

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Community Services Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 5 November 2015 at 10.30am.

### Present:

Mr R Balfour	Mrs L MacDonald
Mrs J Barclay	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr A Baxter	Mr K MacLeod
Mr B Clark	Mr H Morrison
Mrs G Coghill	Mr B Murphy
Mr N Donald	Mr G Phillips
Mr G Farlow	Mr A Rhind
Mr A Graham	Mr J Rosie
Mr R Greene	Mrs J Slater
Mr A Henderson	Mr H Wood
Mr D Kerr	

### Non-Members also present:

Ms J Douglas	Mrs M Paterson
Mr B Gormley	Mrs F Robertson
Mr D MacKay	Mr R Saxon
Ms A Maclean	Mr J Stone
Mr T MacLennan	

### In attendance:

Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services  
Dr C Clark, Head of Environmental and Regulatory Services  
Mr R Evans, Head of Roads and Transport  
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing  
Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager  
Mrs S Barrie, Acting Programme Manager, Development and Infrastructure  
Mr D MacKenzie, Chief Structural Engineer  
Mr S Graham, Project Manager, Chief Executive's Office  
Mr D Summers, Transport Development Officer  
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager  
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Corporate Development Service  
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Corporate Development Services  
Mrs R Daly, Committee Administrator, 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 Committee.**

**Mr A Henderson in the Chair**

### Business

#### 1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 9 - Mr B Murphy (financial)

Item 13 – Mrs L MacDonald, Mr H Wood (non financial)

Item 15 - Mr K MacLeod (financial)

In terms of the general dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, Mr G Farlow and Mr D Kerr declared financial interests in any items which might arise during discussion in regard to Council housing on the grounds of being Council House tenants.

### **Preliminaries**

The Committee **NOTED** the following:

- A Special Meeting of the Lochaber Area Committee had been held on 21 October 2015 to deal with the Winter Maintenance priority network.
- A petition had been received in relation to concerns at the possible loss of town gardeners in Wick and Thurso. This was being dealt with and an assurance was given that work was ongoing in this regard.
- A consultation on budget savings had been carried out using social media which had attracted over 1200 online interactions and had provided useful feedback. The main question had been whether green bin collection should move to a three weekly schedule to save money for essential services and this had been rejected by 93.66% of respondents. Details of responses to other consultation questions were also provided and the Chair confirmed that the Public Relations office would be asked to break down the responses on a gender and geographic area basis.

## 3. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

The following areas of good news were noted and it was **AGREED** that this should be emailed to Committee Members in advance of the meeting in future:

### • **Quality Awards**

Community Services had three shortlisted entries for the Quality Awards:

- Inverness Response Team
- Transport Programme – Sutherland Transport Services Retendering
- The Handyperson Telecare Project (joint submission with Development and Infrastructure)

### • **Building Maintenance work with Secondary Schools**

Inverness Building Maintenance Team Leader had received an encouraging letter from a Millburn Academy S4 student who had spent time carrying out work experience as an electrician with the Highland Council.

### • **War Memorials**

Two war memorials maintained by Community Services along with community assistance had recently been successful in Highlands & Islands Area competitions organised by Royal British Legion Scotland. Fort William war memorial had recently won the Best Kept War Memorial without a garden category 2015. Nairn War Memorial had also been judged top in the Highlands

in the category with gardens. Both memorials had been entered into National competitions.

- **Student EHO passes EHO professional exams on first attempt**

Following the student policy, Tim Lush would now start as an Environmental Health Officer in Inverness and this temporary post would be in place until a suitable vacancy arose within the existing structure.

- **Scottish Housing Regulator – Outcome of data accuracy visit carried out on 11th August 2015**

The Scottish Housing Regulator had carried out data accuracy visits to obtain assurance on the accuracy of the annual performance information social landlords report as part of the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the key findings were detailed.

- **White Bridge**

Funding of £2.25m had been approved for the replacement of White Bridge.

#### **4. Presentation on Roads Collaborative Working with Transport Scotland/Bear Scotland Taisbeanadh mu Cho-obrachadh Rathaidean le Còmhdhail Alba/Bear Alba**

The Vice Chair provided a summary of a recent meeting of the Northern Roads Collaboration Forum which had been attended by representatives from six Local Authorities. With the largest geographical area, Highland faced particular difficulties but it was hoped that opportunities would be available for increased collaborative work with partners.

