



CAITHNESS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Meeting Minutes

Location: Microsoft Teams

Date: 27th March 2026

Time: 10.00 – 12.00

Chair: Eann Sinclair

Agenda Items

1	Welcome and Apologies	Eann Sinclair (Chair)
2	Notes from last meeting	Eann Sinclair (Chair)
3	Review of Previous Actions	Eann Sinclair (Chair)
4	Presentations - CAB – Outreach Pilot - Homestart East Highland	Jane MacIntosh Fiona Carlisle
5	Thurso Transformation Delivery Group	Eann Sinclair
6	Priority Action Tracker	Lynn McNeil
7	Highland Community Planning Partnership Board – update	Eann Sinclair
8	A.O.B	
6	Date of next meeting - Friday 26th June – 10.00 – 12.00 In Person - Friday 25th Sept – 10.00 – 12.00 In Person - Friday 18th Dec – 10.00 – 12.00 Teams	Venue to be confirmed Venue to be confirmed Microsoft Teams

Attendees: Eann Sinclair (HIE); Lynn McNeil (HC); Anne Gillies (WFWP); Alexander Glasgow (TCC); Kayleigh Nicholson (HIE); Lindsay Broomfield (Planet Youth); Cai MacIver, (HC) Toni Magee (Home Energy Scotland); Cllr Karl Rosie (HC); Luci Ireland (HC); Mark Crowe (HC); Nancy Davis (Caithness Family Support); Marie Cuthbert (NHS); Vicky Strange (HLH); Michael Simpson (CAB); Fiona Carlisle (Homestart East Caithness); Charlotte Mountford (Lyth Arts); Zoe Sutherland (CaithnessKlics)

Apologies: Christian Nicolson (NHS); Cllr Jan McEwan (HC); Jane MacIntosh (CAB); Fiona MacDonald (H&I Climate Hub); Alistair Jack (CVG); Wendy Thain (KLICS); Gillian Unger (SDS); Paul Castle (HLH); David Snashall (Spirit Advocacy); Natalie Bird (AliEnergy); Cllr Raymond Bremner

Notes from the last meeting:

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated in advance and taken as read, with no corrections raised by attendees.

Review of Previous Actions:

Lynn/Cai		Community Networking Event to be planned for mid-March – aligning with chief exec visit on 12 th march, venues to be considered PPP, Carnegie House.	Initial meeting has been held with Cai, Lynn and Eilidh from Foundation Scotland Date has now been confirmed as Thursday 28 th May – 13.00 – 16.00 Royal British Legion. Derek Brown Chief exec of Highland Council will be doing a 20-minute slot and TTDG will be invited to have a presence to continue community engagement.
All		Poverty to be a specific agenda item for next meeting – explore relaunch of Caithness Poverty Action Group or something similar	Completed – CAB and Home Start East Highland are presenting today around Poverty – Short life working group set up to discuss CPAG
Fiona Webster		Promote Community Engagement Fund for Work Life Highland	Completed – Email sent 15.12.2025 and within the minutes
Ann/Alastair		Ann to link Alastair CVG with Caithness Transport Forum to share Caithness Rural Transport input	Completed – Ann will share Trudy's email address with Alastair – Eann will also link in with him.
Lynn		Share community engagement Survey link for Thurso Transformation Delivery Group	Completed – email sent 15.12.2025 and within the minutes
Vicky Strange		Promote Get Active Highland Fund (up to £5,000 per group) – applications due by November 10th	Completed – email sent 15.12.2025 and within the minutes
Karl Rosie		Update to be provided on progress in reinvigorating the Caithness Drug & Alcohol Forum	Ongoing – Karl has met with Nina at HDAP, Cai and Lynn have offered to help to get initial meetings set up.
Lynn/Alastair		To continue gathering information from community groups for mapping food resources.	Completed – poster created and circulated for organisations and groups to display. Alastair sending to HTSI to update food map.
Cai/Alastair		To continue supporting Community councils in updating Community resilience plans and to explore funding for generators and raise issue with SSE through funders circle.	Community Resilience specific meeting held. SSEN, Highland Council Emergency Planning Officer presented as well as Alastair who shared the Staxigoe and Papigoe Resilience plan as an example – For further help - Ready Scotland

Presentations

CAB – Outreach Pilot – Michael Simpson

Jane from CAB was due to give a presentation but sent her apologies as she had been called to another meeting. Micheal gave a verbal overview in her absence.

