

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Monday, 19 April, 2021 at 10.30 a.m.**

### **Present:**

Mr B Allan	Mr I Ramon
Mr A Baxter	Mr D Rixson
Mr A Henderson	Mr B Thompson

### **In attendance:**

Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place  
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment  
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber), Communities and Place  
Mr D Esson, Interim Area Education & Learning Manager (West), Education & Learning Service  
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure and Environment Service  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance Service

### **Also in attendance:-**

Mr M Colliar, Group Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (Item 3)

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.**

## **Business**

### **1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr N McLean.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There was circulated Report No LA/12/21 by the Group Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

It was highlighted that there had been a number of road traffic accidents in the October period which was concerning, but since then the number had decreased, which reflected the lack of tourist activity in the area due to Covid restrictions. Further, accidental dwelling fires were very low as were accidental fires which was welcomed. However, there would be a move to increased activity as Covid restrictions eased with an increase in tourism and traffic.

There had not been much increase in recruitment, and therefore advertising of vacancies in the Service would continue using social media to encourage people to join the Service. In this respect, a District Support Officer had been appointed to the Ardnamurchan peninsula which would support the remote rural stations and seek to increase stations availability. Nationally, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service were considering a strategy for recruitment of Retained Volunteers.

In particular, the appointment of a District Support Officer for the Ardnamurchan peninsula was welcomed which would assist the Stations on the peninsula. Staff recruitment to stations on the peninsula was a long standing concern and Ward Members would continue to do everything they could to support and publicise the opportunity for residents to join the Retained Volunteer Service.

The Chairman on behalf of the Committee extended Members appreciation to all staff within the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for all the work they did in communities. The summer period was a particular challenging time for the Service in dealing with wildfires after a dry winter and spring and the public warning about the risks of wildfires was emphasised.

Having scrutinised the report, the Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

*In accordance with Standing Order 9, with the consent of the meeting, item 5 on the agenda was taken at this point.*

## **5. Lochaber Area Roads Maintenance Programme 2021-2022 Prògram Càradh Rathaidean 2021-2022**

There was circulated Report No. LA/13/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

The current Revenue budget allocation for Lochaber for 2021/22 was £1,110,564 which was required to cover Labour, Plant and Materials (including Salt) for Roads Cyclical and Winter Maintenance activities, it was requested that Members be provided with information on how this money was split between the various categories and what potential was there for Members influencing how that budget was directed.

A point was made that Lochaber, Skye and Badenoch & Strathspey had some of the worst road condition reports in the Council area, but it was understood these areas did not get an allocation of funding based on road condition, but that it was done on the basis of road length. Therefore, the view was expressed that the Jetpatcher should be sent to areas where it was needed most in terms of road condition. It was advised that the Jetpatcher was hired and part of the roads capital programme was used to pay for it. The vehicle was usually hired for one month and the cost was approximately between £40k to £50k. A programme for its use was well planned to gain maximum use of the Jetpatcher. There was a Council owned Jetpatcher based in Inverness that served the Inner Moray Firth area as there was a high concentration of roads and population to maximise its use.

Continuing, a comment was made that there had been a substantial deterioration in local roads and the repair of potholes using the Jetpatcher was concentrated into a one month period in Lochaber. Therefore, there was a substantial amount of the year when it was not available. If another Jetpatcher was purchased for a wider area of the Highlands this would be an efficient use of the equipment. In response, it was advised that if the Council purchased another Jetpatcher, it would have to meet the costs of maintenance, staffing and its use would require to be maximised all year round. In this respect, it was

not possible to Jetpatch in winter time. Overall it was felt that hiring the Jetpatcher was a more efficient and cost effective way of maintaining roads as the vehicle was hired when needed.

It was advised that there was a mixture of objective data and subjective opinion as to what was most urgent in terms of pothole repairs. The Jetpatcher was an efficient way of filling potholes, but there were various other methods of repairing potholes some of which were explained. In particular, reference was made to a new machine that could be used and further details on the cost of this and whether purchasing one for the Lochaber area would be an efficient use of resources, rather than hiring it, would be supplied to Members. Also, it was highlighted that surface dressing a road could extend the life of a road for a significant period of time.

