

Council Report – July -September 2015

Summary of council activities:

July: No Council meetings

August:

- ❖ 4th North Planning Applications Committee
- ❖ 5th NNA Archive reception, Wick Town Hall
- ❖ 6th Discussions on participatory budgeting
- ❖ 11th Redesign of Adult Services
- ❖ 12th Planning Review Body
- ❖ 13th special Highland Council, discussions on Caithness budget, discussions with leader on Towns Gardens
- ❖ 17th Public Meeting on Towns Gardens
- ❖ 18th Leader Steering group
- ❖ 19th Planning, Development and Infrastructure committee
- ❖ 20th Community Services committee
- ❖ 26th Resources committee
- ❖ 27th Education, Children and Adult Services committee

September:

- ❖ 1st Participatory Budgeting steering group
- ❖ 3rd Highland Council
- ❖ 4th Caithness Transport Forum and Bus Users Group Wick and Thurso
- ❖ 7th NHS Highland annual review, Wick Assembly rooms
- ❖ 8th Caithness Community Safety Action Group
- ❖ 11th Training in equalities
- ❖ 15th North Planning Applications committee, Thurso Youth Partnership
- ❖ 16th last Caithness & Sutherland Area committee, Golspie

Participatory Budgeting

Caithness Councillors have agreed to set aside £30k from their individual ward discretionary budgets to be decided by the community. To be badged as 'Your cash, your Caithness', the closing date for applications – 19th October 2015 Applicants to have 5 minutes presentation comprising 3 minutes to sell application and 2 minutes of Q&A. Event to be held in PPP on Saturday 21st November 2015.

Participant will then vote on the bids.

http://www.highland.gov.uk/news/article/8932/your_cash_your_caithness

For an idea of how it works, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-juzaw-FG_Q

EU Leader

Similarly we are working on the criteria and local assessment panel for EU Leader funding.

Caithness LEADER funding priorities:

1. Tourism
2. Heritage
3. Digital
4. Innovation (and enterprise)
5. Skills development & knowledge sharing
6. Wellness and inclusion

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7. Services and infrastructure

Redesign of Adult Services

The Caithness Redesign process, initiated in has been supported by 6 work-streams. These are:

- Home Based Services
- Older Adult Mental Health & Dementia
- Community Capacity & Service Development
- Palliative Care
- Caithness General
- Rehabilitation & Reablement

Some of the work identified things that could be implemented immediately.

We have bids from Palliative Care; Alzheimer Daycare; Befriending Caithness; Dementia Link Worker. These were scored in a reference group meeting earlier this year. The budget for this comes from savings eg the Harmsworth unit or from bids to NHS Highland. As always with spend to save, finding the budget is problematical.

Added to the project was the redesign of Caithness General. This works on improving efficiencies within the building and approval for this has been given; work on the realignment of the physiotherapy and occupational health services which will enable the development of the ambulatory care unit. The group is also regularly updated on the staffing situation. NHS Highland held its Annual Review on 7th September in Wick and it was attended by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Shona Robison.

Highland Council Programme

The new independent minority administration brought forward their revised programme for the remaining duration of the council, ie until May 2017.

http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/4611/programme_of_the_highland_council

This was discussed at a special meeting in August and ratified in September. The programme includes continued commitment to lobbying for the Berriedale Braes, public Wifi, broadband, expanding of 4G mobile communications, town centre regeneration and environmental improvements in council housing schemes.

Localism

The new administration has brought forward proposals for area committees so the last Caithness & Sutherland Area committee was held last week. I paid tribute to the work of area leader Deirdre Mackay. The committee was often criticised for being an expensive talking shop, but we achieved greater scrutiny on a number of items than could ever have been done by an inverness committee. We will soon have a Caithness committee which will encompass the work of our Single Outcome Agreement community planning partners currently configured as the district partnership. So police, fire, ambulance and NHS Highland will all figure in the arrangement, with some aspects of budget control devolved to the new committee.

Towns Gardens

Discussions and a public meeting have taken place on the future of the towns gardens (Inverness, Wick and Thurso - only Skye had no gardening service), following last year's budget cuts, which were deferred to April 2016 to allow for local solutions. We are currently looking at a solution where

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North Highland College might take on a service linked to horticultural studies, as is proposed by Inverness College.

Higher Active Waste

The PDI committee discussed Scottish strategy and submitted a response.

Looking forward

Thurso Library

The refurbished Thurso library will be opening soon in the Miller building. The listed building has been completely refurbished with a new roof and will feature a teen area that we never had before, coffee, public Wi-Fi, the return of the art gallery and will be an asset to the town. Library staff are itching to get back and so too are the customers.

Swimming Pool

The ground has been broken for the extensions to the Thurso swimming pool. The project jointly funded by The Highland Council and sportsotland will see a total investment of £2.7M in the facility providing a new gym/fitness suite, a new dance studio, steam room , sauna, new changing village and replacement of the roof. Existing facilities will be refurbished with a full redecoration planned, new reception area, reconfigured storage, the existing gym will become a strength and conditioning/wellness hub and the pool being retiled. Pleased to see local company O'Brien construction was awarded the contract.

Caithness Flag

The winning entries for the new county flag will be unfurled at a ceremony – early November - in the presence of the Lord Lyon, who has promised to purchase the first flag. A total of 726 votes were recorded, more than usual for flag competitions. We will be the first mainland Scottish county to have a flag, following on from Shetland and Orkney. The announcement will be made in our new Wick council offices, Caithness House, which will be open for business on 16th October.

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Monday, 28 September 2015

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