

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on 6 November 2023 at 9.30 am.

Present:

Mr S Kennedy
Mrs G MacKenzie

Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager
Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing
Mr D Martin, Area Education and Learning Manager, Education and Learning
Miss J MacLennan, Joint Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Mr P Young, 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

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

There had been circulated Report No DSA/15/23 dated 10 October 2023 together with the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- given significant changes over the past ten years within the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), the relevance of the KPIs, arrived at following ward and community consultations in 2013, was questioned and it was asked when these KPIs would be revisited;

- the station was commended for the rate of 99% availability of first appliance and an explanation was provided regarding the availability of the second appliance, namely a recent retirement and staff sickness;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding staffing and facilities and the Committee was advised that the station was due for refurbishment, which would include an improved decontamination area;
- a visit to the station by Members would be welcomed at any time;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding home fire safety visits, including methods of referral to the SFRS and to whom a visit could be offered;
- an update was requested, and provided, regarding the Driving Ambition programme;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the purpose of the SFRS attendance at road traffic collisions;
- concern was expressed regarding nationwide cutbacks and the impact was questioned in relation to local wildfires earlier this year;
- an update was requested regarding the implementation of the Unwanted Fire Alarm Signal procedure and it was confirmed that it had been very successful since it commenced in July, freeing up the SFRS Officers to complete training, exercises, and home fire safety visits; and
- Members commended the SFRS report and asked for their grateful thanks to be passed to the local officers for their continued services in the community.

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

4. 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** the following Dingwall and Seaforth Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved since its last meeting.

- HLH 'Dingwall Youth Forum' – Health and Wellbeing Project - £1,500
- Highland Rugby Club – Under 16s Legacy Tour to Italy in October 2023 - £200
- Dingwall Fire Brigade Community Group – Replace and Upgrade the PA system for town - £1,000
- Killearnan Public Hall – Upgrading Killearnan Public Hall (Tore) - £1,000
- Maryburgh Community Woodland Group – Removal of Dangerous Trees - £800
- Maryburgh Amenities Company Ltd – Senior Citizens Christmas Lunch - £500

5. Dingwall Common Good Fund 2023/24
Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Pheofharain 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No DSA/16/23 dated 5 October 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place, and Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- regarding paragraph 4.3.1 surrounding the anticipated increase in staff costs, clarification was sought as to the reasons for this;
- Members expressed their concerns regarding the community hub, including;
 - a) comments had been made on social media as the property continued to sit empty;
 - b) the delay in advertising despite local interest. It was acknowledged that applications had been received from two community groups but they had pulled out and this partly contributed to the delay; and
 - c) it was important to ensure best value for the public purse.
- frustration was expressed at the number of empty buildings in the town including the premises previously used by Edinburgh Woollen Mill, the former High Life Highland Offices and Pefferside Park Kiosk. It was said that interest had been received in renting each of the buildings but, to date, they had not been marketed;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding Highland Council asset rationalisation;
- Members looked forward to the upcoming removal of the scaffolding surrounding the Town Hall, upon completion expected mid-November;
- an enquiry was made regarding the old Common Good Coal Fund having previously been provided to senior citizens at Christmas and it was asked if there was any potential this could happen again. Further enquiries were necessary as procedures might have changed, such as conditions and assessment of need; and
- it was asked if an application had been received from Dingwall Community Council for meals for the vulnerable at Christmas.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the position of Dingwall Common Good Fund as shown in 2023/24 Quarter Two Monitoring Statement;
- ii. **AGREED** that information be provided to Committee Members regarding the anticipated increase in staff costs; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the position regarding the old Common Good Coal Fund would be reported to a Ward Business Meeting.

6. **Inspection Report of Dingwall Primary School by HMle Aithisg Sgrùdaidh air Bun-Sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain le HMle**

There had been circulated Report No DSA/17/23 by the Area Education and Learning Manager.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was felt that the report was fair and balanced and confidence was expressed in the newly appointed Head Teacher who would be building upon the recommendations of the inspection; and
- the Chair asked the Area Education and Learning Manager to pass on their congratulations to the newly appointed Head Teacher, Mrs Sara Macaskill,

and offered her an invitation to attend a Ward Business Meeting to outline her visions for the school, as well as offering their full support to her and her team moving forward.

Although not involved in the inspection, discussion subsequently moved to the closure of the Croileagan Nursery and the effect it had on Dingwall Primary, to where some of the children were moved. In particular, the following points were raised:-

- the children had been split between two schools and concern was expressed that Gaelic language development would be lost as they integrated more with English speaking peers;
- it has been the Croileagan organisation's decision to cease business and the Education Service was keen to support the continuation of Gaelic nursery provision, and although Dingwall Primary did not have capacity to continue this in the long-term, there were plans to develop the Croileagan premises up to Care Inspectorate standard and it was hoped that this would be completed by Easter next year;
- Members had received concerns from parents but, with no complete list of families affected, the Early Years team had been challenged in communicating with them. They had since been in contact with Croileagan staff and endeavoured to contact all parents/carers to keep them informed; and
- it was intended that peripatetic teaching staff would be employed in the interim.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the report.

7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 14 August 2023 which were approved by the Council on 14 September 2023.

The meeting ended at 10.40 am.