

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held remotely on **Monday, 27 January 2025 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr J C Grafton
Ms S Fanet

Mr T MacLennan
Ms L Saggars

Officials in Attendance:

Ms D Sutton, Strategic Lead - Community Operations & Logistics
Ms M Macdonald, Area Education and Learning Manager
Ms K MacLeod, Roads Operations Manager - Lochaber
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry
Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry)
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms J Young, Community Support Officer
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager
Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services

Also in attendance:-

Mr C Scott, Station Commander, Lochaber District, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
(Item 3 only)

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council.
All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.**

Mr J C Grafton in the Chair

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Baldrey and Ms K Willis.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd

Item 10ii – Mr A Baxter (Transparency statement)

3. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/1/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

Following a summary of the report by the Station Commander, the following points were raised:-

- it would be checked if a breakdown of information could be provided to Members on the proportion of road traffic incidents in the Lochaber area involving tourists and locals. This information would be useful, as if there was a high proportion of tourists involved in road incidents, it would highlight the need to educate tourists about driving in this area. Information was available for tourists in hotels, B&Bs, visitor centres etc. about driving in this country, i.e. Keep Left stickers; different road traffic regulations, and the Service would continue to work educating tourists so that they were prepared when visiting the area.
- The SFRS was taking proactive action to support the process of carrying out inspections of short term lets that require fire safety checks.
- In relation to the recent fire raising incidents and vandalism in Fort William, SFRS personnel were highly trained and recognised the potential for incidents to escalate and identify trends. The service liaised closely with Police Scotland colleagues on this matter. The Police had increased their patrols in the area to reassure local businesses and residents. The service did receive referrals from the Police and Social services for individuals to join the service's fire skills and fire service intervention programmes.
- There was a wildfire strategy which included a three tier response to wildfires across Highland.
- Recruitment to the service remained an ongoing issue across Highland and efforts to recruit to the service were highlighted.

The Committee **NOTED** the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service area performance report.

4. Lochaber Area Place Plan Plana Àite Sgìre Loch Abar

There was circulated Report No. LA/2/25 by the Chief Officer Housing and Communities.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Concern raised that this was another Highland Council plan to go alongside plans produced in the past. The difficulty was in implementing the aspirations in the plan and obtaining the funding for them. Without support from the Administration of the Council for many of these projects, it was unlikely a large number of them would proceed. Also, it was queried what leverage the plan would have in gaining support from external organisation such as Transport Scotland to take action on long term community aspirations. It was advised that there was a commitment to have Area Place Plans in place by the Council and the Highland Community Planning Partnership. In terms of delivery of the plans, the Council had been upfront with communities that having projects did not automatically mean resources would be available. However, potential funders of projects would know that the projects had been through a robust consultation process and that there was broad support for the projects. External parties had been engaged in the process of developing area place plans and were aware of the priorities of the community. If the plan was adopted then the next steps as detailed in the report would be taken forward to fulfil these priorities.

- Once Local Place Plans were created they would be included in the Area Place Plan document.
- There was a need to ensure that the Council when making decisions affecting communities, considers the Area Place Plan, given that the plan sets out the aspirations for communities.
- In terms of the delivery of the plan and next steps, stakeholders involved in the creation of the plan, would continue to be involved in the delivery of the plan. An action plan would be created for each of the priorities and some work was already happening on this.

The Committee:-

- AGREED** to adopt the Lochaber Area Place Plan, using it as a tool to inform and support decision making about Lochaber;
- AGREED** to support and promote the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other Plans, Strategies, Development, and Funding opportunities across or impacting the Lochaber area; and
- NOTED** the next steps for progressing the work set out in the plan.

5. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26** **Prògram Calpa Rathaiden na Sgìre 2025/26**

There was circulated Report No. LA/3/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following a summary of the report by the Roads Operations Manager, the following correction to the capital programme was highlighted:- Appendix 1, line 2, should read A861 (and not B8007).

Further, information would be provided to Councillor A Baxter on the reason for the substantial increase in cost this year compared to last year, for repairs to the B863 North Ballachulish to Kinlochleven Low Road; and information would be provided to Councillor S Fanet on whether pavement access works at Ballachulish would be met from capital programme or revenue funding.

It was highlighted that there was about an £8m backlog in road repairs identified in the capital programme for 2025/26, compared to £6.3m backlog in repairs in 2024/25. It was advised that the plan was continually updated with new roads being added and roads that had works completed, taken off the plan. It was difficult to set a fixed programme of works and realistically the programme would be added to each year as some roads deteriorated quicker than others.

It was difficult to get a comparison over the years as to whether the Council was addressing the road repairs needed or because of resource limitations, the Council was not addressing repairs which stored up problems for the future. Therefore, Mr A Baxter, seconded by Mr T MacLennan, Moved that the Committee approve the Area Roads Capital Programme 2025/26 and in addition:-

“the Committee:-

- requests confirmation of the total amount of capital expenditure required to address all Lochaber road repairs and structures for each of the last five years.

