

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, and remotely on **Monday, 11 August 2025 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr J C Grafton
Ms S Fanet

Mr T MacLennan
Ms L Saggars
Ms K Willis

Officials in Attendance:

Ms K MacLeod, Roads Operations Manager – Lochaber, Place Service
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry, Place Service
Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry), Place Service
Mr A Maciver, Principal Engineer, Place Service
Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer, Place Service
Ms D Ferguson, Senior Community Development Manager
Ms A Martin, FW2040 Project Manager
Mr M Culbertson, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund
Mr D Lamont, Amenity Services Manager, Place Service
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services

Also in attendance:-

Mr C Scott, Station Commander, Lochaber District, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
(Item 4 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

There were none.

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

Item 8 – Ms S Fanet (Declaration of Interest)
Item 8 – Mr J C Grafton (Transparency Statement)

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 26 June 2025 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Lochaber Committee.

Councillor Andrew Baldrey –The Chair on behalf of the Committee extended their best wishes to Andrew who had left the Council, on health grounds, at the end of July. Andrew was thanked for his contributions to the

Council and Ward business over his time as a Councillor and wished him well for the future.

In terms of Standing Order 9, with the consent of the meeting, the following item was taken after item 9 on the agenda.

**4. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Local Committee Performance Report
Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh agus Teasairginn na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No LA/19/25 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, the following issues were raised by Members and responded to by the Station Commander:

- There had some instances of anti social behaviour within the deliberate fires statistics. As to preventative work by the Service, there was the media communication in dealing with deliberate fires and joint working with Police Scotland in dealing with anti social behaviour. The Service had community fire safety teams and strategies to educate and work with the local community to highlight areas of anti social behaviour and promoting fire safety in schools. Dealing with anti social behaviour was an ongoing process and involved partner agencies such as Highland Council, NHS, voluntary groups and members of the public. New ideas were also being looked at to support the community to try and reduce anti social behaviour.
- Wildfires were becoming much more frequent and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service had a wildfire strategy to address this. The Service had redefined their response to wildfires into a three tier response. This meant that depending of the severity of the fire extra equipment/vehicles could be brought in to support tackling wildfires. There was good partnership working in addressing wildfires with public agencies, landowners and deer management groups and anything councillors and community groups could do to support knowledge and awareness of wildfires would be welcome. Educating the public on preventing wildfires was also highlighted. The Service was also looking to innovation to predict where wildfires might occur, such as looking at weather patterns, the use of drones and CCTV cameras on the mountains.
- A point was made that in the Dava moor wildfire, muir burning did very little to restrict the wildfire and the environmental restoration community should be involved in partnership working. Strategic meetings on wildfires would help with lessons learned from other areas, for example, the Cairngorms National Park Authority were sourcing additional resources to support tackling wildfires, which was something other areas might wish to consider.
- It was incumbent on everyone to ensure that there was a plan and strategy to ensure that visitors and communities enjoy the area and try and prevent wildfires. It was highlighted that there were seasonal Rangers who would engage and educate visitors on responsible practices in the countryside.
- The Service undertook home safety fire inspections in homes and provided fire safety advice to residents who met the criteria for such a visit. There would be verified traders that residents could contact to carry out essential maintenance in houses, such as electrical equipment.
- Signage for wildfire risk was a good idea and was in use in other countries. It would be checked if signage was being considered in the wildfire strategy, and if so information on this provided in the next report.

- Battery energy storage system sites in the Highlands would be visited by the Service's fire safety teams to understand the owners fire plans and to determine what the Service's fire plans would be.
- Campervans parking next to each other was an issue as a fire in one could spread to the others. As and when fire personnel saw this, they would address it and the Council should also ensure the campervan parking areas were visited and educate drivers to ensure safe distances when parking.

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

5. Winter Service Plan 2025/26
Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh 2025/26

There was circulated Report No. LA/20/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The Roads Operations Manager highlighted that there was no change in the Winter Service plan to Primary or Secondary routes. The plan also covered other routes and footpath treatment, along with the staff establishment, vehicles, plant, target treatment times and details of the winter resilience scheme that communities could join.

It was queried how much flexibility there was in the plan if a new road or section of path required treatment. It was advised, that roads, footpaths in new developments would require to be adopted, as the winter maintenance team were not insured on a developers road/footpath. However, once they were adopted by the Council these roads/footpaths would be incorporated into the winter service plan.

In response to a query, the Council's website should be used to re-order salt/grit for bins before they were empty. There were around 150 grit bins in the Lochaber area and they were filled at the start of winter and refreshed thereafter.

The logistics of covering all the routes was explained which could be hard to manage at times, but having grit bins and the winter resilience scheme did help.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2025/26.

6. Partial Deletion of U1015 Glenroy Road (465m end of road)
Pàirt Dhubhadh Às de U1015 Rathad Ghleann Ruaidh

There was circulated Report No. LA/21/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

It was advised that the Braeroy Estate approached the Council to take over 465 metres at the end of the U1015 Glenroy road. This part of the road also included a bridge that would need replaced in the next five years. The Estate had confirmed that public access through the Estate would continue as it currently is and would not be compromised. The Council would not be liable for any costs associated with the future upkeep and maintenance of the road, bridge and cattle grid.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed partial deletion of the U1015 Glenroy Road from the List of Adopted Roads.

