

Introductory Comments about open and co-operative working between Community Councils and Highland Councillors. (Draft 2)

1. We very much welcome Michael's video about the importance of all working together as elected representatives for the good of Nairn, and would like to highlight what we think could be the way forward for regular two way communication between our groups.

The 20+ community councillors have huge wealth of knowledge and experience of the problems and issues in the area, and are surely an invaluable database and memory bank to assist in administering Nairnshire, especially when most officials are now not based locally.

In May we welcomed the new team and committed to working together in a positive and co-operative way. In return we asked that the culture of secrecy and non communication which pertained to our previous councillors would cease and that open and inclusive administration would follow.

Prior to the Unitary Authorities, District Council meetings were held in public discussing everything from major developments to dog poo and accurately and fully minuted so that people in the area were aware of what was being discussed and why decisions were taken.

It is a matter of regret that our request for open and collaborative working does not seem to be a two way process. Community Councils meet in public, and have strict rules pertaining to agendas, full and accurate minutes, and maintain informative websites detailing their actions. Highland councillors are ex officio members and are welcomed to our meetings.

In contrast Highland Council persists with secretive ward business meetings behind closed doors, where the minutes have now been manipulated to be completely meaningless and reports discussed are never revealed. Chosen officials and favoured others are selectively and anonymously included and Nairn Area Committee are now apparently merely rubberstamping decisions taken behind closed doors.

For the business of a small town in the Highlands to be treated as if it is top secret to be kept from the populace is both surreal and pathetic.

Community councils should not have to submit freedom of information requests and sometimes even appeals to the Information Commissioner to find out what is being discussed and decided in their own town. At a recent meeting Paul agreed that it was unacceptable that FOI requests had to be submitted by CCs to obtain minutes, and the issue of the secrecy of ward business meetings was to be reconsidered by HC.

We appreciate the effort that Paul is putting into writing a public blog, but this is neither corporate nor official, and can never replace full and open communication from one statutory body to another.

Q 1 Any progress?

We would like this situation of secret ward business meetings resolved in the very near future:

- That WBM agendas and reports will be sent to community councils before the meetings.
- That CC reps will be invited to take part when they have particular interest/expertise in any topic.
- That full and meaningful notes or minutes will be sent to community councils as of right.