

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Monday, 9 August, 2021 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr N McLean
Mr I Ramon

Mr D Rixson
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
Ms M Cameron, Principal Housing Officer, Housing and Property
Mr L Macdonald, Repairs Manager, Housing and Property
Mr D Esson, Interim Area Education & Learning Manager (West), Education & Learning
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure and Environment
Mr M Bain, Project Manager, Corran Ferry, Communities and Place
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager, Infrastructure and Environment
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance Service

Also in attendance:-

Inspector Nick Hough, Police Scotland (Item 3)

Item 4 – Fort William 2040 Board Members:-

Mr A Nicolson, HIE; Mr N MacRae, HITRANS; Ms L Bussell, NHS; Mr F Coupland, Lochaber Chamber of Commerce; Ms P Coles, Crown Estate Scotland; Ms A Phillips and Mr D Devine, Transport Scotland

q

Items 11 & 12 – Corran Ferry Steering Group

Dr M Foxley, Ms G Calver, Mr J Jones, Ms P Kennedy, Mr D Dixson, Mr M Jones

Items 11 & 12 - Mr S Reid, Project Manager, Mr S Canning, Project Director, Stantec

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

Interim Chairman

The Chairman was temporarily unable to join the meeting remotely due to technical difficulties. The Committee were invited to appoint an Interim Chairman until the Chairman was able to join the meeting.

Mr B Thompson was unanimously appointed as Interim Chairman.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

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

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Items 4,5,8 – Mr D Rixson (non financial)

3. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/14/21 by the Lochaber Area Inspector which provided an update on the progress with reference to the objectives outlined in the Highland Policing Plan 2020-2023.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Reference was made to Operation Close Pass where Police Scotland who would deploy plain-clothes officers on bikes and drivers who overtake cyclists to closely may be pulled over and cautioned for dangerous driving. This operation had been carried out in the past in Lochaber and it would be great to see it carried out again. An undertaking was given to do this.
- In relation to the ongoing investigations into electronic fraud on local businesses and charities, it was very easy for elderly and trusting members of the community to be targeted by electronic fraud. It was requested that consideration be given to a local public relations campaign with specific advice to combat electronic fraud. It was highlighted that the origin of these crimes were unfortunately mostly non local and often outwith the UK. These crimes were investigated and reported to Action Fraud, the UK's national reporting centre for fraud and cyber crime and CID would investigate where large frauds occurred. An undertaking was given to offer specific advice to vulnerable people in the community.

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

- i progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020 – 2023 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021;
- ii the intention to implement Operation Close Pass in the Lochaber Area, given the increase in number of cyclists in the area; and
- iii that Police Scotland would engage with Community Councils with a view to communicating specific advice to combat online fraud, in particular to vulnerable members of the Community.

At this point, Mr A Baxter took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

4. Update on Fort William 2040 - Presentation Fios às Ùr mu Ghearasdan 2040

Declaration of Interest - Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association and the Lochaber Environmental Group 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 a presentation by Members of the Fort William 2040 Board providing an update on the work of the Board. The Board coordinated activity and investment across Board member organisations, sought and developed new opportunities and developed ongoing community involvement. The presentation highlighted achievements since the last update to the Committee, a briefing on hospital reprovisioning, a transport update, a summary of current issues and opportunities and an update on the bid to the UK Government's Levelling up Fund.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- In relation to the issue of the road link between the Health centre and the new Hospital, this was a matter of significant local concern. It was understood that there was space within the development site for this road link and there was a need for this to be covered moving forward with the project. It was confirmed that the Director of Estates and Facilities, NHS would take this on board.
- It was welcomed that a District Heating Scheme was being considered for Lochaber and Members would like to see the results of the feasibility study on this. There were good environmental reasons for such a scheme and also the Scottish Government's challenge fund could cover up to 50% of the District Heating scheme costs which would be ideally suited for the Blar Mor site.
- There was a need to regenerate the Transport Hub, bus and railway stations in Fort William and improve links with the town centre. If there were improvements that could be made that could be funded through the Bus Improvement Fund these would be considered. Also, in terms of the Strategic Transport Project review, the Transport Hub, improvements to Fort William interchange, cycle routes, improved ticketing and information facilities could all potentially be considered for funding as part of the review.
- Given the disappointment of the traffic signal trial at the Nevis roundabout which failed to increase the flow of traffic, it was queried what further interventions were planned, such as a realignment of the A82 and future timescales in order to resolve problems at the roundabout. It was explained that given the trial had just been completed, there would be a reflection on it and the next steps would have to be considered. It was a very difficult junction and the problems challenging to resolve. Transport Scotland would continue to work with the Council and provide updates on any progress.
- There was a rapid changeover in car technology with electric vehicles and there was a need to be prepared to increase substantially the number of charging points available.
- The Coire Glass hydro scheme was likely to be one of the biggest civil engineering projects in the area for some time and the significant rock extraction would impact on the A830 which was already in a fragile state. Therefore in terms of FW2040 this scheme along with the increase demands on roads with tourism meant the fragility of the road network should be considered.
- The need to link the FW2040 Board with Community Planning Partnerships and for CPPs to be properly resourced was highlighted;
- Members requested they be updated on progress with UK Government Levelling up Fund bids.
- There were pressures on housing, through more houses being used for short term letting and businesses were having difficulty in attracting and retaining people through lack of housing. It was queried if the demand on the local housing market was being monitored in order to plan ahead for future Council housing build programmes. It was explained that a housing need and demand

