

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Lochaber House, High Street, Fort William on Friday, 10 June, 2016 at 10.30 am.

### Present:

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

### In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)  
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing, Community Services  
Ms S MacLennan, Interim Housing Manager, Community Services  
Ms J Scotson, Business Change Manager, Corporate Development Service  
Mr S Carr, Principal Policy Officer, Chief Executive's Office (by Video Conference)  
Mr D Esson, Quality Improvement Manager, West  
Mr R McNab, Performance & Inspection Co-ordinator, Community Services  
Mr R Porteous, Assistant Area Manager, Community Services  
Mr D Wilkie, Group Manager, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service  
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**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

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

Item 7 – Mr Murphy (Financial)

**3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report for 2015-16**  
**Aithisg Dèanadais Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba airson 2015-16**

There was circulated Report No. LA/8/16 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland providing an update to Committee Members on the progress against the priorities outlined in the Local Committee Plan for Lochaber 2015 - 2016.

Priority areas were identified through a range of Intervention, Prevention and Protection activities delivered in partnership to reduce risk to the communities of Lochaber. The report also contained previously agreed information and performance as requested by Committee Members.

In particular, the report showed the current staffing levels on stations and total availability that these individuals have been available for calls, and how this affects the availability of the station's fire appliances. The Service was actively recruiting in a number of communities to improve station and fire appliance availability. Members were asked through their contacts to raise awareness of the need to recruit individuals to most stations in Lochaber. Praise was given to the crews who worked tirelessly to provide operational cover at stations and to Employers for granting leave to crews in order to allow them to attend incidents and training events.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Council had introduced new Public Entertainment Licence Regulations, and any event that previously sought a donation to gain entry would now require to comply with these regulations. There were a number of public fire work displays in Lochaber and people were encouraged to attend these rather than ad hoc displays. It may be the case that volunteers running these events may feel that the new regulations would make it too time consuming for them and they may not be prepared to run the events in future. It was queried if the Fire Service could assist volunteers in complying with the regulations as it was assumed the Fire Service would prefer people to go to organised events for safety reasons. In response, it was confirmed that the Fire Service would like people to attend organised Fire Works displays. If there was an increase in ad hoc bonfires, then through local intelligence the Service would target those at an early stage. The Service worked with partner agencies and visited Schools and Community Groups in order to encourage people to act responsibly at Fire Work displays. However, in order to reassure people, in Highland this had not been a significant problem in the past.
- Road safety initiatives in the area were welcomed, such as Driving Ambition and Safe Highland, all of which had a focused message of road safety, targeting key groups in the reduction of road related accidents. It was queried how young people were made aware of these safety initiatives. In response it was advised that secondary schools were targeted for pupils who could drive or were about to start to drive. Driving events were held throughout the community and the Service worked with partner agencies in this respect. The Service also worked with Driving Instructors to raise awareness of road safety initiatives to people who did not start to learn to

drive until after they had left school. Also local Stations held open days at which the fire safety and road safety message was put to those attending.

- It was queried if the time that Emergency response vehicles had to wait at the Caledonian Canal was an issue for the Service, as there didn't seem to be a process whereby Emergency response vehicles could get the canal bridge opened at very short notice. In response, there was no evidence that this was a problem. While there was no process for opening bridges along the canal, the bridge operator could contact the Service's control room when they were closing any of the bridges along the canal. An undertaking was given to contact Scottish Waterways to see if a formal process could be put in place for Emergency Response vehicles to get canal bridges opened at very short notice.
- In terms of recruitment, it was queried if there were any female fire officers in Fort William. It was advised that there were retained female firefighters in Fort William and a Duty Manager. The Service was actively recruiting in a number of communities and females were encouraged to apply. In terms of people working offshore for example wanting to apply, it was advised that each application would be looked at individually.

