

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Lochaber House, High Street, Fort William on Thursday, 22 May 2014 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr B Clark
Mr B Gormley
Mr A Henderson

Mr T MacLennan
Mr B Murphy
Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Miss M Morris, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development
Mr D Haas, Acting Head of Community and Democratic Engagement
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Mr C Kemp, Area Community Services Manager, Community Services
Ms M Cameron, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Mrs N Young, Area Education Manager (West), Care and Learning Service
Mr K Masson, Policy Coordinator – Climate Change, Chief Executive's Office
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Corporate Development Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Also in attendance:

Mr A Knox, Scottish Ambulance Service
Mr R Dalziel, Scottish Ambulance Service

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr T MacLennan in the Chair

Business

Preliminaries

The Chair welcomed Mr Ben Thompson to his first meeting of the Area Committee following his recent election as a Councillor for Ward 12 (Caol and Mallaig).

1. **Apologies for Absence** **Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Baxter.

2. **Declarations of Interest** **Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declarations of Interest:-

Item 9 - Mr B Murphy (financial)

3. Helicopter Landing Sites in Lochaber Raon-laighe Heileacoptair ann an Loch Abar

There was circulated Report No. LA/14/14 dated 12 May 2014 by the Acting Head of Community and Democratic Engagement introducing a presentation by Mr A Knox and Mr R Dalziel, Scottish Ambulance Service.

It was explained that the very rural geography of Lochaber, with the inclusion of four islands, led to a scattered and fragile area which presented challenges to all emergency responders and partner agencies. Air Ambulance support extended the service provided by ambulance road vehicles in responding to emergency incidents. The ability to land in remote locations was critical and ongoing change to the fleet and equipment being used was increasing this flexibility and adaptability. Due to its environment Lochaber had frequent use of Search and Rescue helicopters. Currently there were no permanent helicopter landing and/or refueling sites in Lochaber. This was an issue which had been raised by the Community Safety Action Team and which partners were currently seeking to address. The Presentation by the Scottish Ambulance Service outlined their response to these challenges.

The presentation provided details of the current Air Ambulance fleet of 2 helicopters and two fixed wing aircraft which were available 24/7 and was Government funded. An air ambulance funded by charity was also available to the Service as was support from military aircraft. It was a national service which offered local support. There had been approximately 3,500 missions last year by the Air Ambulance Service. The role of the service was to provide transfers of casualties from remote and rural locations, the movement of specialist transfer and retrieval teams and for use in pre-hospital emergencies. The operation of the air ambulance service had weather limitations which complied with Civil Aviation Authority standards. The response time to incidents for mainland Scotland was 30 minutes and for all other areas of Scotland no longer than 45 minutes. However, for rural Lochaber, at night time, with a 45 minutes of pilot preparation included, it would be about 1½ hours before a helicopter would be on the ground. Locations of secondary Helicopter landing sites in Lochaber were provided and a further site was planned in Acharacle. However no permanent sites existed in the area. A future planned upgrade of helicopter for the Service would provide greater safety measures in flight and increased cabin/clinical space and would enhance support for the specialist retrieval services. A specialist services desk was to be set up and located in the Air Ambulance Control Room in Cardonald, co-located with an Aviation Expert and expert clinical support.

During discussion the following issues were raised:-

- there were no current plans to move Air Ambulance Service control rooms. The three control rooms in Scotland all worked together to provide quicker dispatches and a streamlined service;
- a suitable permanent landing site for Lochaber was required to support the local needs for the people in Lochaber. In this respect, reference was made to a site at Blar Mhor which had been earmarked for some form of community use. Plans for a replacement hospital on this site had also included a helicopter landing site and it would be worth pursuing what stage this proposal was at;

- a new landing site should be able to accommodate both the Air Ambulance Service and Military Search and Rescue Helicopters. However, a landing site outside a hospital may not be suitable for Military Search and Rescue Helicopters given their different role. It was advised that there was a need to have discussions with the Ministry of Defence about identifying other landing sites for use by Military Search and Rescue helicopters away from the hospital; and
- Members welcomed the advances being made by the Scottish Air Ambulance Service in providing a more adaptable emergency response.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the presentation; and
- ii. **AGREED** to recommend to the Lochaber Community Safety Action Team:-
 - a) that they evaluate, if appropriate, utilising Blar Mhor as a helicopter landing site;
 - b) the inclusion of consideration of further options for helicopter landing sites as part of the NHS Hospital Plan;
 - c) the need to have discussions with the Ministry of Defence about identifying other landing sites for use by Military Search and Rescue helicopters away from the hospital; and
 - d) that a secondary landing site in the Acharacle area be pursued.

