

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Monday, 7 August 2023, at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms T Collier
Mr D Louden

Mrs P Munro
Ms M Smith

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.
Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager
Mr D Martin, Area Education & Learning Manager.
Mr I Moncrieff, Area Roads Operations Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in Attendance:

Mr S Freireich, 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

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr A Rhind and Ms M Nolan.

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

There were none.

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2023 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Easter Ross Area Committee.

4. Fire – Area Performance Summary Report Smàladh – Geàrr Aithisg Coileanadh Sgireil

There had been circulated Report No ERA/13/23 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- in response to concerns about a recent spate of deliberate fires, assurance was provided that this had abated following efforts by the local police officers and youth groups;
- the reduced number of road traffic collisions was welcomed, though it was acknowledged that due to the low baseline figures, the 3-yearly averages gave a better indication than the quarterly figures;
- concern was expressed at reports of trespassing and vandalism in the old pumphouse at the former Seabank Tank Farm and it was requested that further data on the associated fire risks be gathered and appropriate action taken if required;
- in response to numerous incidents of small fires being set in woods in Alness, some of which were dealt with by residents and therefore not reported to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), Ms P Munro would email Mr Freireich to discuss how best to report these incidents. As some of the incidents were reported to the Police rather than to the SFRS, the Senior Ward Manager would make contact with the new local Inspector and local Youth Development Officers to ensure good information/intelligence sharing; and
- information was sought and provided on new policies in relation to call outs for single point detection systems. A link to information had been provided in the report.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report and **AGREED** the Senior Ward Manager support SFRS to make contact with the new local Inspector and local Youth Development Officers to ensure good information/intelligence sharing and other relevant matters.

5. Inspection Report of Invergordon Academy by HMIE Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Acadamaidh Inbhir Ghòrdain le Luchd-sgrùdaidh Foghlaim na Banrigh (HMIE)

There had been circulated Report No ERA/14/23 by the Area Education & Learning Manager.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- it was hoped the action plan that resulted from the inspection, and the new Head Teacher starting in post, would bring much needed stability and continuity to the teaching staff. Some teaching shortages were a national challenge;
- subject choice was also affected by teacher shortages, however this would be addressed and attention was drawn to alternative and vocational opportunities that were available, including via the Highland Virtual Academy, and through working with Education and business partners; and
- assurance was sought and provided that progress with the action plans would be shared with parents via the parent council.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

6. Winter Service Plan 2023/24 Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh 2023/34

There had been circulated Report No ERA/15/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the winter routes being on one plan was welcomed;
- it was important the public knew how to support the winter maintenance efforts, for example by ensuring local grit bins were filled in good time for winter;
- concern was expressed at the number of outstanding potholes on the road network in Easter Ross, which might be hidden by snow and cause damage to vehicles, and assurance was sought that potholes would be repaired before the onset of winter. Particular reference was made to the poor state of roads in some housing estates. A summary was provided of the revenue budget work programme with regard to road patching, which had been affected by the decision to focus on capital works, and investigation would be made into the possible use of a contractor to address the outstanding potholes. Members expressed gratitude to the road maintenance team for their work. It was also acknowledged that a decision had been made to focus resources for patching on higher speed roads; and
- Members expressed concern about the number of weeds growing in some urban areas, with particular reference to Invergordon and Tain, and while acknowledging the earlier decision to achieve budget savings in this area, it was hoped that something could be done to address the problem. In response to Members, the Area Roads Manager referred to the need for additional resources and for a strategic capital programme that facilitated improved planning, for Council resources and contractor availability.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2023/24 and **AGREED**:

- i. gratitude be expressed to the road maintenance team for their work;
- ii. to investigate the weed situation in various urban locations; and
- iii. to investigate whether it was possible to undertake additional pothole patching in the areas detailed during discussion.

7. Invergordon Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain

There had been circulated Report No ERA/16/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

- in relation to Invergordon Town Hall, the Invergordon Naval Museum and Heritage Centre's Community Asset Transfer consultation was due to close on 25 August 2023. Members were reminded that while the Town Hall remained in the ownership of the Common Good Fund, the Fund remained responsible for any essential maintenance to the building; and
- in relation to the Bouchardon Bust, the options appraisal had not yet been progressed due to staff vacancies. The history of the discovery and subsequent considerations about what to do with the Bust were summarised.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the Quarter 1 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund; and
- ii. the update on current Invergordon Common Good issues

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

There is circulated Report No ERA/17/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Community and Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 1 monitoring statement for the Tain Common Good Fund.

**9. Ward Discretionary Awards
Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** the Ward Discretionary Awards approved since 1 April 2023.

**10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and was **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 22 May 2023, which had been approved by the Council on 29 June 2023.

The meeting ended at 11.45am.