

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 29 November 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baldrey (remote)	Mrs J Hendry
Mr J Bruce (remote)	Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Mr M Cameron (remote)	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)	Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs A MacLean (substitute)
Mr L Fraser	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr A Graham	Ms L Niven (remote)
Mr R Gunn (remote)	Mr M Reiss

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr C Ballance	Ms K MacLean (remote)
Dr C Birt (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Ms M Hutchison (remote)	Mr K Rosie (remote)
Mr P Logue	Ms M Ross (remote)
Mr R MacKintosh	

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 S Graham, Corporate Improvement Project Manager
Ms D Sutton, Amenity Services Manager
Ms L MacGillivray, Community Support Coordinator
Ms L Gray, Chief Registrar
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr M Humphreys, Local Senior Officer, 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 G MacKenzie in the Chair

Business

**1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Gale, Mr M Green and Ms M Nolan.

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

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

**3. Good News
Naidheachdan Matha**

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

- Ingrid Jamieson had been promoted from Amenities Officer to Service Support Officer within the Amenities team. She had worked for the Council for 15 years as a Community Works Officer and Amenities Officer and, during that time, had developed a specialism in playparks having gained accreditation in Playground Philosophy and Design.
- The post vacated by Ingrid Jamieson had been filled by Scott Duncan who had been promoted from Assistant Foreperson and Acting up Amenities Officer at the Crematorium. Scott had joined the Council on a youth trainee scheme and had gained many qualifications since then.
- A successful partnership with the Cairngorms National Park Authority had resulted in a new public toilet being built at Glenmore, which would contribute to the visitor experience in that area. The project had been jointly managed by Amenities and the Council's Property Team. There would be an official opening in due course, and thanks were extended to all involved in this successful project; and
- Alf Leslie, Project Coordinator in Bereavement Services, was retiring after a long career with The Highland Council, starting in the former Regional Council in 1987. Alf was commended for his work on the War Memorial Renovation Project for the centenary of the First World War, and best wishes were extended to him for his well-deserved retirement.

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 the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report for the period April to September 2023.

The Local Senior Officer for Highland, SFRS, introduced the report, highlighting some key areas including the postponement of the new Local Fire and Rescue Plan, accidental dwelling fires, road traffic accidents, deliberate fire setting, non-domestic fire safety, unwanted fire alarm signals, firefighter training, and recruitment and availability.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the opportunity to attend briefing sessions at Invergordon Fire Station and online;
- concern was expressed regarding availability in North and West Highland, particularly Sutherland and Caithness, although joint mobilisation was helping with this;
- roadworks near Thurso Fire Station were preventing firefighters getting through the area and could impact on the availability of the second Thurso appliance;
- information was sought, and provided, on plans for the relocation of Portree Fire Station, the building of a new Fire Station at Uig and the joint mobilisation procedure;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that joint mobilising was being rolled out across the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that new Fire Station designs were modular which would allow for co-location with other agencies;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that for joint mobilising a crew may rendezvous at an incident and they would not drive past an incident to join up; and
- the new cutting equipment on the new Thurso appliance was welcomed and it was confirmed that new battery powered cutting equipment was being retrofitted to existing appliances.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Highland Performance Report.

5. Communities & Place – Revenue Budget Monitoring and Service Performance Reporting for Q2 – 1 June 2023 to 30 September 2023

There had been circulated Report No CP/25/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, it was clarified that household waste recycling figures were now being compared against the family group rather than the national average causing the change from red to green on the RAG assessment despite the figures being lower;
- information having been sought as to why the recycling rate was as low as 37% and what was being done to improve it, it was explained that the Recycling Improvement Fund Project would be covered in detail under item 8 on the agenda;
- in response to a question regarding the Stores and Logistics budget, it was explained that staff vacancies had caused an overspend due to the cost of employing contractors.

