

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 31 August 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baldrey (remote)	Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Mr J Bruce	Mr P Logue
Mr M Cameron (remote)	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr J Finlayson	Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr L Fraser (remote)	Ms J McEwan (substitute) (remote)
Mr R Gale	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr R Gunn	Ms L Niven (remote)
Mrs J Hendry	Ms M Nolan (remote)

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mr T MacLennan (remote)
Mr C Ballance (remote)	Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr S Kennedy	Mr D Millar (remote)
Ms L Kraft (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Ms K MacLean (remote)	Mr M Reiss (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 and Engagement
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy and Operations
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services
Mr A Hunter, Service Lead – Transport and Logistics
Mr J MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Superintendent R Shepherd, Police Scotland
Sergeant D Jack, 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 T Collier, Mr A Graham and Mr M Green.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

Item 5: Mr R Gale, Mr D Macpherson and Mr D Millar

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2023 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Committee.

4. Good News Naidheachdan Matha

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

- Kyle MacKay, Environmental Health Technical Officer, had successfully completed a modern apprenticeship route to gain an HNC in the Built Environment from UHI Inverness. Kyle was based in Drummie and covered private sector housing duties including housing grants for adaptations and repairs.
- Isla MacKintosh, based in Wick, had passed her professional qualifications in Animal Health and Welfare and would now be undertaking the full duties of an Animal Health and Welfare Officer in the area.
- As Members were aware, the Service did a lot of work to support communities with the upkeep of war memorials. The effort put in by communities and the teams from Communities and Place was recognised and appreciated by the Royal British Legion Scotland. This had been noted recently in the 2023 Highlands and Islands War Memorial Awards with winners in their specific categories for Dingwall, Fort William and Golspie and a special commendation for the war memorial in Ardgay. Thanks were expressed to the teams from Amenities, Waste and Street Cleaning, and Bereavement Services.
- The Public Conveniences team had been shortlisted as finalists in the APSE Service Awards. These awards were extremely competitive with over 300 submissions from across the UK. The winner would be announced at the APSE Annual Seminar on 14 September 2023.
- Continuing with the theme of Public Conveniences, the Glencoe facility had been successfully refurbished. This had been a major project to upgrade the site to offer more modern facilities with the inclusion of disabled access, installation of energy efficient solutions and new baby changing facilities. This had been part of the wider Glencoe Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund project and had opened in June in time for the busy summer tourist season.
- Stores Modern Apprentice, Kevin Martin, Inverness, had recently gained his qualification in Logistics Operations in Stores and had passed his driving test first time on 7 August 2023.
- The Cost of Living Support Fund had been successful in winning the Resilient and Sustainable Communities section at the Highland Council Staff Recognition Awards in June. Members would recall how well received this fund had been by

communities and what it had been able to achieve, and the recognition was welcomed.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

5. Police Area Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Poileis

Transparency Statements: Mr R Gale, Mr D Macpherson and Mr D Millar made Transparency Statements in respect of this item on the basis that a family member was a serving Police Officer. However, having applied the objective test, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No CP/17/23 dated 18/08/23 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

The Chair highlighted that, whilst the recommendation asked the Committee to note the report, Members had a scrutiny role and were therefore asked to comment on and scrutinise the report.

Chief Superintendent Shepherd provided a brief operational update, drawing attention to the loss of 9 policing posts due to Police Scotland budget cuts; the reduction in the overtime budget; the high number of assaults on police officers in Highland compared to the rest of Scotland and what was being done to combat this, including the upcoming introduction of body-worn video; the success of the Highland Cops documentary; the strength of recruitment in the Highland area; the reduction in dropped 101 calls; and the relatively high level of public confidence in the police compared to elsewhere in Scotland.

