

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, and remotely on **Monday, 12 May 2025 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter

Ms S Fanet

Mr T MacLennan

Ms L Saggars

Ms K Willis

Officials in Attendance:

Ms T Urry, Head of Roads & Infrastructure

Ms K MacLeod, Roads Operations Manager - Lochaber

Ms M Macdonald, Area Education and Learning Manager

Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry

Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry)

Mr A Maciver, Principal Engineer

Ms E Wilkinson, Principal Housing Officer

Mr J Murray, Senior Environmental Health Officer

Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager

Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services

Also in attendance:-

Chief Inspector D Allan, Police Scotland (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.**

Ms K Willis in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Grafton and Mr A Baldrey.

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

Item 4 – Mr A Baxter (Transparency statement)

3. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/13/25 by the Area Commander, Police Scotland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised by Members and responded to by Chief Inspector Allan:

- the extent to which local communities could challenge people with open fires during a period when the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had issued an extreme hazard warning, and other anti-social behaviour such as littering, and at what point should the police be involved. Education of the public was

important, and the employment of seasonal rangers was highlighted. The matter would be taken on board by the Police and liaison undertaken with the SFRS;

- the process for taking anti-social and criminal behaviour to court was lengthy, and the reasons for this were summarised;
- concern was expressed at the handling of a recent incident of vandalism in the West End car park, which would be looked into; and
- concern was expressed at the occasional use of the emergency helicopter landing pad at Carr's Corner by members of the public and it was requested that this be investigated and appropriate mitigation undertaken, such as signage.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

4. 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/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the results of the recent inspection of Kinlochleven High School were welcomed but it was disappointing the information had not been included in the overview report. It was requested that future inspection reports and progress with the action plans, be reported to the Committee. Education officials were thanked for meeting with the parent Council and local members after the release of the inspection report, and for their commitment to various improvement measures;
- Members voiced their support for the Head Teacher and other staff at Kinlochleven High School and welcomed work being undertaken to address long-standing issues;
- it was queried why some schools had waited a significant number of years for an inspection and it was clarified that the Scottish Government was taking steps to address this;
- information was sought and provided on the schedule for secondary schools to be informed of their probationer teacher allocation, and it was pointed out that delays held back schools from finalising their teaching staff recruitment requirements. It was requested that anomalies be investigated;
- acknowledging that it was challenging to report on some detailed attainment figures for small primary schools in order to protect individual pupil identity, it was requested that primary school attainment be reported for a cluster;
- information was sought and provided on strategies in place to support pupils with special needs and to stretch very able children; and
- the extent of the use of non-specialist teaching staff at Kinlochleven High School was queried.

The Committee **NOTED** the report and **AGREED**:

- i. that future inspection report information would be included in Education performance reports, and regular updates on Inspection report action plans be provided to the Committee;
- ii. that information on the use of non-specialist teachers at Kinlochleven High School, be provided to Members outwith the meeting; and
- iii. that consideration be given to the provision of attainment data for primary school clusters rather than individual schools.

5. **Area Roads Capital Programme 2024/25 Update** **Prògram Calpa Rathaiden na Sgìre 2024/25**

There was circulated Report No. LA/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the number of outstanding area roads projects not included in the capital programme was queried and, following a summary being provided, it was suggested that the total value of capital schemes that were not included in the programme was now around £6m in value, whereas in 2022 this figure had been around £4m. In response, a summary of the reasons for rising costs was provided, as was a recap of the Highland-wide position, the amount of funding required to maintain the roads in a steady state, and the current backlog in improvements;
- reference was made to the continued insufficiency of funding for roads, and improved ways of working and engagement with communities was welcomed. However, concern was expressed at the allocation process for area capital roads funding and as well as disappointment that Mr Ken Gowans, Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure, had not been able to attend the meeting as requested. Mr Baxter asked that Mr Gowans be invited to attend the August or November meetings, noting the political nature of the decisions that were required with regard to capital roads funding; and
- the improvements that were being made to the road to Kinlochhourn were welcomed, and the busyness of the car park at the end of the road was highlighted.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the final budget allocation for Lochaber area for 2024/25;
- ii. **NOTED** the works completed on the approved list to date;
- iii. **NOTED** the additional works identified and prioritised throughout the year; and
- iv. **AGREED** to invite Mr Ken Gowans, in his capacity as Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, to attend the August or November meeting of the Lochaber Committee to address concerns about the area roads capital programme allocation.

