

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Lochaber House, High Street, Fort William on Tuesday, 24 November, 2015 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr T MacLennan
Mr B Clark	Mr B Murphy
Mr B Gormley	Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Mr C Kemp, Area Community Services Manager, Community Services
Mr S Callan, Assistant Area Manager, Community Services
Mrs S McKandie, Benefits and Welfare Manager, Revenues and Business Support
Mr K Masson, Policy Coordinator - Climate Change, Chief Executive's Office
Mr D Esson, Quality Improvement Manager, West
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development 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

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

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

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 3 – Mr Gormley (Non Financial)
Item 6 – Mr Murphy (Financial)

3. Advice and Information Services – End of Year Monitoring Seirbheisean Comhairle agus Fiosrachaidh – Sgrùdadh Deireadh Bliadhna

Declaration of Interest: Mr B Gormley declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's Advisor to the Lochaber Citizens Advice Bureaux 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 was circulated Report No LA/34/15 dated 7 August 2015 by the Director of Finance which explained that advice and information services are recognised as a critical approach in alleviating poverty in the Council's Programme and Single

Outcome Agreement. In this regard, the report provided Members with the end of year monitoring of advice and information services in Highland for 2014/15.

Members commended the Council funded advice and information services in Highland provided by eight Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Council's customer income maximisation and money advice teams. Total financial gains in benefits to local people in 2014/15 was £17m, which would greatly benefit the local economy in Highland. It was particularly good to see how well the different agencies in Highland worked collaboratively to help support people who were financially disadvantaged.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the level of support provided to customers across Highland in 2014/15; the continued increase in demand for these services; and the pressures associated in delivering the intensive resource required to resolve complex cases;
- ii. the positive impact of the Mental Health Project in addressing issues presented by vulnerable clients which has current funding until end of March 2016;
- iii. the positive impact of the Reaching the Unreached service in preventing households being evicted and avoiding additional pressures on the Council's homeless services. This service has Scottish Legal Aid Board funding until end of September 2016;
- iv. the potential of the Midwifery project to support new and expectant mothers in the Highlands to maximise their incomes which has funding until end of May 2016; and
- v. the outcomes being achieved in supporting Highland residents to mitigate the effects of poverty.

4. Lochaber High School Associated School Group Overview Sealladh Coitcheann air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-Sgoil Loch Abar

There was circulated Report No LA/35/15 dated 4 November 2015 by the Director of Care and Learning which provided an update of key information in relation to the Schools within the Lochaber High School Associated School Group (ASG) and useful updated links to further information in relation to these Schools.

In discussion, the following points were made:-

- In terms of the devolved budgets for schools in Lochaber, this amounted to approximately £7m to operate all the schools in the area.
- Reference was made to the great transformation of Lochaber High School which was highly commended.
- In relation to those schools with no after school activities due to lack of Teacher participation, it was queried if anything could be done to encourage Teachers to volunteer to run these activities. It was advised that not all the data was complete and that all schools did have after schools activities. The Teaching staff in Lochaber were very supportive of after schools activities. There was a trend for activities to take place at lunchtime also. There was a need to look at how this data was captured and for the data to include lunchtime activities as well.

- It was advised that there had been no heating at Lundavra Primary School on 23 November, 2015 and an update was requested on this. It was advised that with any new school there would be some issues with the building and these would be addressed.
- In terms of the Free School Meal uptake at Inverloch Primary School, the low uptake for P1-3 and P4-7 compared to other schools was queried. The Quality Improvement Manager undertook to liaise with the Head Teacher of Inverloch Primary School to check what the reasons for this were.
- In relation to Bun-sgoil Ghaidhlig Loch Abar it was queried if two additional classrooms were to be added to this school. The Quality Improvement Manager undertook to liaise with the Area Care and Learning Manager (West) for information on this.
- There may be a shift by people to reading e books rather than paper books from libraries. It was noted that the numbers of people using the mobile library service had increased.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

5. Education Scotland Report – Ballachulish Primary School and Nursery Class Sgrùdaidhean le Foghlam Alba – Bun-Sgoil agus Clas Sgoil-àraich Bhaile a' Chaolais

There was circulated Report No LA/36/15 dated 13 November 2015 by the Director of Care and Learning which provided details on Education Scotland's report of Ballachulish Primary School and Nursery Class dated 15 September 2015.

The Committee welcomed the positive report on Ballachulish Primary School and the Head Teacher and staff at the School were commended for this. The Committee looked forward to continued good progress in the future.