assessment was undertaken annually and also intelligence gathered from partners on housing needs. In particular, there was a need to consider business needs for housing and consideration was being given to different types of housing models to meet this need.

Officers were thanked for their comprehensive presentation and Members welcomed the update and progress made to date on FW2040, following which the Committee **NOTED** the presentation and that the following matters would be progressed:-

- i the need for a Road link between the new Hospital and Health Centre;
- ii the Blar Mor feasibility study into a District Heating Scheme for Lochaber be shared with Members;
- iii that work would continue to try and identify improvements to the Nevis Roundabout and Members would be informed of progress;
- iv improvements to the transport hub and links to the town centre were being considered;
- v the need for the right connections between the Community Planning Partnerships and the FW2040 Board;
- vi the Head of Development & Regeneration would attend a future Ward Business Meeting to brief Members on UK Government Levelling up Fund bids.

**5. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021
Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2021 gu 30 Ògmhios 2021**

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/15/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property which provided information on how the Housing Service performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 June, 2021.

Reference was made to a housing satisfaction survey undertaken of new tenants and it was requested that the satisfaction levels of new tenants in Lochaber entering homes compared to the rest of the Council was requested. It was advised that a Tenant Satisfaction Survey for Lochaber compared to other Council areas would be submitted to the next meeting.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021; and
- ii that a Tenant Satisfaction Survey report would be submitted to the next meeting.

At this point there was a short comfort break and the meeting resumed at 12.35 p.m.

In accordance with Standing Order 9, with the consent of the meeting, items 11 and 12 on the agenda were taken at this point.

**11. Corran Ferry Project (Outline Business Case) Update
Fios às Ùr mu Phròiseact Aiseag a' Chorrain (Dreachd Cùis Gnothachais)**

There was circulated Report No. LA/20/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy which provided an update on the progress of the Corran Ferry Project (Outline Business Case).

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Although the Corran Ferry Steering Group were disappointed that the Scottish Government were not going to provide funding for the next stage of the project, it was welcomed that the Council approved funding of £1.6m to enable the project to commence work on the feasibility and project design. This was great support for this project.
- The Corran ferry had been exceptionally busy recently and therefore the two new vessels should be the largest capacity and capability possible.
- Lessons had to be learned from recent problems with building ferries for the Calmac fleet. Transport Scotland/CMAL and the Naval Architects had to learn from this when designing the new Corran ferries. In terms of the propulsion system on the new ferries, there had been concerns about the current state of electric engines and there may be a form of hybrid system to address this.
- The Council was committed to an ambitious environmental target in relation to climate change. It was queried at what stage would decisions be made on the propulsion system of the new ferries. It was explained that the project team were looking at the fuel/propulsion technology for the ferries. Safety and reliability were key factors in this assessment and in light of changing technologies the statement of requirements would include the option to retrofit the propulsion system to hydrogen technology when it becomes available. Decisions on the technology to be used would be made by Members.
- It was requested that the specification for the new ferries includes that the propulsion system be easily accessible for retrofitting and repairing faults. In the past there had been difficulty accessing parts of the vessel when there were breakdowns.
- The project team had joined the Future Maritime Fuels Group. A point was made that technology changed very quickly and there should be continuous feedback from the Group to the public, so that the public were engaged in the process of the choice of fuel/propulsion technology for the new ferries.