Mr Jonny Moran, Acting National Network Manager, Transport Scotland and Mr Eddie Ross, Operating Company Representative, NW Unit, BEAR Scotland, together with the Council's Head of Roads and Transport, then undertook a short presentation on Roads Collaborative Working.

In this regard, the national perspective was outlined by Transport Scotland in the context of long-standing partnership working arrangements and attention was drawn to the key benefits of collaboration with strategic partners and the current requirements for collaboration in the trunk road maintenance contracts. In particular, reference was made to future contracts, also known as "5G". It was also highlighted that quarterly collaboration meetings were held between Transport Scotland, BEAR and Highland Council, as well as quarterly operational meetings, and this was a positive approach which had been referred to as a model of best practice.

BEAR Scotland had maintained close working links with the Council and their geographic area coincided with that of the Council. In this respect, there was collaboration on verge cutting, litter picking, gully emptying and sweeping and it was intended that this would be continued on a range of programmes with improved co-ordination. Ongoing issues to be discussed included winter maintenance, remote and rural routes, brine/salt combination trials, shared depots, road marking, street lighting, traffic signals, landscape maintenance and road safety barriers. Governance around procurement and the sharing of resources and skills were also being considered.

During discussion, the collaboration between Transport Scotland, Bear and Highland Council was commended and comments were made as follows:

- it was felt that trunk road maintenance in the Highlands had been undertaken to a higher standard before privatisation when the overriding motive had been good service provision rather than profit. In this respect, examples were provided of roads which had been in a poor state of repair for several years and concern was expressed that further areas of road maintenance were going to be a target for future privatisation which might put local jobs at risk;
- consideration should be given to taking some short stretches of trunk road, especially in remote and rural areas, back into Council ownership;
- the traffic light management system near Garve seemed unnecessary given the little use that was made of one of the minor roads;
- there had been significant investment in trunk roads in the Highlands with the planned dualling of the A96 and the A9. Also, the consultation with communities in relation to the Nairn Bypass had been well received and this project should now be a priority;
- increased consultation with Local Members should be undertaken prior to the installation of road signs;
- the maintenance of rural roads required consideration to establish the best use of public resources and information was sought and provided on joint maintenance of large plant;
- information was sought and provided on a protocol for regular negotiation with Scottish Canals, particularly in relation to the impact on traffic flow at Canal crossings along the A82;
- information was sought and provided on proposals for upgrading the trunk road lining, particularly at the Harbour Road Roundabout in Inverness;
- a solution to the traffic blockages at the Longman Stadium Roundabout in Inverness was needed and in this regard it was highlighted that it had been assumed that the traffic lights had only been installed on a temporary basis although it was now understood they could be permanent. This should be investigated, along with the possibility of altering the timings on the lights and painting a yellow box on the northwards carriageway;
- there was a need for clearer consultation and communication with Local Members on roadworks, for example recent works on the Dores Road, Inverness, had left verges in a dangerous state;
- it was felt that insufficient environmental maintenance was being undertaken on the A82 through Inverness, namely on verges and roundabouts, which presented an unfavourable image of the city. Future contracts should include the maintenance of green areas;
- there should be a mechanism to improve and recognise the skills of local contractors and to focus on local employment;
- there was a need to highlight the shortage of HGV drivers and to focus on the wages being paid in this respect;
- the re-painting of lines on roads which were in poor condition and which required re-surfacing was questioned;
- areas of work highlighted as requiring attention included gully maintenance, litter picking, bin emptying in lay-bys and grass cutting;
- Friars Bridge in Inverness required resurfacing without traffic flow being impacted if possible;
- reference was made to a recent flood on the trunk road outside Tain following heavy rain and information sought on what was being done to prevent this in future, especially in light of climate change;
- the increasing prevalence of ragwort beside roads needed to be controlled to prevent it germinating in agricultural crops;
- referring to applications for waivers, e.g. the installation of the disabled ramp for a Church in Golspie, agreement could often be reached on a common

sense approach but had a tendency to hit a bureaucratic blockage and improved collaboration would be beneficial on these kinds of issues;

- in the increasingly challenging budget situation, it was important not to lose sight of the long term implications of decisions and in this regard reference was made to the need to future proof the next phase of the A82; and
- it was noted that funding issues were due to be discussed at the Council meeting in December 2015.

