

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, and remotely on **Monday, 10 November, 2025 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr S Cameron
Mr J C Grafton

Mr T MacLennan
Ms L Saggars
Ms K Willis

Officials in attendance:

Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner, Place Service
Mr R Bartlett, Principal Officer Traffic & Parking (Acting), Place Service
Ms E Wilkinson, Principal Housing Officer, Place Service
Mr P Nevin, Legal Manager (Conveyancing & Commercial), Corporate Service
Mr M Albiston, Solicitor (Litigation & Advice), Corporate Service
Ms T Batchelor, Solicitor (Conveyancing & Commercial), Corporate 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 M Culbertson, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund
Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager (West & Mid Highland)
Mr J Maclean, Bereavement Services Project Manager, Place Service
Ms R Robertson, Project Co-ordinator, Place Service
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate Service

Also in attendance:

Inspector K Duncan, 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 the Committee.

Ms K Willis in the Chair

At the start of the meeting, the Chair on behalf of the Committee welcomed Councillor S Cameron, Caol and Mallaig Ward, to his first meeting of the Lochaber Committee.

The Committee also extended their best wishes to former Councillor Sarah Fanet who had left the Council in October. Sarah was thanked for her contributions to the Council and Ward business over her time as a Councillor. Sarah would be very much missed and the Committee wished her well for the future.

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

There were none.

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

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

Item 12 – Ms K Willis

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

There was circulated Report No LA/27/25 by the Area Commander, Police Scotland.

Following commentary on the report by the Area Commander, the following main points were raised by Members and responded to:-

- in terms of hate crimes, Police Scotland were fully committed to dealing with such crimes and had a zero tolerance approach to any hate crimes. The Police worked to ensure the wellbeing of the victims of such crimes and this was an ongoing process. In terms of detection rates, hate crimes could cover a wide range of incidents and the Police would deal with the evidence presented to them when investigating crimes of this nature;
- the Home Office had announced that Asylum Seekers would be located in the Highland area, and it was queried if this would have any impact on Police Scotland Officers in the Lochaber area. It was advised that there was no information about Asylum Seekers being located in the Lochaber area and therefore it was not anticipated that there would be any impact on Police Officers in this area at this time.
- Police Scotland were not aware of any reports of fraudulent schemes involving parking meters in this area.
- the issue of anti social behaviour and vandalism was raised and the focused efforts by Police Scotland in dealing with this. The role of the Childrens' Panel and Procurator Fiscal in taking robust action to deal with individuals behaving in this way was highlighted. Reports in the media stated that vandalism across the Highlands had cost £100,000 in the last year. Police Scotland understood the impact of this behaviour on communities and they would always deal with such incidents robustly and working in partnership with other agencies and parents of young people involved in this behaviour. Some of the work and resources available to tackle this problem was detailed.
- Police Scotland working with partners tried to address the problem of young people using electronic cigarettes or vapes, such as through education in schools, test purchasing. Alcohol was also a contributing factor in anti social behaviour and there was a focus on addressing the problem of underage drinking.

The Committee **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2023–2026 Year 1 attached as Annex A to this report, for the period covering 01 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.

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

There was circulated Report No LA/28/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

The report detailed one community regeneration fund application received for consideration from Mallaig Community Hub and Shop. There was a request for funding of £50,000 with an available budget of £600,197.08. The application was eligible for support.

Following a summary of the assessment of the application, it was queried and advised that the current lease of the property was to the end of 2027 and the organisation had a commitment from the Landlord to extend the lease for another 5 years from end 2027. The organisation would have up to one year to spend the grant, but there were no concerns that this project would take a year to complete.

It was noted that a further nine local community regeneration fund applications are currently in progress, targeting the first Lochaber Area Committee of 2026, with an additional two still to confirm if they wish to go forward. The current indicative value of these applications was approximately £425,000.00. There may be still time for other applications to come forward for consideration at that meeting, but this would need to be reviewed on a case by case basis. There would be flexibility to carry forward an underspend to a future meeting.

Further, a new website was about to be launched for the Community Regeneration Fund, called 'Be Connected'. Community Groups would be able to put their ideas for projects on the website, and it could be monitored how they were developing.

Following consideration, the Committee **AGREED** the application from Mallaig Community Hub and Shop for Community Regeneration Fund grant award and the grant requested.

