare Support Team etc;
- this highlighted that the Housing Service was now picking up more of a duty of care. These were hidden costs but ones which needed to be highlighted to the Scottish Government as often this was a result of policy changes;
- the arrangements surrounding the offer of properties to tenants was explored but, thankfully, there was a low level of refusal in the Dingwall and Seaforth Ward;
- the substantial improvement on emergency repairs was commended; and
- it was acknowledged that there was now a greater expectation of service delivery.

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

**5. HRA Capital Programme 2023/24 Update and 2023/27 Programme**  
**Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd a-steach Taigheadais**  
**2023/24 agus Prògram 2023/27**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/8/23 dated 10 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the life-cycle based approach to major component replacement was explored. It could be argued that those tenants who kept their kitchens, bathrooms etc in good order could be disadvantaged whilst others would

- have replacements before them. There were a number of factors to take into consideration determining when a kitchen needed replaced but officers undertook to provide an approximate average cost to Members;
- heating upgrades were seen as a priority by tenants and this element might attract more Government support;
  - the resources available for window replacement was hampered due to the increase in the price of materials;
  - there were competing demands between increasing housing stock and improving existing stock to meet Government targets; and
  - the Council was buying former Council houses back, when appropriate.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update on the 2022-23 Dingwall and Seaforth HRA Capital Programme at section 5 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the resources available to Dingwall and Seaforth at paragraph 6.7 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed investment priorities in the HRA Capital Programme for Dingwall and Seaforth 2023-27 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- iv. **NOTED** that updates on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme would continue to be provided through ward briefings and at future Local Committees as requested by Local Members, in addition to reporting to Housing and Property Committee; and
- v. **AGREED** that officers would provide Members with an average cost of a kitchen replacement.

**6. Dingwall Common Good Fund – Variation to Property Budget 2023/24  
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Pheofharain – Atharrachadh do Bhuidseat Seilbh 2023/24**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/9/23 dated 16 May 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Dingwall Jubilee Park Road was well used by the Caravan Park and Ross County Football Club and was popular with dog walkers accessing the canal and park area so its improvement, planned to take place at the end of June, was welcomed.

The Committee **APPROVED** an increase of £10,000 to the 2023/24 property budget to enable a contribution towards essential road and carpark maintenance in Common Good ownership at Dingwall Jubilee Park Road.

**7. Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary budget applications approved since last meeting  
Iarrtasan buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàrd Inbhir Pheofharain agus Shìophort air an aontachadh bho choinneamh mu dheireadh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since its last meeting.

(from 2022/23 Budget)

- i. Muir of Ord Community Council : Seniors Christmas Lunch - £1,160
- ii. Windsor Place Residents Association : Sharing Shed - £2,200
- iii. Muir of Ord Community Council – Lighting Muir of Ord Square - £450
- iv. Dingwall Primary School – National Schools Shinty Finals - £147

(from 2023/24 Budget)

- v. Dingwall Community Development Company – Study into Creation of Allotments in Dingwall - £100
- vi. Maryburgh Community Council – Maryburgh in Bloom Project - £400
- vii. The Neil Gunn Trust – Neil Gunn Writing Competition 2023 - £650
- viii. Dingwall Community Council – Dingwall in Bloom Project - £1,500
- ix. Black Isle Farmers' Society – Black Isle Show 2023 - £600

## **8. Ross & Cromarty Educational Trust Report Aithisg Urras Foghlaim Rois is Chromba**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/10/23 dated 12 May 2023 by the Area Education & Learning Manager.

The Committee-:

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** to delegate authority to Education officers to explore options to improve investment income and report findings back to the Committee

## **9. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 30 January 2023 which were approved by the Council on 9 March 2023.

The meeting ended at 12.05 pm