

The Highland Council

Minutes of Special Meeting of the **Lochaber Area Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Lochaber House, High Street, Fort William on Wednesday, 21 October 2015 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr T MacLennan
Mr B Clark	Mr B Murphy
Mr B Gormley	Mr B Thompson
Mr A Henderson	

In attendance:

Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Mr C Kemp, Area Community Services Manager (Lochaber, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey)
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Mr M Leary, Assistant Area Manager, Community Services
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, 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 the Committee.

Mr T MacLennan in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Winter Maintenance Priority Network – 2015/16 Plana Obair-càraidh Geamhraidh – 2015/16

There had been circulated Report No. LA/33/15 dated 14 October 2015 by the Director of Community Services which provided Members with information on winter maintenance service provision and invited the Committee to agree the winter maintenance priority routing for Lochaber for 2015/16 (further to the report to the Lochaber Area Committee in August 2015 which was attached).

In this connection, there had been re-circulated Report No. LA/24/15 dated 7 August 2015 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- Appreciation was expressed to the Officials for explaining clearly the issues surrounding the winter maintenance plan and routing priorities. This was a very important service provided by staff working in difficult conditions throughout the winter and they were commended for their work. It was also important to note that resources had been seriously depleted which would have an impact on the service which the Council was able to provide. However, the Council had undertaken to carry out a full review of the Winter Maintenance Policy and a report on this would be submitted to the April 2016 meeting of the Community Services Committee;
- A point was made that locally stored salt would be provided by Bear Scotland rather than from the Council's own supply of salt and it was queried whether, in severe winter conditions when salt stocks were depleted, trunk roads would take priority over the roads for which the Council was responsible. In this respect, it was confirmed that in normal circumstances there should be no issues with the supply of salt but in extreme conditions the supply could be determined by the Scottish Government. It was also advised that at the Community Services Committee meeting on 5 November 2015 Transport Scotland and Bear Scotland would be giving a joint presentation with the Council on how they collaborate and work together and one of the issues covered would be how the Council shares salt and collaborates to provide a better service across the Highlands;
- In terms of footway gritting, it was queried as to how many footway tractors were currently available in Lochaber, whether they were fit for purpose, the cost of the tractors and whether Lochaber would get any extra footway tractors from the resources elsewhere in Highland. It was clarified that the allocation of footway tractors was calculated fairly on the basis of need. Members suggested that Lochaber used to have four footway tractors and they were concerned that the number was now two. This information would be clarified and a response provided to Members;
- It had to be recognised that the Council was in a period of austerity which had been imposed by others and depleted resources were having a day to day impact on people's lives. When Members had previously considered the winter maintenance plan, it had been difficult to know what the effects of a reduction in service would be on people's lives i.e. which areas were losing out. As such, there was more work to be done on the wording within the winter maintenance plan so that it was understood and interpreted in the same way by all;
- It was suggested that the Scheme of Delegation should be reviewed to reflect more accurately what decisions the Area Committee could make regarding winter maintenance as there was now no alternative but for Members to agree the report;
- Last year's budget setting process had been good as it had involved Members from across the Council at a very early stage in discussing budget savings. However, in hindsight, part of the failing of that exercise had been that Members had been unable to see the repercussions of the budget savings that they were being asked to agree e.g for winter maintenance. It was hoped that this issue would be addressed in the current budget saving process. Given the lack of an alternative other than to agree the winter maintenance plan as presented, Councillor A Baxter requested that his lack of support for the recommendation in the report be noted;

- It was advised that the new local committees would have a new Scheme of Delegation;
- It was advised that the exact amount of reduction in the funding to Councils was still to be clarified as it was expected that the grant settlement would not be known until January 2016;
- There would be further savings to be made and the lesson that had to be learned was that the Council needed to take cognisance of the public's priorities;
- An assurance was sought that the full review of the winter maintenance policy would take into account new tyre technology, such as a four season tyre and potentially fitting new technology tyres to school transport from a safety point of view, and an undertaking was given that this would be considered.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the Winter Maintenance priority network for Lochaber as presented in Appendix B to the report.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 a.m.