5. Short Term Let Control Area Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine

There was circulated Report No. LA/29/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

In discussion, Officers were thanked for all their hard work into producing the report. This was an important and significant report for the Lochaber area. An opinion was expressed that short term lets were having a detrimental impact on local communities. For some time there had been a significant increase in the number of properties being purchased for the purpose of turning into short term lets. In particular, property developers and companies from outwith Lochaber were purchasing homes in the area for this purpose. These were not community based investors with the consequence that homes were being taken out of the local housing stock. The report highlighted that 10% of homes were now short term lets in Lochaber and 40% of house buyers were from outside the Highlands. Local people were finding it increasingly difficult to purchase or rent homes. While tourism was vital to Lochaber, however short term lets were having to much of a detrimental impact on communities that action needed to be taken to resolve this. It was important to note that a short term let control area would not have retrospective impact on existing short term lets, but would only apply to new short term lets. A short term let control area would help ensure there were more homes available for living in to the benefit of local communities.

In response to a query, it was advised that if someone built a new property they would require planning permission. If they subsequently turned their old property into a short term let, this currently did not require planning permission, unless the property was in a short term let control area. If annexes were tied to a dwelling and not separate units, and the property was to be sold, the property would require to be sold with the annex.

Clarification on the consultation process was provided and the importance of making the consultation informative and accessible to the public was highlighted. Feedback on the outcome of the consultation would be provided to local Members.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the evidence presented demonstrating the degree of prevalence of Short Term Lets within Lochaber;
- ii. **NOTED** that this evidence, demonstrates that the housing market within parts of Lochaber, is subject to significant pressure, exacerbated by high rates of potential dwellings being converted to Short Term Lets;
- iii. **NOTED** that the designation of any new Short Term Let Control Area will have no retrospective impact on existing Short Term Lets where no material change of use had occurred at the time of establishment and will therefore only require planning permission from new Short Term Lets established after a Short Term Let Control Area comes into force;
- iv. **NOTED** that should the Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee formally commence the process of introducing a Short Term Let Control Area, this will initiate a process of further evidence gathering and public consultation with communities;
- v. **AGREED** that the Lochaber Area Committee seeks to progress the consideration of a Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of the Lochaber Area; and
- vi. **AGREED** that progressing with consideration of a Short Term Let Control Area enables communities within the area to participate in that consultation at the appropriate stage.

In terms of Standing Order 9, with the consent of the meeting the following item was taken after item 4 on the agenda.

6. Fort William Common Good Fund – Parking Costs Maoin Math Coitcheann a’ Ghearasdain – Cosgaisean Parcaidh

There was circulated Report No. LA/30/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place. Members were invited to agree that £4249.55 costs incurred by the Council’s Parking Enforcement Team to operate the paid parking scheme at the Fort William Common Good site is charged against the Fort William Common Good Fund.

Following commentary on the report by the Principal Officer Traffic & Parking (Acting), a view was expressed that before the Committee agree to this recharge, confirmation was requested whether all of the outstanding works requested by Members as custodians of the Common Good Fund from the Parking Management Service had been completed, namely:-

sections of the car park were poorly surfaced/badly lined which made the car park quite hazardous once it was dark early in winter months; the results of an assessment of the sea wall containing the West End car park; the Common Good Fund was not in place for the whole of 2024/25 and therefore clarification was required as to the duration the Common Good Fund was being charged; an explanation of how the 55%/45% split in income/costs between the Common Good Fund and the Council for the West End car park, was arrived at; clarification

on whether the Common Good Fund would be liable for any major future repairs to the sea wall containing the West End car park; and ongoing management and maintenance plans of the Common Good Fund assets and how funds would be dispersed.

Further, there was an area in the West End carpark mainly used by Council staff. It was queried if this would be formalised into a long term agreement. An undertaking was given to provide information on this to Members.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the costs incurred to operate the paid parking scheme and the charge against the Fort William Common Good Fund;-
- ii. **AGREED** not to approve this recharge until all the following outstanding matters about the West End Car park previously raised by Members were resolved:-
 - Information on when would maintenance on sections of the car park that were poorly surfaced/badly lined be undertaken ;
 - Information be provided on the results of an assessment of the sea wall containing the West End car park;
 - clarification on whether the Common Good Fund would be liable for any major future repairs to the sea wall containing the West End car park;
 - the Common Good Fund was not in place for the whole of 2024/25 and therefore clarification was required as to the duration the Common Good Fund was being charged for parking costs;
 - an explanation of how the 55%/45% split in income/costs between the Common Good Fund and the Council for the West End car park was arrived at;
 - information be provided on management and maintenance plans for the Common Good Fund assets and how funds are dispersed.

7. Invitation to Pay Income **Teachd a-steach bho Chuireadh gus Pàigheadh**

There was circulated Report No. LA/31/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on income generated in the area via the Invitation to Pay scheme in Council operated Car Parks.

