

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in The Sunart Centre, Strontian on **Wednesday, 10 April 2019 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr A Henderson
Mr N McLean

Mr I Ramon
Mr D Rixson

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport, Community Services
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Community Services
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Community Services (by Skype conference)
Ms M Cameron, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Mr L MacDonald, Repairs Manager (South), Community Services
Mr T Usher, Harbours Manager, Community Services
Mr J Allan, Lighting and Communications Manager, Community Services
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

Also in attendance:-

Mr R Dibble, Group Manager, Scottish Fire and Rescue Services
Ms J Matheson, Acharacle Community Council
Ms G Calver, West Ardnamurchan Community Council
Mr J Jones, Sunart, Community Council

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 A Baxter - Chairman

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Allan and Mr B Thompson.

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

Item 6 – Mr D Rixson (non financial)

3. Community Council Feedback on Corran Ferry Issues Fios air ais bho Chomhairle Choimhearsnachd mu Chùisean Aiseag a' Chorrain

The Chairman advised that the role of Local Committees was being reviewed, and it was intended that two of the Lochaber Local Committee meetings each year would be held in locations outside Fort William. It was also the intention that if there were items on the agenda linked to a specific geographical area within Lochaber, that relevant Community Councils, or if a school issue, Parent Councils, would be invited to attend the Committee meeting to put their case on specific issues to be discussed at meeting.

Thereafter, the Chairman welcomed representatives of the local Community Councils on the Ardnamurchan peninsula to the meeting who were in attendance to give a presentation on issues relating to the Corran Ferry.

The Community Council representatives explained that those living in rural areas were well aware that the costs of living in a rural environment far outweigh the costs of living in an urban one. The benefits of a rural lifestyle were overwhelmingly intangible and for those benefits, rural communities pay heavily in terms of income and isolation. The Highland Council were adding to these additional burdens by effectively taxing their lifeline ferry service to their only urban hub. The representatives identified some of the social, safety, economic and inequality detrimental impacts that this additional tax had on their communities. In conclusion, Corran Ferry price rises only applied to communities living west of Corran Ferry and it was therefore not equitable across the Highland Council area. The Council should reconsider price rises and seek to tax other communities to close the budget gap. The representatives felt that their community already paid higher taxes to the Council than any other in their area. The Community Councils wanted to be involved in and work with the Council in addressing the issues raised, given the impact these issues had on their communities.

The Chairman thanked the representatives for their presentation and noted in particular their desire to work with the Council in addressing the issues raised and he expressed the need for the Council to also work with the Community Councils to progress solutions.

A view was expressed that at some stage the local community should have the option of taking charge of running the Corran Ferry service.

There was a need for accurate figures from both Community Councils and the Council when providing information on detrimental impacts that the ferry fares were having on the community and in terms of ferry usage.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation by representatives of Community Councils on Corran Ferry issues and that local Members would work with Community Councils and the local community on the approach to address the various issues with the Corran Ferry service.

4. Corran Ferry Service Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Aiseag a' Chorrain

There was circulated Report No. LA/7/19 by the Director of Community Services which provided an update regarding ongoing issues with the Corran Ferry service.

In presenting their report, the Head of Roads and Transport and Roads Operations Manager looked forward to further meetings with Community Council representatives in relation to the ongoing work to address various issues with the Corran Ferry service. This work would involve consultation with stakeholders. The breakdown of the Ferry in 2017 highlighted the vulnerability of the ferry service and the need for future investment. As a result the Council had undertaken a 1st Stage Options Appraisal and in taking this work forward there was an absolute commitment to consult with local Members and Community Councils to develop the preferred option going forward.

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

- The report referred to the Corran Ferry service being recognised by Transport Scotland as a lifeline service. The report did not state it was recognised as a lifeline service by The Highland Council. There was a view by some that it was not a lifeline service as people could use the road instead. It was confirmed by Officers that it was their view and the corporate view of the Council that the Corran Ferry was a lifeline service.
- It was queried if there was an indicative timescale by Hitrans for the commencement and conclusion of the Corran Narrows Fixed Link STAG appraisal. It was advised that the STAG appraisal would commence as soon as possible with a report on it being available within approximately 18 months.
- The Scottish Government's second Strategic Transport Projects Review would take place in the next three years to identify potential transport investment in Scotland over the next 20 years. The aim was to work on the Corran Ferry project so that it could be considered to be on this priority list for investment. The Fixed Link was a long term project and in the meantime there was a need for considerable investment in the current Ferry service.
- A view was expressed that the Project Manager post for Corran Ferry should be based in Lochaber and that the Lochaber Committee should be the priority for reporting to rather than the Harbours Management Board or Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee. It was explained that the report to EDI Committee did propose that the project governance arrangements would be through the Harbours Management Board. However there would be local reporting on the project to the Lochaber Committee.
- It was queried why there had been no progress on smart ticketing. It was explained that it was a Government aspiration to have smart ticketing to link all modes of transport. However, the current ticketing system did not have the capacity for taking payment by Smart-card, or web-based sales or mobile phone pre-payment apps. Therefore Officers were currently looking at ticketing providers, including speaking to suppliers with a view to upgrading the current ticketing system.
- Meetings had been held with Transport Scotland on the Options Appraisal for the Corran Ferry and they were fully aware of progress in this respect. Future discussions with Transport Scotland would require Elected Member involvement.
- Once a Project Officer was appointed a copy of the Corran Ferry Socio-Economic Study commissioned by the Council should be provided to the Officer, as this outlined the views of the community, the changes the community