The Committee **NOTED** the Education Scotland report on Ballachulish Primary School and Nursery Class dated 15 September 2015.

6. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2014 - 30 September 2015 Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2014 – 30 Sultain 2015

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

There was circulated Report No. LA/37/15 dated 9 November 2015 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 2014/15 and for the first half of 2015/16.

In relation to Appendix 1 of the report, a correction to the RAG status for Tenancy Offers refused in Lochaber was reported. This should be RAG status Green and not Red.

In terms of the increase in rent arrears figures there was some impact on these figures as a result of Universal Credit being rolled out. But it was also accepted that action was required from Officers in order to reduce rent arrears. Recent pressures had impacted on the time available to closely monitor arrears performance and steps had been taken to address this issue.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2014 to 30 September 2015.

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

There was circulated Report No. LA/38/15 dated 9 November 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided information to Members on the status of the 2015-16 Housing Revenue Account Capital Projects and the 2016-17 Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme for the Lochaber Area.

In discussion the following points were made by Members:-

- With reference to the remedial work to Swedish Timber houses in Caol, it was queried if this work would be rolled out to all the Swedish Timber houses in the Lochaber area. It was also queried what the main cause was for the remedial works e.g. lack of resources leading to more work being required now. Also, information was sought on how the ongoing maintenance issues would be addressed once this work had been undertaken. In response, it was advised that the pilot surveys that had been undertaken would inform the rest of the work that was required in other areas of Lochaber. Further information would be provided on the ongoing maintenance issues.
- In terms of the external insulation work to properties in Plantation, it was noted that E.on had advised that as the construction of the properties was cavity wall they were not able to provide funding for external wall insulation. It was advised that these houses had cavity wall insulation inserted some time ago which had not worked and was removed. It was queried if E.on were made aware of this. As the Council were partners with E.on in this project, it should be possible to come to some arrangement with them to do this work. Councillor B Murphy requested to see correspondence with E.on on this matter. In response it was advised that the Council would do all that it could to progress this project. The detail on the basis for E.on refusal to undertake this work would be provided to Members.
- It was queried if it would be possible to undertake external insulation work or an outer leaf of blocks on Swedish Timber houses as a way of fixing the problems with the timber cladding. There was a need to look at long term solutions for this type of property. It was advised that a meeting had been arranged with the Energy and Sustainability team to look at the external insulation work on houses in Plantation and it would be explored if this work could be done on Swedish timber houses also.
- If the work was to start on the Swedish Timber houses in January, 2016, reassurance was sought that carrying out this work in Winter was feasible and would not cause undue discomfort to those people living in the properties. It was advised that these issues would be taken into account when carrying out the work.
- In terms of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and the commitment to complete contracts to achieve this standard, it was advised that all houses that were originally surveyed would be brought up to SHQS by March, 2016, with the exception of opt outs. Since the survey had been carried out, it may have been found that there were other houses that did not comply with SHQS and these houses would be put into future years capital programmes.

- In terms of the SHQS it was advised that decisions were being made by Officers in Inverness and then passed onto Officers in Lochaber. Local Officers knew more about the conditions of properties and would be better placed to make decisions on allocation of resources. It was advised that in future decisions on the allocation of resources in terms of the SHQS would be made locally at the Area Committee. Should Members have any queries in respect of the housing stock in Lochaber, then they could contact the Area Community Services Manager or Assistant Area Manager, Community Services.
- There was a need to ensure that records of maintenance undertaken on Council properties was up to date.
- Tenants had very little information on whether their houses met the SHQS or information on the standard of their houses compared to other houses in their neighbourhood. This information should also be available to Elected Members at a local level, rather than having to check with Officers in Inverness for answers.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i the status of the 2015-16 Lochaber HRA capital projects contained in the report;
- ii. the position regarding the 2016-17 Lochaber HRA Capital Programme and that the status of the 2016-17 programme would be reported to future Lochaber Area Committees;
- iii. the position regarding completing external insulation work in Plantation, Fort William;
- iv. that a briefing note would be issued to Members on the undernoted matters for discussion at a Ward Business meeting in January:-
 - how the ongoing maintenance issues would be addressed once remedial works to Swedish Timber houses had been completed;
 - progress with the remedial works on the Swedish Timber houses over the winter period;
 - details of the basis of refusal by E.on to provide match funding for external wall insulation for the 45 properties in Plantation which did not receive external insulation in 2012-13 and whether E.on had been made aware that cavity wall insulation had previously been tried and failed on these properties.
- v. that more information would be provided to Members and tenants on the standard of the Council Housing stock in Lochaber.