The Committee, having scrutinised the Local Performance Report, **AGREED**:-

- i. to raise awareness of the need to recruit individuals to most Fire Stations in Lochaber; and
- ii. that the Local Senior Fire Officer would contact Scottish Waterways to see if a formal process could be put in place for Emergency Response vehicles being able to get canal bridges opened at very short notice.

#### **4. Digital Inclusion Presentation Taisbeanadh mu Chom-pàirteachadh Didseatach**

A presentation was given by the Business Change Manager on Digital First and Digital Highland projects. In particular, the Manager highlighted the benefits which allowed customers access to Council Services anytime, anywhere on any device. To date, nearly 12,000 customers had signed up to "myaccount" to use this facility and this generated savings not only in staff time but also improvements to process times. 90 forms were now available online and the range of activities was to be collated into a poster which would be displayed at Service Points etc. To help customers to use the system a variety of training and courses were available, the details of those taking place in Lochaber being provided to Members, and Members were encouraged to promote these in their local community.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Anecdotal evidence suggested that the Highland Council's website was excellent from a customer's perspective. Also, the website was regularly reviewed and for the three years up until this year, the website had received a two star rating out of four for the website and online services, and this year it had been increased to a three star rating out of four with a mobile accreditation also. Therefore, the Council's website was continuing to improve and this was being recognised.

- It was queried if there was demographic data on the usage of the Council's website. It was advised that demographic data had been looked at by Consultants in terms of the demographic in communities and which of those demographics were facing the greatest need. While this data was extensive, a summary for the Lochaber area would be produced for Members, to show what the greatest need was in the area.
- Digital platforms are being looked at in order that communities could discuss issues in on-line forums. A digital platform is being considered as part of the work on the Council redesign, so as to engage communities with the redesign process on-line, which may enable more of a discussion or conversation than previous consultation approaches. There was also funding available for a digital tool on participatory budgeting. In Lochaber a participatory budgeting process had been done on-line. In other areas participatory budgeting had been carried out in off-line processes, i.e. people had been invited to meetings. Not everyone could attend these events, so by using digital tools the process could be opened up to more people. There were a few strands of work in respect of digital tools and a report on this would be submitted to the next Communities and Partnerships Committee. It was requested that a report on digital tools be also submitted to the next meeting of the Lochaber Committee.
- It was advised that most services that the Council provided could now be accessed on-line e.g. people could report on grounds maintenance issues, roads maintenance, light or traffic light issues or apply on-line for housing benefit, housing applications and housing repairs. Also services could be paid for on-line. Work was currently being undertaken on a single benefit form that would allow people to apply for all the benefits they were entitled to. Forms in relation to liquor licensing, planning and environmental health were also being developed.

Thereafter, the Chair thanked the Business Change Manager for a very informative presentation, and the Committee:-

- i **AGREED** that a report on digital tools would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.
- ii **AGREED** that a summary of the demographic data produced by Consultants, specifically for the Lochaber area, be provided for Members.

## **5. Grounds Maintenance Performance Monitoring Report – Mid Season Update Cumail Suas Raointean**

There was circulated Report No LA/9/16 by the Director of Community Services which detailed performance management information of the Grounds Maintenance Services from April to May 2016. It was reported that Appendix C to the report contained errors, and a revised version would be circulated to Members.

In discussion, the following points were raised: -

- It was explained that work on hard landscaped areas included all internal footpaths on housing estates, schools etc. and included play areas. It also included works on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) such as weed killing. The financial penalty to ISS in the last financial year for the Highland area was £28.5k. Members would be provided with the amount for the

Lochaber area, how much of it had been used and what it had been spent on.