- suggests, for comparative purposes, that the same information is provided for every Area Committee within the Highland Council region. This information will be provided for discussion at the next Area Business Meeting and published as an addendum to the minutes of this Area Committee meeting.
- notes with concern that the total amount of capital expenditure required to fix the Lochaber road network is increasing year-on-year, and the Council is failing to address this backlog of repairs.
- invites the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee and appropriate officers to attend the Lochaber Committee on Monday, 12th May 2025, to explain how the Council addresses the Committee's concerns."

The Committee was supportive of this Motion.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed prioritised 2025/26 Area Roads Capital Programme for Lochaber Area; and
- ii. **AGREED** to:-
 - request confirmation of the total amount of capital expenditure required to address all Lochaber road repairs and structures for each of the last five years.
 - suggest, for comparative purposes, that the same information is provided for every Area Committee within the Highland Council region. This information will be provided for discussion at the next Area Business Meeting and published as an addendum to the minutes of this Area Committee meeting (**see appendix**).
 - note with concern that the total amount of capital expenditure required to fix the Lochaber road network is increasing year-on-year, and the Council is failing to address this backlog of repairs.
 - invite the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee and appropriate officers to attend the Lochaber Committee on Monday, 12th May 2025, to explain how the Council addresses the Committee's concerns.

6. Community Asset Transfer Requests Glusad So-mhaoin Coimhearsnachd

i. Land adjacent to the Spean Bridge Community Centre

There was circulated Report No. LA/4/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Committee **AGREED** the following Community Asset Transfer request:

Transfer of ownership of circa 2.3 acres of land adjacent to the Spean Bridge Community Centre for £1, based upon the terms set out in the report, subject to Scottish Government Minister approval as the land is on Housing Revenue Account.

ii. Lease of Unit 9a, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William

There was circulated Report No. LA/5/25 by the Chief Officer – Housing and Communities.

The Committee **AGREED** the following Community Asset Transfer request:

Lease of Unit 9a, Blar Mhor Industrial Estate, Fort William, PH33 7PT for £2,750 per annum over 5 years to Fort William Men's Shed SCIO, in line with the terms outlined at section 8 and on the basis no objections are received during the statutory consultation period which closes on 31 January 2025.

**7. Station Brae Public Conveniences
Taighean-beaga Bruthach an Stèisein**

There was circulated Report No. LA/6/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

In discussion, it was requested that there should be a break clause in the lease of the site, as it was a valuable strategic site and there may be some other future use of the site that would be of greater benefit to the community.

It was queried if the new tenant would be charging for the use of the toilets. It was advised that once the site had been marketed and notes of interest received this would be asked. As part of the Comfort Scheme the new tenant would be permitted to charge up to the same amount the Council charged for its public conveniences, currently 50p.

It was important that the public were reassured that this was not a closure of the public convenience, but the Council were trying to reopen the facilities, but operated by an external party.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the closure of the Station Brae public convenience from 31 March 2025;
- ii. leasing of the site on a 25-year lease with provision of at least two unisex accessible facilities made available for public use;
- iii. the lease to include a break clause at the same time as rent reviews, to allow early termination of the contract if required; and
- iv. support a Comfort Scheme with the lease holder for the Station Brae public convenience from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

**8. Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2025/2026
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2025/2026**

There was circulated Report No. LA/7/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, which detailed examples of possible rent increases for Members to choose from for the garage estate in Lochaber. It was up to Members to choose a level of rent increase. Last years rent increase was 7.95%.

It was advised that only a small proportion of the total amount collected from garage and garage site rents went on repairs and the rest of the money went into the Housing Revenue Account. There was concern expressed that the total income raised from garage rents in Lochaber was not being spent in Lochaber.

Further, it would be up to Members if they wanted to spend some of the rental from garages to bring void garages up to standard for rental again. A point was made that one of the criticisms often from tenants was that they were paying the rent, it was increasing each year and they were not seeing any benefit from this. Also, with the cost of living at the moment, it was not felt that the various options for increases could be justified. It was therefore proposed that the Committee apply a 5% increase to the garage estate for 2025/26 and in addition a report be submitted to the next meeting outlining how the garage estate could be improved using the total budget available from the collection of rents.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. a 5% increase to apply to Lochaber Garages and Garage Sites for 2025/26; and
- ii. a report to come to the next Lochaber Committee outlining how the garage estate can be improved using the total budget available from the collection of rents.

9. Housing Performance Report **Aithisg Choileanaidh Càraidhean Thaighean**

There was circulated Report No. LA/8/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

There was a summary of the report by the Principal Repairs Officer. In response to a query regarding adaptations for disabled use and access, it was advised that in the capital spend there was a budget for equipment and adaptations in Council houses and the annual budget this year was circa £96k.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024.

10. Education Attainment Reports

- i. **Ardnamurchan High School Associated School Group Overview**
Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-Sgoil Àird nam Murchan

There was circulated Report No. LA/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People which provided key information in relation to the schools within the Ardnamurchan High School Associated School Group.

