

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in Lochaber House, High Street, Fort William on Wednesday, 19 October, 2016 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr A Henderson
Mr T MacLennan

Mr B Murphy
Mr B Thompson

Non Member in attendance:-

Mr A Rhind

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Mr D McDiarmid, Station Manager, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Community Services
Mr I Bruce-Low, Community Works Officer, Community Services
Mr D Esson, Quality Improvement Manager, (West), Care and Learning 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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Clark and Mr B Gormley.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Developing Local Priorities for Lochaber A' Leasachadh Phrìomhachasan Ionadail airson Loch Abar

There was circulated Report No LA/19/16 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which provided Members with an update on the local strategic priorities for Lochaber.

The Depute Leader of the Council was in attendance at the meeting to discuss with the Committee their key issues and whether the Administration could help progress

these issues. The Depute Leader also discussed with the Committee their strategic priorities for the Lochaber area in order to allow these to sit alongside the priorities as listed in Highland First.

In particular, it was advised that discussions had been held with Lochaber Chamber of Commerce who had been advised of the local strategic priorities for Lochaber and it was intended that the Chamber of Commerce would also bring forward their local priorities. It was suggested that the Council should write to the Chamber of Commerce asking them to submit their priorities and/or seeking their endorsement of the Council's priorities.

Further, the A830 relief road was highlighted. The construction of this road would remove around 60% of traffic from a recognised A82 choke point, delivering more effective traffic movement and freeing up land for commercial use. It was emphasised that this had been a local priority for some time and it was important that the road was built given the significant traffic volumes in Fort William. A route options study for the relief road would be an important step forward. Concern was expressed that it had taken so long for the Administration to address this issue despite repeated assurances that it would be. Also of concern was the apparent lack of knowledge in the Council of the benefits that building this road would have for the area, as it had been discussed many times in and out of Council meetings. Members were informed that this issue had been discussed with the Leader of the Council and with Scottish Government Ministers and that the Council's Transport Planning Manager had been tasked into looking at this issue. An assurance was given that the relief road was a main priority for the Leadership of the Administration.

Reference was made to the forthcoming Local Government Election in May 2017. There would be concern if progress on these priorities were delayed until after the Election, and it was hoped that these strategic priorities would be progressed by Senior Management with public sector partners.

In relation to the Nevis Centre, concern was expressed that there was a proposal to go before the next Education, Children and Adult Services Committee that funding for the Centre be reduced substantially over the next year. A point was made that while the Nevis Centre's funding was being reduced, there was a proposal that Eden Court Theatre's funding was maintained at almost the same level. The Depute Leader was asked to do all he could to maintain the funding of the Nevis Centre as it was of great benefit to local people and tourism. A request was made to the Depute Leader to liaise with the Chair of Education, Children and Adult Services Committee and the Director of Care and Learning to give the Management Committee of the Nevis Centre the opportunity to give a presentation at a future ECAS Committee meeting.

Reference was made to the priority of establishing a Lochaber Common Good Fund which would enable appropriate projects to be funded by a mechanism which would have direct community input. It was advised that a local Community Trust was very close to acquiring land from the Rio Tinto Alcan estate which would then enable the setting up of a Lochaber Common Good Fund. This would only happen if there was a substantial income stream from the estate, like other common good funds, for community benefit. This was a huge opportunity that could benefit the Lochaber area for many years and therefore the Council's support was required for the community's attempt to acquire the estate land for the common good. The

Council's support of the Community Trust would send a strong message to the Scottish Government whose financial backing was essential for a common good fund. It was proposed that a recommendation be submitted to the next Council meeting, that the Council expresses its support to the local Community Trust in its attempts to acquire land from the Rio Tinto Alcan estate for the community's benefit. This fitted in with Highland First priorities in assisting community's with acquiring land for community benefit. Further, it was emphasised that the community's attempts to acquire this land would not impinge on the future security of the aluminium smelter and its water rights.

The Depute Leader advised that the Administration would do all it could to support the Committee with its local priorities. Most of the Local Committees had only recently set their local priorities and both the Leader and Depute Leader were currently undertaking a programme of visits to all Local Committees to discuss these. The Depute Leader had visited the Lochaber area recently and was impressed by the level of commitment that the Council had given to projects in the area and this was very encouraging.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the draft local priorities for Lochaber;
- ii. **AGREED** that these priorities would be further considered within the Lochaber Community Planning structures;
- * iii. **AGREED** that the following recommendation be submitted to The Highland Council:- "the Lochaber Committee invites The Highland Council to express their support for community land ownership in Lochaber and the current efforts of the community to acquire land in the area."
- iv. **AGREED** that a letter be sent to the Lochaber Chamber of Commerce asking them to submit their priorities and/or seeking their endorsement of the Lochaber Committee's local priorities; and
- v. **NOTED** the undertaking from the Depute Leader, for the Administration to do all it could to support the local priorities for Lochaber.

