

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Lochaber House, High Street, Fort William on Tuesday, 26 August 2014 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr B Clark
Mr B Gormley
Mr A Henderson

Mr T MacLennan
Mr B Murphy
Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Mr D Haas, Acting Head of Community and Democratic Engagement
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Ms C McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform, Chief Executive's Office
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager, Development and Infrastructure Service
Mr C Kemp, Area Community Services Manager, Community Services
Ms M Cameron, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector C Gough, Area Commander South Highland, Police Scotland
Mr P Green, Group Manager B – Service Delivery Highland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Ms L Rohmer, Principal, West Highland College, University of the Highlands and Islands

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

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 14 – Mr B Murphy (Financial)

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaìdh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 26 June 2014 had not required to be exercised in relation to the business of the Lochaber Area Committee.

In terms of Standing Order 18, the Committee **AGREED** that Item 7 be taken at this point in the proceedings.

7. UHI - Provision of Further/Higher Education in Lochaber OGE – Solar Foghlam Adhartach/Àrd-ìre ann an Loch Abar

Lydia Rohmer, Principal, West Highland College (UHI) undertook a presentation on provision of Further and Higher Education in Lochaber.

Ms Rohmer explained that a merger had taken place to create West Highland College UHI in August 2010. Together with the other 12 academic partners, the College formed part of the UHI. The College's ambition was to be the education provider of choice in the West Highlands of Scotland, delivering excellence in learning, training and support for all students, business and rural communities and, in so doing, having a transformational impact on the development and prospects of the region. She explained the College had been formed in response to meeting the specific issues of the West Highlands, an area affected by rural poverty and underemployment. The College had a network of ten Learning Centres, in sparsely populated areas, ranging from Ullapool in the north to Kinlochleven in the south and details of each were provided.

Continuing, the Governance arrangements for the College were outlined, it being explained that it was unique in as far as it wasn't incorporated. Other governance details were provided together with information regarding staffing and student numbers, the annual budget, the wide range of subjects offered and the growth of the College since 2010 for both Higher and Further Education courses. The College worked closely with the 9 High Schools in its area and offered a wide range of Skills for Work programmes and worked with Skills Development Scotland to deliver some of the stages of its Employability Programme. It was contracted with Highland Council to deliver Deprived Area Funding Programmes in Fort William, Kinlochleven and Skye. Furthermore, it catered for Adult and Community Learning in association with High Life Highland.

The College was a Centre for Recreation and Tourism Research and worked in close partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Film Council and the Nevis Landscape Partnership as well as local businesses. It was now in a position to offer Masters and Doctoral supervision and, from 2014, a new MSc course in Eco Tourism had been made available.

In conclusion, she highlighted the key achievements of the College and the significant economic impact generated. The College had also received an excellent report from a recent inspection and had been recognised as delivering a quality product. However, there were still challenges ahead, including new Governance arrangements and the introduction of a national pay arrangement, but there were plans and funding in place to ensure that opportunities could be maximised as and when they arose.

In discussion, Members welcomed the successful expansion of the College in recent years and its continuing engagement with the community. In particular, the College now attracted students of various nationalities and information was sought as to proposals to provide student accommodation. In response, Ms Rohmer explained that the College was in discussions with the Robertson Group who, it was hoped, would design and build a 40-bed unit on a site at An Aird. The contract would ensure student accommodation would be available for a 20 year period and was particularly attractive to the College in that it also offered a 3-year buy back option for part of the land on which the development was taking place. In response to other questions raised by Members, Ms Rohmer commented:-

- in the expansion of its courses to include subjects such as engineering, it was hoped that this could include courses for electrical trades if it was responsive to local needs. There was a drain of skills to the Oil Industry and it was essential therefore to ensure that there was a skills pipeline in place to address need;
- the College had close ties with the local Underwater Centre and the Centre's Remotely Operated Vehicle Course had been accredited by the College. Discussions looking at new products/courses were ongoing but it had be borne in mind that the Centre was a commercial operation; and
- results from a recent survey showed that 75% of those students who had responded had either gone on to higher level courses or found employment.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked Ms Rohmer for her presentation and suggested to the Committee that it might be appropriate in the future to hold a Ward Business Meeting at the College to allow Members an opportunity to see the facilities the West Highland College had to offer.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the presentation; and
- ii. **AGREED** to hold a Joint Ward Business Meeting at the College to allow Members an opportunity to see the facilities at the West Highland College.