- It was confirmed that ISS were contractually responsible for grass cutting of all areas in Lochaber in relation to housing, education, sports areas etc. The DLO was responsible for all non-contracted grass cutting and maintenance of open space assets. It was advised that weed killing was not part of the contract, but could be contracted separately if funding was available. Currently this service had not been requested in Lochaber. It was explained that there was no overall weed killing contract for Highland and Services would require to issue a contract for this if required. As a Council weed killing should be happening on a regular basis as it would lead to the long term deterioration of open space assets. Therefore, clarification was sought on what weed killing there currently was, where this was being done and who was doing it, i.e. the DLO, ISS or local contractor. The Chair of the Community Services Committee also undertook to raise this issue with the Director of Community Services. It was also advised that the Local Committee could agree to carry out more weed killing in the area if it wished, but this would have implications for other budgets under its control.
- In terms of the lack of personnel in the DLO in Lochaber, it was queried when this would be addressed as this would eventually lead to complaints from the public. It was advised that there was no effect in terms of grass cutting as this service was being delivered by ISS and evidence suggested that they were delivering a good service. In terms of the non-contracted grass cutting work delivered by the DLO there were some issues with the standard of work and this was being looked at.
- It was advised that new technological to monitor the standard of grounds maintenance work could in future be of significant benefit to the Council in terms of saving staff time in covering a large geographical area.

Thereafter, the Committee having scrutinised the performance management and remedial action information provided on the grounds maintenance service set out in the report:-

- i **NOTED** that a revised Appendix C to the report would be issued to Members;
- ii **NOTED** the management action taken to address the performance issues identified;
- iii **AGREED** to review required service standards at future Ward Business meetings;
- iv **AGREED** that information on the financial penalty to ISS in the last financial year for the Lochaber area be provided, how much of it had been used and what it had been spent on.
- v **AGREED** that a report be submitted to the August meeting of the Committee on what weed killing was currently being undertaken, where this was being done and who was contracted to do it. Officers from Community Services representing Roads and Transport and Housing were requested to be attendance to answer questions on this issue. In the interim a summary briefing paper on this issue would be sent to Members.

**6. Ardnamurchan High School Associated School Group Overview  
Sealladh Farsaing air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-Sgoil Àird nam Murchan**

There was circulated Report No LA/10/16 by the Area Care & Learning Manager (West) which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Ardnamurchan High School Associated School Group and useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

In discussion, the point was made that the process of measuring academic performance of pupils was very good, but Curriculum for Excellence related to more human skills e.g. working together, being creative, showing initiative, which was much harder to measure performance. It was advised that there was an emphasis with Curriculum for Excellence in developing skills in learning for work and looking at employability skills. As part of this a career standard had been introduced whereby from the age of 3 to 18 years old, young people would be given a clear framework in the development of skills in learning for work and employability skills. The measurement of those skills could be difficult. In future it was intended that the career standard would link in with local employers and local chamber of commerce, as a means of creating work placements for young people.

Reference was also made to progress being made with the sports pitch at Acharacle Primary School which should be completed soon.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED** the content of the report

**7. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016  
Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 An Giblean 2016 gu 31 Am Mart 2016**

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

There was circulated Report No. LA/11/16 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 31 March, 2016.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- In relation to the client, contractor split with regards to Housing and Building Maintenance this had originally come about as a result of compulsory competitive tendering which the Council did not have to comply with anymore. It was felt that this was not an efficient way to organise the Service. It was queried why the Council was still continuing with this artificial split in the Service when there was no requirement for it anymore. In response, it was advised that as part of the restructuring of Community Services there was now a priority to integrate the Housing section and Building Maintenance section of Community Services as there was no legal obligation to have this split anymore and also to improve efficiencies with a single structure for repairs and maintenance. It was intended that this structural change would be carried out by the end of this year.

