

**The Highland Council  
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held remotely on Monday 21 August 2023 at 10.00am.

**Present:**

Mr R Bremner  
Mr R Gunn  
Mr W MacKay  
Mr S Mackie  
Ms J McEwan  
Mr M Reiss  
Mr K Rosie

**Officials in attendance:**

Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place  
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure and Environment  
Ms F Cameron, Project Officer (Community Regeneration), Infrastructure and Environment  
Mr M Crowe, Access Officer, Infrastructure and Environment  
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Performance and Governance  
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

**In Attendance:**

Station Commander P Farrell, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

**Mr R Gunn in the Chair.**

**Business**

**1. Apologies for Absence  
Liesgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Jarvie.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**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 Caithness Committee.

#### **4. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 29 May 2023 which were approved by the Council on 29 June 2023.

#### **5. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba**

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

In presenting the report, the Station Commander invited Members to attend an open day being held at Thurso Fire Station on 9 September 2023.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- further information was sought and provided on the Service's successful fire skills programme involving young people from Thurso High School;
- it was hoped the above programme would encourage young people to join the Service in future and it provided a range of benefits in terms of life skills; and
- the fact Thurso Fire Station was to take delivery of a new fire appliance was welcomed. Details were provided on its enhanced capabilities and arrangements would be made for Members to have a demonstration.

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

#### **6. Winter Service Plan for 2023-24 Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh airson 2023-24**

There had been circulated Report No CC/14/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

In discussion, Members welcomed the Plan and the encouragement for communities to become involved in the winter resilience scheme locally.

In response to questions, a summary was provided on the difference between Bear Scotland and the Council's winter service. Unlike the former, the Council did not operate a 24 hour service, and it was understood that Bear Scotland had certain conditions imposed on their trunk road contract in relation to the spread rates of salt that was different to the national guidance followed by the Council. There was also a greater volume of traffic on the trunk road which had a bearing on the effectiveness of the salt

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

## 7. Thurso Common Good Asset Register Clàr So-mhaoin Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Theòrsa

There had been circulated Report No CC/15/23 by the Acting Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance and Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- officers be commended on the excellent work being undertaken on the Asset Register and Members looked forward to continuing dialogue on the development of the Common Good Fund;
- a detailed explanation was sought and provided around the financial risk to local Members associated with the Fund assuming responsibility for its assets, given there would be maintenance costs with some buildings. Further discussion with Members would be required to balance the need to allow the Fund to generate income alongside the need to assume responsibility for its assets, bearing in mind all common good funds were required to cover their costs;
- further clarity was sought and provided that a public consultation would be required on any proposal to dispose of Common Good assets and this would also most likely have to go to court, given the public nature of the use of the buildings. Publication of the Asset Register drew a line in terms of what was formally considered to be Common Good assets. Members would need to consider each asset in turn and decide what information they required; and
- once the asset register was published, regular reports would be brought to the Area Business Meeting and the Committee and reference to other similar common good funds in Highland in respect of the type of reports Members could expect to receive.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the contents of the Asset Register in the format for publication (Appendix 1);
- NOTED** the content of the document titled “Thurso Common Good property consultation representations and responses” (Appendix 2);
- AGREED** to the publication of the Common Good Asset register for Thurso;
- AGREED** to the reclassification of the property included in the Register and to the creation of a Common Good Fund for Thurso;
- NOTED** that Thurso Common Good property will continue to be maintained by Highland Council until such time as an income source is established to sustain Thurso Common Good assets; and
- NOTED** that the creation of a Thurso Common Good Fund, and its financial position, will be reported to the next meeting of Highland Council under the minutes of this meeting given that all Highland Councillors are custodians of Common Good Funds across Highland.

## 8. Wick Common Good Fund Quarterly Monitoring Report Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Ràitheil Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige

There had been circulated Report No CC/16/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place and Head of Corporate Finance.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the need to move forward as quickly as possible to consider the overall strategy for the future of Fund with a focus on income generation from its assets and sustainability. Specific reference was made to the potential to maximise the income from the Riverside Car Park and Wick Town Hall; and
- the above be considered in depth by Ward 3 Members at a separate meeting as soon as possible with the local community council being asked to submit their considerations. It was important this was an open and transparent process while at the same time complying with the relevant legal requirements.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the position of Wick Common Good Fund at the end of the first quarter for 23/24;
- APPROVED** the proposed property budget of £20,000 in respect of Wick Town Hall utility costs; and
- NOTED** that a strategy for the Fund will be prepared with a report taken to a future meeting of this Committee.

## 9. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No CC/17/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

In discussion, Members indicated their support for the work of the Wick Development Trust. The application was robust in terms of meeting the qualifying criteria and approval would improve the facility and bring benefits to Wick and its visitors and significant investment opportunities for the regeneration of the town. The project would also benefit the wider area in Caithness.

The Committee **APPROVED** the application presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:-

| <b>Applicant:</b>      | <b>Project:</b>  | <b>Grant Awarded:</b> |
|------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Wick Development Trust | Wick River Campsite – Phase 2 Toilet Block & Facilities Building | £90,000               |

## 10. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

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

**Ward 2** Thurso Football Academy - £1500

**Wards 2 & 3** Sidhchailleannart-“Legends of Caithness” - £1350 (£675 from each Ward)

**Wards 2 & 3** FEIS GHALLAIBH-Caithness Feis - £2500 (£1250 from each Ward)

**Ward 3** Pentland Parish Church - £800.00

**Ward 3** - HLH-Wick Youth Development - £1500 – payment yet to be processed

The meeting ended at 11.05am