

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Lochaber House, High Street, Fort William on Thursday, 21 May 2015 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr B Clark
Mr A Henderson

Mr T MacLennan
Mr B Murphy
Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Mr D Esson, Quality Improvement Manager (West), Care and Learning Service
Mr C Kemp, Area Community Services Manager, Community Services
Mr S Callan, Assistant Area Manager, Community Services
Mr M Smith, Senior Engineer, Community Services
Ms L Lee, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development

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

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr B Gormley.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 6 - Mr B Murphy (financial)

3. Mallaig High School Associated School Group Overview Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-sgoil Mhalaig

There had been circulated Report No. LA/13/15 dated 11 May 2015 by the Director of Care and Learning providing an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Mallaig High School Associated School Group (ASG), and providing useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

Members praised the ethos and successes of Mallaig High School. During discussion, Members gave consideration to:-

- the need to improve the reporting of successes and to continue to provide additional support for mathematics at Mallaig High School;

- High School catchment boundaries in the Glenuig and Roshven areas; and
- options being considered in response to forthcoming head teacher retirements, including the possible rearranging school cluster groups at Eigg and Muck, and the possible extension of Mallaig High School to a 3 – 18 campus.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the content of the report and information provided in response to Member questions;
- ii. that matters raised in discussion would be fed back to officers as appropriate, with a report being brought to the next Ward Business meeting on Glenuig and Roshven catchment areas; and
- iii. the assurance given that no school closures or job losses were planned for West Coast schools.

4. **Education Scotland Report – Ardnamurchan High School Aithisgean Foghlam Alba – Àrd-sgoil Àird nam Murchan**

There had been circulated Report No. LA/14/15 dated 11 May 2015 by the Director of Care and Learning providing details on Education Scotland's report of Ardnamurchan High School of 10 March 2015. Education Scotland was pleased with the progress that had been made and would be making no further visits to the school in connection with the inspection letter of January 2013.

The Committee **NOTED** the Education Scotland report on Ardnamurchan High School of 10 March 2015.

5. **Area Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges Prògram Cumail-suas Sgìreil airson Rathaidean is Drochaidean**

There had been circulated Report No. LA/15/15 dated 1 May 2015 by the Director of Community Services inviting Members to approve the Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges for the Lochaber Area for 2015/16.

During discussion, Members gave consideration to:-

- feedback and technical information on new road repair processes;
- a number of specific road and bridge issues, including Kinlochleven Viaduct, Mandarlay Road, the road to the South of Gairloch, Invercoe Bridge, Tomonie Railway Bridges and Carnoch Bridge parapet;
- how emergency situations would be responded to and funded; and
- the way in which asset management principles were used to inform the capital programme.

Members emphasised the risk identified in the report, that work being managed within budget allocations from a resource perspective could lead to a continued reduction in the standard of road conditions in Lochaber.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Maintenance Programme for Roads and Bridges for the Lochaber Area for 2015/16, **NOTED** the information provided in the report and in response to questions, and **AGREED** that:-

- i. future reports show the extent and estimated costs of the backlog of roads and bridges maintenance works and, in particular, the value of the assets and depreciation and that this information also to be brought to the next Ward Business Meeting; and
- ii. that issues raised in discussion be fed back to officers as appropriate and that information in response to concerns raised regarding Tomonie Railway Bridges and Carnoch Bridge parapet be brought to the next Ward Business Meeting.

Arising from this item, the Committee **AGREED** that two Grounds Maintenance reports be submitted to the Committee each year, one pre- and one post the growing season. Officers were also reminded that the Winter Maintenance Report was to be brought to the August rather than the November Committee.

6. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2014–31 March 2015 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2014–31 Màrt 2015

Prior to discussion of this item, with the consent of the Chairman, Mr B Murphy sought information as to the reasons rent arrears in Caol and Mallaig had increased over the past two years. In response, Members were advised that there was no single factor in either of the Lochaber Wards - the general financial environment for tenants was increasingly challenging.

Declaration of Interest

Mr B Murphy declared a financial interest as a temporary accommodation provider and left the room for the duration of the remainder of this item.

There had been circulated Report No. LA/16/14 dated 22 April 2015 by the Director of Community Services providing information on how the Housing Section had performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators during 2014/15.

During discussion, Members gave consideration to a number of issues, including the way rent arrears figures were recorded and the reasons for variance in re-letting times.

The Committee **NOTED:-**

- i. the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015;
- ii. information provided by officers in response to questions; and
- iii. that a presentation on the Lochaber Credit Union and Lochaber Housing Association would be given at the next Ward Business Meeting.

7. HRA Capital Programme Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No. LA/17/15 dated 7 May 2015 by the Director of Community Services providing information to Members on the status of the Housing Revenue Account Capital Projects within the Lochaber Area.

In discussion, Members gave consideration to:-

- the figures contained within the report, in particular the budget for capital projects in Lochaber itself, excluding monies for projects spanning a broader area;
- the impact of the Scottish Quality Housing Standards in determining capital expenditure on housing and the potential for greater Member input to the Programme once Standards had been met;
- the performance and reliability of new heating systems, the need to provide more conventional heating systems for older people and the potential impact of wood pellet heating systems on the availability of housing for older people;
- options for the insulation of the Swedish Timber Housing; and
- the poor standard of the recent presentation on the Caol District Heating system.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the status of current capital projects contained in the report;
- ii. that issues raised in discussion be fed back to officers, as appropriate, with Lochaber-specific figures for the 2015/16 Capital Programme and an update on progress with works at Plantation being brought to the next Ward Business Meeting;
- iii. a report was being prepared on the findings of the current Council survey of tenant experience with new heating systems and would be brought before Members in due course; and
- iv. a report by the Energy Team on how new energy systems (such as air source heat pumps) worked and were performing would be brought to the next Area Committee meeting, with an Energy Team officer in attendance to answer technical questions.

The Committee also **APPROVED** the new projects set out in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 and at Appendix 2 of the report, for inclusion in the 2015/16 capital programme (External Wall Insulation and Remedial Work to Swedish Timber Houses).

8. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated, and were **NOTED**, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Area Committee held on 26 February 2015, which were approved by the Council on 12 March 2015.

9. Additional Item – Future Reports

The Committee **AGREED** that the Senior Ward Manager liaise proactively with Directors with a view to bringing reports to the Committee.

The meeting concluded at 12 noon.