support, including the introduction of charging for pedestrians and pedal cycle and smart ticketing.

- A new integrated ticketing system should not be rushed as it was important to get the right system that could meet all our requirements. Failure to do this could cost the Council money if the system did not work as expected.
- There may be an opportunity for the Corran Ferry Project Officer post being involved in the work on establishing a proposed Loch Linnhe Harbour Authority and thereby providing value for money.
- It was noted that passengers were not charged primarily because the short crossing time does not allow sufficient time to collect that number of fares with the current ticketing system. It was queried if there was an option to have a foot passenger ticket machine on the Ferry forecourt. It was advised that this was possible and discussions on this and other ticketing options had been held with the Council's Principal Traffic Officer.
- It was confirmed that the Ferry income went into the Council's general fund. Also, there was a need for accurate information on ferry usage for future planning and strategy.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- Supported** the proposal of the Corran Ferry staffing review;
- NOTED** the developments in card reader and ticketing solutions;
- NOTED** the progress to appoint a Corran Ferry Project Manager;
- NOTED** the progress of Hitrans' Corran Narrows Fixed Link STAG;
- Supported** the introduction of foot passenger and pedal cycle charging and requests that suitable ticketing arrangements are implemented in financial year 2019/20; and
- Requested** a full review of Ferry usage figures to check for their accuracy and to consider new ways of monitoring usage in future years.

5. **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No LA/8/19 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland which provided an update on progress against the priorities outlined in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Area Committee Plan for Lochaber 2016-2018.

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

- the station availability in Lochaber was relatively stable and slightly improving for many of the stations, despite the reduction in staffing.
- The proactive work of Group Manager Pat McElhinney was commended in meeting with local Members at Fire Stations and discussing recruitment efforts. Mr McElhinney's work and commitment in the Community Planning Partnership in relation to the preparation of the local plan for Caol was also acknowledged as this had been very successful.
- it was queried if the Fire Service were actively involved in working with car hire companies to ensure that information was in the car to ensure drivers were aware to drive on the left side of the road in the UK.
- The Fire Service's work in connection with extinguishing out of control Muirburn was commended.

The Committee having scrutinised the Area Performance Report, **NOTED** that the Fire Service would welcome the opportunity to be involved in initiatives to reduce the

number of road traffic accidents caused by drivers driving on the wrong side of the road.

6. Housing Performance Report and HRA Capital Programme Update Aithisg Dèanadais Taigheadais

Declaration of Interest: Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association 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 discussion.

There was circulated Report No LA/9/19 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 up to 31 December 2018 and also provided an update on the Lochaber HRA Capital Programme.

Having heard the Chairman commend the work of the Housing section, particularly in Lochaber, the Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 December 2018 and the position on the HRA Capital Programme.

7. Roads Maintenance Programme 2019/20 Prògram Càradh Rathaidean 2019/20

There was circulated Report No. LA/10/19 by the Director of Community Services which detailed the proposed 2019/20 Roads Maintenance Programme for Lochaber. In discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- There had been complaints regarding the new bridge at Pier Road in that the approach to it was unsafe;
- Reference was made to the following roads that should be on the list for roads repairs:- the retaining wall to the sea at the road end of Rhu, Arisaig; Mallaig East Bay; Ormsaigbeg; Caol Shopping Centre car park and the Loch Morar road needed to be a higher priority on the list.
- As roads maintenance budgets had reduced over the years and costs of road maintenance had increased, there was little revenue expenditure left to spend on roads other than for general maintenance. This situation was the same in all other areas of the Council. It was advised that it cost at least £40,000 for a basic overlay for one kilometre of signal track road.
- There was an additional £1.5m for roads maintenance in the Council's 2019/20 Revenue budget which was essential, as in previous year's, some capital resources had been diverted to support revenue expenditure on roads.
- There was a long list of road repairs, many longstanding, that had not made the priority list. In order to underline the challenge facing the Council, it was highlighted that the backlog of repairs on the priority list was estimated to cost in the region of £5m for the Lochaber area. It was requested that Members be provided with the list of non priority road repairs for the Lochaber area at a future meeting. Also, information on the Scottish Road Condition Maintenance Survey, which informed the requirement for maintenance on our roads, would be provided at a future meeting.
- The Highland Council currently spent £7m per year on road maintenance. To keep the roads in a good state would require the Council to spend £21m on road maintenance each year. It would cost £176m to get the roads up to their

