

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Communities and Place Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 5 September 2024 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Mrs J Hendry
Mr A Baldrey (remote)	Mrs B Jarvie (remote)
Mr J Finlayson (remote)	Mr W MacKay (remote)
Mr L Fraser	Mr G MacKenzie (Chair)
Mr R Gale	Mr H Morrison (Vice Chair)
Mr A Graham	Mr M Reiss (remote)

Non-Members also present:

Dr C Birt	
Mr K Gowans (remote)	Ms K MacLean (remote)
Ms M Hutchison (remote)	Mr D McDonald
Ms L Johnston (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Ms L Kraft (remote)	Mr D Millar (remote)
Mr R MacKintosh	Mrs M Reid
Mrs A MacLean (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)

In attendance:

Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive - Place
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 A Hunter, Service Lead – Transport and Logistics
Ms G Ward, Community Benefits Manager
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager (remote)
Ms H Ross, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms F Richardson, Community Development Manager
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Chief Superintendent R Shepherd, Police Scotland
Ms M Kinsman, BSL Interpreter (item 11 only)

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

Business

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Ms T Collier, Mr M Green, Mr R Gunn, Ms L Niven and Ms M Smith.

2. **Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement** **Foilseachaidhean Com-pàirt/Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. **Recess Powers** **Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 27 June 2024 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Communities and Place Committee.

4. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

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

- the Amenities Team had been shortlisted for two categories at the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Awards 2024. The awards ceremony would take place at the end of APSE's annual seminar on 11 and 12 September 2024. The first nomination was for Best Workforce Initiative for the Amenities Review, and the second nomination was for Best Service Team of the Year for the Parks, Grounds and Horticulture Service. Both nominations referred to the redesign of the Amenities function which had commenced in 2021 and consisted of six objectives. As a result, the entire service delivery method had been reviewed, including numbers and types of equipment, areas and routes covered, and staffing. The team then had a better understanding of their estate, more robust monitoring and an amended work programme, with increased set aside and reduced emissions. The approach taken had involved significant teamwork and consultation with staff and clients;
- the construction work for the extension at Canisbay Cemetery had been completed and was in the settlement period. This would provide an additional 500 lairs, increasing the anticipated capacity by over 100 years and allowing for the reversal of the lair purchase restrictions that were in place; and
- Daniel Ritchie had started work with the Communities and Place Service in the Customer Service Centre in June 2023, at age 16, to support the garden waste campaign for the summer, and had been retained for a year to help with various other campaigns including the recent General Election. Daniel had been keen to get into work with the aspirations of gaining an apprenticeship at 17 once he had passed his driving test. Daniel had grown into a well-developed customer service assistant who had shown more maturity than his years when providing services to members of the public. He was reliable, honest and a great ambassador for young people. He had secured a plumbing apprenticeship with the Council in the Alness Depot, having passed his driving test in the same month. Daniel would take with him a well-rounded knowledge of Council services as well as great customer care skills, and best wishes were extended to him for his bright future.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

5. Police Performance Report Aithisg Coileanaidh Poileis

There had been circulated Report No CP/15/24 by the Divisional Commander, Police Scotland.

Chief Superintendent Shepherd provided a brief overview of the report, highlighting several key points including the appointment of two new Chief Inspectors in Highland; the increasing number of traffic offences; visits to the Highlands by several high ranking Police Scotland Officers; the number of missing people; the use of significant resources to reduce violent crimes connected with County Lines activity; and the review of Police Scotland's estate.

He apologised that drink and drug driving figures were not separated in this report but confirmed they would be in future, and that the current national position was an approximately 50:50 split

During discussion the following main points were raised:-

- the work done to combat County Lines activity was commended, and the public were thanked for their help in providing information in that regard;
- information was sought, and provided, on the Rider Refinement programme for motorcyclists and what else was being done to help reduce motorcycle accidents; the rising rates of shoplifting; the use of the term 'acquisitive crime'; what happened to money that was confiscated following County Lines investigations; and the role of police during road accidents and closures;
- on the point being raised, the Chief Superintendent undertook to liaise with Roads Policing colleagues about the difficulty of catching speeding motor bikes as safety camera vans were usually looking towards oncoming traffic and motorbikes did not have front number plates;
- in response to concerns about road traffic accidents and fatalities it was confirmed that there was to be increased visibility from Roads Policing in the following few weeks with extra patrols on the roads which had seen the most accidents;
- in response to further queries surrounding roads, including concerns about older cyclists, and tourists in hire cars or campervans, the Chief Superintendent undertook to liaise with colleagues in Roads Policing regarding providing an online briefing for Members to address their concerns;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the public phones outside police stations ran on a system that was due to be disconnected by telecoms companies and the cost of replacing them with digital phone lines was deemed too high given the existence of the 111 service and that most members of the public had mobile phones. The Chief Superintendent undertook to come back to Members with more information on the consultation around this and the possibility of the phones being replaced following comments from Members that not everyone, particularly older people, had a mobile phone;
- in response to a question about whether digital road signs could be used to display speed limits in kilometres per hour to help tourists, it was clarified that discussion with Bear Scotland would be needed to see if this was possible;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the implementation of body worn cameras in Highland;
- in response to a question regarding visibility of officers, it was confirmed that officers now had the technology to enable them to work wherever they were

without needing to be in police stations, which would allow them to spend more time out in the community;

