

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held remotely on Monday, 12 February, 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr J Finlayson
Mr D Millar

Mr C Munro
Mr R Stewart

Officials in attendance:

Ms M Macdonald, Area Education & Learning Manager, Education & Learning
Mr M Sutherland, Interim Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure & Environment
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer, Housing & Property Service
Mr C Sharp, Repairs Manager (North), Housing & Property Service
Mr A McKinnie, Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy & Operations, Communities & Place
Mr A Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health & Bereavement Services
Ms A Clark, Head of Community Support & Engagement, Communities & Place
Mr P Waite, Outdoor Access & Long Distance Route Manager, Infrastructure & Environment
Mr J Mackay, Amenities Manager (North), Communities & Place
Mr W MacKinnon, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager, Community Regeneration, Infrastructure & Environment
Ms M Gray, Project Officer Community Regeneration, Infrastructure & Environment
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Performance & Governance

Also in attendance:-

Ms K Stevenson, 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 the Committee.

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

Julie Wileman, Assistant Ward Manager

At the commencement of the meeting, the Chair wanted the Committee to have a moment of reflection for Julie Wileman, Assistant Ward Manager who passed away suddenly on 26 January. Julie was a hard working and valuable member of staff in the ward management team covering Skye, West & Mid Ross areas of Highland, supporting the work of Elected Members and providing support to community councils and community groups. Julie carried out her duties with enthusiasm and good humour and would be very sadly missed by her colleagues and Elected Members. At this difficult time, Members thoughts were with Julie's family and friends.

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

There were none.

2. **Declarations of Interest** **Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

Item 5 – Mr C Munro (Transparency Statement)

Item 14 – Mr C Munro; Mr J Finlayson (Declaration of Interest)

3. **Minutes** **Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee (Comataidh an Eilein Sgitheanaich agus Ratharsair) held on 6 November, 2023 which were approved at the Highland Council meeting held on 14 December, 2023, the terms of which were **noted**.

4. **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report** **Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus** **Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No SR/1/24 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Following a summary of the report by the Station Commander, the work of the service on community engagement to try and improve recruitment to the service was acknowledged and had been quite positive over the last year. Fire skills courses for young people, engaging with local employers to show them the benefits of their employees could have by joining the SFRS; and undertaking more training locally were all initiatives aimed at improving recruitment and retention of staff. The joint mobilisation of crews was working well and helped keep stations operational.

It was good news that there were no casualties in this period and the data relating to incidents was below average which showed the safety message put out by the service was getting to communities.

In terms of the Uig fire station and its future relocation, the funding had been approved for a new station in next year's capital budget. In particular, there would be much improved welfare facilities for employees and there would be the opportunity for partner agencies to co-locate to the new station.

In terms of the relocation of the Portree fire station, the services property team was working with the Council to identify a suitable location and there were ongoing negotiations with partner agencies regarding this. A full update on this project would be provided to members outwith the meeting when further information was available.

The Committee **noted**:-

i the area performance report; and

ii that an update on the relocation of the Portree fire station would be provided to Members.

5. Education Reports

Transparency Statement - Mr C Munro made a transparency statement in respect of this item, as a close family member was a teacher employed by Highland Council and he also had children who attend schools in the associated school group. Mr Munro wished to record a connection to the item but having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

5a School Inspection Report – Portree Primary School

There was circulated Report No. SR/2/24 by the Area Education and Learning Manager.

Following a summary of the report by the Area Education and Learning Manager, it was highlighted that a report was being submitted to the next Education and Learning Committee which would set out improvements, more robustness and consistency in terms of assessment and moderation in schools. Overall Members noted the school inspection report and that there was good progress being made at the school and no further school inspections were required at this time.

The Committee **noted** the report's findings in relation to the school and that the Committee's congratulations would be passed onto staff on receiving a very positive school inspection report.

