

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall on 20 May 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr S Kennedy
Mr G MacKenzie

Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Paterson

In attendance:

Mr L Hannah, Community Development Manager
Mr P Waite, Outdoor Access and Long Distance Route Manager
Mr C Sharp, Repairs Manager (North)
Mr A Byrne, Principal Housing Officer
Mrs G MacPherson, Committee Officer

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 or Transparency Statements.

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn

There had been circulated Report No DSA/07/24 by the Local Group Manager for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

In response to a request from Members during a previous meeting of this Committee, it was confirmed that the performance indicators had been updated and that performance reports would cover a 6-monthly period thereby aligning with SFRS attendance at this meeting.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- it was confirmed that SFRS reports were presented to the Audit Committee once per year, in addition to regular presentation to the Communities and Place Committee;
- the Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) Policy had been in effect since July 2023 and, since implementation, there had been a significant decrease in UFAS;
- Members commended the 99.97% availability of the first appliance and enquired about the 0.03%. This accounted for approximately 15 minutes of downtime over the 6 month period reported;
- the refurbishment of the station was well underway and Members were welcome to visit the station at any time;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding joint mobilising;
- in response to a question about wildfires, it was confirmed that preventative measures included risk assessments, social media campaigns, and providing safety messages to tourists such as those hiring motorhomes;
- Members were encouraged to participate in, and share details of, the SFRS 'Shaping Our Future Service: Your Say' online survey; and
- Members were touched by the generous donation from the family of the late Mr D Munro to The Fire Fighters Charity, and the support that this would provide, and thanks and best wishes were forwarded to the local firefighters for their continued presence and dedication.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Dingwall and Seaforth Performance Report.

4. The Peffery Way, (Dingwall to Strathpeffer) Path Agreement / Path Order Proposal
Slighe Pheofhair (Inbhir Pheofharain gu Srath Pheofhair), Aonta Ceuma / Moladh Òrdugh Ceuma

There had been circulated Report No DSA/08/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- the work of the Peffery Way Association (PWA) was commended, and it was stated that the Peffery Way was a well used path;
- the purpose of the path was to offer a safe route between Dingwall and Strathpeffer to pedestrians, cyclists and families;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the change of use of land after a railway line was no longer in use, and Members were informed of the benefits of repurposing old railway lines as paths. In this case, the landowner claimed he was already using the land for grazing;
- the PWA had offered to erect gates and fencing;
- the landowner had blocked the path, and had the right to do so, as the blockage was in place before the Land Reform Act was established, and the path was not a right of way. This meant no action could be taken without agreement;

- it was felt that the public interest was the provision of a safe route for citizens to travel from one place to another, including prams, wheelchairs and cycles;
- in response to a question regarding the time and resource required from the Council to seek a Path Order, it was confirmed that this would be discussed by the Legal and Outdoor Access Teams, but a previous case where work was outsourced proved successful; and
- the advice from the Ross and Cromarty Local Access Forum was to seek a Path Order.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the two options available to the Council to enable the completion of the Peffery Way, which were:-
 - a) seek a Path Order along the old railway track bed (Route B in Appendix 1 of the report); or
 - b) pursue a Path Agreement with the landowner for the alternative route (Route A and C in Appendix 1 of the report); and
- AGREED** that the Path Order would result in a more accessible route and deliver the best outcomes for local communities (in accordance with the advice of the Local Access Forum) and **APPROVED** the option to seek a Path Order.

5. 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 between 16 February and 31 March 2024.

- i. Dingwall Fire Brigade Community Group – Christmas meal - £500
- ii. Dingwall Art Group – Exhibition display boards - £250
- iii. Killearnan Community Council – Venue Hire - £150
- iv. Community Food Initiatives North East - Fare Share in Highland - £500
- v. Muir of Ord Men's Shed – Installation and equipping of cabins - £2,709.89

6. Housing Performance Report
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No DSA/09/24 by the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to why Dingwall and Seaforth Housing Service took an average of 14.8 days to complete a non-emergency repair, when the target was 8.9 days, and Members were informed that this was due to the impact caused by reduced budgets, in addition to the large area covered, whereby travelling distances affected the

number of hours worked. They also had the second smallest workforce in the Highlands;

- in terms of void properties, information was sought, and provided, regarding the use of in-house tradesmen and subcontractors, and it was confirmed that working time was planned and well-utilised, with a limited amount of work subcontracted in order to cost save;
- Members relayed comments from concerned constituents regarding difficult tenants in homeless units and asked of the possibility of changing property use from homeless to mainstream housing. In response, Members were advised that homeless units were determined by need in an area and the Council had a legal statutory duty to house, but that officers sensitively re-let properties wherever possible;
- it was asked if the term 'homeless unit' could be changed to 'temporary house' and it was confirmed that this was already the case;
- concern was raised, and frustration shared, regarding new buildings being used to temporarily house tenants known for damaging and vandalising properties, when other good paying tenants were being left in substandard properties. An example was to be provided to the Principal Housing Officer outside of this meeting;
- Members were concerned that Housing Officers were covering the work of other Services due to their lack of capacity and it was asked what amount of support they were able to provide their tenants;
- Members had seen an increase in contact from constituents who were being evicted due to their landlord choosing to sell up, as well as those experiencing financial difficulties;
- there would be pressure on the Council moving forward as the number of properties available might not meet the capacity the Council was expected to provide for;
- in terms of sections 7.4 and 7.5 in the report, information was sought, and provided, regarding when and how the Council would intervene;
- in the case of a broken relationship, it was found that it most often left a single male without accommodation and it was asked whether there might be an option to house single males together;
- in response to a question regarding downsizing, Members were informed that there was a downsizing policy in place and that the Housing Service was trying to meet the housing demands as best they could with the supply held; and
- concern was raised regarding the effect the Green Freeport would have on housing in the Dingwall and Seaforth area.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

7. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee held on 19 February 2024 which were approved by the Council on 14 March 2024.

At this juncture, the Committee **AGREED** to add the following items to the agenda of the next and/or future meetings:-

- Green Freeport, namely implications of the final business case for Dingwall and Seaforth, including housing;
- Flood Alleviation;
- Highland Investment Plan;
- Education, particularly St Clements School and primary schools; and
- Youth Work update from High Life Highland, Highland Youth Network or Youth Highland

The meeting ended at 11.45 am.