

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 22 May 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baldrey (remote)
Mr J Bruce (remote)
Ms T Collier (remote)
Mr J Finlayson
Mr L Fraser
Mr R Gale
Mr A Graham
Mr M Green

Mr R Gunn (remote)
Mrs J Hendry
Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Ms L Niven (remote)
Mr M Reiss

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)
Mr M Cameron
Mr S Kennedy
Ms K MacLean (remote)

Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr D McDonald
Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Ms M Ross

In attendance:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
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 J MacLean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Mr M Mackay, Community Development Manager, Inverness and South
Ms K Ellen, Community Support Officer
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Group Commander M Colliar, 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

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair paid tribute to former Councillor Bren Gormley following his recent death. Mr Gormley had been elected in 2007 and again in 2012 as a Councillor for Fort William and Ardnamurchan, and had served as Vice-Chair of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee and as a Member of the Adult and Children's Services Committee and Ross, Skye and Lochaber Licensing Committee and Board. He had also chaired Lochaber District Partnership and served on the Police Board. His commitment to the Lochaber community had been evidenced by the numerous directorships he had held. Condolences were extended to Mr Gormley's family and friends.

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms M Nolan and Ms M Smith.

**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 drew the Committee's attention to the following items of good news:-

- Lynn Wooley had recently retired from her position as Area Cleaning Supervisor with responsibility for the public conveniences in the North Area. Her career with the Council had started as a public convenience cleaner and she had been promoted in 2017 to Area Cleaning Supervisor. She was commended for her dedication, flexibility and hard work in ensuring the public convenience service was delivered to the highest possible standard, and was congratulated on her retirement;
- Peter Kelly would be retiring from his position of Amenities Officer at the end of June. He had been leading the Inverness Amenities team for over seven years and had a wealth of knowledge about all things horticultural. His career with the Council had begun in 1992 as the Council's Horticultural Officer in the Bught Nursery, where he had managed many of the Council's most high-profile flower beds such as the well-loved floral clock, the commemorative bedding at Cavell Gardens and the various carpet bedding displays at the Old High Church and Castle banks. He had also produced the plants for the city's numerous hanging baskets for many years. He was congratulated on his retirement;
- Meg Maclean from the Diriebught Depot had been successful in the post of Amenity Officer and would take over from Peter Kelly when he retired at the end of June. She would move from her operational support role, bringing a wealth of experience, enthusiasm and knowledge to the position, and was congratulated on her promotion;
- Neil Mackenzie, also from the Diriebught Depot, had been successful in the post of Foreperson for Inverness Amenities. He had been acting up for a period of time and was congratulated on securing this post on a permanent basis; and
- the Amenities team had been shortlisted for a Silver APSE Award in the category of Striving for Excellence. This was in recognition of the work and deliverables of the Amenities Review. All Silver Award Councils for the Parks, Grounds and Street Scene category would be competing for the Gold Award and would be interviewed by the awards panel on Wednesday 22 May with all awards presented to participants at the annual dinner the following evening. Congratulations were extended to the Team on being shortlisted and they were wished the best of luck for their interview.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Highland Performance Report for the period 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Group Commander Collier, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), provided a brief introduction to the report, drew attention to the current SFRS survey seeking views on shaping the service for the future and confirmed that the development of a new Local Delivery Plan had been postponed until these views had been collected.

The Chair reminded Members that there would be a briefing on the SFRS survey on 6 June at 2.00 pm.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the comprehensive and readable report;
- concern was expressed regarding the 0% availability of appliances in Scourie and Lochinver and how that might affect attendance at road traffic accidents in the area given that other crews were a considerable distance away;
- it was queried whether the change in the most common types of incidents being responded to would have an effect on recruitment;
- information was sought, and provided, on staff retention rates, whether there would be merit in undertaking exit surveys, how fires at battery storage units would be managed, joint mobilisation protocols in the event of roads being blocked, what could be done to help with the problem of low availability in rural areas, the possibility of extending the Balintore fire station to allow for larger appliances, and whether there was any evidence that the installation of interlinked smoke alarms was connected to the decrease in the number of dwelling fires;
- it was queried whether breathing apparatus training should be mandatory for all firefighters and whether there was a case for reducing the minimum age and fitness requirements for retained firefighters;
- congratulations were extended to Group Commander Richard Dibble and Watch Commander Mark Poe on their retirements;
- in response to a query concerning the licensing of short-term lets and whether the SFRS had the resources to deal with this, Mr Collier undertook to liaise with the fire safety team and ask them to respond; and
- it was suggested that some of the issues raised by Members be fed into the SFRS review.

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

5. Communities and Place – Service Performance Reporting for Q4 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024 Coimhearsnachdan agus Àite – Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson R1 1 Faoilleach 2024 gu 31 Màrt 2024

There had been circulated Report No CP/08/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate.

During discussion, information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for the higher levels of sickness absence within the Communities and Place Service than the Council as a whole; what could be done to reduce the number of Freedom of Information requests; and the anticipated increase in the percentage of household waste recycled following the implementation of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the service's performance and risk information.