5b - Portree High Associated School Group Overview

There was circulated Report No. SR/2a/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Area Education and Learning Manager provided commentary on the report and thereafter reference was made to positive destinations and what could be offered in terms of modern apprenticeships. It was highlighted that Skye and Raasay had tourism at the heart of its economy and the hospitality sector was struggling to recruit. Consideration needed to be given on how to attract more young people into this sector and also the social care sector. The collaboration between school, college and local employers was key to encouraging young people having careers in these sectors. Some examples of successes where pupils had moved into careers in hospitality were provided. Items would be on a future Committee agenda relating to the Highlife Highland programme "My future, my success"; and ways to encourage local young people into jobs in hospitality and health and social care sectors.

The lack of land to build affordable housing was seen as having an impact with falling school roles in some areas and there should be collaboration between the Council's housing team, education services and the local housing association to address this. While there were house building projects currently in progress on the island more needed to be done.

The Committee **noted**:-

i the content of the report; and

ii items would be on a future Committee agenda relating to the Highlife Highland programme “My future, my success”; and ways to encourage local young people into jobs in hospitality and health and social care sectors.

6. Area Roads Capital Programme 2024/25 Prògram Calpa Rathaidean Sgìreil 2024/25

There was circulated Report No. SR/3/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Following a summary of the report by the interim Roads Operations Manager, it was understood that variations in the capital programme could be expected as priorities could change due to extreme weather events and roads could deteriorate faster than expected. These variations would be discussed with members at ward business meetings. The priorities for roads maintenance were set out in the report, however the budget for roads maintenance had not yet been agreed. It was noted that additional funds for roads maintenance were received last year and all this funding had been committed to road schemes.

The budget constraints for roads maintenance were highlighted and the amount of schemes that could be undertaken was dependent on the funding from the Council and central government. The ‘green book’ that the Scottish Government used when awarding funding to local government put a heavy weighting on road usage and not road length. It was argued that the length of the road network should be more of a consideration than road usage so that the Highlands and Skye/Raasay areas could get its fair share of roads funding. It was advised that there was a roads redesign project underway and this would look at area prioritisation of resources.

The interim Roads Operations Manager gave an update in relation to specific road schemes raised by Members, in particular in relation to gully emptying, the A855, the road to Edinbane and the issue of extending the sides of roads on Raasay. An update on the staffing establishment of the roads team was provided and the establishment was nearly at full complement.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i **approved** the proposed prioritised Area Roads Capital Programme for Isle of Skye & Raasay Area; and

ii **noted** that information would be provided to Members on planned road maintenance on the road to Edinbane and a planned safety barrier on the A855 above Idrigill.

7. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023

There was circulated Report No. SR/4/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In particular, reference was made to the difficulties some contractors were having on getting onto the Council’s framework for bidding for contracts. The bureaucracy of the framework was disincentivising them from becoming involved in the framework. It was advised that there was difficulty in obtaining contractors to carry out work on the housing stock and an undertaking was given to provide

information on the contractors framework to Members. Continuing, the maintenance team staffing establishment was at full strength which helped to alleviate some of the maintenance issues.

In terms of long void periods for properties, it was queried if this was due to repairs to houses to ensure they were up to a good standard before being offered to tenants. It was advised that all void properties had to meet an empty home standard before they could be let. The aim was to turn these properties around for re-let as quickly as possible. Energy efficiency in homes should be looked at but the difficulty was the high costs involved to implement these improvements.

Further, some of the housing stock in Broadford was not in good condition and an update on this was provided. The lack of ground maintenance around properties was a concern and specifically further information on ground maintenance at Cruachan Place, Portree would be shared with Members.

Also, it was noted that there had been good progress in reducing rent arrears. An increase in homelessness figures was to be investigated further to understand the reasons for this. Regarding a rat infestation in Uig, an option being explored was to take the grass away and replace it with gravel.

