

North, West and Central Sutherland Ward Forum

Lairg Community Centre

Saturday 24th January 2012 at 11.00 am

Agenda

Present

Councillor Robbie Rowantree, Chair

Councillor Linda Munro,

Andy Mackay, Ward Manager, Highland Council

Chief Inspector Matthew Reiss, Northern Constabulary

Jim Holden, Assistant Area Housing Manager

Kevin Crowe Durness Community Council

Russell Taylor, Creich Community Council

Roddie Kerr, Assynt Community Council

Gary Sutherland, Kinlochbervie Community Council

Marion Turner, Ardgay & District Community Council

1. Apologies

Councillor George Farlow

David Hannah, Ardgay & District Community Council

Donald Fisher, Scourie Community Council

Janette Mackay, Strathly Community Council

Sandra Munro, Bettyhill Community Council

There were 5 members of the public in attendance.

2. Welcome: Councillor Robbie Rowantree welcomed everyone and introduced the members of the Ward Forum.

3. Note of Last Meeting and matters arising.

Note was amended – remove the last word and under final paragraph in point 4. Note was accepted as a true record.

4. Matters arising: Under point 7 Cllrs were to contact HC Transport Officer regarding complaints about the Parent Council concerns about the Ullapool School Bus service.

Action: AM asked to contact Transport Officer for an update and circulate to Councillors and Assynt CC members.

5. Police / Community Safety – Chief Inspector Matthew Reiss, advised he is based in Wick, Inspector Garry Cameron is now based in Thurso and Sgt Ian Sutherland is in Lairg and the Com. Safety Officer, Angi Grant, is covering Caithness & Sutherland.

One of the main concerns for Police is on road safety. In Highlands, last year sadly saw of all fatal road accidents, almost 50% happened in CSER, and the 3 main causes of most road accidents were not wearing a seatbelt, driving under the influence of drink or drugs and driving at excessive speed.

Winter road conditions were discussed and it was acknowledged not all roads could be gritted but that driving to the road conditions. Simple things like, fitting of winter

tyres, allowing more time for journeys, be more aware and alert to the winter conditions especially if temperatures are between +6°C - - 7°C.

Cllr Rowantree reported how the Ward 1 members had met the Chair and Director of TECs Services about the conditions of the roads and the consequences of this was more funds have been made available to address road drainage and maintenance.

Driving Ambitions programme for S6 Pupils is delivered by Police and other partners each year and has been very effective in the message it sends out to young people. He explained due to the numbers, it takes place on the east coast secondary schools.

The current position with the single Scottish Police Force which is to be in place for 2013 was discussed and at this time there is little detail of the future structure.

Questions raised;

From Kinlochbervie CC, how the snow clearing and gritting on single track roads has been worrying for them. One instance was given is where the snow plough blade appears to be so high it ends up making the road in a worse condition and it was felt the gritter wasn't doing the job it should do?

Action: KLB CC to contact Stuart Bell, Community Works Manager and invite him to attend a future community council meeting.

Chief Inspector Reiss was thanked by everyone for his attendance at the forums.

6. Access to Affordable Housing in NW & C Sutherland: Jim Holden, Assistant, Area Housing Manager gave a presentation on the HC Housing and Property Service. Explained that Highland Council now owned c13,500 houses in Highland (reduced from c19,500 in 1998) and that c12,00 people were on the 'housing waiting list' now called the Highland Housing Register. In the NW and Central Sutherland area, there were 484 social rented houses owned by HC and Housing associations. 65 of these became available for rent last year, but there were 145 applicants whose first choice for location of housing was in that area: there were around 300 applicants for whom NW & Central Sutherland communities were second or lower choices. This excess of demand over housing supply typified all areas of Highland and made access to affordable housing very challenging. The Council was adopting a Housing options approach, whereby applicants for housing would be advised of a range of ways of meeting their housing needs (and aspirations) that might or might not include social rented housing.

Gave a thumbnail sketch of the housing allocation policy, and explained how a dispassionate and evidence based information was required in order to ensure peoples housing needs are met, which took in social factors, such as health and disability.

Described how the Highland Council is looking at working and supporting communities interested in developing housing in their area and further information is available on the HC website

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/livinghere/housing/findinghousing/commonhousingregister/usingprospects.htm>

Questions were raised about allocations, priority to homeless, points, a more open housing register, role of the Homeless Intervention Officer and on HC land for communities to develop houses on to meet demand.

Action: Cllr Rowantree to speak with Housing and Property to see where they are with the asset register that shows all land the HC owns.

Durness has a need for affordable housing for their area but there is a high number of unoccupied housing in the area.

Action JH offered his help in discussions with the Housing Association and Durness.

A house by KLB High School lies boarded up.

Action Jim Holden said he would look into this matter with ECS.

Cllr Rowantree thanked Mr Holden for his excellent presentation.

7. Ward Discretionary Budget : The Ward Manager explained how the spending has taken place so far for this year.

8. Community Council Matters:

Ardgay – Training for Community Council's and on methods to get real community engagement.

Action AM to circulate dates of new training for Community Councils and for CC to provide what it is they would like to have training on.

Assynt – Mentioned the festival that the community is planning throughout this year.

Creich – Lack of publicity of the Rosehall post bus service and asked for better joined up working to look at ways of travelling around the area.

That due to failure of broadband services the CC has written to BT.

RR mentioned the HIE and Scottish Gov broadband project and on how Ofcom are trialling 4G trials in Cornwall.

Durness - Raised their concerns about the position of Northwest Care Alliance and the funding of respite care which has been reduced.

Councillors reported on how they had met on a number of occasions with NWCA and Social Work regarding the service. They advised the Durness CC Chair, the funding for respite care has been decided and agreed by the full Highland Council Committee. The current model for respite care is no longer on the table, that the status quo is not an option, but assured him that they would continue to encourage NWCA to fully investigate looking at the offer of the contract for Care at Home Service.

Kinlochbervie – The empty house at KLB High School needs to be investigated.

Scourie – No problems to report (all positive) - we're looking forward to the Scourie Pier Regeneration Project, the go-ahead is now eagerly awaited, HC, project managing contract. Thanks to WDB, for financial support to the Scourie News.

9. A.O.B. Model of forum and structure was discussed.

10. Theme, Date and Venue for next meeting Saturday 26 May 2012 at Skerray Village Hall. Theme – Update on the Integration of Health and Social Care Services.