In response to a query it was advised that there were 80 parking bays in Mallaig, West Bay Car Park, with a £53 per bay cost allocated to the car park. There was also a £400 cost per ticket machine and there were two ticket machines in that car park. Therefore, annual costs for this car park were £5,040, excluding transaction fees. It was requested that this information be provided in future reports to the Committee. Further, it was advised that Parking Services did not have revenue or capital budgets for car parking maintenance. The income from costs referred to above would go into a corporate budget.

It was recognised as good practice that income raised in a particular ward is allocated to that ward so that the public could see the practical benefits of the scheme.

The Committee **NOTED:-**

- i. the earmarked funds for this Committee from the Invitation to pay Parking of £8,593.91; and
- ii. that in future reports there would be a detailed explanation of income and costs associated with the invitation to pay scheme in Mallaig West Bay Car Park.

At this point the meeting adjourned for a comfort break and it resumed again at 12.20 p.m.

8. Bereavement Services Project updates Cunntasan às Ùr mu Phròiseact nan Seirbheisean Bàis

There was circulated Report No. LA/32/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the work being undertaken on burial ground capacity and new and/or extended burial grounds in the Lochaber area.

In discussion, it was welcomed that works were ongoing to extend the existing Glen Nevis burial ground given the pressure on space left in the burial ground. An update was sought regarding storm damage to Duror burial ground. An update would be sought and information provided on this to Councillor T MacLennan.

In relation to Kinlochmore burial ground it was advised that there was under 2.5 years capacity at this site and there was capital funding approved for a new site. Ground testing for the proposed new site would be required and the results of this would be shared with Members. If the ground tests showed the site was not suitable, alternative sites would need to be identified in South Lochaber. If the tests were successful it was anticipated that the new site would be ready by end 2027. Any new extensions would cover at least 25 years capacity.

The challenges in some areas with burial ground provision with it becoming increasingly difficult to identify available land for development of extensions or for new burial grounds was recognised. In Ward 11 there were a number of burial grounds now closed and it was queried what the future provision would be for these areas. All opportunities were investigated where there may be potential for new burial ground sites.

Kilmonivaig burial ground was closed to new purchases, but it was still maintained. An undertaking was given to fix the gates to the burial ground.

The Committee **NOTED:**

- i. the current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Lochaber area; and
- ii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development.

9. Housing Management Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Càraidhean Thaighean

There was circulated Report No. LA/33/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. The report provided information on how the Housing Service performed in

relation to Scottish Social Housing Charter and other performance indicators up to 30 September 2025.

In discussion, there had been cases where private residents had been moved out of their homes by private landlords due to anti social behaviour. They had then been housed in Council accommodation. It was felt that if there had been Social Services intervention this may have prevented the tenants being moved from their private rented accommodation. Members were advised that the council had an anti social behaviour officer and referrals could be made to this officer by local housing teams.

The number of housing allocations to homeless presentations had increased considerably and it was queried what the effect of this was on housing waiting lists. It was advised that when allocations were made, consideration was given to those on the general waiting list, housing transfer list and homeless list. A breakdown of homeless presentations that were urban and rural would be shared with Members.

In terms of there being a lack of adapted accommodation for disabled people, it was advised that when properties became vacant, opportunities to future proof these homes for use as disabled accommodation was considered. The same approach applied to existing tenancies where their homes could be adapted to their specific needs, if the property allows for this.

An update was requested on the travellers site on Locheilside. Information on this would be provided to Members.

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

10. Corran Ferry Update Cunntas air Aiseag a' Chorrain

There was circulated Report No. LA/34/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place which provided an update on the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme, the Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel and Corran Ferry Service operations.

In discussion, reference was made to the marshal project which had gone well and had been welcomed by the community. Some feedback on the trial was provided particularly relating to the Corran side, such as marshals should be more proactive working at the top of the slipway leading onto the A82 so that they were also at the back of the queue as well as the front of it.

At the last meeting of the Committee, 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 was to have been provided to the Committee. It was advised that this information had not as yet been provided to the Committee and an undertaking was given to do so now.

Further, at the last meeting of the Committee consideration was to be given to introducing a road traffic order on the Corran side of the Corran ferry and it was queried what progress had been made with this. Information on this would be provided to Members.

In relation to the introduction of foot passenger fares, it was queried when these fares would start. Also, in terms of the projected £20,000 income from these fares, given the fares were being started late in the year it was queried if this income would be achieved. It was advised that the foot passenger fares were effective from 10 November, 2025 and therefore income from these fares would now be projected to be half the original estimate for the 2025/26 financial year.

It was queried what were the community consultation plans on the Corran Ferry ahead of next year's budget. Community Councils in particular were prepared to have a discussion with the Council about the long term fare structure on the Corran Ferry. The Operations Manager, Corran Ferry undertook to attend the next Ward Business meeting to discuss engagement plans on next year's budget for the Corran Ferry.