8. Road Safety at East Tomonie, Banavie Sàbhailteachd Rathaid aig Tom Mòine an Ear, Banbhaidh

There was circulated Report No. LA/39/15 dated 12 November 2015 by the Director of Community Services which advised that concerns had been highlighted regarding the safety of the access road into East Tomonie, Banavie. A road safety assessment had been prepared in order to address these concerns and improvements to the existing infrastructure were recommended.

A point was made that the report had not taken account of the five planning application approvals where houses were still to be built in this estate. The report referred to there being no recorded accidents within the development in the past 20 years. However the number of houses and vehicles had increased substantially

over this period. The most dangerous part of the road was the railway bridge and while in the short term the Council should undertake the improvements stated in the report's recommendations, an additional recommendation was put forward, that a proposal to widen the footpath and provide a footbridge over the railway at East Tomonie, Banavie be explored and that any future Developer contribution be set aside to fund the project.

It was advised that the Scottish Government's Transport Minister announced a competition for Local Authorities to express an interest for developing footpaths and cycle paths. There was £3m this financial year to fund the design of potential paths to make areas such as at East Tomonie, Banavie safer. It was suggested that the Council should consider expressing an interest for this funding to develop a plan to bring forward to 2015/16 the medium to long term option of more significant improvements to road safety at East Tomonie, Banavie. Members requested feedback from Officers discussions on this.

Reference was made to the medium to long term option on the possibility to make the road and pavement "shared use" so that pedestrians and cyclists have the priority on the roads within the scheme and vehicles would have to travel slowly and be ready to stop if required when pedestrians or cyclists are on the road. It was queried why this had not been included in the recommendations. It was advised that this option would require significant investment in changing the road surface and to create a pedestrian friendly environment. This would require to be funded on the back of any future development. Instead of "shared use" throughout the whole scheme it was suggested that just the railway bridge itself be treated as "shared use". An undertaking was given to consider this.

A comment was made that given that this issue was raised in August, 2015, it had been hoped that the speed survey would have been completed by now and road markings at passing places would have already been implemented and footpath repairs completed. Had these actions already been taken, the effect of them would now be known. It was felt that Members were being asked to approve things that did not have to wait that length of time.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the introduction of a mandatory 20mph speed limit;
- ii. a speed survey to determine the need for traffic calming measures;
- iii. to undertake footway repairs and localised widening where this was justified and land availability permits;
- iv. to introduce road markings at passing places; and
- v. to recommend to the Director of Development and Infrastructure a proposal to widen the footpath and provide a footbridge over the railway at East Tomonie, Banavie be explored and that any future Developer contribution be set aside to fund the project.

9. Carbon Clever Community Grant Fund 2015-16 Maoin Thabhartasan Coimhearsnachd Càrboin Chiallaich 2015-2016

There was circulated Report No. LA/40/15 dated 4 November 2015 by the Head of Policy and Reform which set out the applications received for the Carbon CLEVER community grant fund in Lochaber for 2015-16. It detailed the background to the fund, together with a summary of applications, the assessments and funding recommendations.

It was queried how extensively had this grant fund been advertised, as it was thought that not a lot of people in the community knew about it. It was advised that the grant fund had been advertised through the Corporate Communications team, through social media, through carbon clever declaration signatories and Lochaber environmental group had promoted it as well. This was the first year of the fund and if it was continued in 2016/17 then it was hoped to promote it more extensively. It was suggested that Members should cascade the information on the fund through their local networks and organisations.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. funding recommendations as shown below;

Ref. No.	Applicant Organisation	Recommended Award
11785	Isle of Eigg Community Association	£5,638.00
11802	Mallaig & District Swimming Pool	£1,127.62
	Total	£6,765.62

- ii. that the funding shortfall detailed at paragraph 3.2 should be considered under the Ward 12 Discretionary Budget at the next Ward Business Meeting.

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated for noting Minutes of Meeting of the:-

- i. Lochaber Area Committee held on 25 August 2015 which were approved by the Council on 3 September 2015; and
 ii. special meeting of the Lochaber Area Committee held on 21 October 2015 which were approved by the Council on 29 October 2015.

The Committee **NOTED** the minutes and that information requested at the Special meeting of the Committee held on 21 October, 2015 in respect of footway tractors would be e-mailed to Members of the Committee.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 a.m.