

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held remotely on Wednesday, 3 November 2021 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr W Mackay
Mr S Mackie
Mr M Reiss

Mr K Rosie
Mr A Sinclair
Ms J Tilt

Officials in attendance:

Ms H Ross, Senior Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mr M Sutherland, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Mrs A Donald, North Area Manager, Education and Learning
Ms H Flavell, Head Teacher, Thurso High School, Education and Learning
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Dr S Andrews, Flow Country World Heritage Bid Coordinator, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Housing and Property
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in Attendance:

Station Commander P Farrell, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

1.	<p>Appointment of Chair Cur an Dreuchd Cathraiche</p> <p>Mr W Mackay, Vice Chair, invited nominations for the appointment of a Chair of the Caithness Committee.</p> <p>Mr K Rosie seconded by Mr W Mackay moved that Mr R Bremner be appointed Chair.</p> <p>Mr A Sinclair seconded by Mr M Reiss moved that Mr S Mackie be appointed Chair.</p> <p>On the matter being put to a vote, nominations were cast as follows:-</p> <p><u>Mr R Bremner (4)</u> Mr R Bremner, Mr W Mackay, Mr K Rosie, Ms J Tilt</p> <p><u>Mr S Mackie (3)</u> Mr S Mackie, Mr M Reiss, Mr A Sinclair</p> <p><u>Decision</u> The Committee AGREED to appoint Mr R Bremner as Chair of the Caithness Committee.</p>
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2.	<p>Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan</p> <p>An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr D Mackay.</p>
3.	<p>Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt</p> <p>Item 7: Ms J Tilt (non-financial) Item 9: Mr K Rosie (non-financial)</p>
4.	<p>Minutes Geàrr-chunntas</p> <p>There were circulated for noting Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 12 August 2021, which were approved by the Council on 9 September 2021, the terms of which were NOTED.</p>
5.	<p>Matters Arising – Action Tracker Gnothaichean Ag Èirigh – Tracair Ghniomhan</p> <p>There had been circulated an action tracker which detailed the actions arising from previous meetings.</p> <p>Item 6 - Mr S Mackie advised that he had written to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in relation to the refurbishment of Thurso Fire Station, and following subsequent discussions with the Service he considered that from a Member perspective all courses of action had been taken.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed the remaining actions continued to be ongoing.</p> <p>The Committee NOTED the updates to the action tracker.</p>
6.	<p>Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/20/21 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the assistance Members could provide to encourage more recruits to come forward and for employers to release their staff, particularly for the initial training requirements, details of which were provided; • the opportunity for Members to recognise the achievements of employers locally who already accommodated the time off required by firefighters; • confirmation was sought and provided that there had been a considerable level of interest locally in the legislation which required homeowners to have interlinked fire and heat alarms, including referrals from partner organisations; and

- an explanation was sought and provided on the options available for purchasing and fitting the new interlinked alarms. The Service's community safety advocates would also pick up on this issue as part of their home fire safety visits. The Service could provide the interlinked alarms in certain circumstances and was unable to comment on how insurance companies were viewing this issue.

The Committee **NOTED** following scrutiny, the Area Performance Report.

**7. Thurso Associated School Group Overview
Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Inbhir Theòrsa**

Declarations of Interest:- Ms J Tilt declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds a family member was employed at Miller Academy and a family member attended Halkirk Primary School, Thurso but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CC/21/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The North Area Manager and Head Teacher, Thurso High School provided an update in relation to the report.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the progress in relation to nursery new builds and the ongoing work around developing the young workforce was welcomed;
- concern was expressed at the reduction in ASN staffing levels within the ASG and an explanation was sought and provided this had been necessary due to a reduction in the Council's overall ASN budget;
- the need for Members to instigate a consultation with the community on the Thurso High School's estate going forward, concern being expressed at the lack of finance and investment over recent years;
- The Head Teacher advised that if funding was provided to maintain the existing buildings, there was no significant need for a new build, however there was a need for repairs to be actioned more quickly and for her to be given more support in having outstanding repairs carried out. There was also a need to invest in improving the School's outdoor all weather sports facilities in line with new builds;
- it was disappointing that negotiations to acquire land to improve the bus turning area at Thurso High School could not be progressed further;
- the Council's budget team were considering whether refurbishments of schools were a lower cost way forward compared to new builds and also comparing the environmental implications of demolishing existing buildings;
- Thurso High School was an excellent example of how senior and other staff had consistently looked after an important asset over a number of years and was a credit to all those involved; and
- the potential to undertake tree planting at Thurso High School, including through the Queen's Platinum Jubilee scheme.

