



## Area Convener Francis R M Keith

I am delighted that Sutherlands close affiliations with HMS Sutherland can be officially recognised by the granting of this honour which has only been granted on two previous occasions. The previous freemen were the Queens Own Highlanders, and the late JOF MacKay in recognition of his 50 years as a Councillor.

From the start of her construction, to her launch, commissioning and deployments around the world, the progress of HMS Sutherland has been followed carefully. Over the year's successive crew members have maintained close links with our communities and have visited many parts of the area.

As well as forging lasting friendships, the crew have worked on many projects that have directly benefited communities and have formed close relationships with many of our Sutherland Schools.

Tomorrow it will be an honour to witness the hand over of the scroll that will officially grant the ship and her crew the Freedom of Sutherland and I would invite everyone to come along and enjoy the spectacle of this historic occasion.



### **Close Connections:**

Sutherland's affiliation with HMS Sutherland began in 1995 by the former Sutherland District Council whilst the ship was being constructed at Yarrow's shipyard on the Clyde. Before her launch close ties were already established between the ship and Sutherland with members of the then skeleton crew visiting to get to know communities and to carry out work such as the creation of a garden at Migdale Hospital, Bonar Bridge for the patients to enjoy.

When the ship was commissioned in 1997 a delegation from Sutherland attended the ceremony to watch the new Captain, Commander Martin Harriman, take formal possession of the ship on behalf of the Royal Navy.

During a number of trips to Sutherland the ship has been confined to docking at Invergordon because of the draught required but in July 2002, February 2003 and again during this visit the ship has been able to drop anchor at Loch Erribol, the deep sea loch near Durness.

Pupils from Tongue, Scourie, Durness and Kinlochbervie schools visited the ship on Tuesday and Wednesday when she was in Loch Erribol and were delighted to see evidence of the close affiliation between the ship and Sutherland. Whilst on a tour below deck they noticed that the messes, including the captains cabin, were proudly bearing the names of Sutherland villages on their doors.