

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Caithness Committee** held **remotely** on Monday, 11 November 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr A Jarvie
Mr S Mackie
Ms J McEwan

Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie
Mr W Mackay

In attendance:

Ms H Ross, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms M Ross, Principal Housing Officer
Mr M Dent, Access Officer
Ms A Macrae, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Inspector K Macrae, Police Scotland

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 S Mackie in the Chair

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr R Gunn.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

Items 9 &10: Mr S Mackie (Transparency Statement/Declaration of Interest)

**3. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held on 12 August 2024 which were approved by the Council on 19 September 2024.

Arising from the Minutes, concern was expressed that Members had not yet received an update in relation to the Council's commercial leases with a specific focus on Thurso and Dunnnett campsite leases, reference being made to the opportunities to realise significant investment and benefits for local communities.

Following discussion, the Chair undertook to ensure that an update was provided to Members as soon as possible.

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

There had been circulated Report No CC/18/24 by the North Area Commander.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- contrary to Transport Scotland roads signage, the need to place responsibility for safe driving on motorcyclists as opposed to other vehicle drivers. It was explained a key issue was raising awareness of the dangers of speeding and reducing the number of road traffic accidents and fatalities;
- concern at continued driver behaviour reflected in the number of drink/drug offences over the period;
- local officers be commended on the high detection rates for drink/drug driving offences in the area;
- the robust approach being taken to theft by shoplifting be welcomed;
- a query as to why there were no recorded arrests in the area for persons being drunk and incapable. It was explained this may be due to a more encompassed approach being taken to such persons;
- in response to a query, confirmation that a date had yet to be confirmed for the introduction of body worn cameras in Caithness. The Inspector undertook to follow up on this point and respond directly to Mr M Reiss;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Police continued to use speed detection equipment in the area and Members were encouraged to report any areas of concern;
- in response to a query in relation to the roll out of push bikes for officers in the area, the Inspector undertook to follow up on this point and respond directly to Mrs J McEwan;
- Police Scotland be commended on their role in the Remembrance Sunday events held in the area; and
- the Inspector and her team be thanked for their ongoing work in communities across Caithness.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023-2026 Year 1, attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024.

5. Flow Country World Heritage Site – Presentation Làrach Dualchas na Cruinne nam Flobhachan – Taisbean

The Committee **NOTED** this item had been deferred to a future meeting.

6. Adoption of the Modified Core Paths Plan (Caithness and Sutherland) Amended Gabhail ri Plana nam Prìomh Cheuman Atharraichte (Gallaibh agus Cataibh) air Atharrachadh

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

In discussion, Members welcomed the report and commented that the integrated impact assessment was overwhelmingly positive in terms of actively encouraging and promoting outdoor access in the area. The improvements and specific projects being delivered by the Council and partners was also encouraging and reference was made to the continuing opportunities going forward.

Thereafter, an update was sought and provided on the new core path from John O'Groats to Ness of Duncansby (CA07.16c). The John O'Groats Development Trust had funded the new path and had resources for its maintenance, however the Trust did not propose to extend the path along the coast east of the caravan site due to issues of coastal erosion and therefore it had to be routed inland. Members were advised that discussions were ongoing, including with landowners, on this route.

The Committee **AGREED** to **ADOPT** the:-

- i candidate core paths as consulted upon, and not objected to, under the amended plan December 2017 to March 2018;
- ii candidate core paths as consulted upon under the modified amended plan April 2019 – May 2019;
- iii candidate core paths into the plan as directed by Scottish Ministers by letter on the 2 September 2024; and
- iv Altnabreac to Forsinain candidate core path CA01.05(C) with the exception of the level crossing at Altnabreac.

7. Housing Management Performance Report – 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 Aithisg Dèanadais Stiùireadh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2024 gu 30 Sultain 2024

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

In response to questions, it was explained the increase in rent arrears was mainly due to the migration of tenants on benefits to Universal Credit as this was paid in arrears. It was confirmed that the potential to recoup those arrears from the DWP was not an option and that the arrears remained with the tenants and the challenges in this regard were highlighted.

Thereafter, Members commended the local Housing team on their timely responses to Members enquiries and reference was made to the value of the regular Member/officer housing meetings held in the area.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024.

8. Wick Common Good Fund – Quarter 2 Monitoring Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige – Sgrùdadh Ràith 2

There had been circulated Report No CC/21/24 by the Chief Officer - Community and Housing and Chief Officer - Corporate Finance.

In addition to the report, Members were advised that the Sheriff Court had recently granted consent for the disposal, by way of "ribbon" lease, of small portions of Wick

Common Good Land at Riverside Park to wind farm developers to facilitate the oversail of turbines and equipment.

In discussion, confirmation was provided that an update would be given to a Ward Business Meeting on the income generated for the Common Good Fund from other similar “ribbon” leases and noting there were further enquiries in the pipeline.

Thereafter, Members highlighted the need to develop a longer term strategy for the best use and investment of the monies generated by and opportunities to grow the Wick Common Good Fund. It was suggested that regular diarised Member/officer meetings outwith the Committee be arranged to take this forward with the local community council also feeding into this process. A strategic approach was also required in relation to the Thurso Common Good Fund and it was important to make both Funds as robust as possible for the benefit of communities.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 2 monitoring statement for the Wick Common Good Fund.

9. Ward Discretionary Awards Duaisean fo Ùghdarras Uàird

Transparency Statement: Mr S Mackie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item on the grounds a business he co-owned and listed on his Member declarations of interest was a member of the Caithness Chamber of Commerce which had been the recipient of a Ward Discretionary award for the Caithness Transport Forum. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024:

Community Food Initiatives North East – Fareshare in Highland	£1,690.00
Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Pentland Firth Yacht Club – Replacement Windows	£1,450.00
Highlife Highland – Active School Coaching & Equipment	£1,500.00
Sidh Chailleann Art – “Industrial Caithness” Exhibition	£1,000.00
Thurso Youth Club SCIO – Holiday Activities	£1,000.00
Thurso Community Council – Thurso Town Centre initiative 2024	£400.00
Total Spend to Date	£7,540.00
Current Available Balance	£6,860.00

Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications approved 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Wick and East Caithness Ward Discretionary Budget applications had been approved for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024:

Community Food Initiatives North East – Fareshare in Highland	£2,763.00
Caithness Chamber of Commerce – Caithness Transport Forum	£500.00
Highlife Highland – Youth Session Resources	£999.00
Argyll Square Area Association – Replacement Litter Bin	£561.60
Total Spend to Date	£4,823.60
Current Available Balance	£9,576.40

10. External Appointment – Dounreay Stakeholder’s Group

Declaration of Interest: Mr S Mackie declared a financial interest in this item as Chair of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group and took no part in the discussion or determination of this item. Mrs J McEwan took the Chair for this item.

Members were advised that the Dounreay Stakeholder’s Group (DSG) had indicated to the Council that one of its three membership places on the Group has lapsed due to non-attendance over a period of time. The DSG therefore requested that the Council reappoint a replacement member as soon as possible.

The Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr R Bremner as a replacement Member to the Dounreay Stakeholder’s Group

The meeting concluded at 11.45am.