- The work of the Housing team was commended, particularly those staff in Lochaber, where any issues from Members were dealt with quickly.
- Concern was expressed in relation to the reduction in staff resources in Lochaber Housing and Building Maintenance which meant an increase in the workload for the remaining staff and this would affect performance. It was advised that there were issues relating to staff changes and workload and these would be addressed to ensure that the workload was manageable and that the current Housing Maintenance staff resource could maintain good performance.
- In relation to the significant number of staff leaving the Council through voluntary severance, it was important that previous requests for actions/information from Members were not lost as a result. In this respect, a report would be provided to Members in relation to a previous request for information in relation to timber houses in Lochaber, in relation to the regularity they were inspected and were provided with routine maintenance.
- there was a need to introduce a process whereby local Members and staff could agree a planned HRA Capital Programme and planned maintenance investment within disaggregated budgets. The process of developing the 2017/18 HRA Capital programme was currently underway and it was intended to arrange workshops involving staff and local Members, so that they could engage in this process.
- While staff were dealing sympathetically with people presenting themselves as homeless, the difficulty staff had was that very often there was no accommodation in the area to put people into. It was queried if the number of people presenting themselves as homeless had been reflected in the Council house building programme. In response, it was advised that the Council had agreed a set of changes in the way temporary accommodation was provided. There was a need to move away from the current provision, private sector accommodation, to Council accommodation mainly for affordability reasons. There were local issues in terms of the supply and demand for housing and Lochaber was an extremely pressured area in this respect and it was very difficult to find temporary accommodation for homeless people. There were discussions between the Housing team and the Property Development team in terms of future temporary housing investment in terms of what was required and where. There was a need to ensure that in future housing developments, that more Council owned and managed temporary accommodation was planned. In terms of the pattern of people presenting themselves as homeless, this was fairly consistent with in the main these being young single people or childless couples. However, it was most difficult to find housing solutions for people with children.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED:-**

i the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016; and

ii that a report would be provided to Members with information on how many timber houses there were in the Council's housing stock in Lochaber, the regularity that they were inspected and the maintenance plans for them.

## 8. **Street Naming – Development in Torlundy** **Ainmeachadh Sràide – Leasachadh ann an Tòrr Lunndaidh**

There was circulated Report No. LA/12/16 by the Director of Corporate Development which invited the Committee to homologate the naming of a new development of 8 properties in Torlundy as Tower Ridge Courtyard.

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the naming of new Torlundy development as Tower Ridge Courtyard.

## 9. **Lochaber Roads Maintenance Programme** **Prògram Càraidh Rathaid Ionadail Loch Abar**

There was circulated Report No. LA/13/16 by the Director of Community Services which invited the Committee to approve the Lochaber Roads Maintenance Programme for 2016/17.

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

- It was advised that works on Mandally Road would commence by the end of June, 2016;
- It was common for pot holes to be repaired and within a short space of time they were needing repaired again. It was advised that this was down to the materials being used to fill the potholes being affected by the weather and large vehicles forcing the material out. For a long term solution, a permanent patch could be done if the funding was available or other solutions such as jet patching. In this respect, it was queried when the Jetpatcher road repair machinery was due to be used in the Lochaber area. Members would be advised of the date for this. It was confirmed that a Jetpatcher was to be purchased by the Council and it was important to make the most efficient use of this throughout Highland.
- It was queried if all the Surface Dressing that was not delivered last year, would be delivered this year in addition to whatever had already been planned for this year. It was advised that the number of Surface Dressing machines had been reduced from three to two and this also coincided with budget reductions and therefore the programme for Surfacing Dressing programme had been altered, so that Surface Dressing was not done as frequently.
- Training requirements for roads maintenance staff would be looked at.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the Lochaber Roads Maintenance Programme for 2016/17.

## 10. **Minutes** **Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 11 February, 2016 which were approved by the Council on 10 March 2016, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

Arising from the minutes the following points were raised:-



i **NOTED** that a briefing paper would be sent to Members on progress with the external insulation work on properties in Plantation, Fort William. This issue would also be reported to a future Ward Business Meeting.

ii **AGREED** that a briefing paper would be sent to Members on progress with the following issue raised at the last meeting:- "In relation to record keeping on the HRA capital programme, in terms of the volume of work being undertaken, there had been a time delay in inputting this information on the capital programme into the Housing information system and this would be addressed. Information on the works planned in the capital programme would also be provided to tenants."

iii **NOTED** that information on the following issue raised at the meeting held on 24 November, 2015 would be issued to Members:- "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."

The meeting concluded at 12.50 p.m.