- information was sought, and provided, on whether the Police Station in Portree would be manned more regularly and whether there were still plans to move the station to a combined blue light building with other services; and
- concern was expressed around the future of the Police House in Dunvegan and the Chief Superintendent indicated that he would be happy to discuss this with Local Members outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

6. Firework Control Zones Raointean Smachd Chleasan-teine

There had been circulated Report No CP/16/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the new discretionary power and the guidance on its use provided by the Scottish Government;
- ii. **NOTED** the current situation and approach in the Highland Council area; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the proposed process for responding to any community requests.

7. Near Final Outturn Revenue Budget Monitoring for 2023/24 and Service Performance Reporting for Q1 2024/25 Toradh Faisg air Deireannach airson Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach airson 2023/24 agus Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson R1 2024/25

There had been circulated Report No CP/17/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- according to a report to the Corporate Resources Committee on 11 September, the Quarter 1 2024/25 spend was 33.6% of the total Communities and Place budget of approximately £41m;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that the detailed Quarter 1 Revenue Budget monitoring statement would be circulated to Members of the Committee as soon as it was available;
- commentary was sought, and provided, on the issues associated with the implementation of the new corporate financial system, and Members were assured that managers were maintaining an overview of spend and there was no impact on the day-to-day operations of the service;
- in relation to the near-final outturn 2023/24, approximately half of the projected overspend of £1.962m was attributed to the Service Leadership budget, and an explanation was sought, and provided, in that regard. It was confirmed that a more detailed breakdown of the Service Leadership budget overspend would be circulated to Committee Members, including an explanation as to why the near-

final overspend had more than doubled since the Quarter 3 monitoring statement;

- staff absence in the Communities and Place Service was consistently 30% above the Council average, and an update was sought, and provided, on the action being taken to address this; and
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that 2023/24 data on the inspection and sampling of high risk private water supplies should now be available, and the Strategic Lead – Environmental Health and Bereavement Services undertook to circulate it to Mr R Gale.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Service's revenue monitoring position;
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance and risk information;
- iii. **AGREED** that the Quarter 1 2024/25 Revenue Budget monitoring statement be circulated to Committee Members as soon as it was available; and
- iv. **AGREED** that a detailed breakdown of the Service Leadership budget overspend 2023/24 be circulated to Committee Members, including an explanation for the significant increase since the Quarter 3 monitoring statement.

8. Capital Monitoring: Near Final Outturn 2023/24 Coimhearsnachdan agus Àite – Sgrùdadh Calpa: Toradh Faisg air Deireannach 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No CP/18/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there was good news in the report around public conveniences, particularly the refurbishment of the facilities at Whin Park, and burial grounds, and Members welcomed burial grounds being given a higher profile at Committee in recent years;
- there had been significant slippage but it did not appear to be cause for concern;
- information was sought, and provided, in relation to the cessation of landfill in Highland and the delay in the procurement of waste shredders.

The Committee **NOTED** the near final capital outturn position for Communities and Place for 2023/24.

9. Highland Community Benefit Policy (Procurement) Poileasaidh Shochairan Coimhearsnachd (Solair agus Sochairan Saor-thoileach Eile)

There had been circulated Report No CP/19/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was hoped that lessons would be learned from the past when the majority of contracts had been awarded to large companies, and small and medium enterprises in remote communities in particular had been disadvantaged by the

procurement process. There were a number of examples of situations whereby the previous procurement exercise had put businesses at risk and driven down employment opportunities in remote and rural areas, and an assurance was sought, and provided, that this had been taken into consideration;

- the cheapest option was not always the best, and the importance of quality was emphasised; and
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Committee and Local Members would be kept up-to-date as work progressed.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the rationale for, and the work undertaken, to review the Council's approach to community benefits from procurement;
- ii. **AGREED** the draft Community Benefit from Procurement Policy set out at Appendix 2 of the report; and
- iii. **NOTED** the next steps and that an update on the implementation of this policy would be reported to this Committee in September 2025.

10. Sustainable Business Travel – Update on progress 2023/24 Siubhal Gnothachais Seasmhach – Cunntas às ùr mu adhartas 2023/24