He went on to highlight several key areas of the report including the number of road deaths; drink and drug driving offences; violent crimes; online fraud; shoplifting; missing people and County Lines activity. Thanks were expressed to the public for their help in locating several missing persons reported on social media.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the high number of assaults on police officers was troubling and not to be tolerated, and it was hoped the introduction of body cameras would help with this issue;
- the exercise that had taken place in Wick to measure community confidence in and interaction with the police force had highlighted that the community would like a greater police presence, including attendance at events such as county shows. However, with the loss of officers due to budget cuts it was recognised that this would be difficult;
- information was sought, and provided, on the possibility of losing the Operational Support Unit in Inverness due to budget cuts;
- officers working alone in remote locations were very vulnerable and the reduction in officer numbers could lead to officers having to attend serious incidents with no back-up;
- the closure of care homes in smaller towns could impact on the number of missing Looked After Children as they would be harder to find in cities;

- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for the high numbers of missing children, whether conditions such as dementia were contributing to the number of missing adults and the steps being taken to combat these issues;
- information was sought, and provided, on how mobile phone driving offences were detected and what could be done to reduce the number of offences, and it was confirmed that the decrease in speeding convictions was possibly due to officers focussing on different areas such as detecting mobile phone and drug offences;
- the conviction rate for assaults on police officers was queried and information was sought as to how the police and the judicial system were working together to ensure that more detections led to convictions;
- it was important to consider community involvement, co-location and inter-agency working, and an invitation was extended to Chief Superintendent Shepherd to visit Skye to discuss proposals in that regard;
- information was sought, and provided, on the ways in which Police Scotland was working with NHS Highland to deal with the high level of calls relating to people with mental illness;
- concern was expressed regarding some Police Station offices being open infrequently;
- information was sought on the number of road traffic fatalities and collisions in the Skye and Raasay area and the Chief Superintendent undertook to ensure that this would be reported to the Skye and Raasay Area Committee;
- thanks were extended to the officers who had policed the Scottish Independence March across the Skye Bridge;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the geography of the Highlands led to different challenges than in the rest of Scotland; and
- it having been queried where the equipment for scanning road accident scenes was located, the Chief Superintendent undertook to investigate and advise Members accordingly.

Mr R Gunn moved that Members show support for the Police Scotland North Division and, in recognition of the impossible demands expected of them in the light of the Scottish Government cuts, leading to a reduction of 27 Officers and a 50% cut in overtime budget, call upon the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee to write to the Scottish Government in the strongest possible terms calling for an increase in funding to ensure that there were no cuts to service in the Highlands.

However, it was explained that Standing Order 34 applied, a decision having been taken at Full Council on 9 March 2023 that the Leader of the Council would write to the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Justice requesting an urgent review of Police Scotland resources in the Highlands.

Mr R Gunn therefore withdrew his motion and the Chair undertook to liaise with the Leader of the Council to ascertain what the response had been to the letter and arrange for it to be circulated to Members.

The Committee scrutinised and **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 March 2023.

**6. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 22/23 Outturn & 23/24 Quarter 1 and Service Performance Reporting for 2022/23
Suim Dheireannach Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 22/23 & Aithris Cairteil 1 23/24 agus Coileanadh Seirbheis airson 2022/23**

There had been circulated Report No CP/18/23 dated 11 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, information was sought, and provided, on what steps could be taken to improve performance in terms of the number of complaints resolved within 20 days; the resource allocated to dealing with Freedom of Information (FOI) requests; and possible ways of decreasing the number of FOIs such as providing more information on the Council website or via the Council's Publication Scheme.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Service's revenue monitoring position; and
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance and risk information.

**7. Capital Monitoring – Quarter 4 2022/23 and Quarter 1 2023/24
Aithisg Sgrùdadh Buidseat Calpa: Suim Dheireannach 22/23 agus Cairteil 1 23/24**

There had been circulated Report No CP/19/23 dated 7 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

On the point being raised, it was confirmed that in the case of an underspend due to slippage the funding would be carried forward. In addition, in relation to paragraph 5.6 of the report, information was sought, and provided, on the procurement process, including opportunities for local businesses.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the capital outturn position for the Communities and Place Service for 2022/23;
- ii. the forecasted capital outturn for the Communities and Place Service for 2023/24 as at Quarter 1; and
- iii. the current forecast for the major project for the Communities and Place Service for 2023/24.

