

Meeting of the Blackburn and Kinellar Community Council

Wednesday 12 November at 7.45pm

Kinellar Community Centre

Present: Doug Grant, Martin Hunter (Chair), Alex Lamb, Emma Morrison (Secretary), Jim Ogg, & Peter Robinson

Councillors: Cllrs Gifford and Mason, and Cllr Reid (attended from 8.05 pm onwards)

In attendance: Karen Thomson

Apologies: Cllr Lonchay

1. Welcome and Apologies

Martin Hunter (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Cllr Lonchay.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Minutes of meeting held 8 October 2025

- a. Corrections – It was incorrectly recorded in the draft minute that Jim Ogg was present at the October meeting.
- b. Approval - Approved as an accurate record by Doug Grant and Jim Ogg.

4. Matters arising:

- Update regarding Public Liability Insurance

Emma Morrison has submitted a request to Zurich's business team for a quote to increase the Community Council's Public Liability Insurance (and sought confirmation that policy would extend to snow clearing activities) – response is still pending.

- Update on the North East Scotland Community Council Convention – Stonehaven Town Hall 11 October 2025

Peter Robinson provided an update on the North East Scotland Community Council Convention, held at Stonehaven Town Hall on 11 October 2025 and organised by Tealing & Feughside Community Councils. Blackburn & Kinellar Community Council were invited, and Peter Robinson attended as an interested observer.

The event was attended by approximately 50–70 Community Council representatives from across the region, along with members of the public. Presentations focused on the impacts of large-scale renewable and energy infrastructure projects, including substations, battery storage facilities, overhead lines, and wind energy developments.

While no proposals currently affect Blackburn & Kinellar directly, concerns were raised that similar issues could arise locally in future. Key points included the limited influence of community councils on major developments, the cost barriers associated with public inquiry processes, and challenges around statutory consultation and public notices.

Examples discussed included proposed developments at Tealing, Hill of Fare near Dunecht, battery storage extensions near Kintore, and energy transition proposals affecting parts of Aberdeen City.

The meeting concluded with a large majority vote in support of the Unified Statement of the Convention of Community Councils.

Peter Robinson's main takeaway was the importance of neighbouring Community Councils working collaboratively to share workloads and strengthen responses to significant planning proposals. He has prepared a short piece for the Blackburn and Kinellar Community Council webpage.

- Update regarding Aberdeenshire Funding Shortfall and proposed Coordinated Community Council Response

As discussed at the October meeting, Westhill and Elrick Community Council is seeking to hold a summit on Monday 24 November 2025 at 7.30 pm at the James Hutton Institute and has invited all 70 or so Community Councils in Aberdeenshire and all Constituency and Regional Members of the Scottish Parliament covering the Aberdeenshire Area. The purpose of the summit is to highlight the serious shortfall, relative to the average across Scotland, that our local public services receive from Scottish Government and to seek to find a way to redress this. It is Emma Morrison's intention to attend to find out more, and she will report back at the December meeting.

For the purpose of the summit, Community Councils are asked to compile a good list of examples of services not meeting reasonable expectations across as wide a range of services as possible. Members of the Community Council noted that, in this area, examples include but are not limited to difficulties accessing GP appointments, prolonged A&E waiting times, delays in ambulance response times, and road maintenance issues.

Emma Morrison also advised that David Ritchie (Westhill and Elrick Community Council) wrote to Gillian Martin MSP regarding funding of public services in Aberdeenshire and the proposed summit. A response was received from Scottish Government's Local Government Finance and Non-Domestic Rates Unit, which very much echoed the comments raised by Cllr Mason at our October meeting that the Scottish Government is always open to suggestions to improve the funding formula, however any proposals for change must come through COSLA (Convention of Scotland Local Authorities) in the first instance. Cllr Gifford noted that the Scottish Government is due to publish its proposed 2026/27 Budget on 13 January 2026, making it unrealistic to influence funding allocations for that financial year. He added that the solution is less about securing a larger share of the existing funding, and more about increasing the overall level of funding available to local government.

5. Treasurers' report

Peter Robinson advised that he now has access to the Community Council's bank account. He reported that the balance on 12 November 2025 is £1,743.77.