In relation to a comment that there was too much tar put into potholes which meant a rough drive for motorists, it was advised that road teams did try to leave a smooth finish on pothole repairs. This point was noted and would be fed back to roads teams.

That had been good work done by local road teams in conjunction with BEAR Scotland in terms of bell-mouths and more of this was encouraged. There were clear definitions of who was responsible for what in terms of the interface between local authority and trunk roads.

Reference was made to representations made at Council to the use of recycled material on roads and Members when keen to experiment with recycled material within the Council area. It was suggested that extra money may be available to Lochaber if it offered to do a pilot scheme to introduce recycled material into road surface dressing. It was advised that the roads team in Lochaber were using recycled traditional materials on a stretch of the Glen Etive road at approximately half the cost on new materials.

It was requested that information be sent to Members on which areas of the A884 Sunart Side road was to be repaired.

Members requested that consideration be given to the following suggested changes to the Lochaber Area Roads Maintenance Programme 2021-2022:-

- Surface dressing or overlay at Grange Terrace, Fort William;
- Kinloch Hourn Road – possibly divert £40k set aside in the budget for drainage works on this road to remedial works following conclusion of construction activity, if no reparation funding is received.
- Morar Village Centre road
- Glenkingie Terrace, Caol
- Caol Shops car park
- A884 at Lochaline village
- B8043 Kingairloch Road did not have the same level of use as the A884 Lochaline road and if the programme was to be altered to allow capital to be spent elsewhere, deferring the works on the B8043 may be a possibility.

It was suggested that the Roads Operations Manager consider the above requests for alterations to the Roads Maintenance Programme and how they could be accommodated in the Programme. It was advised that the Programme contained contingencies which allowed for some flexibility and it was confirmed in particular that there would be capacity to undertake the Grange Terrace, Fort William road maintenance in the 2021/22 programme. There was extra capital money being received this year and

next year and it was not always possible to carry out maintenance on all roads in a particular year and the work required to be spread out.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i **APPROVED** the proposed prioritised 2021/22 Roads Maintenance Programme for Lochaber Area; and

ii **AGREED** to authorise the Roads Operations Manager to consider the suggested amendments to the Programme highlighted at the meeting, and to make changes within the overall budget allocation. Changes to the Programme would be reported to the next Ward Business Meeting and reported to a future Local Committee for homologation.

#### 4. Education Update Fios às Ùr mu Fhoghlam

There was a verbal Education update by the Interim Area Education & Learning Manager (West).

It was highlighted that due to Covid-19 restrictions over the last 12 months there had been no Education Scotland Inspections or Inspection reports. Information was provided on local Education staff appointments, key worker and vulnerable children support, remote learning and phased return to schools.

In terms of Area working, details were provided of the support Area Teams were providing Schools. Officers continued to support Schools and parents with remote learning guidance and in key areas such as health and wellbeing and mental health and well being.

Area Operational meetings had been linking with education, health and safety, catering, cleaning and transport. The meetings had been ongoing over the last 12 months and reference was made to the strong partnership working to support Schools in these challenging times. The strong partnership working with NHS Highland in supporting young people was also highlighted.

There had been regular communications to staff, parents and pupils over the Covid period and all primary and secondary Schools had now returned on a full time basis. The support of all area strategic teams in supporting children and young people was acknowledged.

In discussion, it was queried when the acting up Management posts in the Education Service were likely to become permanent and the recruitment timetable. It was advised that recruitment would be on a phased approach basis with Strategic and Area Manager posts being appointed by end June, 2021 and thereafter Area posts to be appointed by end of 2021.

The Chairman on behalf of the Committee requested that their thanks and best wishes be intimated to all School staff in Lochaber for their commitment and effort during the Covid-19 period. They had worked in very challenging circumstances and their hard work was acknowledged and much appreciated.

The Committee **NOTED** the Education update.

**6. Minutes**  
**Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated:-

i for information Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 18 January, 2021, the terms of which were **NOTED**; and

ii for approval, Minutes of Meeting of the Special Lochaber Committee held on 23 March, 2021, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

The meeting ended at 12 Noon.