At this point in the meeting, the Chair thanked Mr Ross and Mr Moran for their attendance at the meeting and welcomed pupils from Alness Academy.

Members were also reminded of the good news that £2.25m had been approved for the White Bridge replacement.

Thereafter, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the presentation.

## **5. Revenue Budget 2015/16 - Monitoring Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2015/16 – Sgrùdadh**

There had been circulated Report No COM/52/15 dated 26 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the Revenue Budget monitoring position for the period 1 April to 30 September 2015.

During discussion, comments were made as follows:

- clarification was sought and provided on what had been included under the heading 'Other Income' and also in relation to the zero year end variance which had been forecast for waste disposal;
- information was requested on the numbers of agency workers currently engaged by the Service, the roles they performed and whether former employees were being engaged as consultants;
- in relation to car park income, there were concerns that further increases in charges would have a detrimental impact on communities but no impact on the budget. On this basis, it was suggested that a review should be carried out of the charging regime as part of the budget setting exercise in order to address such issues as staffing costs, the cost of ticket machines and the upkeep of car parks;
- it was essential to pitch fuel prices competitively to avoid losing fishing income at Harbours. It was acknowledged that Harbour Managers had successfully managed fuel prices, especially in volatile times, but it had to be recognised that attempts to increase margins could be counter-productive in this instance and could impact on dues;
- in the event of an end of year underspend on refuse collection, consideration should be given to allocating monies for the provision of more recycling bins across Highland;
- when caravans and trailers were parked for extended periods in remote and rural areas, it was suggested that hauliers in particular should be invited to make community contributions;
- in regard to the forecast underspend on street lighting, and specifically in terms of the use of LED lights, it was suggested that the position should be raised with CoSLA as it was understood that energy companies' standing charges were increased if LEDs were used. Also, the overall performance of LED lights had caused some concerns locally, particularly in foggy conditions, and it was suggested that further

information should be provided on their performance and also on the impact of switching street lights off in summer;

- it was noted that there had been expenditure on new cremators and they were currently being installed;
- further information was sought and provided on the budget for voids. In this regard, clarification was also sought as to what could be done to relieve the burden of loan charges on the HRA;
- it was essential to address the issue of homelessness and the lack of permanent housing. In this regard, further clarification was sought on an ongoing request for information on the recovery of outstanding money relating to homelessness;
- short and long term hostels were still needed for those with lifestyle challenges;
- borrowing was becoming burdensome and increased costs for tenants. In this regard, a breakdown of borrowing figures was requested, indicating historical debt and more recent borrowing to increase housing stock;
- further funding was required to address the demand for housing maintenance;
- increases in rent arrears could not all be attributed to benefit changes as significant arrears were being written off due to bankruptcies; and
- clarification was sought and provided on the presentation of budget figures for gypsy traveller sites and it was noted that there had been no progress on establishing temporary travellers sites.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the terms of the report and the monitoring statements which showed the revenue position for the period 1 April to 30 September 2015 and the actions which had been put in place to manage the budget over the remainder of the financial year.

**The Committee adjourned for lunch at 1 p.m. and resumed at 1.40 p.m.**

## **6. Capital Expenditure 2015/16 – Monitoring Caiteachas Calpa 2015/16 – Sgrùdadh**

There had been circulated separately Report No COM/53/15 dated 27 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which invited Members to approve the capital expenditure monitoring position for the period from 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015 for both the Community Services element of the Council's approved capital programme and the HRA capital programme.