Emma Morrison sought approval to action the payment for the hire of the Kinellar Community Centre's meeting room for November's meeting (£30). This spend was approved by Doug Grant and Peter Robinson.

An update was provided by Emma Morrison regarding recent communication from Aberdeenshire Council on changes to the Community Council administrative grant. Aberdeenshire Council advised that it provides a discretionary annual administrative grant to Community Councils to support operating costs, noting that previously there had been no formal assessment of whether the full grant awarded was utilised. Going forward, Community Councils' use of the administrative grant will be assessed against defined categories of acceptable expenditure, including accommodation costs, insurance, stationery and printing, website costs, relevant IT software and hardware, secretary/treasurer honoraria, and storage. While the list is not exhaustive, any additional operational expenditure would require discussion with the relevant Area Office. For the 2025/26 financial year, the grant may only be used to cover costs directly associated with administering Community Council business. Emma Morrison expressed concern that these changes significantly narrow the flexibility of the administrative grant compared with previous arrangements and may hamper the Community Council's ability to respond effectively to local issues.

In discussing fundraising in light of the changes to the administrative grant, Cllr Reid noted that Kemnay Community Council had cancelled its fireworks display this year due to rising costs. He contrasted this with the experience of Kintore and District Community Council, whose fireworks display went ahead and generated a significant level of fundraising income. Cllr Reid suggested that there may be an opportunity for neighbouring Community Councils to collaborate and share events in future to improve viability. It was noted that Emma Morrison would contact Moira Moran at Kintore and District Community Council to explore this possibility further. It was also suggested that the issue of start-up grants for new Community Councils, potentially including an element of unrestricted funding to help mitigate the impact of the revised administrative grant arrangements, could be raised at a future Garioch Forum.

ACTION: Emma Morrison to contact Ann Overton (Aberdeenshire Council) to invite her to attend a future meeting to discuss community projects.

6. Police Scotland report

No report was received. Emma Morrison advised that Iain Fraser, Police Sergeant at Inverurie Police Station, had been in contact to explain that Police Scotland is currently reviewing and restructuring its approach to Community Council engagement across the Garioch area, as the existing format of reporting is considered unsuitable for both Community Councils and the Police. Police Scotland has requested feedback on the key priorities Community Councils wish to receive updates on.

Members discussed that the primary requirement is for consistent and regular communication. It was noted that this request reflects previous occasions where reports had not been received for Community Council meetings. Members agreed that a brief but consistent monthly update would be sufficient, and that the scope of information provided in reports to date broadly meets the Community Council's needs. It was also discussed that the Community Council should plan one or more related public events in 2026, inviting Police Scotland and Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards team to provide advice on avoiding scams and on issues such as property safety.

ACTION: Emma Morrison to respond formally to Iain Fraser, setting out the agreed priorities and the preference for consistent monthly reporting.

7. Adopting a Grit Bin(s) and promoting the Snow Warden Scheme

Emma Morrison provided an update on Aberdeenshire Council's Adopt a Grit Bin Scheme and the Snow Warden Scheme:

- The Adopt a Grit Bin Scheme allows Community Councils to take ownership and responsibility for grit bins within their area that do not meet current Council criteria. The deadline for applications is Friday 19 December 2025. Grit bins not marked for adoption will be removed from the network.
- By adopting a grit bin, ownership of adopted grit bins transfers to the Community Council, which becomes responsible for: replenishing the bin with a 50:50 rock salt/coarse sand mix, and replacing bins if damaged or in poor condition. Permission to retain the adopted grit bin is granted for five years, after which a reapplication to the local Roads team is required.
- Key points discussed regarding the Adopt a Grit Bin Scheme:
 - A map identifying 16 grit bins for potential removal in Blackburn and Kinellar is available in the document pack and via Microsoft Power BI.
 - Community Councils must hold Public Liability Insurance covering snow clearing activities up to £5,000,000; Emma Morrison has sought confirmation of cover from Zurich.
 - Each grit bin must display a contact name, phone number, and email address to inform the public of ownership and responsibilities.
 - *Estimated costs* for maintaining a single grit bin are approximately £546.50 per winter season (based on two 800 kg bulk bags of grit salt at £273.25 each), with an additional estimated £250 for replacement of a damaged bin.
- The Snow Warden Scheme enables community volunteers to assist with clearing snow in footways, footpaths, cul-de-sacs, streets, or housing estates. The scheme involves a Team Leader, Deputy Team Leader, Team Members, and coordination with the Local Roads Office. Under the scheme:
 - Grit will be supplied by the Roads Office and stored by the Snow Warden Leader.
 - Replenishments will be made on request to the Aberdeenshire Contact Centre by the Team Leader or Deputy.
 - Grit is to be used on Council-adopted footways and footpaths only and stored in a dry area to prevent spoilage.
 - Volunteers will be provided with PPE and equipment, including hat, gloves, high-visibility waistcoat, snow grips, and shared shovels; teams may also request snow pushers or grit spreaders.
 - Insurance remains an outstanding issue if a Snow Warden team is organised directly by Blackburn and Kinellar Community Council.

