

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Sutherland County Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Offices, Drummuie, Golspie on Tuesday 14 May 2024 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr M Baird

Mr R Gale

Ms M Hutchison (remote)

Mr J McGillivray

Mr H Morrison (remote)

Ms L Niven

In attendance:

Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager

Ms A Jansson, Area Education & Learning Manager

Ms M Grant, Principal Housing Officer

Mr C Sharp, Repairs Manager

Ms P Betts, Project Officer (Community Regeneration)

Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Station Commander D Bell, Scottish Fire & 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 R Gale in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Item 6: Mr R Gale

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No SCC/06/24 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members expressed concern at the figures for station availability in some locations in Sutherland. A specific concern was the potential for a major road traffic collision on the NC500 in remote locations and the delay that may rise due to the unavailability of local stations and distance from the nearest appliance that could be deployed.

In addition, it was suggested a different model for recruitment and training was required in the area and for innovative measures to be considered. This included the potential for training of recruits to be undertaken over a longer period to accommodate

their main employment and lowering the recruitment age in remote and rural areas to 16/17 years old to capture school leavers. The potential through community benefit schemes to pay recruits for the time involved in training and other duties and the opportunity to have discussions with employability officers also be considered.

In response, the Station Commander provided an update on the joint mobilisation pilot being trialled on the NC500 in North and West Sutherland which he indicated was providing resilience in the area. Recruitment continued to be actively pursued and he would feedback the comments in relation to training to the Area Commander.

Further comments from Members related to the need to investigate the lack of water pressure in hydrants in Durness and Scourie. The Station Commander undertook to establish responsibility for this matter.

In conclusion, the Chair extended an invitation to the Station Commander to attend a Ward Business Meeting for further discussion on the points raised.

In the meantime, the Station Commander confirmed he would feedback the points raised by Members to the Area Commander, relevant Group Commanders and also the Station Commander in Skye who was overseeing feedback on the joint mobilisation pilot.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. Attainment Overviews – Kinlochbervie, Farr, Dornoch and Golspie Associated School Groups Foir-sheallaidhean Buileachaidh – Buidhnean Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Cheann Loch Biorbhaidh, Farr, Dhòrnaich agus Ghoillspidh

There had been circulated Report Nos SCC/07/24 to SCC/10/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- an explanation was sought and provided on the standards and quality rating for Farr Primary School and it was confirmed further clarification would be sought from the Head Teacher;
- an update was sought and provided on the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on smaller rural schools in the area;
- concern at the school roll forecasts for Kinlochbervie High School and how a full curriculum would be delivered going forward, reference being made to the emphasis on digital education;
- the attainment overviews were mainly positive across the Associated School Groups (ASGs) and Members thanks be passed to all head teachers and staff for their hard work and the quality of education being delivered;
- the school roll forecasts reflected the challenges around depopulation in the area and the provision of new housing in communities was essential in tackling this issue;
- an invitation be extended to the new Head Teacher of Kinlochbervie High School to attend a future ward business meeting;
- in response to a query, the Manger confirmed she would provide Ms M Hutchison with the definition of 'training' under positive destinations; and

- attainment reporting to the Committee should include pupils from Ardgay and Assynt who attended Tain Royal Academy and Ullapool High School respectively. The Area Education & Learning Manager confirmed she would share with Members the respective reports for both ASGs.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the reports.

5. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2023 gu 31 Màrt 2024

There had been circulated Report No SCC/12/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the Repairs Team be commended for performance on repairs being well below target times;
- the impact on rent arrears figures as a result of benefits being paid in arrears and noting the Housing Manager would be asked to provide more details on this issue to the next Ward Business Meeting which he was due to attend;
- the Principal Housing Officer and staff be commended on their hard work in ensuring rent arrears in Sutherland were well below the Highland average;
- it would be helpful for Members to be provided with details of void properties within their wards so they could pass this information onto community councils to raise awareness;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed Members would be provided with an organisational chart for the Service and full contact details for officers;
- further clarity was sought and provided that it was not anticipated there would be a significant impact on the number of evictions in the area associated with the ending of the Cost of Living (Scotland) Act on 31 March 2024. The Service's focus was on providing intensive support to tenants with evictions being a measure of last resort;
- in response to a query, information was provided on the number of void properties in the area and specifically pockets of very low demand in North and West Sutherland; and
- clarification was sought and provided that currently there was no cyclical gutter cleaning programme and works were undertaken on reactive basis. However, consideration was being given to establishing an inhouse gutter cleaning team in the longer term.