Following a summary of the report by the Area Education Manager, the Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

ii. **Kinlochleven High School Associated School Group Overview
Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-
Sgoil Cheann Loch Liobhann**

Transparency Statement - Mr A Baxter declared a transparency statement in relation to this item as he had children that attended Kinlochleven High School. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No. LA/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **AGREED** that this report be **DEFERRED** this report until the next Lochaber Committee meeting by which time Members would have had the opportunity to read an Education Scotland inspection report on Kinlochleven High School, that was due to be published on 28 January 2025.

iii. **Mallaig High School Associated School Group Overview
Foir-shealladh air Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Àrd-
Sgoil Mhalaig**

There was circulated Report No. LA/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People which provided key information in relation to the schools within the Mallaig High School Associated School Group.

In particular, it was noted that a new Head Teacher had been appointed to Mallaig High School. The Head Teacher would be invited to an Area Business meeting at which attainment data for Mallaig High School Associated School Group would be provided.

It was highlighted that there had been coverage in the press on the issue of children who did not appear on school rolls and were not in education. There were suggestions the numbers of children in this situation were quite high. In this respect, information would be provided to Members on the process to be undertaken for parents wanting their children to be home schooled and the number of home schooled children in the Lochaber area.

The Committee **NOTED** the content of the report.

11. **Corran Ferry Update
Cunntas air Aiseag a' Chorrain**

There was circulated Report No. LA/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Commentary on the report was provided by the Operations Manager, Corran Ferry. In response to queries, it was highlighted that the MV Corran should be back in operation in February following maintenance on the vessel. However, this was dependant on a 3rd party providing parts for the vessel and then sea trials being carried out satisfactorily to regain the passenger licence. The internal ferry grant request to Transport Scotland for £1.5m had only been considered at Officer level as yet. There had been no recommendation to the

Council's Administration on ferry fares and the presumption would be an inflation based increase. There was a national smart ticketing advisory board ongoing with Transport Scotland and smart ticketing was an ongoing project for the Corran Ferry. Members were reassured that it was intended to undertake marshalling on both sides of the Corran Ferry and would be trialled during busy periods.

It would be checked with CMAL and the naval architects if there were any health and safety risks from electric magnetic fields on the new electric Corran Ferry vessel. Information on this would be provided to Councillor T MacIennan.

Issue raised by Ardgour Community Council and stakeholders about parking at the ferry needed to be addressed. Further, there should be greater promotion of the Web camera at the ferry so that the public were able to see how busy it was when making their travel arrangements.

It was requested that consideration be given to paper tickets being sold in books of 40 tickets rather than 30, which would make it easier for regular commuters to budget for one book of tickets a month.

It was highlighted that there was £58m available for a new vessel and infrastructure at the Corran Ferry site and officers great efforts on this project was recognised and commended. It was hoped that all interested parties would work together to deliver the project as soon as possible.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Corran Ferry Operations update;
- ii. the Corran Ferry Infrastructure and Vessel Replacement Project update; and
- iii. that a report be submitted to a future Area business meeting on the outcome of a review of live ticketing, the review to also incorporate the suggestion of paper tickets being sold in books of 40 tickets.

12. Ward Discretionary Fund Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

The Committee **NOTED** the following Ward Discretionary Fund grant awards since the last Committee meeting:-

Ward 11

Knoydart Tree Nursery - Electricity Connection £1250

Ward 21

Nether Lochaber Village Hall Committee SCIO – Transfer of title legal costs £1,320

Nether Lochaber Community Council – Transfer of title legal costs £930

13. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 12 November 2024 which were approved by the Council on 12 December 2024, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

Also, **AGREED** that an update on the following action point from the minute of the last meeting be provided to the next Area business meeting:-

“Agreed, for full transparency, clarification was sought as to the division of Highland Council/ Fort William Common Good Fund land in relation to the West End car park as well as other assets in future, and also the share of responsibility for costs of major repairs to the sea wall containing the West End car park.

The meeting ended at 1.00 p.m.

- requested confirmation of the total amount of capital expenditure required to address all Lochaber Road repairs and structures for each of the last five years. Figures will be brought to the ward business meeting for the capital expenditure for the last 5 years for Lochaber Roads, Structures.
- **Lochaber Roads:** - Links below holds the agenda, reports and committee papers for total amount of capital expenditure for Lochaber roads for each of the last five years.
 - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2020-2021
 - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2021-2022
 - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2022-2023
 - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2023 – 2024
 - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2024 – 2025
 - [Lochaber Committee | The Highland Council](#) – 2025 - 2026
- **Structures Roads:** - Links below holds the agenda, reports and committee papers for total amount of capital expenditure for Structures for each of the last five years.
 - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 4 November 2020
 - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 2 December 2021
 - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 10 November 2022
 - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 16 November 2023
 - Road Structures Annual [Report](#) – 24 November 2024
- Scheme estimation prices on the wish-list/below the line have increased due to now including road marking lines, traffic management, contractor & material price increases.
- Footpath works will be under capital expenditure.