**8. Communities and Place Service Plan Update 2023/24
Cunntas às Ùr mu Phlana na Seirbheis Coimhearsnachd agus Àite 2023/24**

There had been circulated Report No CP/20/23 dated 9 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, information was sought, and provided, on the following matters:-

- progress in respect of inspection and sampling of high-risk water supplies and the development of a business case in relation to sampling private water supplies;
- whether there were any plans to roll out food waste collections beyond Inverness;
- public convenience provision, with particular reference to the lack of provision for people travelling from north Highland to Inverness;

- street cleaning, which it was commented could be more efficient, particularly in terms of clearing gullies which would help to prevent flooding;
- whether there were any resources available to support local communities to develop their own Place Plans;
- whether the Energy from Waste (EfW) feasibility study would take account of the Church Report on future incineration capacity and if, given the lack of capital funding, money would be better spent on reducing residual waste by increasing the amount of reuse, repair, recycling and upcycling by both residents and visitors. The Executive Chief Officer explained that Members at the Waste Strategy Working Group on 8 August 2023 had received a detailed update on this matter and it was intended to present a report on EfW and related matters to the November Committee.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Service Plan for 2023/24.

9. Approach to Sustainable Business Travel

Dòigh-obrach a thaobh Siubhal Gnothachais Seasmhach

There had been circulated Report No CP/21/23 dated 9 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- the comprehensive report was commended, and the financial challenges associated with delivering it were recognised;
- the potential expansion of Car Club to external organisations or the general public at off-peak times presented an exciting opportunity, particularly in remote and rural areas where transport was a significant issue. Further information was sought, and provided, in that regard and it was confirmed that a more detailed position statement could be provided at the next meeting;
- the availability of public electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure was a significant issue, and it was queried whether there were any improvement plans and what support was available from the Scottish and UK Governments. The Head of Community Operations and Logistics undertook to liaise with relevant officers and ask them to respond;
- in relation to Ultra-Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV), it was queried whether the reference to hybrid vehicles included mild hybrids as most of the time they were not driving on electricity;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether new petrol and diesel cars and light commercial vehicles were still being procured; whether training was being provided for efficient driving of EVs; and, in relation to heavy vehicles such as gritters, what the deadline was for moving to ULEVs, how sustainable and efficient they would be and whether government support was available given the significant costs;
- in relation to the Fleet Pathfinder Project and the potential collaboration with private sector partners, information was sought on the effects on service users and who would set the charges for EV charging. The Head of Community Operations and Logistics undertook to request colleagues in procurement to provide a short briefing to Dr C Birt;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Car Club was available to Members and a link was available on the Council's Intranet or via the Head of Community Operations and Logistics;

- it having been queried how on-call staff would be recompensed for charging EVs at home, it was confirmed that a policy was under development.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** that the report and Action Plan supported the Council's Net Zero Strategy approved at The Highland Council on 29 June 2023;
- NOTED** the contents of the report;
- AGREED** the Sustainable Business Travel Action Plan; and
- NOTED** the annual review of the Action Plan and reporting of progress as outlined at section 7.2 of the report.

10. Waste Management Service Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Sheirbheis Rianachd Sgudail

There had been circulated Report No CP/22/23 dated 10 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- in relation to the imminent ban on upholstered furniture containing Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) being landfilled, information was sought, and provided, on the potential impact on the budget, whether any financial support was available from the Scottish government, the proposals for areas with smaller Household Waste Recycling Centres that could not accept upholstered furniture, and whether an increase in fly-tipping was anticipated; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the carbon impact and cost implications associated with the cessation of landfill at the Seater landfill site;

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- the service response to the imminent ban on upholstered furniture being landfilled;
- the work and progress being made connected to the Recycling Improvement Fund project and that a detailed report including the scheduled and planned rollout would be reported to the Committee in November 2023;
- the updated position on the planned Waste Transfer Station in Fort William; and
- the scope of work and progress on the Nairn Re-Use Feasibility Project.