	The Committee NOTED following scrutiny, the content of the report.
8.	<p>Visitor Management Car Parking and Motorhome Provision Parcadh Chàraichean Rianachd Luchd-tadhail is Solar Dhachaighean-motair</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No. CC/22/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an explanation was sought and provided on the rationale for the delivery of Invitation to Pay rather than this being a mandatory requirement; • confirmation was sought and provided that all payment machines had card paying facilities and the option to pay remotely through an app and that when machines were being installed a check would be undertaken to ensure a phone signal could be received; • clarification was sought and provided that the proposal would generate useful data in relation to occupancy levels at sites. The roll out of public space sensors in the Highlands would also generate a map of the visitor journeys. The use of this smart technology would provide for a more strategic approach to visitor management; • an explanation was sought and provided that in terms of the larger bays identified for motorhomes, there was not a one size all fits approach and a reasonable assessment was carried out depending on the size of the car park. The rules relating to Council car parks would apply i.e. all activities must be contained within the vehicle. Related to this was the need for education, enforcement and adequate signage; • the locations of car parks at which invitation to pay would be delivered would continue to evolve, specific reference being made to sites in Thurso; • there would be a level of concern within the community at in relation to the introduction of car parking charges, and the need to provide reassurance to the public that the proposal did not involve and local Members would not support enforced parking charges; and • in regard to the above, an explanation was sought and provided on the difference between enforced parking charges and invitation to pay and that officers were aware of the sensitivities of any sites located on Common Good Land. <p>The Committee AGREED:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. the locations proposed and amend and add to them as appropriate and agree the immediate delivery of Invitation to Pay at the locations in Section 8.1 of the report and charging to be voluntary at this stage; and ii. the approach to motorhome parking at sites identified in Section 8.2 of the report.
9.	<p>Flow Country World Heritage Site Nomination – Update Ainmeachadh Làrach Dualchas na Cruinne do Dhùthaich nam Fìobhaichean – Fios às Ùr</p>

Declarations of Interest:- Ms K Rosie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Member of the Flow Country World Heritage Site Working Group but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CC/23/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- an explanation was sought and provided on the main benefits for the area associated with of the Flow Country being designated as a world heritage site;
- the importance of continuing to conserve the Flow Country site going forward and for future generations;
- the fact officers had been invited to present on the Flow Country to COP 26 recognised and reinforced the value of this area;
- the role of local Members could play in lobbying in terms of supporting the nomination process for world heritage site status and securing potential funding streams;
- it was important to reassure local residents that if the nomination was successful it would not adversely impact in terms of planning restrictions on their homes, it being confirmed there was few buildings within the boundary of the site; and
- the potential to open up access through long distance trails and enhancing facilities to attract more visitors to the Flow Country and to incorporate income generation and branding opportunities. It was confirmed the Working Group was seeking to commission a study supported by Highlands and Islands Enterprise to scope this out further.

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

**10. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2021 gu 30 Sultain 2021**

There had been circulated Report No. CC/24/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

- an explanation was sought and provided on the status of the choice based letting, it being confirmed that any decision on the future of this initiative would have to be taken in consultation with the Council's Highland Housing Register partners. Discussions had commenced on this matter and there would be consultation with tenants prior to any final decision; and
- confirmation was sought and provided on the work of the tenant participation team in reinforcing the message through publications and in meeting with tenants of the importance of engaging with officers if in rent arrears or experiencing financial difficulties.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021.

11.	<p>Additional Urgent Item St Georges Park, 'The Dammies', Thurso – Funding</p> <p>The Chair AGREED to consider an additional urgent item on the grounds of the urgent funding approvals required to undertake the significant works at St Georges Park, 'The Dammies', Thurso which the Committee had previously agreed to progress through Place Based Investment funding and on the basis of the quotations received for the works.</p> <p>Following discussion, the Committee AGREED to provide a further £15,000 of funding towards the works at St Georges Park, 'The Dammies' programme of works. Given the urgent approvals required to undertake the works, funding to be allocated through the use of the Highland Council's COVID-19 Response Fund, and if necessary the Ward Discretionary Budget, for the Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward, giving the project a total allocation of £75,000, made up of the previously committed £60,000 Place Based Investment funding and this new £15,000 commitment.</p>
	The meeting ended at 12.30pm.