The idea for the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) rural outreach pilot began around three years ago during a CPAG meeting focused on food banks. A key concern raised was that many rural residents, particularly those with mobility or transport difficulties, cannot easily access food banks or other essential services due to poor public transport links.

Reviewing the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) highlighted that while urban areas like Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee, Merkinch (Inverness), Thurso, Wick, and Castletown show clear deprivation patterns, rural poverty often remains invisible in the data. This reinforced the need for targeted services in remote communities.

CAB had done some outreach previously, but they recognised the need for a dedicated team. Funding was secured from Dounreay and the Robertson Trust to run a three-year pilot, employing two full-time advisors. The outreach team began work in February, with a formal launch planned for April. The project will be reviewed at 6 and 12 months.

A key message was that rural poverty is distinct and deserves to be treated as such.

The pilot aims to bring advice and support directly into rural communities, helping people who otherwise cannot reach existing services. It may be the only dedicated rural outreach service of its kind in Scotland. Jane, the project lead, will return to provide updates on progress over the coming months.

Further discussions arising from the presentation were around Fuel Poverty. Rural Households are facing severe pressures from the rising cost of domestic heating oil, which has more than doubled. Scottish Government has announced a £300 payment for households using heating oil or LPG, participants agreed that this support will not go far given current prices. The scheme will be delivered through Advice Direct Scotland. Further guidance can be found here: - [homeheatingadvice.scot](https://www.homeheatingadvice.scot)

Home-Start East Caithness – Fiona Carlisle

FC introduced herself as the manager of Home-Start Caithness and centred her presentation on the organisation's work around food and fuel insecurity, outlining how Home-Start supports families experiencing poverty. She explained that Home-Start is a long-established, family-based charity of 25 years, originally focused on children under five but now operating a whole-family approach through Whole Family Wellbeing funding. The service covers Caithness, rural Sutherland, and contributes to support in Orkney. Demand for Home-Start's support has risen sharply, growing from around 60 supported families when Fiona began to more than 170 currently, with 625 families supported last year alone through almost 4,000 interactions. Needs are increasingly complex, involving crisis-level situations such as child protection, problematic substance use, and high-intervention cases. Most referrals come from health visitors, social work and, increasingly, midwifery teams, indicating earlier engagement with families.

FC highlighted the organisation's aims: reducing isolation, providing practical and emotional support from pregnancy onwards, and helping families overcome poverty-related barriers through trauma-informed, person-centred, strengths-based approaches. A major part of this work is addressing food and fuel insecurity, especially as 17% of children in Caithness live in poverty. Home-Start works to ensure families are not forced to choose between heating and eating, partnering with groups such as Ally Energy, Citizens Advice and welfare officers, and carrying out holistic "health checks" to identify unmet needs. Support includes daily hot meals and snack bags during school holidays, their own food-sharing system, supermarket vouchers to ensure dignity and choice, and cooking sessions complete with equipment and ingredients. The team also helps families manage challenges such as cold and damp housing, lack of transport, high pre-pay fuel costs, and neurodiverse dietary needs not met by standard food bank provisions. Alongside this, Home-Start offers home visiting, group sessions, pregnancy and baby support, benefit checks, life-admin help, kinship and neurodiversity support, and nurturing activities like baby massage. Throughout all its work, the focus remains on dignity, kindness, and empowerment, helping families to build confidence and eventually thrive without ongoing support.

Further discussions highlighted a clear rise in demand for Home-Start's support, with families presenting increasingly complex needs and the expansion to whole-family work further driving this growth. Questions focused on how Home-Start tackles food poverty, the limitations of existing food-aid systems, and the need for stronger collaboration with Highland Council, particularly around funding stability, shared caseloads, and improving referral pathways. Participants also explored future funding models, the loss of the SLA, and the risk of a funding cliff-edge. Finally, there was strong agreement on the need to reinstate a poverty forum and strengthen partnerships, including work around drug-affected families and developing accessible local hubs.

Thurso Transformation Delivery Group

ES shared the ongoing progress with the £100m Thurso Transformation project, emphasising that it is far more than a new education campus, extending into wider community regeneration, whole-family wellbeing, and enabling infrastructure. Attendees noted the positive impact of having the Scottish

Government present at recent meetings, with government officials commenting on the unusually strong level of joined-up working across local partners.

Key themes included the need for better communication with the public to counter pessimistic narratives and clearly explain the project's scope, timescales, and benefits. Partners highlighted opportunities to leverage private-sector involvement, especially around renewables, and the importance of health and wellbeing being built into the project's design. The conversation also touched on youth engagement in consultations, pending publication of survey results, and the potential for greatly improved sport, leisure and cultural facilities that could support regeneration and attract events to Caithness.