**7. Scottish Government Play Park Funding
Maoineachadh Phàircean-cluiche Riaghaltas na h-Alba**

There was circulated Report No. LA/22/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place in relation to Scottish Government Play Park funding for Ward 11.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** in Ward 11, £20,000 be allocated to the agreed project as outlined in Section 6.4 of the report.

**8. Community Regeneration Fund Assessment of Applications
Measadh Iarrtasan Maoin Ath-bheòthachaidh Coimhearsnachd**

Declaration of Interest: Ms S Fanet declared an interest in the Glencoe Folk Museum application as a volunteer at the Museum and her music recordings were for sale at the museum. Ms Fanet left the meeting when this application was being considered.

Transparency Statement – Mr J C Grafton declared a transparency statement in relation to the An Comunn Gàidhealach application as he was a Council representative on the Group organising the Royal National Mod 2025. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There was circulated Report No LA/23/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

The report detailed 3 community regeneration fund applications received for consideration. There was a total request of funding of £192,367.55 with an available budget of £793,564.63. All 3 applications were eligible for support.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- In terms of the Glencoe Folk Museum application, the projection was for a significant increase in visitor numbers at the museum. The museum wanted to install all new exhibition space.
- In terms of An Comunn Gàidhealach application this was for support for the hire and provision of a high quality marquee at the Royal National Mod 2025 to be held in Fort William. In response to a query regarding how resilient the marquee if there was bad weather, it was assumed that this had been taken account of in the technical specifications for the marquee.
- The application from Highland Council was for support towards a new Corran Ferry Flit Boat for crew transfers. There would be a significant reduction in the annual maintenance cost of the flit boat as a result of the provision of a new vessel.

A comment was made that it was a good application and should be supported as the new boat would enhance crew safety and future resilience in the event the Corran Ferry service being out of action. However, it was disappointing that the Council was using this Fund for funding that should instead be put to a strategic committee of the Council to fund. The Council should have made provision for a replacement Flit boat which was a core service and community regeneration funding was meant to be for projects that provide additionality. It was advised that match funding for the boat was to come from the Council's operation budget for this ferry service.

It was queried if more match funding may be possible, if the boat could be used for a rescue boat service as well, which would provide some additionality. It was advised that the current vessel did serve this function and the new boat would provide additional capacity to undertake a rescue service.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** all the applications for Community Regeneration Fund grant award and the grants requested.

9. Appointment to Isle of Rum Community Trust
Cur an Dreuchd gu Urras Coimhearsnachd Eilean Rùm

The Committee **AGREED** that Councillor L Saggars replaces Councillor J C Grafton on the Isle of Rum Community Trust.

10. Fort William 2040 Annual Update
Fios às Ùr mu An Gearasdan 2040

There was circulated Report No. LA/24/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place.

Following a summary of the report by the FW2040 Project Manager, the following issues were raised:

- The issue of integrated transport in accessing Fort William without using the road was often raised in community engagement. Feedback on comments made on this issue were given to the consultants on the Fort William integrated transport plan. They would be looking at all the possibilities for alternative and active travel in Fort William, so there wasn't as much car or lorry dependence in the town. Information on this would be provided in the next report.
- Caol was being included in the FW2040 plan and it was queried if the Caol link road would now go ahead. It was hoped that the integrated transport plan would look at proposed link roads and establish the viability of these. It was understood the outcome of this would be fed into the next Highland Local Development Plan.
- An update was provided in relation to the STEM centre. In relation to the new road junction at Lochaber High, this worked well, but there were now no gaps in the traffic at the roundabout leading to the road to the Isles. This resulted in queues of traffic on the A82, the main route through Fort William. It was felt the FW2040 should take this issue onboard and highlight this issue to the trunk roads authority. It was advised that this issue had been raised with Transport Scotland and with the consultants to the Fort William integrated transport plan. A road survey would be undertaken over the next few weeks and this would also take account of the operation of the swing bridge in this area.
- Given the valuable information contained in the report, it was suggested that a FW2040 update report be provided to the Committee every six months.

The Committee **NOTED:-**

- i. the progress that had been made with the individual projects within the FW2040 Masterplan as summarised at Appendix 1: FW2040 Annual Masterplan Project Update July 2025.

ii. the wider developments that had been implemented in 2025 to enhance the delivery of the programme, specifically:

- a) a review of the FW2040 governance arrangements which is ongoing.
- b) preparation of a community engagement event in November in collaboration with Lochaber Community Planning Partnership and the Area Place Planning team.
- c) continued engagement on specific issues and with particular interest groups through the FW2040 Community Stakeholder Group and FW2040 Transport Sub-Group.

These wider developments were expanded on in section 5 of the report;

iii. **AGREED** to support identified priority FW2040 work areas for the coming year as summarised in section 6 of the report; and

iv **AGREED** that a Fort William 2040 update report be submitted to the Committee every 6 months.