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

There was circulated Report No. LA/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- information was sought, and would be provided outwith the meeting, on the frequency and outcomes of requests to Transport Scotland to increase ring-fenced grant funding, community engagement with regard to proposed fare increases, and the estimated income from the proposed £3 walk-on fare;
- information was sought and provided on smart ticketing, for which there was no current funding although a new ticketing system was in place, the crew transfer boat project, which was designed but had no current funding, and the use of marshals at either side of the Corran Straits;
- assurance was sought on the likelihood of further slipway repairs being required but this was dependent on unknown factors such as severe weather and the ageing infrastructure; and
- assurance was sought on the completion dates for the infrastructure (summer 2027) and new vessel delivery (end of 2028), and that the vessel would be operational upon delivery.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update on Corran Ferry Operations; and
- ii. **NOTED** the update on the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme and New Electric Vessel which can be found below within Appendix 2; and
- iii. **AGREED** information on the following be provided to Members outwith the meeting:
 - a. the number of times in recent years the Council had requested that Transport Scotland increase the level of ringfenced grant funding for a project, and the number of times this had been agreed;
 - b. community and local Member engagement undertaken with regard to the proposed Corran Ferry fare increases, and to the proposed £3 walk-on fare, including the anticipated approximate income expected from this.

7. **Housing Management Performance Report** **Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais**

There was circulated Report No. LA/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- The engagement with communities and walkabouts being undertaken by Housing staff were appreciated;
- Information was sought and provided on how antisocial behaviour should be reported; and
- The issue of housing stock for homeless people was considered, noting the challenges around location.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

8. Environmental Health - Annual Report & Activity 2024/25

There was circulated Report No. LA/18/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Information was sought and provided on the process for abandoned cars, and the definition of an abandoned car. Similar information was sought for boats abandoned on the shore, and the process for that would be clarified outwith the meeting;
- Concern was expressed at debris building up in the water around the West End carpark, Fort William, and various measures were proposed including short term monitoring of littering, improved signage, and consideration to a clean-up operation with local volunteer divers; and
- An update was requested for ward 21 Members on noise monitoring at Achaphubuil sawmill.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the range and volume of work being undertaken locally by the environmental health team.
- ii. **NOTED** the Highland wide issues;
- iii. **NOTED** the report format and content; and
- iv. **AGREED:**
 - a. to provide further information to Members outwith the meeting on where responsibility for washed up marine debris, including abandoned boats on the shore, lay;
 - b. that the interim summary on noise monitoring activities at Achaphubuil sawmill be provided to Members; and
 - c. consideration be given, outwith the meeting, to the issue of waste in the loch near the West End car park in Fort William, including short term monitoring of unlawful waste disposal, the provision of appropriate signage, and the possible organisation of a clean-up using local diving club.

9. Ward Discretionary Fund Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

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

2024/25 budget

Ward 11

Caol Community Council - Caol Local Place Plan - £1500

South Knoydart Community Council - SKCC Local Place Plan - £1500

Lochaber Action on Disability - Volunteer Training - £980

Remembrance Day Costs - £283.05

Cycling Without Age Scotland - Cycling Without Age Scotland Fort William - £555.95

Loch Shiel Spring Festival - Loch Shiel Festival "The Big Music" - £900

Ward 21

Urram - Childcare Needs in West Highland Peninsulas - £2500

Remembrance Day Costs - £283.05

Voluntary Action Lochaber - Plantation Larder - £1938.58

Lochaber Environmental Group - Fort William Repair Café - £1500

Nether Lochaber Community Association - Extend & Enhance Floral Displays in Nether Lochaber - £900

2025/26 budget

Ward 11

Mallaig Community Hub & Shop - Toilet construction for community space - £1000

Arisaig & District Community Council – Laptop - £400

Kilmallie Community Fridge and Garden - £2000

10. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED**, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 27 January, 2025 which had been approved by the Council on 27 March, 2025.

The meeting ended at 12.45pm