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

6. Community Regeneration Funding – Assessment of Applications Maoineachadh Ath-nuadhachadh Coimhearsnachd – Measadh Iarrtasan

Declaration of Interest: Mr R Gale declared an interest in the application by the Go Golspie Development Trust on the grounds he was Trustee of the organisation and he left the meeting for the determination of the award for this application and the other applications detailed in the report. Mr H Morrison, Vice Chair, took the Chair for the determination of each of the undernoted applications.

There had been circulated Report No SCC/11/24 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

Members were advised that the available funding remaining from the 2023/24 allocation was £195,872.38 and that total value of grant requests was £219,982.33. The application by the Embo Trust had been withdrawn as they had been successful in securing a match funding request.

The Committee **APPROVED** the applications presented for a funding award from the Community Regeneration Fund as follows:

Applicant	Project	Grant awarded
GoGolspie	Increasing Capacity and Resilience within Go Golspie Development Trust	£30,071
Scourie Community Development Company	Gearing Up 2 - Continuation of Freelance Development Officer Post	£18,309
Durness Golf Club	Golf Course Machinery	£10,025
Highland Council	Sutherland Access Rangers	£100,000
Kinlochbervie Community Company	Loch Clash Regeneration Phase 3	£21,341.71
Embo Trust	Embo Old School solar panels & battery backup	Application withdrawn
Assynt Leisure	Assynt Learning Hub	£16,125.67
TOTAL		£195,872.38

7. **Ward Discretionary Awards** **Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird**

North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

The Committee **NOTED** that the following North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 1 April 2023:

Lairg Community Council - Lairg Bird Hide upgrade	£2,000.00
Sutherland Women's Football Club - Transport Funds	£800.00
Farr Youth Development – High Life Highland - Day Trip to Durness	£240.00

The Sutherland Community Partnership - Community Learning Exchange	£500.00
Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust - Kyle Feeds	£1,000.00
Lairg & District Community Initiative - Replace Flag Pole	£500.00
North West Training Centre - Learning Programme 23-24	£1,750.00
TYKES - Programme of Residential Respite	£2,500.00
Farr Edge 2000 - Continue Service	£1,240.00
Culrain Hall – Heating upgrade	£1,200.00
Scourie Community Devt Co. – Safe Parking for Affordable Housing and School	£1,000.00
North West Schools PC – Extra-curricular Activities	£1,000.00
East Sutherland Schools Sports Association – Transport	£1,000.00
Scourie Community Devt. Co. - Spring Wellbeing (Scourie)	£440.00
Total	£15,170.00

East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

The Committee **NOTED** that the following East Sutherland and Edderton Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 1 April 2023:

Clyne Heritage Society – Aultcraggie Roundhouses Archaeological Excavation	£500.00
Dornoch Bowling Club – Victorian Benches	£700.00
East Sutherland Camera Club – Highland Challenge 2023	£600.00
Sutherland Women's Football Club - Transport Funds	£800.00
Go Golspie - Caretaker Post	£500.00
The Sutherland Community Partnership - Community Learning Exchange	£500.00
Dornoch Academy - Edinburgh Book Festival Literacy Trip	£1,175.00
The Embo Trust - Old School Reset	£600.00
HLH - Dornoch Youth Services Summer Activity Programme	£1,000.00
Tykes - Programme of Respite Residential	£3,000.00
Embo Trust (Urras Euraboil) - Embo Community Centre Resilience	£ 999.99
East Sutherland Schools Sports Association – Transport	£2,560.00
Golspie Youth Action Project - Office	£1,415.00
Helmsdale PS Parent Council – Crossing Patroller Shed	£850.00
Total	£15,199.99

8. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** the Minutes of the Sutherland County Committee held on 23 January 2024, which were approved by the Council on 14 March 2024.

The meeting concluded at 12.30pm.