During discussion, Members welcomed that the report details had already been discussed at Ward Business meetings and made the following comments:

- in response to suggestions that the style of reporting provided insufficient detail and a format conforming to normal commercial standards would be preferable, it was confirmed further discussion would be undertaken with Members to ensure that they were provided with an appropriate level of scrutiny;
- some HRA heating replacements in Sutherland had attracted criticism but corrective action had been successful and it would have been helpful if this had been reflected in the report;
- in response to the update on SHQS compliance, and specifically reference to failures which had been identified since project initiation and concern that targets would not be met, the Head of Housing highlighted

the current position, including the number of properties surveyed and the extent and reasons behind access being denied to some properties, and confirmed that he was available to respond to any detailed questions which Members might have in this regard;

- there was general concern that the works associated with replacement heating and windows for properties in Caithness would be undertaken during the winter season and in this regard it was confirmed that any specific issues should be notified to the Head of Housing if and when they arose;
- external wall insulation had been understood to be a Government-funded scheme but it was noted that this did not apply to Council housing;
- a meeting had been held with Highlands & Islands Enterprise in Kinlochbervie regarding concerns at the lack of Harbour chilling facilities and in this respect it was stressed that it was essential to maximise fishing activity at Kinlochbervie;
- it was emphasised that good communication with tenants over delays and changes in respect of Capital Programme work was essential;
- there was a need for further and more detailed information on the Programme for War Memorials and specifically the work to be undertaken in this regard;
- noting that a framework contract had been awarded, timescales were requested for discussion at Ward level on the Programme of Bus Shelter installations; and
- in regard to previous agreement that 5% of the capital budget would be spent on cyclical/environmental maintenance of housing estates, and following a query in respect of funding within the Inverness area, it was confirmed that the allocation of this budget had been the subject of consultation with Members.

The Committee **APPROVED** the capital expenditure monitoring position for the period 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015.

## **7. Proposed Amendments to Service Structure Atharrachaidhean a Thathar a' Moladh do Structar Seirbheis**

There had been circulated Report No COM/54/15 dated 27 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which proposed amendment to the Service structure to align teams under four Heads of Service rather than under the current matrix management structure of eight (three Heads of Service, four Area Managers and one senior manager).

The report also outlined the benefits to the Service, the Council and the public, as well as the effect that this would have on staff.

During discussion, comments were made as follows:

- concern was expressed that the report had not provided sufficient rationale or assurance for the proposed structure and, given the likely significant strategic impact, it was suggested that the full revised Service structure should be detailed for Members, with any proposed amendments prioritising service delivery;
- communities had supported staff being present locally and the Area Manager and Assistant Manager posts had been successful. In this respect, it was feared that the proposals would diminish this and it was stressed that it remained important for residents not only to know who to

- contact but to be able to gain access to the relevant Officers;
- there was a need for more information on the proposed recruitment and appointment timescales; and
- whilst being minded to support the basic structure of four Heads of Service, further consideration should be deferred pending more detailed information being received.

The Committee therefore **AGREED to DEFER** the proposals meantime to allow more detailed information to be presented to the next meeting.

## **8. Environmental Health Workforce Planning and Review of Team Structure Dealbhadh Sgioba-obrach Slàinte Àrainneachd agus Ath-sgrùdadh air Structar Sgioba**

There had been circulated to Members Report No COM/55/15 dated 26 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided an update on progress with Workforce Planning within the Environmental Health team and sought Member approval for changes to the team structure.

During discussion, Members welcomed the report and the work of the Environmental Health Team and made the following observations:

- the level of monitoring of licensing HMO landlord activity was not as high as assumed and there was a need to ensure that statutory issues were monitored and a stronger focus on enforcement;
- there had been previous concerns about shortfalls in Environmental Health staff and the proposal to make an overall reduction of 2.3 posts added to these concerns;
- the amount of food hygiene inspections which could not be carried out was also concerning as this was a vital service which was critical for public health and wellbeing; and
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that all Environmental Health activities were statutory and could be covered by the new staffing structure.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- NOTED** the Workforce Planning Action Plan for Environmental Health as detailed in Appendix 3; and
- AGREED** the proposed structure changes for the Environmental Health team structure as set out in Appendices 5 and 6 of the report.

## **9. Community Services Performance Report – 1 July 2015 to 30 September 2015 Aithisg Coileanaidh nan Seirbheisean Coimhearsnachd – 1 Iuchar 2015 gu 30 Sultain 2015**

### **Declaration of Interest**

**Mr B Murphy declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds of being the provider of homeless accommodation and left the room.**

There had been circulated Report No COM/56/15 dated 23 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how Community Services had performed in relation to performance indicators during the first half of 2015/16.



