

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held **remotely** on 12 August 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr A Jarvie
Mr S Mackie

Ms J McEwan
Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie

In attendance:

Ms H Ross, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager
Mr J Maclean, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Ms R Robertson, Burial Grounds Project Co-ordinator
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Station Commander, G Cringles, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Inspector S Mezals, Police Scotland
Mr P Faccenda, Focus North Partnership Manager.

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Business

Preliminaries

In response to a question, the Chair confirmed he would request that an interim report on Highland Council commercial leases in the area be brought to an Area Business Meeting at the earliest opportunity.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Gunn and Mr W MacKay.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

Item 7: R Bremner, S Mackie, Ms J McEwan (Transparency Statements)
Item 9: Mr R Bremner, Mr S Mackie (Transparency Statements)

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaìdh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 27 June 2024 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Caithness Committee.

4. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held on 20 May 2024, which were approved by the Council on 27 June 2024.

In relation to Item 9: Ward Discretionary Grants, the Senior Community Development Manager advised she would check whether the grant awarded to Vikki Mackay School of Dance – 1st Annual Easter Festival, had been recorded under the correct Ward.

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

There had been circulated Report No CC/12/24 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the Service be thanked for the informative public engagement session held in Thurso as part of the Strategic Service Review programme and on running fire skills courses in the area;
- the potential for the Service to work with Police Scotland to extend the catchment areas for recruits by providing volunteers with blue lights for their private cars. In response, challenges in relation to insurance and training were highlighted;
- further information was sought and provided on the content of the safer driving presentations delivered at Wick High School; and
- whether provision would be made for specialist equipment to tackle fires at large battery storage plants likely to be built in the area if and when the Wick and Thurso fire stations were replaced. It was confirmed the Strategic Service Review programme was reviewing the location and condition of fire stations and equipment.

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

6. Police – Area Performance Summary Poileas – Geàrr-chunntas air Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No CC/13/24 by the North Area Commander.

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 01 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the proactive approach being taken in relation to road traffic offences in the area be welcomed;
- the significant reduction in missing persons cases in the area and the impact of the closure of Avonlea Children's Home and move to children being placed in different settings;
- in response to a query, an update was provided on the action being taken to boost recruitment in the area. Members indicated they were willing to offer support in this regard;
- confirmation was sought and provided that Members would receive an update on the impact of average speed cameras installed on the Forss straight once live and speed checks would be carried on the alternative Shebster route. The Council was also conducting a speed survey on the alternative route;
- the Police be commended for their attendance at Thurso Community Council and on the level of community liaison achieved;
- concern in relation to the intercom system at Thurso Police Station and any improvements that could be delivered to this interface, including shielding the public from traffic noise and inclement weather. The Inspector confirmed he would follow up on the issues raised outwith the meeting;
- further information was sought and provided on the 'No Knives Better Lives' campaign and level of support Police Scotland was able to provide mainly in schools;
- in terms of the cost of living crisis and incidents of shoplifting, information was sought and provided on the specific items involved and importance of a partnership approach to this issue.

7. Focus North Partnership – Presentation Com-pàirteachas Fòcas a' Chinn a Tuath – Taisbeanadh

Members made the following Transparency Statements in respect of this item, however, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to the item and any personal connection, they did not consider that they had an interest to declare:

- **Mr R Bremner as Chair of Focus North Advisory Board;**
- **Ms J McEwan as she attended Focus North meetings as a substitute;**
- **Mr S Mackie as a member of the Focus North Advisory Board due to his position as Chair of Dounreay Stakeholders Group**

There was a short presentation by Peter Faccenda, Focus North Partnership Manager.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- the exciting opportunities that existed in Caithness and potential for the Partnership to be more streamlined to speed up the delivery of projects. It was reported the Partnership's Advisory and Executive Boards were reflecting on this issue, however the coordination of activities was important particularly in the climate of diminishing resources across many sectors. Progress was being made in some areas in terms of the pace of delivery through increased direct partner influence and resources being invested in area priorities;
- the volume of opportunities in the Caithness was vast and reference to the ongoing work of the Partnership to ensure the right people, skills, expertise and

infrastructure were in place to support investment and economic transformation; and

- in regard to the above, Caithness was uniquely placed as the Partnership regularly had major funders and those who were involved in skills and infrastructure around the table. It was also important that Members put forward proposals and solutions and supported projects where required.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

8. Winter Service Plan 2024/25 Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh 2024/25

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:

- in presenting future service plans to Area Committees, it would be helpful for a senior officer from fleet services to be present to allow Members to consider any issues that may impinge on the delivery of the roads operations and provide confidence the required fleet support would be available. The Council Leader advised he would also take this matter forward; and
- in response to a query, confirmation was sought and provided that the Plan and hierarchy of routes was published in the public domain. In addition, the Caithness specific information leaflet on the winter service and Highland wide series of roads factsheets would be shared with Members.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2024/25.

