

Stornoway Community Council

Minute of Meeting held in Newton Ward Community Rooms, Seaforth Road, Stornoway
on Thu 30 Jan 2025 at 7:00 pm

Present	Robert Doig (Chair) Josh Gibbens (Treasurer) Betty Jappy Morag Smith Cllr Frances Murray	Kenneth Burns (Vice Chair) Mike Macleod (Secretary) Ian Minty Cllr Rae Mackenzie
In Attendance	Donald Macleod (Chief Officer, Education & Children's Services, CNES)	Sharon Reid (Community Learning & Development Officer, CNES)
	7 members of the public	
Apologies	1 Janet MacDonald Cllr Duncan Macinnes Cllr George Murray Elma Afrin Kaleigh Macleod	Cameron Thompson Cllr Angus McCormack Cllr Gordon Murray Kirsten Macinnes Anji Macritchie
Childcare in Stornoway & Related Matters	2 The Chair welcomed Mr Donald Macleod, Chief Officer, Education & Children's Services, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CNES), to the meeting and invited him to give a brief presentation. Mr Macleod reviewed current childcare provision: CNES has responsibility for childcare. There are currently 18 provisions from the Butt to Barra, all within schools, mostly in Gaelic & English medium, some Gaelic only. There is also private provision, such as at Stornoway Scout Hall. CNES has a large new facility at Stornoway Primary, also one at Laxdale School. There is a statutory duty to provide 1140 free hours of childcare a year, through the locations just mentioned. There are challenges such as the closure of An Cothan – CNES has been trying to reinstate that provision. Ian Minty asked why CNES, UHI and WIHB together could not save An Cothan? Mr Macleod explained that once UHI found they could not support An Cothan, CNES and WIHB came in, looked at modelling – it has to be able to pay for itself. CNES could not find the funding. The difficulty is that it needed significant subsidy – it was not possible to provide sufficient levels of staffing. CNES had discussed with private nursery provider, who could not make it pay either. Speaking generally, all those entitled to statutory childcare are getting it. The gap is in unfunded childcare for two year olds. The Stornoway Primary facility is operating at capacity, CNES has been working to support it. Mr Macleod stated that childminding is another avenue for exploration. They are trying to recruit new childminders and held an event at Adventure Island. Childminders are self-employed individuals, and this brings nation-wide issues. The home to be used has to be compliant, and there are requirements around health and snacks. It is at the upper margins which people are willing to pay for. We need to demonstrate it is a positive thing.	

- 2 Mr Macleod explained there are shortages in Stornoway, the West Side, North Uist. The challenge is the regulatory requirement. It is the responsibility for the business owner to remain compliant, and it is not easy to run a business from your own home. CNES finds that as the Childminder's children get older, the childminder tends to exit childminding. We are looking at ways childminders could work collectively. CNES cannot run it as not a statutory requirement. Cost will vary from case to case. CNES is exploring the possibility of supporting childminders in the same way that CNES supports the two childcare providers. The challenge is the ages 1 – 2 – 3 (children are covered by maternity leave up to first birthday). CNES recognises the importance of childcare in preventing depopulation. They are trying to work with parents in Uist, trying to encourage them to move from helping each other to formalising the service. The challenge is the staffing ratio of 1:3 – has to be alternative solutions.

A member of the public suggested approaching windfarms – Point & Sandwick are good at providing facilities. Mr Macleod pointed out that a lot of windfarms have a clause in their constitution restricting funding to their own communities. He explained that the Stornoway and Balivanich facilities are for 1-2 year olds. In Stornoway there are 50 places across approximately three rooms and around 50 on the waiting list. Morag Smith asked about how someone who wanted to get into childcare could find out. Mr Macleod explained that the Early Years Service Manager is based above the Library – CNES also engages through Social Media and holds events in the Town Hall. He further mentioned that two years ago the Scottish Government made a change. Previously a child who turned five in January or February could defer starting school could get a year's free nursery care. This was changed so that any child who had not turned five by August could also defer for a year. A bottleneck was created – 60-70 children stayed in nursery a year longer. This will level out after time.