The Committee **noted**:-

- i the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 – 31 December 2023; and
- ii that information would be provided to Members on the Council's framework for contractors; and ground maintenance at Cruachan Place, Portree.

**8. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2024/25
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2024/25**

There was circulated Report No. SR/5/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

The Principal Housing Officer gave a summary of the report, following which Members were invited to agree a level of rent increase for garages for 2024/25. It was suggested that there be a rent increase of 7.95% for garages. Further, garage rent increases should be aligned in future with Council house rent increases, albeit the Committee should reserve the right to change this arrangement in future.

The Committee **agreed**:-

- i a 7.95% rent increase to apply to Isle of Skye and Raasay garages for 2024/25;
- ii in future, the Committee shall delegate the decision making authority regarding the rent increase for the Isle of Skye and Raasay Garages. The rent increase for these garages will be set to align with the rate of increase applied to Council house rents; and
- iii the Area Committee reserves the right to change this arrangement at the request of the Chair of the Committee.

9. Waste Management and Environmental Health (Abandoned vehicles) Update

There was circulated Report No. SR/6/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

Following a summary of the report by the Strategic Lead, Waste Strategy & Operations and Strategic Lead, Environmental Health & Bereavement Services, it was queried if there were any known issues regarding the development of the Portree waste transfer station. It was advised that focus was currently on the design of the transfer station in advance of a planning application being submitted and a tender for the contract. There were no risks highlighted to this project other than there was a tight timescale to complete it. In terms of changes to refuse/recycling bins, a crucial part of this project was how the changes were communicated to the public and businesses. A phased delivery of the new bins would commence across Highland in April and would include communication about the changes.

The issue of abandoned vehicles was discussed and how the Council dealt with these, the legislation surrounding this and constraints on the Council to removing these vehicles. Various scenarios regarding abandoned vehicles and how they could be removed were discussed. Any improvement in legislation and progress by the Council to remove abandoned vehicles as quickly as possible would be welcomed.

The Committee **noted**:-

- i. the progress on the Recycling Improvement Service Change and Portree Waste Station; and
- ii. the update from environmental health on abandoned vehicles.

10. Community Support & Engagement Team update

The Head of Community Support & Engagement provided an update on the review of the Community Support & Engagement team. There had been a restructure of the team as roles within the team had changed over time, there were new legislative duties and a change of focus in the Council to local decision making. Recruitment to the new team was almost complete and staff were transitioning into their new roles. A Member briefing pack on team structure, key contacts and functions of the team would be shared with Members. A detailed briefing on operational aspects of the team would be given to Members at a ward business meeting.

Members highlighted the importance of the community knowing about the changes and their appreciation of the work of the Ward Manager for Skye and Raasay was recognised. It was confirmed that communications would be issued through contact networks so that community groups would know who to contact if they had specific queries.

The Committee **noted** the update on the Community Support & Engagement team and that a Member briefing pack on the new structure, key contacts and functions of the new team would be issued to Members. There would be a detailed briefing at an area business meeting on operational matters.

11. **Modified West Highland and Islands Amended Core Paths Plan, Skye and Raasay Area**

There was circulated Report No. SR/7/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy, which summarised the review of The Highland Council Core Paths Plan in Skye and Raasay with respect to the representations received on the amended core paths plan which was out for public consultation from June to September 2019.

It was queried if a further consultation was carried out the outcome on the proposed changes to the core path plan might be different, given the length of time since the initial consultation. It was advised that there may be greater interest in the core path plan as more people had used core paths during the covid period and continued to do so. However, given the changes to the plan were minor and would not significantly affect access to walking routes in these areas, it was unlikely a further consultation would make a difference to the amendments proposed to the plan.

The Committee:-

- i. **approved** the Skye and Raasay area of the Modified West Highland and Islands Amended Core Path Plan to be submitted to Scottish Ministers. The modifications are shown in Appendix 1;
- ii. **agreed** that the changes being minor and raised no previous public comment do not require further public consultation; and
- iii. **noted** the reasons for the delay in bringing this matter to committee in paragraph 4.7.