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

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

Following commentary on the report by Officers, the following issues were raised and responded to:-

- Given the MV Corran was out of service last week, the importance of clarity with the contingency plan was emphasised. There should be engagement with the local community regarding the role the new Corran Ferry Flit boat would provide in transporting passengers and goods, in the event both the MV Corran and Maid of Glencoul were out of action. It was advised that now funding had been approved for the Flit boat, it would take around 6 months to build the boat.
- The Corran Ferry ticketing project was about to commence and an undertaking was given to keep local members and the local community involved in this.
- It was disappointing that there had been no apology from the Council that the Corran Ferry service was out of action last week, as the Council were failing to respond to the needs of the local community. The Operations Manager, Corran Ferry apologised on behalf of the Service to last weeks outage of the ferry service.
- It was queried why the contingency plan last week had not been put in place immediately. There was a need to respond to ferry service outages much more quickly and it be clear when the plan be triggered immediately. Going forward the contingency plan should be shared with local Members for comment.
- An open letter by Loch Shiel garage on Facebook illustrated the impact the loss of service had on its business and others in the area. It was queried what officers response to this was. It was understood this contained some older ideas on the ferry service that had been addressed over the years. It did highlight the need to keep the public informed of progress in addressing issues with the Corran Ferry service.

- It was queried why the ferry service budget information in the report had not been included in budget papers to the Council budget meeting in March, 2025, when it was proposed to increase ferry fares and introduce a foot passenger fare. Information on this would be provided to the Committee.
- It was queried why communities and stakeholders or Lochaber Members were not consulted when new ferry fares and the introduction of a foot passenger fare were proposed. It was understood that this had been answered by officers at Committee and steering group meetings.
- In terms of the introduction of the foot passenger fares, clarification was sought as to the operation and location of the ticket machine. It was advised the ticketing machine would be located in the passenger lounge as only one machine would be required, rather than two if located on the slipways. Also if the machine was located on the slipways there was potential for the ferry boat to be delayed.
- Significant work had gone into taking the ticketing project forward and required funding to do so.
- Consideration be given to introducing a road traffic order on the Corran side of the Corran ferry, as vehicles were being parked and left within the marshalling lanes, thus taking up space and leading to problems with queuing traffic going onto the A82. There should be adequate signage and prosecutions, as vehicles parked in marshalling areas were illegally parked.
- There was now money available for a new Corran Ferry and associated infrastructure, so it should be recognised that matters had moved on since a few years ago, when there was no money available for a new ferry.
- The small vessels replacement programme phase 1 had already been awarded. There would be significant lessons learned from those boats before construction of the new Corran ferry started. The Corran ferry crew would also have the opportunity to try out one of the new vessels.
- It was queried if there was to be a review of the tendering and repair process for Council ferries, as the repairs to the Corran ferries were taking longer to complete. It was advised that the current yard that undertook refit services were successful having gone through a tendering process which was positive as they would have to evidence they could undertake the work successfully. This contract assured there would be a slot for each Corran ferry to be maintained annually. The tender refit review would be shared with Members.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the update on Corran Ferry Operations;
- ii. the update on the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme and New Electric Vessel as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report; and
- iii that local Members would be involved in the development of the Corran Ferry service contingency plan and that the plan needed to be clearly communicated with local communities.

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

There was circulated Report No. LA/26/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place which provided information on how the Housing Service performed in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 June, 2025.

Following commentary on the report by the Principal Repairs Officer, the capital funding investment in housing was welcomed which including heating system upgrades, energy efficiency improvements, and the replacement of major components reaching the end of their lifecycle. There had been significant investment in the Caol area through the Whole House Retrofit Programme.

The work with colleagues from the Climate Change and Energy Team to identify and secure funding opportunities across the Highlands in the delivery of energy efficiency projects was noted.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2025 – 30 June 2025.

13. Ward Discretionary Fund Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

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

Ward 11

Lochaber Coastal Rowing - Each Dubh Mobilisation - £100

National Trust for Scotland - Glenfinnan Sunday Bus Service Pilot - £2,463

Visit Small Isles (VSI) - Welcome to the Small Isles - £2,000

Ward 21

Lochaber Coastal Rowing - Each Dubh Mobilisation - £100

National Trust for Scotland - Glenfinnan Sunday Bus Service - £750

Lochaber Pride - First Pride Parade - £500

Linnhe Leisure - Manual Mobile Wheelchair lift - £1,000

Lochaber Trusts and Bequests:

Elizabeth George Bequest – Lochaber Lunch Club - £179.10

M Campbell Gift Fund – Lochaber Lunch Club - £25.93

Ben Nevis Pathway Fund - Nevis Landscape Partnership – £1,273.25

Fort William Poor Fund - Plantation Community Larder, Voluntary Action

Lochaber - £512.89

14. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED**, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 12 May, 2025 which had been approved by the Council on 26 June, 2025.

Arising from the minutes, it was **NOTED** that:-

i an invitation had been sent to 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. A response to this invitation was awaited.

ii the following information was still to be received by Members:- Corran Ferry Update Report:-

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.

iii there was now an action tracker of decisions made by the Committee to ensure agreed actions were carried out in a timely manner.

The meeting ended at 1.07pm