Councillor Rae Mackenzie asked about progress with the Stornoway Primary Games Court. Mr Macleod explained that the scheme had been submitted for planning permission Dec 2024, and has now moved to the procurement stage, works to go out to tender. The groundworks tendering will be done first then the building work to begin May 2025, with occupancy late autumn 2025. This is a steel frame building with double-skinned membrane over top – has to be heated and ventilated so children can use it. It is directly across from P7 – on pitch area – takes up less than one-quarter of the pitch area.

The Treasurer asked about the prospects of the Gaelic Secondary School happening. Mr Macleod explained that a report is coming to Children's Committee on Tuesday seeking consent from Elected Members. It has been brought forward since it was in the CNES Gaelic Plan. Communities want to keep Gaelic in their own community. There is a different imperative in secondary – every child in Lewis travels to Stornoway for their secondary education. There is the potential to explore more – expand provision in a secondary school, but it is at a very early stage.

The Secretary sought clarification of mainland placements. Mr Macleod explained that when a child's needs are exceptionally demanding, such as requiring 24x7 provision, parents can request that they be placed on the mainland. Councillor Rae Mackenzie stated that it was the desire of CNES to have placements on the island.

- 2 Mr Donald Macleod explained that there were educational and care elements, which are costly to provide. CNES has committed £0.5 million in improving provision complex needs to allow young people not to have to leave.

Mr Charlie Nicolson asked if plans of the Stornoway Primary complex could be given to the Community Council. It was agreed that Morag Smith will pick up plans (A1 or A2 size) and take to the library.

Given the Comhairle's financial difficulties, Mr Macleod explained that as the Education budget is approximately one-half of the Comhairle's total spend, therefore it will have to bear its share of cuts. While they will try to avoid compulsory redundancies, no details can be given until February. Cllr Frances Murray mentioned the meetings Paul Steele had had last year. There was some discussion to make it online – will be feedback not consultation.

As regards the Single Authority Model, Mr Macleod explained that it was unclear how this would impact his responsibilities. These have lots of statutory provisions, and these should remain substantially unchanged. The benefits of Single Authority would be on the wider picture – being able to work together in more harmonious ways. He gave the example of the regrettable cancellation of Move More last year.

Having answered all the questions, Mr Macleod asked a question of his own – at the Community Council last year, at the suggestion of re-starting Neighbourhood Watch. The Secretary explained that he had passed this suggestion to Cllr Frances Murray, she explained that she had spoken to Bob Shephard. The process is set out online. Morag Smith explained that Bayhead Community Association had asked for volunteers for Neighbourhood Watch, and only found one. The problem is going to be identifying the individuals to help with it.

A member of the public said – it's a generation thing – are you going to get younger people? Mr Macleod stated that it sound like there is work to be done on identifying suitable people. Another member of the public stated the fear of intimidation deters people. The first member of the public referred to the Anti-Social Behaviour Schedule, also mentioned an incident where a ball-bearing from a catapult had been fired through a window causing £500 worth of repair costs. The detective constable investigating suggested that either it had been thrown, or had come off a car being driven at speed. Ball-bearings have also been found in other gardens in the area. They expressed their concern about the lack of provision for children who do not attend school. The Anti-Social Behaviour Schedule refers young people under 18 back to Social Work. It is a small group causing a riot in town. Mr Macleod committed to take back this feedback. Morag Smith stated that no work is being done with hard-to-reach youngsters. Mr Macleod said some work was being done. Sharon Reid mentioned that Action for Children did have some funding, and suggested inviting them to a Community Council meeting. Mr Macleod said some good work is being done, including engagement of children into youth clubs that are being run.

Childcare in Stornoway & Related Matters (contd.)

- 2 A member of the public asked why the decision was made to stop the last two hours of activities for children on Friday afternoon. Cllr Frances Murray explained that the buses go back at 2 pm. Teachers have to work a 35-hour week – they have longer hours from Monday to Thursday. The Chair explained the value of Work Experience – confidence builds as young people learn. There are loads of young teenagers going out on Friday afternoons and gaining work experience.

The member of the public mentioned that Iceland introduced a culture of sport – this changed youth culture from drink and drugs. Sharon Reid mentioned that Pointers is open on Friday afternoons. There was discussion of social media. Charlie Nicolson said the Chief Inspector was looking for a way forward. Another member of the public mentioned that people in Manor have set up a WhatsApp support group. Morag Smith said the Police have a lot online about Neighbourhood Watch. A third member of the public said we should publicise Neighbourhood Watch upfront – if people knew what was involved – they want anonymity.

