

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Monday, 8 November, 2021 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr B Allan
Mr A Henderson

Mr D Rixson
Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber), Communities and Place
Mr D Manson, Assistant Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Ms S MacLennan, Housing Manager, Housing and Property
Ms M MacLeman, Principal Customer and Tenant Engagement Officer
Mr L Macdonald, Repairs Manager, Housing and Property
Mr D Esson, Area Education & Learning Manager (West), Education & Learning
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance Service

Also in attendance:-

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

Interim Chairman

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr B Thompson was unanimously appointed as interim chairman for this meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Baxter and Mr N McLean.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

Items 4 & 9(f) – Mr D Rixson (non financial)
Item 11 – Mr B Allan (non financial)

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/21/21 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland which provided performance information for the period July to September, 2021.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- There had been a significant reduction in all deliberate fires in the spring which was very welcome and it was acknowledged that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had worked hard to deal with the issue of muir burn. The Service would continue their efforts on this, liaising with partners such as the Forestry Commission.
- the Ranger Service had played a part in the reduction of deliberate fires with their engagement with the public;
- The Service was engaging with the community regarding the legislative requirement for all homes in Scotland to have interlinked fire alarms by February, 2022 and guidance was available on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service website.

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

4. **Tenant Satisfaction Survey – Lochaber Update** **Suirbhidh Riarachadh Luchd-màil**

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/22/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property which provided an update on the Highland Council Tenant Satisfaction Survey and provided details of the survey results for Lochaber.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- There had been some negative feedback from new tenants regarding the standard of decoration of empty properties. It was advised that there were high expectations from tenants and during lockdown the majority of viewings were not accompanied by Officers and there was perhaps a lack of understanding what the Council could offer. There would be a financial impact if all empty properties were to be redecorated which would impact on all tenants rents. The Council had an Empty Homes Standard which officers were working to and included tenants receiving decoration allowances where this was appropriate.
- in relation to responses to quality of homes, most of the dissatisfaction was with tenant's view that they were overdue capital programme items, such as new kitchens, new bathrooms and heating. Due to the Covid pandemic work had stopped on the capital programme and it was an ongoing process to address the issues in each particular area.
- The Tenants Scrutiny Group had carried out a review of the Empty Homes Standard and was preparing a report for senior management with recommendations to raise awareness of the standard and improve tenant satisfaction. The preliminary report from the Scrutiny group had been discussed at the senior management team meeting and it was viewed as a positive report with valid recommendations. An officer working group would discuss the report

further and prepare an action plan to improve the customer experience throughout Highland.

- The satisfaction of tenants with the Council's Housing Service contribution to the management of the neighbourhood was very positive and was a result of improved tenant engagement through resident groups who provided information on their priorities.
- For a trial period a Lochaber tenants newsletter would be produced and it would provide information on capital projects, engagement activities etc.

The Committee **NOTED** the results of the Tenant Satisfaction survey for Lochaber.

5. Lochaber High School Associated School Group Overview Foir-shealladh Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Loch Abar

There was circulated Report No. LA/23/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning which provided an update of key information in relation to the schools within the Lochaber High School Associated School Group.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The St Columba's RC primary school roll had reduced significantly. It was advised that there were a number of different factors behind this reduction including that the Head Teacher post had been advertised a number of times without success. An Acting Head Teacher was in post and the substantive post would be readvertised after the Christmas holidays. It was hoped that a permanent appointment to this post would provide consistency and reassurance to parents of children attending the school.
- There were a number of schools in Highland where the buildings were in poor condition and the Council was preparing a plan to build 5 new schools across Highland. Apart from Banavie Primary and Inverlochry primary which required upgrading, the condition of school buildings in Lochaber was good.
- In terms of leaver destination information, the data fluctuated from year to year and was impacted by local employment. There was significant further education provision with the West Highland College that benefited Lochaber and West Highland school leavers and the work of the College was commended.
- In terms of free school meal entitlement, schools encouraged and supported the uptake of free school meals.
- The difficulties in recruiting Teachers and Pupil Support Assistants in Lochaber area was acknowledged. It was advised that both locally and nationally there were significant recruitment challenges part of which was due to the Covid pandemic and concerns and anxiety's around this. The workforce planning team were looking at this issue and there was a continual review of recruitment processes.
- Information would be shared with Members on (i) pay rates for Nursery staff and Pupil Support Assistants; (ii) pay rate of the national living wage and the real living wage; and (iii) the cost per pupil for Stramash Outdoor Nursery.

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

At this point there was a comfort break and the meeting resumed at 11.45 a.m.