12. **Portree Demonstrator Project - Presentation**

This item was deferred to the next meeting when a comprehensive briefing would be provided. In the meantime, the Chair provided a brief update on the project whereby a contractor and external design team had been engaged to work alongside the Council's project team to review options and develop a masterplan. Once this exercise had been completed a full update would be provided to the next area Committee.

13. **Scottish Government Play Funding Allocation Sònrachadh Maoineachadh Cluiche Riaghaltas na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No. SR/8/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place. The report proposed Members agree the spending of their area Scottish Government play funding allocation on the identified sites

The Committee **agreed**;

- i. the homologation of funding to the project identified for Dunvegan Community Park; and
- ii. the homologation of funding to the project identified for Ardvasar Play Park.

At this point the meeting was adjourned for a short break and it resumed again at 1.00 pm.

**14. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrrasan Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh Coimhearsnachd**

Declaration of Interest

Mr C Munro declared an interest in part of this item as he was a co-opted Director of SkyeConnect. He took no part in the discussion or determination of the application for funding submitted by SkyeConnect.

Mr J Finlayson declared an interest in part of this item as he had a connection with Skye & Lochalsh Citizens Advice Bureau. He took no part in the discussion or determination of the application for funding submitted by Skye & Lochalsh Citizens Advice Bureau.

There was circulated Report No. SR/9/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

The report detailed the community regeneration fund allocations received in the current round. There were 11 applications for consideration at the meeting and a total request of funding of £403,921.37, with an available budget of £437,500.67.

The Committee dealt with the applications that had been presented as follows:-

- i Skye Connect – Sustainable Transport & Infrastructure improvements – approved £57,080.00. Also to highlight concerns to applicant from Members and regular reports on the work being carried out was requested.
- ii Skye & Lochalsh Mental Health Association – connecting our communities – approved £58,476.00
- iii Uig Community Hall – Accessibility improvements - approved £67,500.00
- iv Sleat Community Trust - Supporting our community with a refurbished play area – approved £55,719.00 subject to conditions being met.
- v Carbost Pier Ltd – Safe harbour – approved £29,813.00
- vi Skye Dance – Building connection & community through dance – approved £23,052.37. Applicant to look at how they can be financially sustainable going forward and look at other funding opportunities.
- vii Broadford & Strath Community Company – resilient communities programme – approved £24,776.00. Applicant to look at financial sustainability and other funding opportunities in future.

Mr C Munro, Vice Chair of the Committee took the Chair for the next application only.

viii Skye & Lochalsh Citizens Advice Bureau – cost of living advice in the community – approved £18,177.00

ix Portree Community Centre Association – Venue co-ordinator – approved £11,328.00

x Dunvegan Community Trust – Dunvegan community park – approved £37,500.00 subject to conditions being met.

xi Broadford & Strath Community Company – Paths network feasibility study – approved £10,500.00

The Committee also **agreed** to ringfence remaining grant within the 2023/24 allocation to deliver area priorities identified through work to develop an area-based plan, subject to full applications being brought to a future committee meeting for consideration.

**15. Ward Discretionary Budget
Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

The Committee **noted** the following Ward Discretionary Fund Grants for Ward 10 in the financial year 2023/24:-

Highlife Highland Skye & Lochalsh Archive Centre £500
Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association (2) £500
Skye Youth Pipe Band £1,000
Waternish Community Garden £500
Portree & Braes Community Trust £1,500
New Pads for Tigh na Sgìre Defibrillator £55
Helping Hands Skye & Lochalsh £2000
Skeabost & District Community Council £530
Poppy Scotland Wreaths £160
Portree & Braes Community Trust £6000

Any other business

Storr Project – the Committee **noted** progress was being made and jobs at the Storr site had now been advertised on the My Job Scotland website.

The meeting ended at 2.00 p.m.