Priority Action Tracker – Lynn McNeil

LM highlighted steady progress across several priority areas in Caithness, with some actions now showing as green due to strong activity led by the Whole Family Wellbeing local partnership network. Ongoing work to improve access to food and energy was noted, with Home Energy Scotland, Ali Energy and CAB continuing to respond to increasing fuel-poverty pressures. Updates were also referenced from the Caithness Drug and Alcohol Forum and employability and economic development partners.

Planet youth also provided an update. Emphasising its strong focus on early intervention and prevention, **LB** explained that the data is gathered from S3 and S4 pupils at Wick and Thurso High Schools and is used to form community action groups. These groups review the findings, covering young people's views on their environment, substance use and community life, and use the data to shape locally-driven action plans. **LB** highlighted that it is important for members of this partnership to have access to the data and offered to present Caithness-specific findings directly to the group, possibly at the next meeting.

Work is underway to incorporate quarterly updates from both the Thurso Transformational Delivery Group and the Caithness Transport Forum into the tracker. Some items marked in red relate to the Area Place Plan, and there is recognition that aspects of this plan overlap with existing workstreams, meaning sections may need consolidated to avoid duplication. The tracker will be circulated for partners to review, provide feedback, and submit any additional updates so the master version can remain accurate and up to date.

Highland Community Planning Partnership Board update

ES reported that preparation has begun for the next Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) for 2027 -2037. A call for evidence is now open for most of the year. Partners across sectors, including public services, sports, culture, and community organisation, are encouraged to submit relevant data to inform the plan. To submit any evidence please send in an email to hoip@highland.gov.uk.

ES confirmed that the HCPP Annual Conference will take place on Friday 15th May at Ross County Football Ground in Dingwall, running from 10am–4pm. The event will feature a mix of speakers and workshops. Invitations have already been issued, and anyone who has not received one was encouraged to get in touch.

For a full update from the HCPP please click the link - [HCPP Update March 2026](#)

Any Other Business

Highland and Islands Enterprise

KN informed that HIE has recently supported the creation of a Caithness Space Development Trust Forum, giving local development trusts a place to share ideas, discuss challenges and identify common barriers. HIE's role is to facilitate the forum, spot patterns in the issues raised and escalate wider

structural problems that individual groups cannot tackle alone. She noted that in Sutherland, a similar network (SCAN – Sutherland Community Anchor Network) includes *all* core third-sector organisations, not just development trusts, and suggested that Caithness could move in the same direction.

HIE is open to expanding the forum to include wider community organisations such as Home-Start and others who may benefit from collaborative problem-solving. **KN** invited anyone who feels they should be part of the group or wonders why the current list is limited to development trust to get in touch so the forum can grow into a more inclusive, area-wide network.

Caithness Poverty Forum

MS raised concern that although poverty had been touched on throughout the meeting, a focused discussion on a Caithness Poverty Forum was still needed. Eann, Cai, and Lynn confirmed that early conversations are already underway with key partners, including Jane, Fiona, and Natalie, to agree the direction and purpose of a new local poverty forum. They explained that they are intentionally keeping the planning group small at this stage until they understand the outcomes of the Highland Poverty & Equality Commission meeting that took place the same day.

The group agreed that Caithness must be proactive rather than reactive, ensuring a local forum is established before wider Highland-level decisions and funding allocations occur later in the year. **MS** requested that the poverty forum be added as an agenda item for the next meeting, and Eann committed to ensuring visible progress by then. It was also noted that a formal report on the Poverty & Equality Commission will go to Highland Council in June, giving the group an opportunity to prepare a strong Caithness-focused position in advance.

Actions

Lynn McNeil	Community Networking Event – Working with TTDG, HC & NHS finalise and circulate details
Eann Sinclair	To follow up with Alastair CVG re - Transport Forum
Lynn McNeil	Circulate Caithness Transport Forum's request for input on future priorities with the wider group.
Cllr Karl Rosie/Lynn McNeil	Caithness Drug & Alcohol Forum initial meeting to be set up
Lynn McNeil	Lynn to liaise with Vicky Rosie to supply a quarterly update from the TTDG to the Caithness CP
Cai MacIver	Poverty Forum – develop proposal and bring back to next meeting
Lindsay Broomfield	Planet Youth results to be delivered to the school and then to the CP

Next Meeting Date:

The next Caithness Community Partnership meeting is scheduled to take place on **Friday 26th June**. This will be an in-person meeting held at the Wick Town House Chamber.