There had been circulated Report No CP/20/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in relation to the Pathfinder Project Plan and the Opportunity Headline in respect of the existing revenue-generating network of Charge Place Scotland chargers, information was sought, and provided, on what was going to be done to encourage people to use these chargers when they were currently shying away from them due to the excessive tariffs in place in Highland. The Head of Community Operations and Logistics undertook to provide a specific statement in that regard to Mr R Gale from procurement colleagues;
- as stated in the report, transitioning the fleet was going to be financially challenging. Electric or hydrogen-powered larger vehicles and Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) in particular would be significantly more expensive than existing vehicles and, given the current financial climate, there was a real risk that transitioning larger vehicles and HGVs would not be attainable in the seven-year life of the plan. It having been questioned whether the Council was acknowledging this risk, the Head of Community Operations and Logistics confirmed that she would review the wording on the Risk Register to ensure it was robust and clear;
- it was understood that the increased weight of electric vehicles meant that tyres wore out up to 40% faster. It having been queried whether this had been taken into account, it was explained that there was not a lot of evidence regarding tyre wear at present but a comparison could be carried out and brought back next year; and
- it was queried whether there were winter or all-season tyres specifically for electric vehicles.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. progress to date on reducing fleet, miles, and emissions;

- ii. progress with Pathfinder 2 and the indicative timescale for implementation in Highland;
- iii. the updates to the action plan at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- iv. the summary of Pathfinder Projects at Appendix 2 of the report.

11. Highland British Sign Language (BSL) Local Plan 2024–2030 Plana Cànan Soidhnidh Bhreatainn 2024–2030

There had been circulated Report No CP/21/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the BSL Local Plan and the engagement taking place were welcomed. However, there was a long way to go to achieve full equity and inclusion;
- elderly people who were becoming hard of hearing often struggled to communicate in shops, for example, and it would be helpful for those who were having difficulty to learn basic BSL. It was confirmed that this issue would be raised with See Hear Highland Education and Learning Services;
- it was highlighted that this was the first time a BSL interpreter had attended a Committee meeting and it was only for this item;
- the work being done by the Education and Learning Service was commended. However, the majority of deaf people had left school, and it was necessary to look at equity for all;
- the work being done to improve BSL content and accessibility on the Council's website was welcomed. However, if equity was the aim it was necessary to provide all information in BSL;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that officers would look at the provision of training for Elected Members on Contact Scotland and the use of BSL interpreters; and
- it was welcomed that there would be ongoing regular meetings with the deaf community as they should be leading and driving this area of work.

The Committee **AGREED** the Highland BSL Local Plan for 2024-2030 as set out at Appendix 2 of the report.

12. Waste Management Service Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Atharrachadh dhan t-Seirbheis Sgudail

There had been circulated Report No CP/22/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was queried whether it was planned to provide containers for plastics, metals and cartons at recycling centres so people could dispose of their waste there if they filled their green bin before it was due to be collected;
- using a can crusher to maximise space in recycling bins was good advice, and it was confirmed that consideration would be given to including that in future communication materials;
- it was questioned how the Council could encourage people to recycle properly and encourage those who did not recycle at present to start;

- the need to provide recycling bins at the roadside and at places such as filling stations having been emphasised, the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations, confirmed he would be happy to look at that going forward;
- Members commended the Strategic Lead – Waste Strategy and Operations and his team for the efficient rollout of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements, which had brought into focus how much waste there was and led to positive behavioural change. Particular reference was made to plastic wrapping which could not be recycled, and it was suggested finding a way to address that was the next step;
- if people understood what happened to their waste it would encourage them to embrace recycling, and the need for education on the recycling journey was reiterated;
- whilst there had been some issues with food waste bins not being collected, it was understood that was due to higher than expected participation;
- some service-users, such as vulnerable people who required full-time care, required additional bins, and it would be helpful if, going forward, there could be pre-emptive communication in that regard; and
- the introduction of communal bins for flats was welcomed, and it was good to see officers engaging with residents about what suited them best. It was added that there might be a need for gravity locks in some areas.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress that had been made on the phased introduction of Recycling Improvement Funded (RIF) collection service changes; and
- ii. the progress being made on the essential infrastructure projects that would support service change in Caithness, Skye and Lochaber.

13. Community Asset Transfer Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd

13a. Annual Community Asset Transfer Report 2023/24 Aithisg Bhliadhnail Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd 2023/24

Suspension of Standing Orders - the Committee **AGREED** to suspend Standing Order 34 to allow consideration of recommendation ii. of this item.

There had been circulated Report No CP/23/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In response to a question regarding Fort Augustus Memorial Hall, which was both a listed building and a war memorial, it was confirmed that there was no indication that the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company wanted to change the character of the building.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the annual report on Community Asset Transfer, as detailed in the report and at Appendix 1 of the report, for submission to the Scottish Government; and
- ii. the removal of a right of pre-emption in regard to Fort Augustus Memorial Hall as detailed at section 7 of the report.

13b. Community Asset Transfer Request – The Field Iarrtas Gluasad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd – An t-Achadh

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

The Committee **AGREED** to the lease of the land sited at 4 River Drive, Teaninich Industrial Estate, Alness (currently known as The Field), for £1 per annum, based upon the terms of transfer as set out in the report at paragraph 8.2.

At this stage, the Chair paid tribute to Caroline Campbell, Head of Community Operations and Logistics, who would be leaving the Council at the end of October. Caroline had worked in a range of different roles and services during her 17 years of service, and had been a great supporter of her own staff and others across the organisation in a mentoring role. On behalf of the Committee, he thanked her for her years of service and wished her all the best for the future.

The meeting concluded at 1.15 pm.