6. Area Roads Programme 2021/2022 Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Phrògram Rathaidean Sgìreil 2021/2022

There was circulated Report No. LA/24/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy which provided an update on progress achieved with the prioritised list of structural works for the Lochaber Area.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was confirmed that works on Grange Terrace, Fort William was proceeding and would be completed as soon as possible. In addition to surface dressing or overlay, improvements would also be made to pavements and drainage. The estimate for all these works was £300k and this was included in the Area capital roads budget.
- The extra funding for road maintenance was welcomed and had resulted in additional works being undertaken to improve roads in the area.
- Attention was drawn to the following roads that should be considered for improvement:- A861 Ardgour to Drumsallie; bridge repairs in Knoydart and Morar and road repairs in Knoydart, Mallaigvaig; Loch Morar and access to the beach from the road on the B8008;
- By planning and notifying works and engaging with contractors early, meant that contractors had sufficient jobs to do without having to leave the area and then come back again.
- Visitor Infrastructure improvements in the area were highlighted and this was continuous work in progress;

The Committee **NOTED** progress achieved with the prioritised 2021/22 Roads Programme for Lochaber area.

7. Proposed Traffic Calming, Lundavra Road, Fort William Socrachadh Trafaig ga Mholadh, Rathad Lunn Dà Bhrà, An Gearasdan

There was circulated Report No. LA/25/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy which invited the Committee to approve the installation of 3 sets of speed cushions on Lundavra Road, Fort William, necessary to support the 20mph speed limit on this road.

In discussion, Members expressed their support for traffic calming measures on Lundavra Road given the problems of speeding. Local Police were also supportive of these measures given the history of accidents on the road. An undertaking was given to provide Councillor B Allan with the full speed data for Lundavra Road.

It was queried what plans were in place to put a 20mph speed limit on the full length of Kilmallie Road as requested by the Community Council. It was advised that significant traffic calming measures would need to be put in place along the full length of this road to bring speeds down to 20mph and discussions would be held with Members on this.

A Members seminar was to be arranged to discuss options for a wider rollout of 20mph speed limits to other residential areas in Highland.

The Committee:-

i **NOTED** the background to the temporary 20mph speed limit order and associated traffic calming in Fort William.

ii **NOTED** that, following review, the temporary traffic calming build outs on Lundavra Road have now been removed.

iii **NOTED** the existing mean average speed data for Lundavra Road and note that the existing speeds dictate that some form of traffic calming is required on this road to enable the temporary 20mph speed limit to remain and a permanent 20mph limit to be promoted.

iv **NOTED** the speed cushion traffic calming proposal and rationale behind the permanent form of traffic calming being promoted.

v **APPROVED** the installation of 3 sets of speed cushions on Lundavra Road, Fort William.

8. **Use of Lochaber Covid Response Funds Cleachdadh Mhointean Freagairt Covid Loch Abar**

There was circulated Report No. LA/26/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place which invited consideration of proposals for the use of Lochaber Covid Response Funds.

Members were supportive of the proposals for the use of Lochaber Covid Response Funds and thereafter, the Committee:-

i) **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £13,500 from the remaining W11 (Caol and Mallaig) Covid19 Ward Discretionary funds to the Road to the Isles Facilities Group to support additional cost of the construction of new toilet provision in Mallaig.

ii) **AGREED** the proposal to allocate £20,000 to improve play areas in W21 (Fort William and Ardnamurchan) in consultation with amenities staff.

iii) **NOTED** that next steps to progress the play area work would include confirmation of any other funding available, the type of equipment to be installed based on the budget available and consideration of ongoing maintenance associated with any equipment installed. This would involve the amenities team and communities.

9. **Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations Maointean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite – Riarachaidhean Maoineachaidh gam Moladh**

Declaration of Interest - Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in the Housing needs assessment proposed funding allocation, as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association and would take no part in the discussion or decision on that specific item.

There was circulated Report No. LA/27/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place which proposed funding allocations from Place Based Investment Funds.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** the proposed allocations of Place Based Investment Funds as follows:

- i. Ward 11 – Caol and Mallaig
 - a. Investment in play amenity provision in Caol - £35,000
 - b. Investment in Mallaig play park provision - £30,000
 - c. Investment in a trishaw project - £9,800
 - d. Support for Young Carers - £12,000
 - e. Support for community planning - £8,200
 - f. Housing needs assessment - £5,000

g. Total = £100,000

**10. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas**

There was circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 9 August, 2021 which were approved by the Council on 9 September, 2021, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

**11. Place Based Investment Funds – Funding Application
Maointean Tasgaidh Stèidhichte air Àite – Riarachaidhean Maoineachaidh gam
Moladh**

Declaration of Interest - Mr B Allan declared a non-financial interest in this item as he had family members that work and volunteer for Lochaber Hope and would not take part in the discussion.

There was circulated Report No. LA/28/21 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place which proposed a funding allocation from Place Based Investment Funds.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** a grant of £15,000 to Lochaber Hope to support the 'New Connections' mental-health project within the Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward.

The meeting ended at 12.45 p.m.