The Committee:-

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

6. Capital Monitoring – Quarter 2 2023/24 Sgrùdadh Calpa – Cairteal 2 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No CP/26/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the forecasted capital outturn for the Communities and Place Service for 23/24 as at Quarter 2; and
- ii. the current forecast for the major project for the Communities and Place Service for 23/24.

7. Long-term Waste Management Stiùireadh Sgudail Fad-ùine

There had been circulated Report No CP/27/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- some Members were of the view that investigations into the possibility of an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility in Highland should be ceased due to the likely over-provision of incineration facilities in Scotland within the next few years which could cause gate prices to fall, the possible introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme in the future, the low number of incineration facilities which managed to produce any energy from waste and the lack of money in the capital budget to complete such a project. However, the Chair stated that Members were not yet in a position to make a decision on long-term waste management, that more information was needed and that it was important to be mindful of the best interests of the whole Highland community when considering this issue. Other Members concurred, commenting that the decision on long-term waste management was one of the biggest the Committee would have to make and it would be in a better position to do so in 2024 once more information had been provided. Support was therefore expressed for the proposed next steps set out in the report;
- it was important to remember that should an EfW facility be developed locally it would require to operate as a combined heat and power facility;
- it was queried whether there would be a possibility of transporting waste by rail or sea rather than by road;
- it was necessary to explore all avenues, and to look to other countries for possible solutions;
- in response to a question as to why investigations into building an EfW facility in Highland should continue when the funds were not available in the capital budget and the consultants' report showed that it was the most expensive option, it was clarified that the limited cost of further investigations would come from the revenue budget and that finance was not the only consideration when deciding which option would be most suitable; and
- concern was expressed that continuing to explore the possibility of an EfW facility in Highland was wasting valuable officer time, and it was suggested that consideration be given to implementing simple measures such as local composting of food waste.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the study findings which Council Officers had considered; and
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed next steps as reported at section 5.2 of the report.

8. Waste Projects Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phròiseactan Sgudail

There had been circulated Report No CP/28/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- officers were commended for the developments in the report;
- it was queried whether the possibility of composting local food waste to support community food-growing groups or to produce compost for sale could be investigated;
- the proposed trial of accepting vans and trailers with DIY waste at Inverness Recycling Centre was welcomed, and it was queried whether this could be extended to other areas;
- it was important for public health that domestic refuse collections continued to be done well;
- physical adjustments might need to be made, particularly in flatted developments, to accommodate the new bins, and it might be necessary to look at the provision of communal bins. However, it was queried how the standard of recycling would be monitored in communal bins;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that food waste collections would be extended to the areas where this would become a legal requirement as well as some additional areas in Ross and Cromarty;
- the recycling policy was easy to understand and there was a clear plan for the phased rollout of the Recycling Improvement Scheme;
- the importance of communication, education, publicity and waste awareness having been emphasised, it was confirmed that two additional officers were being brought in to assist in the rollout of communication; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Communities and Place Service provided refuse collections for schools and other Council buildings at no cost to the user;
- it was emphasised that reducing waste was the first step in waste management; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the waste collected in food waste bins was required to be taken for thermal treatment and therefore not suitable for composting.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the amended Household Waste Policy as described in section 4 of the report and as shown in full in Appendix 1;
- ii. **NOTED** the updated position on the timeline for the phased introduction of Recycling Improvement Fund collection service changes and the highlighted progress that had been made;
- iii. **NOTED** comprehensive communications and engagement plan for the service change;
- iv. **NOTED** progress being made to secure a Waste Transfer Station in Fort William; and
- v. **APPROVED** the introduction of a trial at a recycling centre as described in section 7 of the report.

