

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Lochaber House, High Street, Fort William on Tuesday, 23 August, 2016 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:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing, Community Services
Ms A Clark, Acting Head of Policy, Chief Executive's Office (by video conference)
Mr S Carr, Principal Policy Officer, Chief Executive's Office
Mr D Gallagher, Business Gateway Service Manager, Development & Infrastructure Service
Mr S Purdon, Senior Area Business Manager, Development & Infrastructure Service
Chief Inspector B MacKay, Police Scotland
Inspector D Campbell, Police Scotland
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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declaration of Interest:-

Item 6 – Mr Murphy (Financial)

3. Police – Area Performance Summary Poilis – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìre

There was circulated Report No LA/14/16 by the South Area Commander for Police which updated Members on progress with reference to the local priorities within the Highland 2014-2017 Policing Plan.

Having heard the Chief Inspector, Police Scotland summarise the report, the following points were raised by Members:-

- The Committee's thoughts and condolences were expressed to the victim's family and friends following last week's fatal road accident in Fort William. In this respect, it was acknowledged that such an accident had to be thoroughly investigated and as was shown in this incident the road could be closed for some considerable time while the investigation process was carried out. Diversions could be hundreds of miles, and there was the economic cost associated with this. In relation to the Police Road Traffic Unit in Lochaber, it was queried if Digital Mapping equipment could be located within that unit in order to speed up the process of investigating road accidents. It was advised that there were currently no collision investigators in the Road Traffic Unit in Lochaber and that Officers in Dingwall required to assist in such incidents. There was a need to train officers in collision investigation and then train them in the use of Digital Mapping equipment. An undertaking was given to address this issue. It was advised that the Road Traffic Unit currently comprised seven officers, and advertising to fill the remaining vacancies was ongoing. However, it was acknowledged that the Unit had never been at full strength due to the difficulty in recruiting officers to the vacant posts.
- In relation to road traffic safety, there was a problem with tourists not driving appropriately on single track roads. In particular roads on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula were highlighted. The work of the Police in raising awareness of proper driving standards was acknowledged. It was suggested that for the next summer season, the Police and the Council work together in promoting proper driving standards on single track roads by, for example, staff on the Corran Ferry handing out leaflets to drivers. In response, Police Scotland welcomed any suggestions on improving road safety and working with its Partners to do this.
- A view was expressed that the standard of driving seemed to be deteriorating. Driving infringements led to delays and accidents. It was also suggested that communities should be made aware of what powers the Police had to deal with driving infringements/dangerous driving and what the Police response would be. In response, incidents such as this needed corroboration by Officers and it was a case of having Officers in the right place at the right time. Also, the Police needed evidence before they could take action on road traffic offences, and the public were encouraged to report incidents. Appropriate action would be taken by the Police on any road traffic offences.
- Reference was made to comments by professional drivers of HGVs of the lack of maintenance on the A82 Road which caused hazards to drivers. Also, cyclists were not using cycle paths in Lochaber as they were not being maintained. These issues were the responsibility of Transport Scotland. HGV Drivers wished to discuss and address these issues with the Council, Police Scotland and Transport Scotland. In response, it was advised that the Police did submit road hazard reports to the appropriate authority for action, and they would welcome addressing these issues at the A82 Partnership.
- Given the concerns of road safety/road accident investigation expressed by Members, Police Scotland's Roads Inspector for the area would be in attendance at a future meeting of the Committee.
- With reference to the anti-scam presentation given by Police Scotland to bank staff in Fort William, it was queried if there were any plans for the Police to work with Post Office Ltd to promote the risks with residents as there were a number of Post Offices in Lochaber whose customers were/could potentially be the target of scams. In response, Police Scotland welcomed this suggestion and undertook to work with Post Office Ltd on this matter.

- In terms of drug use in Lochaber, it was queried if suppliers of these drugs were individuals or people working together. In response it was advised that there was no big enterprise involved locally in the supply of drugs, but it was individuals involved in this illegal activity. It was also reported that there was no evidence that crack cocaine was being used in the Lochaber area. If the public had any intelligence on drug use then they should contact the Crimestoppers telephone number anonymously.
- In relation to Wildlife Crime, there were no reports of the loss of Birds of Prey in Lochaber during the reporting period.