4. Engaging With Police and Fire and Rescue Services at Area Committee A' Com-pàirteachadh le Seirbheisean Poileis agus Smàlaidh is Teasargainn aig Comataidh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No LA/22/14 dated 6 August 2014 by the Head of Policy and Reform which described the role of Members in engaging with the new national services for police and fire and rescue. This was provided as context for Members in considering the first round of performance reports from the national bodies at Area Committee.

The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 had established the Police Service for Scotland (Police Scotland) and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and had abolished the former forces and their governing bodies (including the Northern Joint Police Board and the Highland and Islands Fire Board). The report outlined the new roles for local authorities set out in the Act in relation to local policing and local fire and rescue services and how these had been addressed by the Highland Council, in particular through the scrutiny role of the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities and Education, Children and Adult

Services Committees. Members of these Committees had participated in workshops and had identified a range of improvement actions, as listed in the report, to support them in their role locally, including the providing performance reports for police and fire services to Area Committees.

Members were also supplied with an extract from the Collaborative Statement of Good Local Scrutiny and Engagement, agreed between the Government, CoSLA and police and fire services, setting out good practice principles for local authorities in scrutinising the new national services.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the requirements on the Council for the engagement and scrutiny of police and fire and rescue services;
- ii. **NOTED** the governance arrangements for this purpose through strategic, non-strategic and Area Committees as well as partnership arrangements through community planning and district partnerships;
- iii. **NOTED** that local Members had important engagement and scrutiny roles but had no role in specifying operational matters or in agreeing resource allocation; and
- iv. **AGREED** to scrutinise the performance of police and fire and rescue services based on information provide separately for the Area Committee and to make use of the good practice guidance for doing this as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.

5. Police – Performance Summary Poilis Geàrr-chunntas an Dèanadais

There had been circulated Report No LA/23/14 dated 12 August 2014 by the Highland South Area Commander for Police which provided a local summary update to Committee Members on progress with reference to the local priorities within the Highland 2014-17 Policing Plan.

The report summarised road traffic accident and offence statistics; road safety campaigns and initiatives; checks of licensed premises; antisocial behaviour/disorder statistics; crimes of dishonesty statistics, campaigns and initiatives; and statistics and initiatives relating to the work of the Public Protection Unit. There were various initiatives, both planned and in place, which he also detailed including safe motorcycling, protection of vulnerable persons and Rural/Farm and Pub Watch schemes. All measures were designed to keep crime down and make Lochaber a safer place to be. However, he recognised that the report concentrated on the South Area Command and more local information would be beneficial and he undertook to investigate the possibility of providing these statistics at a level more appropriate for the Area Committee.

Members raised a number of questions during discussion, the Area Commander responding as follows:-

- measures to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as had been experienced in Glen Etive, would continue as necessary;
- links with Transport Scotland in relation to road safety concerns on the A82 was a matter for the Road Policing Inspector but he did consult with him so any action required was taken;

- road safety campaigns were welcomed generally and reference was made to the introduction of cameras on the A9 which, it seemed, had reduced the speed of traffic but, in relation to dangerous overtaking on the A82, this was a matter for local police. The Area Commander informed Members of the intention to establish a Trunk Road Patrol Group in Fort William but he stressed the importance of the Group being made up of the right personnel with the appropriate skills;
- alcohol was a factor in many instances of Breach of the Peace /Assault and this emphasised the importance of working with the licensed trade;
- the problems alcohol abuse created and the impact it had on people's lives were recognised but it was felt that the inability to provide alcohol services timeously exacerbated the situation;
- the low percentage of reports of speeding offences for the Lochaber area was, in part, due to the withdrawal of the Police Camera Partnership and the lack of a local Trunk Road Patrol Group;
- given the problems that arose as a result of lengthy road closures, the 3D mapping of accidents would be beneficial. It was intended that it would be used by the Trunk Road Patrol Group, once established;
- unmarked police cars were based in Dingwall but were available for use by areas as required;
- with the creation of Police Scotland, information sharing regarding crime gangs was now better;
- it was recognised that messages regarding crime could affect individuals differently and make some feel more vulnerable. A second Public Satisfaction Survey was being carried out and would provide feedback on how safe people felt in various areas;
- where there was intelligence that alcohol was being sold to juveniles, a plan would be put in place which could include test purchasing; and
- assurances were given that there was no downgrading of crime. The crime management processes involved were explained and it was pointed out that there was now a more consistent approach adopted.

Members also referred to the cycling events on the A82 and Members feared, given the difficulties in overtaking, that this could result in accidents. Such events did bring risks but there were no legal basis on which Police Scotland could challenge them although Police Scotland, at a national level, did liaise with appropriate groups. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that, while these events were often held to raise money for charity, they often incurred significant public expenditure.