In accordance with Standing Order 18, with the consent of the meeting, items 8, 9 and 10 on the agenda were taken at this point.

8. Mallaig Associated School Group Overview Sealladh Farsaing air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Mhalaig

There was circulated Report No LA/23/16 by the Area Care & Learning Manager (West) which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Mallaig Associated School Group (ASG), and provided useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- A view was expressed that there was no virtual comparator to the Mallaig ASG given that it had four island locations and a peninsula in its geographical area;
- It was noted that Mallaig High School was performing in line or above the national average in most Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles but below the national average for deciles 6 and 7. As Mallaig High School only had deciles 6 and 7 this was of concern as the school was well

staffed and it was queried if this was being addressed. It was confirmed that this was being looked at as part of the review of pupils' attainment and looking at specific departments and what they do. The Director of Care and Learning was looking at the SIMD in an effort to provide a breakdown of the criteria to make it more meaningful for rural communities.

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

**9. Education Scotland Report – Invergarry Primary School and Nursery Class
Aithisg Foghlam Alba – Bun-Sgoil agus Clas Sgoil-Àraich Inbhir Garadh**

There was circulated Report No LA/24/16 by the Director of Care and Learning which provided details on Education Scotland's report of Invergarry Primary School and Nursery Class of 23rd August 2016.

It was emphasised that the Education Scotland Report on Invergarry Primary School and Nursery Class was a very strong success story. The Head Teacher and staff at the school were congratulated for such a positive report.

One of the key areas identified from the report was that the Council should take action to improve the quality of the accommodation and resources at the school. It was confirmed that the Head of Resources, Care and Learning was looking at this issue.

A comment was made that the Parent Council for the school was very well run and active and the Council should do all it could to communicate/ support them.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED** the Education Scotland report on Invergarry Primary School and Nursery Class of 23 August 2016.

**10. Street Naming – Developments in Fort William and Lochyside
Ainmeachadh Sràide – Leasachaidhean sa Ghearasdan agus Taobh Lòchaidh**

There was circulated Report No. LA/25/16 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which asked the Committee to homologate the naming of two new developments - one in Lochyside (southwest of Columba Court) and the other in Fort William (former Belhaven Ward site).

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the street naming for the new Lochyside development as Curlew Place and the new Fort William housing development site as Belhaven Drive.

**4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report for
Quarter 1 of 2016/17
Aithisg Dèanadais Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn
na h-Alba airson Ràith 1 de 2016/17**

There was circulated Report No. LA/20/16 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland providing an update to Committee Members on the progress against the priorities outlined in the Area Plan for Lochaber 2016 – 2017 for Quarter 1.

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.

Having heard the Station Manager, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) summarise the report, the following points were raised:-

- The SFRS was actively recruiting in a number of communities to improve station and fire appliance availability. The Service would welcome assistance from the Council, through its community connections, and Employers of raising the profile of the work of the SFRS in order to attract candidates to the Service. The Station Manager thanked local Employers who continued to support Retained Fire and Rescue teams in releasing them for operational duties.
- In relation to the availability of the second fire appliance in Kinlochleven, it was noted that the availability of this appliance had reduced substantially over the past year and it was queried what the Service was doing to address this as there was concern that if the availability continued to be low, then it would be removed altogether. In response, it was advised that the availability figures were proactively being made available to the SFRS recruitment department and there was currently a recruitment campaign and stations with low staffing availability would be prioritised in the recruitment. The Service worked closely with Employers and retained staff to support an improvement in availability. It recognised the challenges faced by retained staff when combining primary employment and their operational availability across communities in the Highland area.
- It was queried why the station in Acharacle had a lower availability compared to other smaller stations in the area. It was advised that the specific reasons for this would be investigated and provided to the Committee after the meeting.
- It had been reported to the Communities and Partnerships Committee in June, 2016 that 12 out of 85 SFRS staff in Lochaber were female and the majority of staff at the Lochaline station were female (5 females compared to 3 males). An update on these statistics would be provided to the Committee after the meeting.

The Committee having **scrutinised** the Area Performance Report, **NOTED** the content of the report.