6. Waste Management Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Stiùireadh Sgudail

There had been circulated Report No CP/09/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Chair and several other Members commented on the effects of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements in their households and areas. The roll-out so far had been successful and well received, and tribute was paid to officers;
- the communication around the new waste and recycling collection arrangements was commended. However, some Members commented that there was still a need for education as people did not understand why the changes were being made and what happened to the recyclate collected;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that stickers would be provided to clarify what should go in each bin;
- it was queried whether the Council had any plans to work with groups setting up local food composting in order to minimise the carbon emissions from the collection of food waste;
- in response to a question, it was explained that there had not been a Members' workshop on Scotland's draft Circular Economy and Waste Route Map to 2030 consultation due to time constraints;
- in response to a question concerning Energy from Waste, it was confirmed that a meeting of the Waste Strategy Working Group would be organised in the near future and that it was intended to bring a report to the Committee later in the year;
- information was sought, and provided, on what would happen if waste was put in the wrong bin; the improvements to the Seater Waste Transfer Station; the possibility of food waste collections being extended to more rural areas; ways to prevent bins blowing open in the wind; and glass recycling; and
- it was queried whether the Lochaber waste transfer station was expected to be completed on time.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the updated position on the service change project (Recycling Improvement Fund);
- ii. **AGREED** to homologate the response to Scotland's draft Circular Economy and Waste Route Map to 2030: Consultation, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- iii. **NOTED** the updated position on Fort William Waste Transfer Station.

7. Bereavement Services – Project Updates Seirbheisean Caoidh – Cunntasan Pròiseict

There had been circulated Report No CP/10/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was good to see that a new burial ground for Inverness was on the list of sites being reviewed for projects in the next 10 years as a new large cemetery was needed to future-proof the city;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the replacement of the cremators in Inverness crematorium was on track for completion in 2025;
- it was queried whether the service had the resources available to carry out all the work needed going forward;
- information was sought, and provided, on the memorial safety budget and National Assistance Burials; and
- in response to a request from the Chair of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee, the Strategic Lead, Environmental Health and Bereavement Services, undertook to provide a report on Bereavement Services to the September meeting of the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress of current projects on burial ground extensions and at Inverness Crematorium; and
- ii. future burial ground extension projects in Highland.

8. Growing our Future – Community Food Growing Annual Report A' Fàs ar n-Àm ri Teachd – Aithisg Bhliadhnail Fàs Biadh Coimhearsnachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/11/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the legacy left by the Community Food Growing Coordinator post was commended;
- progress was being made on a community food growing project in Nairn; and
- in response to a question the Community Support Officer undertook to provide Mr A Baldrey with the number of individual allotments facilitated by the Council in the previous 12 months.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress made to implement the Growing our Future strategy and deliver the community food growing action plan.

9. Update on Improvements to Public Conveniences Cunntas às Ùr mu Leasachaidhean do Ghoireasan Poblach

There had been circulated Report No CP/12/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the refurbishment of the public conveniences in Wick was welcomed, and congratulations were extended to the project board;
- concern was expressed over the limited budget for future improvement works, and it was hoped this might increase due to the Highland Investment Plan;
- it was important to recognise the importance of public convenience provision to communities, and Members commended the efforts to maintain the services being delivered and the improvement works set out in the report;
- there had been very little investment in public convenience provision on Skye, which was the second busiest tourist destination in Scotland, and it was requested that this be looked at in consultation with Local Members. Particular reference was made to the need for toilet facilities in Dunvegan;
- work done in partnership with community groups, such as the community toilets in Elgol and Broadford, should be recognised;
- officers and Members needed to continue work together to identify funding to develop public convenience provision;
- thanks were expressed for the refurbishment and upgrade projects that had been completed in north-west Sutherland, and it was requested that the projects that had not yet commenced be postponed until after the summer season;
- the new timed door lock on the Thurso public conveniences was welcomed, and thanks were extended to the local business that had been opening and closing the building prior to the lock being installed;
- information was sought, and provided, on the effect of external and internal CCTV cameras on decreasing instances of vandalism;
- in relation to the possible impact of the Inverness Castle Project on the need for public conveniences in the city centre, the Head of Community Operations and Logistics undertook to look into the matter and respond to Mr A Graham;
- the importance of members of the local community in making sure public conveniences were looked after was emphasised - for example a member of the community opening and closing the public conveniences in Golspie had helped reduce vandalism and keep the facilities operational;
- the completion of the upgrade works at Whin Park public conveniences was welcomed; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that, in 2023/2024, income of £22,328.49 had been generated from honesty boxes, £67,490 from paddle gates and £4,375.12 from showers, and this would be absorbed into the overall budget.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the content of the report;
- ii. the improvement projects to date including the resulting environmental benefits, and improvements planned for 2024/25; and
- iii. the case studies relating to Glenmore and Wick sites.

10. Comfort Scheme Annual Survey Results Toraidhean Suirbhidh an Sgeama Chofhurtachd

There had been circulated Report No CP/13/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was suggested that the payments to comfort scheme providers should be reviewed as the number of people using the facilities could put a lot of pressure on businesses, and the expenses involved, such as cleaning charges, were increasing;
- there was only one comfort scheme provider in the North West and Central Sutherland ward, which it was suggested could be because businesses were too busy to take on the additional responsibility; and
- the success of the comfort scheme in Balintore was highlighted, and thanks were expressed to the Head of Community Operations and Logistics in that regard.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the results of the 2023/24 survey undertaken with Comfort Scheme providers; and
- ii. that opportunities to promote the Comfort Scheme would continue to be explored.

11. Community Asset Transfer Request – Braes of Balvonie Iarrtas Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd – Bruthaichean Bhaile a’ Mhonaidh

There had been circulated Report No CP/14/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

The Committee **AGREED** to the sale of the land comprising two fields between Braes of Balvonie, Inverness and the A9 Trunk Road, Inverness to Balvonie Park Association for £1, based upon the terms of transfer as set out in the report at 7.1.

At this stage, the Chair congratulated Allan Gunn on his promotion to Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate, and paid tribute to his leadership of the Communities and Place team, attention to detail and work on the staff development programme.

Mr Gunn responded in suitable terms.

The meeting concluded at 12.35 pm.