4. Community Challenge Fund – Area Update Maoin Dùbhlán Coimhearsnachd – Fios às Ùr dhan Sgìre

There was circulated Report No. LA/15/14 dated 17 April 2014 by the Depute Chief Executive which provided Members with an opportunity to consider the interest in the Community Challenge Fund, launched in January 2013, at a local level and also to discuss how the Fund could best be promoted and utilised within the local area.

The report set out the four main types of project which were eligible for funding from the Fund and provided a summary of the Fund to date. There were significant opportunities presented to communities through the Fund and it was important to ensure that communities were empowered and supported to make this work for them. At the Highland Council meeting in March 2014 a series of changes, which were detailed in the report, were made to the Fund to make it more accessible and applicants and staff more supported.

Concern was expressed about the increasing reliance on voluntary organisations to provide some services. These organisations were struggling to recruit and retain volunteers at a time when there was a greater demand for their services due to reductions in Government and Local Government funding. There was a need to sustain the future of voluntary organisations and encourage more community activity of this nature.

It was requested that the cost of delivery of the Community Challenge Fund be provided in the first year of its operation. In this respect, only £10k had so far been committed from the fund of £1m, although there had been a considerable amount of Officer time in processing applications and the cost of this needed to be provided.

The comment was made that the Fund offered the opportunity for communities to take control of the provision of services and deliver them better to suit local needs. It

was felt that one of the criteria for projects, namely, projects which would prevent the need for Council services to be provided or expanded in the future, was very open ended. Concerns had also been expressed about the amount of work communities were taking on. In this respect, the level of support that the Council could give to communities with their proposals should be made known. Also, it was queried what would happen to Council employees employment contracts for services that were being transferred to communities. In this regard information was sought on the number of employees that had been transferred under TUPE to other organisations in the last 6 years.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the take up of the Fund to date in Lochaber;
- ii. **NOTED** the changes made to the Fund and the approach to promoting the Fund agreed at Council in March 2014;
- iii. **NOTED** the feedback provided to the fund's applicants;
- iv. **AGREED** that information be provided to Mr Henderson as to the costs of running the fund in its first year; and
- v. **AGREED** that information be provided to Mr Clark as to the number of staff who had transferred under TUPE to other organisations in the previous 6 years.

5. Rural Poverty – Research Briefing Bochdainn Dùthchail - Brath Rannsachaidh

There was circulated Report No. LA/16/14 dated 10 April 2014 by the Head of Policy and Reform which provided Members with a summary of the methodology and findings of two research studies considering rural poverty published in 2013: *A Minimum Income Standard for Remote Rural Scotland* and *Local Incomes and Poverty in Scotland*. The former considered the increased costs of living in rural areas and the latter the difficulties in measuring poverty and deprivation in these areas. The studies had provided valuable insight and published evidence regarding the costs of living in remote rural Scotland and demonstrated the importance of using a variety of indicators when measuring income and poverty. The research was important as it assisted understanding the needs of the population and for developing policies and plans.

Following the publication of these studies, a rural proofing tool for Highland had been drafted. It provided key questions to policy makers on areas to think about when developing a new policy or service. The introduction of rural proofing should ensure that rural communities were not adversely affected by new policies and that, if needed, adjustments to these policies are made to reflect rural needs.

A good example of how this tool would be used was on the Service Point consultation exercise currently being undertaken. The tool could also have been used to ascertain the rural impact of increasing fares on the Corran Ferry. The socio economic study carried during the Corran Ferry consultation had taken the findings of these reports into account and it was therefore essential that cognisance of the outcomes was taken on board. However, it was pointed out that competition legislation required the Council to cover the costs of running the Corran Ferry but a rural proofing tool could highlight a potential detrimental impact on rural poverty, thus resulting in conflicting requirements.