previous standard, which highlighted the huge scale of the challenge facing the Council.

- In relation to discussions on the allocation of the roads budget for future years, there had been a strong case put forward, that the City of Inverness area should receive a large allocation given the significant road network requiring to be covered., However, it was felt this should be resisted as the Inverness road network was far more modern than in Lochaber and did not have to contend with the same climate. Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch had the greatest proportion of roads in the worst category and so there was a strong argument that the roads budget allocation should go towards roads that were most in need of repairing and not based simply on road length.
- It was queried how many road repairs were required as a result of utility works. It was advised that the Roads Inspector for Lochaber had a tremendous relationship with utility companies and ensured that reinstatement works following utility works were carried out to a satisfactory standard. Sometimes utility companies did not provide the Council with sufficient notice of carrying out works on our roads. This was important as the Council needed to know in advance the location of the works, so inspections could be carried out and various works could be co-ordinated. Further, the Scottish Government launched a consultation paper last year on this issue, with a view to strengthening the powers of local authorities so that they could carry out the reinstatement activities themselves and recharge the utility companies for this work. There may also be penalties imposed on utility companies if Local Authorities were not properly notified of works in advance. The Council supported this consultation paper.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i **APPROVED** the proposed 2019/20 Roads Maintenance Programme for Lochaber Area; and
- ii **NOTED** that information would be provided to a future meeting on the non priority road repairs list for the Lochaber area and information on the Scottish Road Condition Maintenance Survey.

8. Loch Linnhe – Marine Traffic Management An Linne Dubh – Rianachd Trafaig Mara

There was circulated Report No. LA/11/19 by the Director of Community Services.

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

- If the community were motivated to progress a Harbour Authority for Loch Linnhe, there may be an opportunity to have the Corran Ferry Project Officer provide support with this, thereby reducing costs;
- Establishing a Harbour Authority could take a number of years and would require stakeholders to progress this;
- There was a need to construct a viable business model to introduce a Harbour Authority and given the costs this could involve, there was a dilemma, as no one wishes to incur significant costs on something that may not happen.
- It would be preferable for the Council to lead on the project, at least in the initial stages, and consideration should be given to setting up a Steering Group with key stakeholders, to look at the various options for a Harbour Authority.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the previous work carried out in respect to establishing a Harbour Authority;
- AGREED** the further consultation with users of the Loch with a view to the establishment of a Harbour Authority; and
- AGREED** to seek the set up of a Steering Group to discuss the possibility of the establishment of a Loch Linnhe Harbour Authority and to contact all appropriate stakeholders about this.

9. Christmas Lighting and Decorations Solais agus Sgeadachaidhean Nollaige

There was circulated Report No. LA/12/19 by the Director of Community Services.

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

- In relation to the removal of £35,000 from the budget for the delivery of Christmas Lighting, there was concern that this saving would mean that potentially Fort William town centre and other town centres in the Highlands will lose out on their Christmas Lighting, but Inverness could mitigate this saving by subsidising it through their common good fund. Other areas did not have the benefit of this.
- The Fort William Town Team did not feel they had the capacity to deal with a Christmas lighting scheme, but further discussions on this with them would be held. There were also people in the community with skills and equipment that perhaps could assist.
- It was requested that the detailed estimated cost breakdown of erecting Christmas Lighting in Fort William would be provided for the Committee.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** that the Council has previously removed the £35,000 budget for the delivery of Christmas Lighting;

- ii. **AGREED** that the engagement with Fort William community groups will be arranged to discuss the changes and to explore options for the future delivery of Christmas lighting and decorations;
- iii. **NOTED** that Health & Safety and general guidance will be published in the future for communities to enable the safe erection of Christmas Lighting and Decorations; and
- iv. **NOTED** that the detailed estimated cost breakdown of erecting Christmas Lighting in Fort William would be provided for the Committee.

10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED**, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 23 January, 2019 which were approved by the Council on 7 March, 2019.

The meeting ended at 12.55 p.m.