During discussion, comments were made as follows:

- on the issue of grounds maintenance, the low pass rate of inspections was a concern, as was the percentage of rectifications completed in the expected period. External contractors' standards had declined on grounds maintenance and assurance was sought that there was a process in place to ensure standards for next season. A request was also made for statistics to be broken down to draw a distinction between in-house teams and externally contracted works;
- in relation to public convenience cleaning statistics, there appeared to be too few inspections (with no reference to the quality of cleaning) and no rationale as to why some toilets closed during the winter while others remained open. In this respect, it was suggested that the possibility of their upkeep being taken over by the community should be explored;
- in terms of road defects, the jet-patcher pilot had been successful but the cost of the necessary tarmac had not been budgeted for and this was a concern. Cold tar had been used which was not working as well as hot tar and it was queried as to whether Transport Scotland would share the procurement of another jet-patcher with the Council;
- there was a need for an update on dog nuisance cases and particularly dog fouling as the Council had advocated a zero tolerance approach. It had also been understood that Officers would be trained to issue fixed penalty notices but only 13 notices had been issued across the whole Council area to date. There was also only one Officer in Caithness which was inadequate for the task and the matter was being reported in local press as a health hazard for school children;
- only 36 notices had been issued for littering and there had been previous assurances given that this would be taken more seriously;
- on the issue of tenancy management, it was disappointing that the re-let times for Caithness were almost double the average time but in this regard it was noted that further detailed discussions were to be undertaken with Ward Members;
- many young people were presenting as homeless which was concerning and there were also financial barriers preventing them from moving on which created additional pressures for them to remain at home;
- the staff age profile across Community Services was high and this represented a challenge for the Council, especially in regard to manual workers; and
- it was important to address the need to speed up completion of medical adaptations as this was critical in avoiding delayed discharges from hospitals.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the information provided on Community Services performance from 1 April to 30 September 2015.

#### **10. Employee Survey 2015 Suirbhidh Luchd-obrach 2015**

There had been circulated Report No COM/57/15 dated 8 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which summarised the key findings from the 2015 Employee Survey and outlined proposals for addressing areas of further improvement.

The Committee **NOTED** the results of the survey for Community Services and

the timescale for the development of the Service Improvement Plan.

## 11. Bridges and Road Structures Drochaidean agus Structaran Rathaid

There had been circulated Report No COM/58/15 dated 26 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided an outline of the Council's bridge stock, its condition, the bridge inspection regime and how bridges were prioritised for capital investment.

The report also provided recommendations for projects to be included in the "Structural Road Works - Bridges, Retaining Walls & Culverts" line of the Community Services Capital Programme for 2016/17.

During discussion, comments were made as follows:

- there was a need for more information on the criteria for capital investment, the list of bridges in poor condition and the bridges recommended for capital investment and in this respect concern was expressed that the recommended works to four bridges had been chosen according to available funding rather than in response to structural risks;
- there was a need for additional controls over asset management and public safety with all assets being identified in an asset register and accurately valued;
- bridges should be inspected regularly with remedial repairs identified and carried out on a priority basis;
- the delivery of projects within the Capital Programme needed to be scrutinised more thoroughly;
- there was a need for an update on progress and further information in relation to a number of bridges in the Capital Programme, including Ardendrain, Lochbroom, Moy Bridge, Muir of Ord, Braemore, Invercoe, Kinlochleven viaduct and Glenmore;
- there were concerns that the less frequent inspection regime would lead to an increase in bridges in poor condition;
- if HGV traffic flow was being diverted to avoid weaker structures, there was a need for further information on how this was managed and how it impacted on maintenance priorities; and
- Officers were commended for their clear and full communication with communities about improvement works to bridges, with Muir of Ord bridge being cited as a particularly good example.

