The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in **Council Chambers**, **Council Offices, Charles Kennedy Building, Achintore Road, Fort William**, on **Wednesday, 25 September 2019 at 2.00pm.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter   Mr D Rixson
Mr A Henderson   Mr B Thompson
Mr I Ramon

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Mr A Webster, Regeneration and Employment Manager, Development & Infrastructure
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Service

Mr A Baxter - Chairman

Business

1. **Apologies for Absence**
   Leisgeulan

   Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Allan and Mr N McLean.

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

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

   Item 3: Mr A Henderson (non-financial)

3. **Town Centre Fund**
   Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile

   Declaration of Interest: Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative on the Caol Regeneration Company 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 had been circulated Report No LA/26/19 by the Director of Development and Infrastructure.

   The Chair explained that he had called for a special meeting of the Committee to consider this item as it had initially been proposed the Lochaber allocation of the Town Centre Fund be discussed in private at a ward business meeting, prior to the recommendations of local Members being considered centrally by a panel of Members. He emphasised that in terms of governance, it was important for local Members to have the opportunity to express their views in public and for the process to be open and transparent. He also expressed concern that the Committee could not

take the final decision on projects which directly impacted on Lochaber, and therefore at the Administration's commitment to localism.

In response, Mr A Henderson as Chair of the Town Centre Fund Working Group, advised that this was a cross party working group of Members which would consider applications from all areas to the Fund on 3 October 2019. He indicated that in fairness to the Council and the Administration, the time schedules for the Fund set by the Scottish Government had been extremely tight for all parties involved and in terms of the Council's schedule of meetings, rather than there being any deliberate policy not to involve local committees. He suggested that applications would be considered in a reasonably open forum taking into account those time constraints.

Following a summary of the the six proposals received by the Council for Lochaber and an assessment of their eligibility status, Members raised the following issues:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that the Town Centre Fund could not be used to recover the Council's costs in administering the Fund with the exception of professional fees and it was unknown what these administrative costs were to date;
- a point that the West End Roundabout and Fort Roundabout Improvements project was purely aesthetic and would not involve any improvements to the road infrastructure. It was suggested more time was required to ensure the project achieved a high standard and therefore discussions continue to be progressed with Fort William Retail Association and other potential sources of funding investigated;
- it was suggested the Cameron Square Canopy project would encourage more people to attend events and thereby help increase footfall in this area;
- in regard to the Thomas Telford Corpach Marina project, confirmation was sought and provided that there would be a robust audit trail in place in terms of how the funding was being managed between the Council, the funder and Caol Regeneration Company to ensure there were no issues of double funding;
- an assurance was sought and provided that in regard to the above project, Scottish Government and EU grants had previously been awarded to projects on a retrospective basis as long as the expenditure did not pre-date the date of the grant award;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Scottish Government grant criteria did not stipulate what the town centre boundaries should be and it was for the local authority to be satisfied what was reasonably a town centre;
- an assurance was sought and provided that if the Kilmallie Community Centre Car Park project was approved there would continue to be flexibility to change the mix between the acquisition price and infrastructure improvements, for example if a long term lease was more affordable. In response to a question, the Regeneration and Employment Manager advised he would confirm to Members who had undertaken the valuation for this project;
- there was significant desire within community for Caol Co-op Car Park project to be progressed. It was important flexibility be retained in respect of drainage elements of the project given the opportunity for a pelican crossing to be installed and environmental works to be undertaken and the capacity within the Council to take these forward timeously;
- concern at the potential risks associated with allocating funding to projects where there was a question over their deliverability within the relevant timescales; and

- confirmation was sought and provided that there was no indication from the Scottish Government that a further round of town centre funding would be made available in the next financial year.

Thereafter, Members proceeded to discuss and rank the projects in order of priority to fit the indicative funding allocation of £198,000 which was available for the Lochaber area. Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to recommend that the following projects be funded from the Town Centre Fund:-

- Thomas Telford Corpach Marina
- Caol Co-op Car Park
- Cameron Square Canopy

The Committee further **AGREED** to recommend that any balance of funding be allocated to the Fort William High Street Public Realm Improvements with the lighting element being given priority.

The meeting ended at 2.50pm.

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