Having scrutinised and welcomed the progress report, the Committee **NOTED** the position.

6. Fire and Rescue Service Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn

There had been circulated Report No LA/24/14 dated 6 August 2014 by the Local Senior Officer for Fire and Rescue which set out the key areas of planned activity and performance identified during Ward consultation sessions in 2013. In this regard, in separate booklets A & B, there had also been circulated:-

- i. Area Committee Plan for Lochaber for 2014-15 (Booklet A); and
- ii. Lochaber Performance Report (Booklet B).

The Area Plan set out the fire and rescue service and wider partnership activities for delivery across the Lochaber Area over the current year, in the context of the agreed Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Highland 2014-2017. The Performance Report detailed areas of activity and service delivery set against the main priority areas identified by communities during Ward consultation sessions carried out in 2013, i.e. reductions in the following: accidental dwelling house fires and the resultant fatalities and casualties; deliberate fires; road traffic collisions; and the number of attendances to unwanted fire alarm signals (false alarms).

Members raised a number of questions during discussion, the Group Manager responded as follows:-

- across Scotland 36% of all call outs were due to false alarm apparatus. In the Lochaber area the figure was 30% in the last three months. A proactive approach had been taken to reduce the number of false alarms and this had resulted in a reduction in the Lochaber area. However work continued to be done to reduce this figure;
- information on individual fire stations in Lochaber would be provided in future reports;
- information would be provided to Councillor Thompson on Special Services on a Highland and Scottish wide level; and
- there was a strong link between the work carried out on home fire prevention and the drop in house fires occurring and this was welcomed. Partnership working was particularly effective in this respect.

After discussion, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i the Area Committee Plan for Lochaber for 2014-15;
- ii the Lochaber Performance Report; and
- iii that information on individual fire stations in Lochaber would be provided in future reports.

8. Update on Town Centre Action Plan Fios Às Ùr air Plana-gnìomh Meadhan Baile

There had been circulated Report No. LA/25/14 dated 14 August 2014 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which updated Members on the feedback from a consultation event aimed at addressing Town Centre Regeneration in Fort William and subsequent progress on the preparation of a Fort William Town Centre Action Plan. The report set out a portfolio of preferred projects to increase footfall in the town centre and was intended to assist in applications for funding towards delivering such improvements.

Members were also informed that a draft version of the Fort William Town Centre Action Plan was being prepared which would reflect the outcomes of the event. The report also sought approval for a draft version of the Town Centre Action Plan to be finalised and published for consultation. The consultation would enable officers to consider any comments in progressing the Action Plan towards adoption as non-statutory Supplementary Guidance.

During discussion, the following points were raised by Members:-

- the formation of the Fort William Town team who had undertaken to help clean up the town was particularly commended. This Team's input into the Action plan process would be welcomed;
- the challenge for local Members was to keep an eye on the overview for the project and keep everything going in the right direction. For example, in terms of developing the Waterfront, a Harbour Authority was an essential part of this, and there was a need to ensure this was progressed. Also the Council commitment to the Caol link road required to be progressed;
- influencing creative development of the Police Station site and the BT building was suggested as was introducing a digital 'what's on' information board on Cameron Square;
- there were plans for development at Belhaven and also at the Whisky Centre at the West end of the High Street and there was an opportunity here for the Council to improve the appearance of this building by, for example, introducing 'Art Deco' features to the design of the building; and
- in terms of the forthcoming renewal of the West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan, assistance to Members would be welcomed on how they could incorporate appropriate steers that would encourage the development in the way they wanted it to go. In this respect, it was suggested that the Chairman of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee and the Director of Development and Infrastructure be invited to a Ward Business meeting in order to discuss these issues.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the shared priorities identified by participants at the Town Centre event;
- ii. **AGREED** that a draft version of the Fort William Town Centre Action Plan be finalised and published for consultation, based on the structure and format presented at Committee;
- iii. **AGREED** that Members and officers work in collaboration with community representatives in delivering the outcomes identified; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Chairman of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee and Director of Development and Infrastructure be invited to a Ward Business meeting in order to discuss progress on the Town Centre action plan for Fort William.

9. Capital Projects – Investing in Lochaber Prògram a' Chalpa – In-ionmhas san Loch Abar

There had been circulated Report No. LA/26/14 dated 12 August 2014 by the Director of Finance which listed the capital projects included in the Council's capital programme being delivered in the Lochaber area in financial year 2014/15 and the in-year budgets for these projects. Members were advised that should they require any detailed information regarding particular projects a report could be submitted to the next Area Committee meeting.