Minute of Meeting of 19 Dec

- 3 This was adopted, proposed by Josh Gibbens, seconded by Kenneth Burns.

Matters Arising

- 4 *The written report by the Secretary was taken as read:*
3 - Matters Arising – We have had a three-page reply from the Post Office in January, in response to our letter in December. HHP – Maintenance of Properties – a reply has now been received on this, indicating that they will circulate tenants. At this point Charlie Nicolson raised his concerns about the closure, and after discussion it was agreed that the Secretary should write formally to our MP, after first showing his letter to the other officebearers. Also write to Cllr Iain Macaulay and if possible incorporate discussion of our concerns into any meeting we may have with the MSP.

4 – Stornoway Port Authority – we have had some email correspondence with Alex Macleod, their Chief Executive, and hope to have a meeting with him in a week or two.

5 – Newton Battery Development – we have written to and emailed Alasdair Allan MSP and Highlands & Islands List MSPs. We are hopeful of having a meeting with Alasdair Allan at some point, and have separately received some useful information that the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service may have reservations about becoming a Statutory Consultee on Battery projects. However we will have to verify their position with them.

7b – Melbost West Housing Development – we have written, expressing general support for the project, but expressing our concerns about the need for children's play spaces and for good broadband connections and had an encouraging response.

Appeal for the family of Alex Benga

- 5 The Treasurer said the situation had moved much faster than time allowed. It was agreed that we will support it when time comes round again. The Secretary will try and go in to speak with Leona Rawlinson at her shop.

**Kenneth Street
Traffic**

- 6 The Secretary reported that we have emailed David Macleay of the Stornoway Area Forum and hope to have a meeting with Calum Mackenzie, the responsible officer at CNES. We have written to DFDS (no reply as yet) and the Police and received an email response. We have also received an informative and thoughtful letter from An Taigh Ceilidh on the issues with Church Street and Kenneth Street.

Cllr Rae Mackenzie stated that he had tried to do a survey of the businesses on Church Street but it had not been very successful. The Paint Shop need to have heavy deliveries. It has been suggested that there should be no through road through Church Street, apart from for delivery vehicles. The Chair stated that turning right at the bottom of Church Street is more complicated than turning left. Ian Minty stated that now the Butchers is gone, there may be a way forward.

Betty Jappy described a recent incident when she had to take an elderly gentleman along Point Street to the Royal Bank – two cars came along Point Street and they had to dive out of the way. Charlie Nicolson gave the example of “magic” bollards in Inverness. Cllr Rae Mackenzie stated that plans were now at an advanced stage for two bollards at the Crown and at the Town Hall, costing £80k, this work will be progressed.

As regards Kenneth Street, a member of the public expressed his concern that a lorry in the middle of the road could be stopping emergency services. The Vice-Chair referred to the email they had received from Councillor Angus McCormack – each street has different problems – and expressed his concern that we are waiting for a very nasty fatality. Cllr Frances Murray will arrange a meeting between the Community Council and Calum Mackenzie.

A member of the public described seeing visitors driving up Church Street, occasionally also reversing. The Chair stated there was a case for having a Pedestrian Crossing at the Bus Stop at the bottom of Church Street.

AOCB

- 7 Path to Sand Street – Cllr Frances Murray mentioned that Sandwick Community Council were looking at having a path made north of Sinclair Avenue to Sand Street. They need to have another community organisation to assist with this.

Bank Account – the Treasurer explained that there were still ongoing discussions with the Royal Bank. If no response within a week we will look at going to another bank. Western Isles Credit Union had been suggested – but they can only open accounts for individuals.

James Street – Charlie Nicolson stated that Sunday was now a normal day there after Tesco’s decision to open on the Sabbath. Another petition had been raised, with 9,000 signatures, a newspaper from London was up. Tesco was to start deliveries on 3rd March. The Chair stated that Stornoway Community Council had fulfilled its obligations by having a vote and writing to Tesco. We will note Charlie’s point.

Close

- 8 The Chair thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting.