

The Highland Council

Minutes of Special Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held remotely on Friday 11 December 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr B Allan
Mr A Baxter
Mr A Henderson

Mr N McLean
Mr D Rixson
Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Ms F Cameron, Programme Manager
Mr D Gallagher, Business Gateway Service and Development Manager
Ms E Lawson, Business Gateway Adviser
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator

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 A Baxter in the Chair

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr I Ramon.

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

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

Item 3 – Mr D Rixson and Mr B Thompson (both non-financial)

**3. Highland Coastal Communities Fund (HCCF) – Support to Businesses in Lochaber
Maoin Coimhearsnachdan Cladaich na Gàidhealtachd – Taic do Ghnothachasan ann an Loch Abar**

Declarations of Interest:

Mr D Rixson declared non-financial interests in this item as the Council nominee to the Isle of Rum Community Trust and Secretary of Mallaig Heritage Centre but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Mr B Thompson declared a non-financial interest as one of the owners of a business that had an online presence. However, he had no relationship with

Business Gateway and would not be applying for the funding that was to be the subject of discussion therefore, 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 the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No LA/18/20 dated 26 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In introducing the report, the Chair thanked Councillor Thompson for his initial suggestion that the Lochaber Committee should look at providing some specific support for businesses as part of the HCCF. The subsequent discussions by Members, officers and Business Gateway staff had led to the proposal before the Committee today, and thanks were expressed to officers for taking Members' suggestions and turning them into a cohesive policy that could be applied to the HCCF.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- one of the things that had stood out over the past few months was the distress being experienced by some of the business community, not only from a financial perspective but in terms of mental health etc, and it was important to do as much as possible to support businesses, particularly if they were having to diversify;
- Members welcomed the progress that had been made, expressed support for the recommendations and looked forward to seeing some good uptake by local businesses;
- whilst the report indicated that the grant scheme would first be directed to businesses that had already engaged with the Business Gateway, new businesses would also be looking for opportunities and support was expressed for the scheme being open to them straight away; and
- in relation to the proposed requirement for businesses to obtain three quotations, it was questioned whether the sector was big enough for businesses to be able to do so in all instances. In response, it was acknowledged that it might not always be possible to obtain three quotations, Lochaber being a relatively small community, and it was confirmed that the intention was to be as flexible as possible in delivering the fund. Members welcomed the pragmatic approach.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the proposal for delivery of business support through adding value to the Business Gateway service in Lochaber, as set out in the Appendix 1; and
- ii. a ringfenced sum of £30,000 of HCCF – Lochaber funding to deliver the proposal for digital support grants to businesses.

The meeting ended at 10.37 am.