9. Playpark Strategy Ro-innleachd Phàircean-cluiche

There had been circulated Report No CP/29/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

Ms L MacGillivray, Community Support Coordinator, gave a presentation in amplification of the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- while it was disappointing that the revenue budget would not cover all ongoing playpark maintenance, the work of Amenities Officers alongside community groups to fundraise for and design a programme of playpark improvement in Caithness was recognised;
- the importance and success of partnership working was highlighted as communities may have ideas for playparks which officers could offer support to put into action;
- the move away from age segregated play was welcomed;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that when redeveloping individual playparks officers would go into schools to gather children's opinions, and that this was more difficult with secondary school children;
- the need for adequate lighting in playparks and for public conveniences to be located nearby was emphasised;
- literacy, numeracy and environmental awareness activities should be included in playparks, and schools and nurseries should be encouraged to make use of these facilities;
- it was requested that no covered gathering areas for teenagers be located in residential areas due to complaints of noise and mess;
- the emphasis on using natural materials in playparks was welcomed and the benefit of using wild spaces at play areas was highlighted;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the Amenities Service was working closely with colleagues in Planning to ensure that Play Sufficiency Assessments were carried out in new developments and that developer contributions for play areas were properly used;
- information was sought and provided on how a playpark was defined; the involvement of children and young people in place-based planning; the provision and maintenance of play equipment in schools; the dedesignation of playparks; the use of playparks by adults, whether the provision of exercise equipment for older children and adults had been considered; and the lead in times for supply and installation of play equipment; and
- in response to a question about play equipment required at Knockshortie Road play area in Portmahomack, it was clarified that this was not a Council site.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** and adopted the Playpark Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2033 (Appendix 1 of the report); and
- iii. **NOTED** that an annual update on progress would be reported to the Communities and Place Committee.

10. Update on Public Convenience Provision Cunntas às Ùr mu Sholar Ghoireasan Poblach

There had been circulated Report No CP/30/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- given the condition of the public conveniences in Brora, surprise was expressed they were not on the list of sites where improvements were being delivered;
- the re-opening of the public conveniences in Thurso and the ongoing refurbishment of the toilets on Whitechapel Road in Wick were welcomed;
- cleaning staff were commended for the work they did in public conveniences;
- while the stainless-steel public conveniences in Nairn were vandalism-proof in some ways they did still get damaged and people avoided using them due to the unwelcoming environment;
- information was sought, and provided, on Community Asset Transfers of public conveniences; the status of public conveniences in Dingwall and Muir of Ord; and the use of CCTV to prevent vandalism;
- on the point being raised, it was explained that the type of vandalism that often occurred in public conveniences, such as deliberately blocking toilets, leaving large amounts of litter and causing a mess on walls and ceilings, was viewed by the Police as anti-social behaviour and this could cause issues in terms of ensuring such issues were correctly reported;
- the success of honesty boxes at public conveniences was welcomed;
- on the point being raised, it was clarified that some public conveniences accepted contactless payments but these could not be used to identify who had visited the premises;
- teenagers used public conveniences as a warm space to congregate, and providing alternative spaces for them to gather could help combat the problem of vandalism;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the consequences for those caught committing vandalism could be publicised as a deterrent; and
- it was queried whether the provision of public convenience facilities in the High Street and Castle Street area of Inverness would be investigated given that the number of visitors to that area was likely to increase following the completion of the Inverness Castle project.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the improvement projects to date including the resulting environmental benefits, and improvements planned for 2024/25;
- iii. **NOTED** the challenges faced running the public convenience service including financial challenges;
- iv. **NOTED** the community support and involvement including progress with community asset transfer and leasing to communities;
- v. **NOTED** the staff accolades; and
- vi. **AGREED** the closing protocol when required to close any particular Public Convenience.

11. Bereavement Services - Project Updates

Seirbheisean Bàis – Cunntasan às Ùr mun Pròiseact

There had been circulated Report No CP/31/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

At this stage, Members and officers paid tribute to Hugh Gardner who had passed away recently. Hugh had worked for the Council for over 20 years and had been well known to Members and staff through his various roles in Property, Housing, Amenities, and Bereavement Services. He had approached his work in a professional manner, using his wide knowledge and experience, and had always been there to support colleagues.