Having **Scrutinised** the progress report and updates in relation to the 3 Priorities: Road Safety, Drug and Alcohol Abuse, Dishonesty, the Committee:-

i **NOTED** the undertaking from Police Scotland to address the issues of the training of Road Traffic Unit Officers based in Lochaber in road traffic collision investigation, and locating Digital Mapping equipment in the area;

ii **NOTED** that Police Scotland would work with the Council to promote proper driving standards on single track roads in the Lochaber area;

iii **NOTED** that Police Scotland would welcome discussion on maintenance issues on the A82 Road leading to hazardous driving conditions, at the A82 Partnership; and

iv **NOTED** that Police Scotland would work with Post Office Ltd to promote the risks of scams with residents.

4. **Taking Forward Community Partnerships Com-pàirteachasan Coimhearsnachd**

There was circulated Report No LA/15/16 by the Acting Head of Policy which provided Members with an update on the next steps for taking forward Community Partnerships across Highland and considered how this can be implemented within the existing Lochaber arrangements.

In discussion, the following comments were made:-

- The success of the current Partnership arrangements in Lochaber which were well established was recognised.
- Concern was expressed that the report made little reference to communities, no reference to Community Councils and no mention of how to engage with communities. The proposals in the report appeared to suggest a corporate approach to the disengagement of communities in the name of community engagement. It was advised that community engagement had to begin from the ground up and the key members in the Partnership were the community representatives. The proposals needed to be discussed further locally with communities and community councils in the first instance. In response, community involvement and engagement was key in taking forward Community Partnerships. There was a need for each Community Partnership to consider how community involvement and engagement was met locally. There was a need to have Community Partnership structures in place across Highland. Once in place they could determine how the Partnership develops, how it reflects local priorities and local engagement.

- In terms of working arrangements for the Partnerships, while Partner Authorities worked during the day, most communities and Community Councils did their work and had their meetings in the evenings and for the Partnership to work, working arrangements had to suit the availability of those in the Partnership. In this respect, it may help in the engagement and involvement process if there was some form of digital interaction with communities in taking forward Partnerships. There were digital tools available (as referred to in item 5 of this minute) for Partnerships who wanted to consider this.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i **NOTED** the update on the next steps for taking forward Community Partnerships across Highland and how this can be implemented within the existing Lochaber arrangements; and

ii **AGREED** that an event be arranged to engage with the community, Community Councils, the Lochaber Partnership, Partner Authorities, on taking forward the Community Partnership in Lochaber.

5. Making the Best Use of Digital Tools

A' Dèanamh an Fheum as Fheàrr de dh'Innealan Didseatach

There was circulated Report No LA/16/16 by the Acting Head of Policy which updated Members on the potential future use of digital tools as a way to engage with individuals and communities across the Highlands. The report was accompanied by a presentation by the Principal Policy Officer which explained what digital tools were, gave examples of their use, the Council's use of Digital tools, and potential future uses.

In the question and answer session that followed, the following points were raised:-

- Reference was made to some Councils having 'apps' which the public could download onto their digital devices. Members of the public could then, via the 'app' contact the Council to report, for example, a pot hole on a road; the location of a Gritter, progress on a repair job. At any time the Council and the member of the public could look at the trail of communication relating to a particular issue. It was suggested that a Lochaber 'app' would enable greater engagement and accountability to the Lochaber community.
- It would be challenging to be fair and accessible to everyone in whatever form of communication was used for engagement with the public. There was a need to promote the knowledge of digital tools as a means of communication with the Council. There was also a need to ensure that there was continuity in the types of digital tools being used across the Council and other Local Authorities.
- It was advised that there could be data protection issues associated with the use of Digital tools.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

i **NOTED** the progress on using digital tools in the Council; and

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ii **AGREED** to ask The Highland Council that consideration is given to the production of a Lochaber 'app' as a pilot project with the purpose of increasing Highland Council's engagement with and accountability to the Lochaber community.

6. Housing Performance Report - 1 April 2016 to 30 June 2016
Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais – 1 An Giblean 2016 gu 30 Ògmhios 2016

Declaration of Interest: Mr B Murphy declared a financial interest as a temporary accommodation provider and left the room for this item.

There was circulated Report No LA/17/16 by the Director of Community Services which provided information on how the Housing Section performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 June 2016 and which provided an update on the 2016/17 Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme for Lochaber. In particular, reference was made to a correction in the report in respect of the performance indicator 'Average re-let time (days)' for Fort William and Ardnamurchan in Quarter 1 of 2016/17, which should read 26 days (and not 21 as stated in the report). However, performance on re-let times had improved significantly over the quarter. The performance indicators for Lochaber were in most cases better than the Highland average.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- In relation to repair appointments kept in Lochaber, there had been a reduction in performance in Quarter 1, which was well below the Scottish average. It was advised that this was an issue affecting all areas in Highland due to new software having been installed for the repairs appointments system. It was an administrative issue which had affected the performance figures. Updated figures in respect of Quarter 1 would be reported in the next performance report to the Committee.
- In relation to Heating replacements in houses in Lochaber, the Housing team were congratulated for resolving some complicated issues with some residents. In response to concerns with the HRA Capital Programme, Officers were aware that it had not been delivered as well as expected in trying to deliver the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. There had been particular issues with one contractor and it was understood that this contractor was not being used on current contracts in Lochaber. Members comments regarding poor customer care by a contractor was very disappointing. Complaints should be reported to Officers so that they could be addressed with the contractor. A report would be submitted to the Community Services Committee in November on lessons learned in the way the Scottish Housing Quality Standard programme was delivered. Changes had been made to the delivery of the programme and it was hoped that customer care elements of the programme would be improved as well. One of the main areas of improvement would be to maximise the amount of work that could be done in-house.
- Progress with recladding of timber houses in Lochaber and in bringing forward a maintenance programme for those houses was requested. In response, results from surveys carried out on some timber houses in Lochaber showed it was likely that comprehensive modernisation of these houses would be required rather than just upgrading external cladding. A

costed programme in order to deal with the maintenance issues affecting timber houses would need to be submitted to Members, with a view to including the programme in next year's HRA Capital Programme.

- The Council and Lochaber Housing Association had built a few houses together over the last few years which had helped with the housing shortage in the area. It was queried how the partnership network in Lochaber could be used to get a clearer picture of the housing need in the area, so that the right houses were built in the right locations. It was advised that the housing need and demand assessment had been updated and this would inform the housing strategy. Discussions had been held locally with the District Partnership which had focused on the community care issues around housing. Further discussion with the District Partnership on wider housing need would be welcome.

Thereafter, the Committee having **Scrutinised** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2016 to 30 June 2016, otherwise **NOTED** the report.

In accordance with Standing Order 18, with the consent of the meeting, item 8 on the agenda was taken at this point.

8. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 10 June, 2016 which were approved by the Council on 29 June, 2016, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

7. Business Development: Lochaber Update Leasachadh Gnothachais: A' Fàs Eaconamaidh Loch Abar

There was circulated Report No. LA/18/16 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure which updated Members on the performance of the Council's business development services in Lochaber. It summarised the delivery of the Business Gateway over the first quarter of 2016, and informed on progress with Council involvement in local business development activity in Lochaber during the first quarter of 2016/17.

It was noted that the Business Gateway Service, as well as access to finance services, was now being delivered directly by the Development and Infrastructure Service. The delivery of the Business Gateway Service was directly supportive of the Council's commitment to the Highland economy, and specifically helped prioritise and support the creation of jobs in Highland. The Council, through its Access to Finance schemes, was committed to the delivery of business development services aimed at supporting small businesses and Highland entrepreneurs with advice and finance.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- There was a need to be more proactive in promoting the success stories of companies helped through the Business Gateway Service, as there were many strong businesses in the Lochaber area that had used the Service.

- Officers would give a presentation at the next meeting of the Committee about the Business Gateway Service and what products and services clients could access.
- It was queried how the Business Gateway Service and the local business community could do more to look to the future in terms of digital business start ups and the digital economy. It was advised that there was a high awareness of digital capabilities through the Business Gateway Service and the Service also ran a Digital Boost Programme in liaison with Partner agencies to deliver workshops on the digital economy to benefit all communities.
- It was queried where business units were required locally for use by business start ups. It was advised that about one enquiry a month was received by businesses looking for premises, which may be required in the High Street or the Industrial Estate. There was a shortage of business units in the Lochaber area and the Service had discussed this issue with Highland and Islands Enterprise.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

i the Business Development Service performance in Lochaber for the 1st Quarter of 2016/17; and

ii that there would be a presentation on the Business Gateway Service at the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 p.m.