The view was expressed that the gap between rich and poor was widening and this was not sustainable and account should be taken of the main UK Minimum Income Standard study which highlighted that neither the minimum wage nor working wage benefits were high enough to provide families with an acceptable standard of living. It was important therefore that, when jobs were created, consideration be given not only to how many jobs were provided but at what level. This study also highlighted that the gap was even larger for individuals living within remote rural Scotland. The findings of this report should be taken account of when developing policies and plans to tackle rural deprivation and, while it was important that the tool ensured that there was no deterioration in levels of poverty, it was also important to try and improve levels as well.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the findings of both research papers; and
- ii. that a rural proofing tool had been drafted, assisted by the findings of these research studies, for whose use there would be opportunities in 2014.

6. Carbon CLEVER Càrbon CIALLACH

There was circulated Report No. LA/17/14 dated 6 May 2014 by the Head of Policy and Reform which provided Members with an update on the Carbon CLEVER initiative and invited Members to consider how the initiative could be further developed in Lochaber.

It was advised that Carbon CLEVER had the aim to capture, co-ordinate and promote the good work that was being conducted across the Highlands to reduce carbon emissions and to identify a programme of work to meet the ambitions of the initiative. Developing a Carbon CLEVER Lochaber would require local challenges and opportunities to be recognised and understood. The report detailed the challenges and opportunities in Lochaber to reduce carbon emissions by 2025, provided details of the Carbon CLEVER Declaration which was aimed at businesses, community groups and public sector organisations interested in making financial and resource savings by becoming more efficient and reducing their carbon emissions.

The report also provided details of an idea to develop “Smart Towns” where energy production was in balance with use and storage, and details of a Carbon CLEVER Commuting initiative to promote sustainable travel throughout the Highlands, as part of Transport Scotland’s Smarter Choices, Smarter Places programme.

During discussion, Members commented as follows:-

- the Corran Ferry contributed towards keeping carbon emissions down but there was a danger, if ferry fares were increased, that people would chose to use their cars instead;
- tourism was important to Lochaber and, as a result, charging points were needed for electric vehicles for use by visitors to the area;
- Lochaber Environmental Group had already done some useful research into carbon emissions;
- given existing and potential renewable energy projects there was a real possibility that Lochaber could become carbon neutral;

- Lochaber was already ahead environmentally than many other areas with the Green Egg Project being cited as a particular example. This Project had won £300,000 in a competition run by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts to find new and better ways to tackle climate change and provided a transferrable model which could be used elsewhere; and
- although a lot of initiatives might be cost effective they sometimes needed considerable investment to start them off i.e installation of solar panels.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** that the Climate Change Team work with local organisations, stakeholders and community groups to gain an insight into local opportunities and priorities to inform the Carbon CLEVER Action Plan; and
- NOTED** the progress to date on the Smart Towns project and **AGREED** that a conceptual project outline be brought to a future meeting of this committee.

7. **Ardnamurchan High School Associated School Group Overview** **Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidhnean Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-sgoil Àird nam Murchan**

There was circulated Report No. LA/18/14 dated 12 May 2014 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Ardnamurchan High School Associated School Group and provided useful updated links of further information in relation to these schools.

In speaking to the report, the Area Education Manager highlighted pupil attainment and achievement together with wider achievements and notable successes. To complement this information and in response to Members' requests, the percentage of pupils participating in after school activities had also been included. The primary schools in this area served over 140 pupils, with the secondary school serving 108 young people. Substantive Head Teachers covered Strontian, Lochaline and Kilchoan Primary Schools and a Cluster Head Teacher was in place for Ardgour and Acharacle Primary Schools. Head Teachers were in receipt of support through the Quality Improvement Officer and the Area Office.

In discussion, Members referred to the difficulties that had been encountered in finding a permanent Mathematics teacher for Ardnamurchan High School and it was suggested that this could in part be due to competition for housing locally making it difficult for newly qualified teachers to find accommodation. It was also commented that Feisean was active in the area and information regarding pupil involvement would be useful. Reference too was made to the discussion which had taken place at the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee on 21 May 2014 regarding the statutory consultation on the future education provision for the Strontian Primary School Catchment Area. The need for action to address accommodation issues at Strontian Primary had been known for some time and one solution that had been considered was siting the Primary School next to Ardnamurchan High School. However, little progress had been made with this over the previous two years until a recent meeting had been called, with parents and the Parent Council, at which it was announced a statutory consultation was to take place. This had upset parents given that the proposals were different to what had previously been considered and consequently the Parent Council had asked that a forth option be considered which was that a new primary school be built adjacent to the nursery building. It was

emphasised that it was essential that the consultation be as open as possible and that all parties worked collectively. The lack of proper discussion had meant that the local community had felt they did not have ownership of the proposals in the statutory consultation and it was vital that officers engage with the community and keep Local Members informed.