In discussion the following points were raised:-

- the playing field at the new Acharacle Primary School had still not been completed which was depriving the school and community of a sports facility some 6 years after the school was built. This situation needed to be addressed quickly. There were also three other major school projects

currently ongoing and the situation at Acharacle should not be allowed to happen to them;

- officers had produced a list of business cases for projects at the former Transport, Environmental and Community Services Committee to go forward for possible capital funding. However, there had been no information given to Members on why these projects had not eventually been included in the capital programme. It would have been beneficial for a report back to Committee on why those particular business cases were not taken forward, and particular reference was made to the refurbishment to the viaduct at Kinlochleven; and
- there was a need to have some project in the capital programme to increase the interaction with the Fort William waterfront, such as piers/pontoons.

The Committee **NOTED** the budgeted capital projects being delivered in the Lochaber area in 2014/15.

10. Communities Panel Development Leasachadh Phanail Choimhearsnachdan

There had been circulated Report No. LA/27/14 dated 11 August 2014 by the Head of Policy and Reform which summarised the approach to developing the Council's new Communities Panel, with particular reference to the Lochaber Area.

The report advised that the Communities Panel, comprising organisations across Highland, would exist alongside the Citizens' Panel and be available for responding to survey-based consultations. It set out the criteria to be applied to ensure that the groups on the Panel were representative of Highland communities; provided a draft list of bodies which would be invited to take part; and advised that the Highland Third Sector Interface had also been asked to assist in distributing invitations to its contacts. Those invited to participate would be asked to nominate a contact who would receive and respond to surveys on the group's behalf.

The first focus for the Communities Panel would be to respond to the second phase of the Council's Budget Consultation, from late September until November 2014. The Panel would also provide a useful tool for ongoing consultation and engagement with communities across Highland, both on a pan-Highland basis and at a local level, for area-based consultations. It would also be available for Community Planning Partnership partner use and would be constructed with that in mind, so as to address issues such as data sharing and data protection.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the approach to developing the Communities Panel outlined at section 2 of the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** that Members were invited to suggest additional representative groups to be included in the draft invitation list provided at Appendix 1 to the report, and those suggestions already made by Members would be included.

11. Grounds Maintenance Performance Monitoring – Mid Season Update Sgrùdadh Dèanadais a thaobh Cumail Suas Raointean – Fios às ùr Meadhan Ràithe

There had been circulated Report No. LA/29/14 dated 12 August 2014 by the Director of Community Services which detailed performance management information of the Grounds Maintenance Services from April to June 2014.

The report outlined the current grass cutting contracts in place throughout the Committee's area and reminded Members that arrangements for the delivery of the Grounds Maintenance Service, and the resources available, had been reported to the Committee at its meeting on 5 February 2014. In addition, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, at its 19 June 2014 meeting, had considered a summary of the findings of an audit of monitoring of grass cutting contracts during the 2012 season, together with an audit report action plan, and would consider an update on this action plan at its meeting on 21 August 2014.

The report summarised the various activities carried out across the area; the Grass Cutting Amenity Standards specified in the Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreement; progress on the mapping exercise being undertaken to provide a comprehensive database of all grass cutting areas; the inspection regime in place for contract supervision; management action taken in response to the current season's exceptional growth levels; and consultation with Ward Members on any variations of agreed standards at specific sites.

During discussion, Members raised a range of issues, including the following:-

- having commented on remedial works at previous Area and Strategic Committee meetings, it was clear that there were still areas such as the Glenfinnon area and the old road from Morar to Arisaig which required attention, particularly in relation to difficulties with trees growing over the road;
- it was queried where the Contract Supervisor responsible for Lochaber was based and whether there might be scope to use other local officers, particularly from Community Services, to make ad hoc inspections on contract work. Information on this would be provided to Councillor Baxter;
- Councillor Baxter requested information on how many additional seasonal inspectors were employed to monitor the Garden Aid contract and what was the cost to the Council;
- in terms of grass cutting and amenity standards, clarification was sought on how the Council's contract defined spreading grass clippings thinly as there was evidence of excessive clippings having been left in situ and this was particularly problematic in some cemeteries;
- Tomdoun Road in Glengarry was particularly dangerous because of overgrown verges and this had been raised frequently at Community Council meetings. It would be helpful for officers to address this issue with the Community Council. There were similar issues on the Banavie to Achnaharry and Ardgour to Duiskey roads and it was important to ensure that safety was given top priority.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the performance management and remedial action information provided on the grounds maintenance service set out in the report;

- ii. **NOTED** the management action taken to address the performance issues identified; and
- iii. **AGREED** to review required service standards at future Ward Business meetings.

12. Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges Prògram Cumail-suas airson Rathaidean is Drochaidean

There had been circulated Report No. LA/30/14 dated 12 August 2014 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to homologate the decision taken by the Director of Community Services, in consultation with Ward Members, to approve the Maintenance Programmes for Roads and Bridges for the Lochaber Area for 2014/15.

The Committee **HOMOLOGATED** the decision by the Director of Community Services, in consultation with Ward Members, to approve the Maintenance Programmes for Roads and Bridges for the Lochaber Area for 2014/15.

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

There had been circulated Report No. LA/31/14 dated 12 August 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 for the Lochaber area, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The report advised that the Highland Council Road Safety Unit worked with Schools to produce a School Travel Plan (STP) that focused on the journey to/from school and demonstrated the school's all-round commitment to develop Safer Routes to School (SRTS) and to achieve a modal shift on the school run, encouraging healthier and greener methods of travel and supporting the Council's Carbon CLEVER initiative by reducing carbon emissions.

The report outlined the CWSS funding levels available in 2014-15, the grant award criteria and the application process, together with details of two specific applications: cycle storage and shelter at St Brides Primary School and a rustic footpath, drop zone and kerbs at Lady Lovat Primary School.

During discussion, further information and explanation was requested in relation to the application at Lady Lovat Primary School and it was requested that this application be submitted to the Ward Business meeting for further clarification. Councillor Thompson also requested information on how improvements could be made to the access at Banavie Primary School for pupils arriving from the west and who needed to cross the A830. This was a busy road with industrial traffic and presented road safety concerns for parents.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Safer Route to Schools Project listed in Appendix 1 to the report, subject to Members and the Community Council being consulted on the Lady Lovat Primary School project, with a report back to a Ward Business meeting; 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.

14. **Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2014-30 June 2014**

Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2014 - 30 Ògmhios 2014

Declaration of Interest: Mr B Murphy declared a financial interest in this item as a temporary accommodation provider but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No. LA/32/14 dated 12 August 2014 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators during the first quarter of 2014/15.

The report outlined key performance statistics together with details of emergency and routine repairs. It was confirmed that data input would be regularised for future meetings as detailed in the report. Tenancy management, re-let statistics, rental arrears and homelessness issues were highlighted for Members scrutiny.

During discussion, reference was made to the higher than average re-let times in Fort William and Ardnamurchan and it was acknowledged that this was due to specific difficult issues. Referring to non-emergency repairs, it was queried why in Fort William and Ardnamurchan this was lagging behind the Highland average. Also, a request was made that a report be submitted to the next Area Committee meeting providing details and feedback on the current heating replacement programme in Highland Council housing properties for Lochaber, in particular whether insulation was being installed prior to replacement systems being installed.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period from 1 April 2014 to 30 June 2014;
- ii **NOTED** that information would be included in the next report to the Area Committee on the reasons for non emergency repairs in Fort William and Ardnamurchan lagging behind the Highland average; and
- iii **AGREED** that a report be submitted to the next Area Committee meeting providing details and feedback on the current heating replacement programme in Highland Council housing properties in Lochaber, in particular whether insulation was being installed prior to replacement systems being installed.

15. **Landfill Community Fund**

Maoin Choimhearsnachdan an Tiodhlacaidh Sgudail

There had been circulated Report No. LA/28/14 dated 17 July 2014 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve applications to the Highland Council Landfill Community Fund.

At its meeting held on 15 May 2014, the Community Services Committee had agreed that the Council distribute its Landfill Communities Fund to local biodiversity

conservation projects, with a maximum contribution of £10,000 to any one project annually, subject to approval by the appropriate Area Committee. The application before this meeting, from Lochaber Fisheries Trust, aimed to create a significant reduction in the extent of Japanese knotweed along the A82 approaching Fort William. The project would be publicised locally to demonstrate best practice in knotweed control and the environmental improvements undertaken by offenders on Community Service Orders. The offenders taking part would receive training and qualifications and gain a sense of responsibility for their local environment.

The Committee **AGREED** that the application from Lochaber Fisheries Trust be submitted to ENTRUST for their consideration.

16. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Area Committee held on 22 May 2014, which were approved by the Council on 26 June 2014.

The meeting concluded at 1.15pm.