Martin Hunter noted that he had received an email from a local resident in Broadford Gardens expressing concern about the removal of their closest grit bin.

Members agreed that grit bins and the opportunity to adopt a grit bin, along with promoting the Snow Warden Scheme, would be the main focus of the December meeting. Members noted that it would be appropriate to carry out a community consultation via social media to seek opinions, suggestions, and volunteers to support funding, storage, or other practical aspects. Members also discussed the potential to liaise with the Men's Shed and the Kinellar Community Centre to explore collaborative solutions.

8. Christmas fayre at Kinellar Community Centre (30 November)

The annual Christmas Fayre at the Kinellar Community Centre is taking place on Sunday 30 November from 11am – 3pm, and Blackburn & Kinellar Community Council has been invited to have a stall. Members agreed that this would be a valuable opportunity to engage with local residents, and also support the fundraising efforts of the Community Centre. The event will also provide an opportunity to raise awareness about the removal of grit bins, the Adopt a Grit Bin Scheme, and the Snow Warden Scheme.

Emma Morrison sought approval to spend £28 to pay the Community Centre for a stall at the event. This spend was approved by Jim Ogg and Peter Robinson.

Martin Hunter offered to explore a children's craft activity with Betty Hunter, as a possible means to raise funds at the event.

ACTION: Emma Morrison to respond to Kinellar Community Centre to secure a stand at the Christmas Fayre.

ACTION: Martin Hunter to explore activities to raise funds at the event.

9. Co-opting new members to the Blackburn & Kinellar Community Council

Co-option of new members is needed to increase capacity and support the sustainability of the Community Council.

- Karen Thompson, who has attended several meetings, expressed willingness to be co-opted onto the Community Council.
- Martin Hunter highlighted the need to elect a Vice Chair.

Both the co-option of new members and the election of a Vice Chair will be actioned at future meetings.

Peter Robinson noted that he has someone in mind for co-option and will share future meeting agendas to encourage their attendance and allow them to learn more about the Community Council.

10. Aberdeenshire Councillors' update

Updates from Cllr Gifford

- Alasdair Ross, as a Policy and Consultations Officer at Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (AVA), could support community groups to increase capacity in several practical ways including guidance on governance and structure, volunteer recruitment and engagement, funding and resource development, to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of community initiatives.

- As of 4 November 2025, Aberdeenshire Council has begun active enforcement of national legislation introduced via the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which prohibits parking on pavements, double-parking, or parking across dropped kerbs.

Updates from Cllr Reid

- Marcus 'Place' Play Park survey received 77 responses.
- Aberdeen City Council are exploring a possible re-zoning of Dyce Academy to City only pupils. Should the City choose to change the boundary, changes would take effect from 2027 and there would be further consultation with affected communities.

Updates from Cllr Mason

- In 2025 many of Aberdeenshire's river catchments - including the Don, Ythan, Deveron and others - have been under sustained low-flow conditions, with some classified as "Significant Water Scarcity" by Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).
- Parking charges at Burn Lane car park in Inverurie are being retained. Cllr Reid noted that at the Garioch Area Committee on 11 November he had urged fellow Councillors to begin the process to remove the charges at Burn Lane.

11. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Blackburn & Kinellar Community Council will take place on **Wednesday 10 December 2025** at 7.45 pm, Kinellar Community Hall.