9. Bereavement Services – Project Updates Seirbheisean Bàis – Cunntas às Ùr mu Phròiseactan

Mr R Bremner and Mr S Mackie made Transparency Statements in respect of this item as a member of the Friends of East Caithness Cemeteries and Amenities Group and Chair of the Fairer Funeral Fees Scotland Campaign Group respectively. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed their position in relation to this item and any personal connection, they did not consider they had an interest to declare

There had been circulated Report No CC/15/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- Members thanks be conveyed to the Team for all the good work undertaken in the area and burial services provided;
- the report provided an overview of capacity issues with some burial grounds and those which had longevity; and
- highlighting the challenges that existed in identifying and developing suitable land for some burial grounds in the area and commending the progress being made with the extension at Canisbay and use of local contractors.

Thereafter, concern was expressed that Wick Burial Ground would reach capacity in around three and half years and the challenges that existed in extending the cemetery in terms of the surrounding land. It was confirmed the project team was actively seeking to identify available land for an extension in Wick with a number of potentially available sites being investigated and it was hoped a more defined answer could be provided in the coming months.

Following on from the above, Members indicated it would be helpful for the Committee to be provided with a further update within a period of 12 months regarding progress in identifying a suitable site for the Wick Burial Ground extension. In addition, it was suggested opportunities to provide future briefings to the public and community councils on the forward planning being undertaken be considered.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress of burial ground extensions in the Caithness area;
- ii. **NOTED** the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development;
- iii. **AGREED** the Committee be provided with a further update within a period of 12 months on progress with identifying a suitable site for the Wick Burial Ground extension.

**10. Wick Common Good Fund - Invitation to Pay Parking Scheme
Maoin Math Coiteachann Inbhir Ùige - Sgeama Cuireadh gus Pàigheadh airson
Parcadh**

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

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the signage at Riverside and Camps car parks be evaluated to ensure the public and tourists were aware they were available for use and to better advertise invitation to pay. It was confirmed a site visit was to be arranged involving local Members, roads officers and Principal Traffic Officer to discuss a signing plan for the car parks;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the costs associated with external directional signage would not require to be funded by the Common Good Fund;
- the need for works to be undertaken to the Camps car park due to the condition of the barriers and safety concerns at the potential damage to vehicles in some bays particularly in storm conditions. It was confirmed further discussions on potential works would be held outwith the meeting and as part of the site visit referred to above;
- confirmation was sought and provided that any costs accrued in respect of works to the Camps car park would be rechargeable to the Common Good Fund as there was no roads budget allocation for this purpose;
- the need for a forward plan for car parking in Ward 02 and the opportunity to have further discussions with officers on this matter. It was hoped to circulate Members with the draft Thurso Traffic Management Study in August 2024 and to arrange a meeting to seek their views including on car parking; and

- an update was sought and provided on the approach being to parking at the Co-op Car Park, Thurso and that it would be helpful for further discussions to be held with Members on this issue.

The Committee **AGREED** that the £2501.00 cost incurred by the Council's Parking Enforcement Team to operate the invitation to pay parking scheme at the Caithness Common Good sites be charged against the Caithness Common Good Fund.

**11. Wick Common Good Fund - Quarter 4 Monitoring Statement 2024/25
Maoin Math Coiteachann Inbhir Ùige - Aithris Sgrùdaidh Ràith 4 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No CC/17/24 by the Head of Community Support, Contact and Engagement and the Head of Corporate Finance & Commercialism.

In discussion, information was sought on the management meetings held on an operational basis to boost the income of the Wick Common Good Fund going forward. It was explained that currently there was a Highland wide officer working group with a remit for all common good funds.

Thereafter, concern was expressed at the need to have a local working group to consider opportunities to generate income from Wick Common Good assets such as the Wick Town Hall and to understand the work currently ongoing to promote and market this facility. A local vehicle to build up a Thurso Common Good Fund was also required at the earliest opportunity.

Following further discussion, it was confirmed the Senior Community Development Manager and Community Development Manager would meet with Members to discuss the establishment of a local working group to consider the potential to maximise income for Wick and Thurso Common Good Funds, how this may be managed and resourced going forward, and on the basis a more structured proposal be brought to a future Committee, if required.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the Quarter 4 monitoring statement for the Wick Common Good Fund.

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

Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved since 1 April 2023:

Group Name	Project Name	Award Amount
Community Food Initiatives North East	Fareshare in Highland	£1,690.00
Pentland Firth Yacht Club	Replacement Windows	£1,450.00

Highlife Highland	Active Schools Coaching and Equipment	£1,500.00
Sidh Chailleann Art	Annual art exhibition and set of storytelling events under the theme "Industrial Caithness	£1,000.00
Thurso Youth Club SCIO	Holiday Activities	£1,000.00
Thurso Community Council	Thurso Town Centre initiative 2024	£400.00

Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

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

Group Name	Project Name	Award Amount
Community Food Initiatives North East	Fareshare in Highland	£2,763.00
Highlife Highland	Youth Session Resources	£999.00

The meeting concluded at 1.30pm.