11. Bereavement Services – Project Updates Seirbheisean Bàis – Cunntasan às Ùr mun Pròiseact

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

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- The Chair confirmed that if Members wished to take up the offer of visiting Inverness Crematorium that could be arranged, and asked the Bereavement Services Manager to pass on the Committee's thanks and congratulations for the positive outcome of the annual inspection of the crematorium as detailed in the report;

- thanks were expressed for the report, particularly Appendix 2, which set out the status of current burial ground projects and would help Members respond to constituents, and Appendix 4, which showed the burial grounds that were forecasted to reach capacity in the next 10 years. With regard to the latter, it was important that discussions continued with Local Members;
- appreciation was expressed to the Bereavement Services team for their responsiveness to Members' queries and the hard work they did in challenging times;
- it was interesting to note that Skye had the most burial grounds in Highland, and although many were no longer operational it showed how, historically, burial grounds were placed in small communities;
- on the point being raised, an assurance was provided that all burial grounds, whether fully or partially operational or historic, were maintained by the Council's Amenities team. In terms of specific timescales/frequency, the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, undertook to liaise with the Amenities team and revert to Mr J Finlayson;
- in relation to Glen Nevis burial ground, it was questioned whether it should be accepted that a new site was not going to be found and the Council should instead seek to build a crematorium in the area;
- information was sought, and provided, on the procedures in respect of public health funerals. It was suggested that people from rural areas would be expected to be buried in the local cemetery, and the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, confirmed he was happy to discuss specific cases outwith the meeting;
- burial grounds generated a lot of discussion at Community Council meetings and it was queried whether Appendix 4 of the report would be available on the Council's website for communities to refer to going forward;
- thanks were expressed for the first-class maintenance work being carried out by the Amenities teams in Sutherland and Caithness;
- it would be helpful to provide an annual monitoring report on Bereavement Services to Area Committees at Ward level;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether cremation was on the increase and, given the waiting time for slots, whether another crematorium was required in Highland; how many more funerals could be held at Inverness Crematorium if prices were more competitive when compared with crematoriums in neighbouring local authority areas; whether there would be any financial merit in the Council operating a pet cremation service; and whether the cremators that were being replaced had any re-sale value; and
- the re-lining of the car park and re-painting of handrails at Inverness Crematorium was welcomed and would be appreciated by the public.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress of burial ground extensions in Highland;
- ii. **NOTED** the monitoring and governance provided by the Bereavement Services Project Board;
- iii. **NOTED** the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development;
- iv. **NOTED** work had been commissioned to review the options for cremator replacement at Inverness Crematorium and a further update would be provided to Members when the final report was completed;
- v. **NOTED** the range of improvements being undertaken and developed at the Inverness Crematorium; and

- vi. **AGREED** that an annual monitoring report in respect of Bereavement Services be provided to Area Committees including information at Ward level.

12. Annual Community Asset Transfer Report 2023/24 Aithisg Bhliadhnaidh Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd 2023/24

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

At this stage, the Chair paid tribute to one of the report authors, Pablo Mascarenhas, Community and Democratic Engagement Manager, who had retired earlier this month. He had worked for the Council and High Life Highland for over 36 years in roles spanning community education, youth work and, latterly, community participation and involvement. He had been a strong advocate for greater community ownership and supporting communities to take forward their own priorities and had been instrumental in designing and implementing the Council's current approach to community asset transfer. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair wished him a long and happy retirement.

During discussion, Members commended officers for their efforts in facilitating community asset transfers. Voluntary organisations made a significant contribution to Highland communities and the more the Council worked with them on the type of projects described in the report the better.

The Committee **AGREED** the annual report on Community Asset Transfer, as detailed in the report and at Appendix 1, for submission to the Scottish Government.

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

The Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 8 August 2023 were **APPROVED**.

The meeting concluded at 2.00 pm.