In other comments, the percentage of pupils from Ardnamurchan High School progressing on to Higher Education was welcomed, a figure higher than the rest of Highland and Scotland. However concern was expressed that Ardnamurchan High School condition level was reported as being a “C”, a surprising indicator given that the school had only been built 10 years previously.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the condition of Ardnamurchan High School, detailed as a “C”, be investigated and confirmation reported to a Lochaber Wards Business Meeting.

8. Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets Programme Prògram Rothaireachd, Coiseachd agus Sràidean nas Sàbhailte

There was circulated Report No. LA/19/14 dated 7 May 2014 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the projects delivered through the Scottish Government funding for Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets programme for the Lochaber area, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The programme aimed to encourage sustainable and active travel to school by improving safety and removing barriers to walking and cycling. It also aimed to encourage more people to think about their travel decisions. The programme had a budget of £348,000 for 2014/15, an increase of £111,000 over the 2013/14 budget. Schools could normally bid for up to £30,000 of funding in any one year.

In discussion, it was pointed out that Inverlochry Primary School had more in their Travel Plan than what was detailed in the report and assurances were sought that the remaining elements of the Plan would be looked at favourably. Further, referring to the earlier discussion regarding future education provision at Strontian Primary School, it was pointed out that the Speed Indication Devices were still necessary at this location.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Safer Route to Schools Project listed in Appendix 1 to the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** that the Road Safety Unit would continue to work with schools to develop further Safer Route to Schools Projects for future years.

9. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2013-31 March 2014 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2013 – 31 Màrt 2014

Declaration of Interest

Mr B Murphy declared a financial interest in this item as a temporary accommodation provider and left the room.

There was circulated Report No. LA/20/14 dated 8 May 2014 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on housing performance indicators for the year 2013/2014. It was also pointed out that the information contained in Table 1, referring to the average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs (hours), was incorrect but revised figures would be provided to the next meeting of the Area Committee.

The report detailed performance in relation to repairs, tenancy management, rental arrears and homelessness/homeless prevention. It was confirmed that there were on-going resource implications arising from the need to develop and maintain performance monitoring systems relating to Scottish Housing Charter Performance Indicators, managed within the current Housing Revenue Account budget. This was also a legal requirement under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.

During discussion, Members sought confirmation as to how repairs in relation to rising damp were handled. In addition, while recognising the continuing downward trend in homelessness, it was also requested that work continue to reduce the time in finding permanent solutions in such cases.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April to 31 March 2014.

10. Ballachulish Depot Road (U1716) Proposed Deletion Rathad Depot Bhaile a' Chaolais (U1716) Moladh Dubhadh Às

There was circulated Report No. LA/21/14 dated 6 May 2014 by the Director of Community Services regarding the proposal to delete the U1716 Ballachulish Depot Road, Ballachulish from the Council's List of Adopted Roads, as part of the process of downsizing the Ballachulish depot, and its inclusion in the sale of the depot.

The roads depot at Ballachulish previously had to support a larger scale of operations when trunk roads were managed by the Council. An opportunity had arisen to sell the depot on the open market and the sale process was in its final stages. On completion of the sale there would no longer be a requirement for public access to the old depot approach road. This sale provided the opportunity to remove the approach road from the Council's list of roads thereby removing a potentially costly maintenance liability.

Having thanked officers for their work in reaching this point, the Committee **AGREED** to the deletion of the Old Ballachulish Depot access road (U1716) in order to allow it to be sold as part of the depot, thereby releasing the council from the maintenance liability once the depot is sold.

11. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of the Lochaber Area Committee held on 27 February 2014, which had previously been approved by the Council on 13 March 2014.

Arising from the Minutes, the Committee also **NOTED** that the report regarding the Council's action plan to address concerns regarding the investment programme in sports pitches in Lochaber would be reported to the Lochaber Area Committee on 26 August 2014.

The meeting concluded at 12.40 pm.