Thereafter, having heard Members commend the work of Officers and the progress made on this project, the Committee **NOTED** the recommendations below: -

- i. that The Highland Council (as opposed to the Scottish Government) must find the capital cost for the replacement vessels and slipways prior to any potential future transfer of responsibility discussion;
- ii. that a meeting took place between Kate Forbes MSP and a Corran Ferry lobbying group (12 March 2021) which led to a further meeting between Kate Forbes and Paul Wheelhouse regarding the Council's request for financial support to bridge the funding gap by covering half (£0.8M) of the feasibility and preliminary design costs (£1.6M);
- iii. that unfortunately Transport Scotland did not sign off the requested £0.8M but they have agreed that synergies between the Council's Corran Ferry project and Transport Scotland's Small Vessels Replacement Programme (SVRP) should be explored, with consideration given to examining what Transport Scotland can do to maximise support in kind. A copy of the letter from Transport Scotland was attached as a separate report Appendix B;

iv. that a key milestone was reached when the Council approved the funding of £1.6M (Highland Council 24 June 21) to enable the project to commence work on the feasibility and preliminary design of:-

- 2 new vessels (in conjunction with Transport Scotland /CMAL's SVRP); and
- 2 new slipways and supporting infrastructure;

v. that CMAL are in the process of appointing a naval architect and the SVRP is currently on course to move to procurement of the first tranche of vessels in the next 12 months, subject to the completion and approval of an outline business case;

vi. that the Council's Project Design Unit is currently progressing a public service contract through the Scotland Excel framework to procure an external source to commence feasibility and preliminary design work for the Corran Ferry slipways / infrastructure;

vii. the high-level review (attached as a separate document Appendix C) for the slipways / infrastructure proposals;

viii. a suggested Corran Ferry - High Level Preliminary Programme (attached as a separate document Appendix D);

ix. that Stantec will deliver a presentation on the Corran Narrows Socio-economic Study to members following this report; and

x the statement of requirements for the new ferries would include that the propulsion system for the new ferries should be easily accessible for retrofitting and repairing faults and that ferries with the largest capacity possible for the route should be built.

12. Corran Narrows Socio-economic Study

There was a presentation by Mr S Reid and Mr S Canning, Stantec on the Corran Narrows Socio-economic study. The purpose of the study was to analyse the economic, social and community value of the Corran ferry service to the residents and businesses around the Ardnamurchan peninsula and the Isle of Mull. The outcome of the study would feed into the outline business case on the Corran ferry. The importance of the study was to try and determine the value of the ferries to the communities and one way of doing this was testing the hypothetical scenario where the ferry no longer runs. The approach to the study was explained and key areas highlighted in relation to why was the Corran ferry so well used and what were the implications of a no ferry scenario for businesses and visitors.

Another area highlighted in the study was an alternative to investing in the Corran ferry. This was to upgrade the A861 but the study suggested this would cost £190m, far higher than the cost of a fixed link. The study determined that the Corran ferry was of significant importance for communities in the area, businesses and tourists and that a no ferry service scenario was likely to have a significant impact to ferry users, loss of jobs and tourist income and would increase supply chain costs. Therefore, the viability and sustainability of the peninsula could reduce significantly over time.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the presentation and the work carried out on the study. This was a significant piece of work and vital when proceeding with the outline business case

for the Corran ferry and trying to secure funding for replacement ferries. The study highlighted why a crossing at the Corran narrows, whether a ferry service in the short term or a fixed link in the longer term, was so vital for the future of the communities of the peninsula. The alternative, upgrading the A861 at a cost of £190m and the impact of the extra journey times was in no way a viable option.

- In terms of the study findings that in a no ferry service scenario the average journey times from Morven to Fort William would increase by 16 minutes, local views were that this was on the low side and from experience it was more like 30 minutes in the best circumstances as when the ferry was not running the impact of extra traffic should be taken into consideration. A request was made for the journey times to be reconsidered and local views on this being expressed in the final study report.
- The Corran ferry service also served the Isle of Mull, as when the Mull ferry service is disrupted the ferry traffic is re routed via Corran and this should be amplified in the study report.
- In the modelling data there was a period when the Corran ferry broke down for a number of weeks and it was queried if data was accessed for this period.
- the wider impact of the Corran ferry service on communities outwith the peninsula i.e. the Isle of Mull, Arisaig and Isle of Skye was highlighted.
- That the final report should have explanations for technical terms for the public to understand.
- In terms of how the study was used, given the significance of it, it was requested that the Council's Administration team be briefed on it.
- The Corran ferry outline business case update report and Socio-economic study presentation would also be submitted to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee meeting in September.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the presentation; that the Administration Leadership team would also be briefed on the study as a matter of priority and that further consideration be given to local views that the additional journey time of 16 minutes if there was no ferry operating was on the low side.

6. Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations Maointean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite – Riarachaidhean Maoineachaidh a Thathar a' Moladh

There was circulated Report No. LA/16/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

It was noted that Highland Council had allocated a £100,000 Place Based Investment Fund to each Ward for 2021/22 financial year to enable a flexible response to address four harms of Covid. Discussions with Local Members identified a range of opportunities for spend and the Committee were invited to agree the budget allocations detailed in the report.

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed allocations of Place Based Investment Funds as follows:

- i. Ward 21 – Fort William and Ardnamurchan
 - a. Investment in play provision in Kinlochleven - £50,000
 - b. Investment in feasibility study for Upper Achintore Community Hub - £20,000
 - c. Investment in mental well-being projects - £30,000
 - d. Total = £100,000

- ii. Ward 11 – Caol and Mallaig – projects under the themes of play provision, youth facilities and physical and mental well-being are currently being developed. These will be reported to a future Area Committee.

7. Commando Memorial – Garden Extension Carragh-cuimhne nan Commando – Leudachadh Gàrraidh

There was circulated Report No. LA/17/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place which highlighted that following discussion with the Commando Association and the Royal Marines, it had been agreed to carry out works to the Commando Memorial Garden to provide a better environment for tributes. The design had been agreed with Partners and funding was sought for completion of the project.

It was advised that there were issues with the supply of materials for the project, with the consequence that the project could not be completed prior to Remembrance Day 2021. Therefore, the timetable of works would require to be rescheduled once the funding package was in place. Also, there was potential for the second phase (cleaning of the Memorial and works to the base and paved surrounds) to be completed at the same time, subject to funding being made available.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the proposed works to the site which have been agreed with the Commando Association and the Royal Marines;
- ii **AGREED** to allocate up to £65,000 from the Commando Memorial Garden Fund; and
- iii. **NOTED** the intention to carry out further works to the Memorial which will be the subject of a future report.

8. Mallaig Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Mhalaig

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council’s representative to the Isle of Rum Community Trust 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/18/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Mallaig Associated School Group, and provided useful updated links to further information in relation to these schools.

In discussion, reference was made to the building condition report and Mallaig High School was classed as poor. This was concerning as the building was only 32 years old. Further information on the building condition of Mallaig High School would be provided to Councillor D Rixson.

It was noted that pupils would commence in the nursery on the Isle of Rum next year. Also the school house was currently deemed uninhabitable with the school teacher living in private rented accommodation. In future, should there be another teacher at the school, there was a need to ensure there was accommodation for them. Currently supply teachers were housed in a four berth residential caravan provided by the Council. It was advised that the Estates team were currently reviewing the situation with regards to the schoolhouse. The plan was that the schoolhouse would be demolished and in future there would be a new schoolhouse and possibly an annex to

it that could accommodate other Council employees. It was requested that that this build be completed as soon as possible.

In relation to the school boat serving the small isles that returned pupils who boarded at Mallaig High School hostel, there were varying views amongst parents as to what the frequency of the school boat should be. The plan was to run fortnightly school boat runs. However, communities were being consulted on this and Members would be kept informed on the local community consultation on the Rum school boat.

An update was also provided in respect of staffing at Isle of Rum school given the long term sickness absence of the Head Teacher.

In relation to staffing levels at Mallaig High School, it was advised that while individual staffing details were not at hand, information at the end of session suggested that two appointments had fallen through due to the lack of accommodation. Ongoing concerns had been raised in terms of lack of housing for staff and it was known that finding housing locally was very challenging.

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

**9. Lochaber Area Roads Winter Maintenance Plan 2021/22
Plana Cumail Suas Rathaidean Geamhraidh Sgìre Loch Abar 2021/22**

There was circulated Report No. LA/19/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment which provided information on winter maintenance preparations and arrangements for the 2021/22 winter period and invited the Committee to approve the Winter Maintenance Plans for the Lochaber area.

In particular, it was requested that Mamore Crescent, Fort William be included in the Secondary route category and it was confirmed this could be done.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Maintenance Plan for the Lochaber Area in reference to Appendix A of the report, with the addition that Mamore Crescent, Fort William would be included in the Secondary route category.

**10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There were circulated for information Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 19 April, 2021, which were approved by the Council on 13 May, 2021, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

The meeting ended at 2.10 p.m.