5. Business Gateway Presentation Taisbeanadh Slighe Gnothachais

This item on the agenda was withdrawn and would instead be submitted to the next meeting.

6. Fort William Office Project Update and Former Fort William Primary School Cunntas às Ùr mu Phròiseact Oifis a' Ghearasdain agus Seann Bhun-Sgoil a' Ghearasdain

There was circulated Report No LA/21/16 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which provided Members with a) an update on progress on the new Fort William Council Offices and b) a proposal for redevelopment of the former Fort William Primary School.

Having heard the Senior Ward Manager provide a summary of the report, Members were asked to note a correction to the report in respect of the Former Fort William Primary School building. It had been stated that an application for planning permission had been made, but in fact the application had still to be submitted.

The Committee welcomed the good progress in respect of the new Fort William Council Offices, which would realise substantial annual revenue savings. Also they welcomed the project to convert the Former Fort William Primary School into a new Archive and Search Room, records store, meeting room and offices for public sector partners.

It was noted that there had been some disagreement between contractors and adjacent landowners with the treatment for Japanese knotweed and how to dispose of it. An assurance was sought that appropriate measures had been taken to address this. Also, an update was sought on the public art element of the project, the likely cost of this and whether the funding for this could be used for public art elsewhere in the town centre where it was more noticeable e.g. a gateway feature to the town. The Senior Ward Manager undertook to provide an update to Members on these issues after the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee having considered the report:-

- i. **NOTED** progress on the redevelopment of the former Fort William Secondary School; and
- ii. **NOTED** the intention to redevelop the former Fort William Primary School subject to statutory approvals being achieved.

7. Winter Maintenance Plan for 2016/17 Plana Obair-glèidhidh Geamhraidh airson 2016/17

There was circulated Report No LA/22/16 by the Director of Community Services which provided Members with information on winter maintenance preparations and arrangements for the 2016/17 winter period and invited the Committee to approve the Winter Maintenance Plans for Lochaber.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- It was welcomed that an additional driver would be available to provide cover on winter maintenance operations in the Lochaber area this winter. Currently the Lochaber Area staff establishment for winter maintenance was up to its full complement with no vacancies;
- The Council's decision that 10% of the gritter fleet could start one hour earlier at 5am to aid treatment of roads in winter was good news and it was queried how this would operate and what criteria would be used to commence a 5am start. It was suggested that rural routes would be the most appropriate for the 5am start and in particular the Lochailort route around the peninsula, where there were many scattered communities and people set out early in order to go to work.
- In relation to the hierarchy of priorities where Primary routes are treated first, thereafter Secondary and then all Other routes being treated as resources permit, what was noticeable about the total lengths of each priority route for Lochaber compared to other areas in Highland, was that Lochaber had the lowest proportion of Secondary routes allocated and it had the highest, apart

from Badenoch and Strathspey area, of Other routes. This was of concern as funding was allocated between the various areas in relation to each area's Primary and Secondary routes. It would therefore be appropriate to have a Highland wide review of the Other routes, as it was believed that Lochaber area was not receiving its fair share of winter maintenance funding based on the current criteria.

- In relation to footpath tractors, it was noted that Lochaber only had two footpath tractors and it was requested that other areas of the Council be asked to demonstrate that their footpath tractors were being used. If it was found that they were not, then the Lochaber area could make full use of additional tractors. It was advised that the provision of footpath tractors was under review and it was hoped that the Lochaber area would receive an additional tractor. In the meantime, a business case had been submitted for a quad bike to supplement the footpath tractors. The quad bike could also be used for weed killing in the summer and for use as a convoy vehicle.
- It was requested that in future the Winter Maintenance Plans be submitted to the August Local Committee meetings so that Members could consider Plans prior to the winter period. The Roads Operations Manager undertook to deliver on this request.
- A copy of the Winter Maintenance Policy Information would be sent to Members.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Winter Maintenance Plan for the Lochaber Area, which included the priority road lists and maps presented in Appendices B & C of the report;
- * ii. **AGREED** that the following recommendation be submitted to The Highland Council:- "the Lochaber Committee requests the Community Services Committee to undertake a full review pertaining to the parity of route prioritisation across Highland for winter maintenance taking particular regard of the nature of the geographical layout of some parts of the Highlands."
- iii. **NOTED** the request that in future the Winter Maintenance Plans be submitted to the August Local Committee meetings so that Members could consider Plans prior to the winter period.

11. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 23 August, 2016 which were approved by the Council on 8 September, 2016, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 12.55 p.m.