His most recent post had been as Bereavement Services Project Manager where he had worked closely with Members across Highland on projects to maintain war memorials and provide new burial grounds and extensions. This had included successfully delivering the new burial grounds at Daviot, Dornoch and Chapelhill which had been welcomed by the local communities. He would be greatly missed, and condolences were expressed to his family.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members thanked officers for the report and welcomed the Committee being kept fully informed and given the opportunity to scrutinise Bereavement Services;
- on the point being raised, an assurance was provided that officers were committed to reporting on Bereavement Services at Area Committee level and discussing in more detail the unique challenges that existed within each area;
- the project to review the options for the replacement of the cremators at Inverness Crematorium was welcomed;
- in relation to burial ground extensions, the need for a long-term strategic approach was emphasised, particularly in Inverness which would need another major cemetery within the next decade given Kilvean Cemetery was expected to reach capacity in 2029;
- a request was made for a future report on the maintenance of older cemeteries, such as Tomnahurich Cemetery, which were places of remembrance;
- an assurance was sought that investigations into the possibility of a crematorium in Lochaber would include a renewable energy source of heat and the possibility of heating the swimming pool if the crematorium was sited on land to the rear of the leisure centre. It was confirmed that such matters would form part of the proposed options appraisal;
- information was sought, and provided, on the policy in respect of headstone safety; and
- in relation to the extension to Dores Cemetery, it was understood that the land had been acquired, and information was sought, and provided, on the anticipated timescale for completion of the project.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in Highland;
- ii. the progress for cremator replacement at Inverness Crematorium; and
- iii. the intention to commission a detailed options appraisal on the provision of a crematorium in the Lochaber Area.

12. Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages – Annual Report Clàrachadh air Breith, Bàs is Pòsadh – Aithisg Bhliadhnail

There had been circulated Report No CP/32/23 dated 10 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

In introducing the report, the Chief Registrar extended an invitation to Members to visit the Registration Centre or their local Registration Office if they wished to find out more about the work of the Registration Service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- on Skye more and more people were choosing to get married in remote and rural locations and it was important to take advantage of that. As indicated in the report, work was ongoing to explore new opportunities such as the development at the Old Man of Storr, which would be a pathfinder project;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the opening hours of the Nairn Registration Office;
- the empathy and compassion of Registrars when dealing with families who had experienced a bereavement was commended;
- congratulations were expressed to Annemarie MacAlpine, Customer Service Operations Manager for North Highland and qualified Registrar, on her appointment as Vice President of the Association of Registrars of Scotland, and the Chair confirmed that a letter had been sent to Ms MacAlpine congratulating her on her success; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Registration Offices were able to signpost people to the memorial book for those who had suffered a miscarriage before 24 weeks.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the work of the Registration team across the Highland area;
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the performance of the team for 2022, noting that this latest data had not yet been examined and finalised; and
- iii. **NOTED** the continued efforts to promote and modernise the service in relation to marriage and civil partnership, ensuring that the Highland Council continued to offer a professional and cost-effective service to the public, whilst adapting to keep up to date with the ever changing and growing wedding industry.

13. Community Asset Transfer Request Iarrtas So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd a Ghluasad

There had been circulated Report No CP/33/23 dated 9 November 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

During discussion, Mr A Baldrey, as a Local Member, expressed his support for the proposed Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

On a separate issue, concern having been expressed regarding the delays that had been experienced in relation to the CAT for Muir of Ord Men's Shed, it was confirmed that the asset transfer had taken place and that this was now a legal

process for finalising the transfer, and the Head of Community Support and Engagement undertook to liaise with Mrs A MacLean outwith the meeting.

The Committee **AGREED** the following Community Asset Transfer request:-

- Sale of the Banavie Rugby Pitch, Car Park and Play Area to Lochaber Rugby Football Club for £1, based upon the terms set out in the report.

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

There had been circulated, and were **APPROVED**, the Minutes of the Waste Strategy Working Group held on 7 November 2023.

The meeting concluded at 2.25 pm.