Thereafter, the Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the current regime of bridge inspections, the condition of the bridges stock and the factors being taken into account in making recommendations for prioritising investment;
- ii. **APPROVED** the proposed works for year 2016/17 to be funded from the "Structural Road Works - Bridges, Retaining Walls & Culverts" line of the Council's Capital Programme; and
- iii. **AGREED** that further information should be provided on the rationale for the four bridges identified for work.

## **12. 5G Trunk Road Maintenance Contracts Consultation Co-chomhairle mu Chunnraidhean Càraidh Mhòr-rathaidean 5G**

There had been circulated Report No COM/59/15 dated 26 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which sought homologation of the decision by the Director of Community Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, to submit the Council's response to Transport Scotland's Local Authority Consultation on the "Extent of Units and Scope of Services".

The Committee **AGREED** to homologate the decision by the Director of Community Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, to submit the Council's response to Transport Scotland's Local Authority Consultation on the "Extent of Units and Scope of Services" as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

## **13. Transport Programme Prògram Còmhdhalach**

### **Declarations of Interest**

**Mrs L MacDonald declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds of being a Director of Nairn Mini-Bus Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.**

**Mr H Wood declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds of being a Member of Highland Cycling Campaign 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 him from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No COM/60/15 dated 27 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which explained that, as part of the Council's Transport Programme, mainstream school transport and public bus service contracts had been retendered in Sutherland.

In this regard, the report presented an update on the outcomes of the retendering process and the public consultation and supplier briefing events planned to support the tendering of such services across the rest of Highland. Proposals were presented for approval to launch a call for community transport grant applications and an update was provided on the Lochaber Action Learning Project's principal initiative, the Lochaber Transport Advice and Bookings Service.

During discussion, Members welcomed the work being undertaken, particularly on the Community Transport Project, and made the following comments:

- regarding the Lochaber Transport Action Learning Project (LTABS), it was disappointing that none of the partners had so far shown a desire to lead the project;
- it was also noted that this project had been discussed at length by the Highland Community Planning Partnership;
- the Council should consider operating its own bus service in the same way as the Western Isles and Lothian Councils;

- it would be essential to manage timeous communication with communities throughout the tendering process;
- it was welcomed that bus routes in Sutherland would be re-tendered and communities had to be assured that the Council had every intention of securing a provider for these routes;
- it was important to ensure that bus timetables integrated with ferry timetables; and
- it should be noted that the Bus User Group from Glenelg and Arnisdale was keen to make an application for Community Transport grant.

The Committee:

- NOTED** the Sutherland retendering process results;
- NOTED** the progress concerning the rest of Highland school and public transport tender process;
- APPROVED** the community transport grants process proposals; and
- NOTED** the continuing efforts being made concerning the future of the Lochaber transport action learning project.

#### **14. HRA Capital Programme 2016-17 Prògram Calpa HRA 2016-17**

There had been circulated Report No COM/61/15 dated 19 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which outlined the resources required to undertake capital investment to the Council's housing stock and recommended capital investment projects for approval in 2016-17.

During discussion, and with specific reference to the footpath and steps improvements recommended for the Lochaber Wards, it was highlighted that the Lochaber Members had previously asked Officers to assess all housing and environmental issues raised (but not addressed) over the last few years and to report back in this respect. Assurance was therefore sought and received that the actual projects to be funded locally from this budget would be determined by Members at Area level.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the HRA Capital Programme 2016-2017.

#### **15. Internal Audit Report: Management of Housing Voids Aithisg In-Sgrùdaidh: Rianachd Thaichean Bàna**

##### **Declaration of Interest**

**Mr K MacLeod declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds of representing a client on a housing matter and left the room.**

There had been circulated Report No COM/62/15 dated 26 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided an overview and update in relation to a report on Housing Voids which had been considered by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 30 September 2015.

During discussion, comments were made as follows:

- it was noted that the Committee had previously agreed revised void management arrangements in August 2014;
- there was a need for more information on whether the Council or private

landlords were responsible for the condition of housing prior to being re-let through the Council as it was a concern that some properties were viewed by tenants prior to work being carried out and this created a poor first impression; and

- clarification was sought and received on the process to report back on implementing the recommendations in the action plan.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the findings of the internal audit report and progress in relation to the agreed management actions.

The meeting ended at 4.45 pm.