It was queried what progress had been made to the long term aspiration of a fixed link across the Corran narrows. It was advised that all efforts had gone into the Corran Ferry infrastructure improvement scheme and ferry replacement scheme. The Council was working with Transport Scotland on a fixed link. However, Transport Scotland declined to include the fixed link in their Strategic Transport Projects Review 2. The Council did not have any funds for a fixed link and would need funding from Government. This aspiration had been fed into the Scottish Government's Islands connectivity plan. The response to this would be shared with Members.

In response to a query, it was advised that the new electric ferry would be part of the small vessels replacement programme and it was expected to be delivered by the end of 2028/early 2029. Further, the application for SSEN shore power supply to charge the new Corran vessel overnight had been accepted and paid with an estimated date for delivery of November 2028.

A view was expressed that from a period of many years when there was no action on replacement ferries, there was now a commitment to build new infrastructure and ferries which was very positive progress.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme & Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel updates; and
- ii. Corran Ferry Service update.

11. Ward Discretionary Fund 2025/26 Buidseat Fo Ùghdarras Uàird

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

Ward 11

CFINE - Fairshare in Highland - £1,200.00

Lochaber Live - free family day - £600.00
Achnacarry Bunarkaig & Clunes Community Group – New village hall project - £2,100.00
Astley Hall Trust – Restructure of Hall Trust - £1,286.00

Ward 21
CFINE - Fairshare in Highland - £530.00
Fort William Marina & Shoreline CIC - Wrapping Fort William Pontoon Facility - £2,915.95
Lochaber Live - free family day - £900.00
HC Gaelic Team - Additional ferry crossings Mod - £1,000.00

Mr J Grafton, Vice Chair of the Committee took the Chair for the next item.

12. Notice of Motion Brathan Gluasaid

Declaration of Interest: Ms K Willis declared an interest in this item as her partner was an employee of Mowi. Ms Willis left the meeting for this item.

The following Notice of Motion was received by the Chief Officer Legal and Corporate Governance –

Escape of Farmed Salmon from Gorsten Fish Farm, Loch Linnhe

The Lochaber Committee expresses its deep concern at the recent large-scale escape of an estimated 75,000 farmed salmon from the Mowi-operated Gorsten Fish Farm in Upper Loch Linnhe following damage to the site during Storm Amy.

This incident represents one of the most significant escapes in Scottish aquaculture in recent years. Experts have warned that even a small proportion of these fish surviving in the wild could have a long-term impact on Lochaber's delicate river systems, including the Sallachan, Kaichnish, Lochy, Lundy, Loy and Nevis, by:

- introducing maladapted genetic material into already endangered wild salmon stocks;
- spreading disease and parasites such as sea-lice; and
- competing with native species for food and habitat.

The Committee notes that:

- The BBC and scientific experts have highlighted the risk that inter-breeding between farmed and wild salmon could cause “major genetic changes” in wild populations;
- Previous Scottish Parliament committee reports have identified under-regulation of fish farming, a lack of transparency, and the need for a robust penalty system for escapes—yet such measures are not expected to be implemented until 2026/27;
- Similar incidents at Colonsay, Kames and Loch Shin demonstrate that lessons are not being learned across the industry.

Accordingly, the Committee resolves that:

1. The Area Chair should write to Mowi Scotland requesting:
full disclosure of the number, size and age of escaped fish;
details of the company's emergency and preventative procedures;
what steps are being taken to recover escaped stock and mitigate the ecological impact.
2. The Area Chair should write to Marine Scotland, NatureScot, SEPA, and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to ask what investigations and enforcement actions are under way and how they intend to strengthen monitoring of aquaculture operations in Lochaber.
3. The Leader of The Highland Council should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands urging that:
the Scottish Government bring forward its planned penalty regime for farmed fish escapes without delay; greater resources be provided for environmental inspection and regulation; any proposals for new or expanded aquaculture developments in Loch Linnhe be paused pending a full environmental assessment of cumulative impact.

The Committee further agrees to refer this issue to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for wider consideration of the implications for marine environmental management and regulatory reform across the Highlands.

Signed: Mr A Baxter Mr J Grafton

In discussion and by way of context, the Motion had been tabled following conversations with wild fishery stakeholders in Lochaber, constituents and discussions with Mowi. The aim of the motion was to create some additional democratic scrutiny and not to condemn the fish farming industry as it was recognised how vital Mowi was to Lochaber's economy and community. Storm Amy caused a significant release of fish into the loch and river systems. Due to climate change, storms would increase and the risk of future significant releases would grow and the wild salmon required some consideration.

The Proposer of the Motion had further discussions with Mowi and the following key points were highlighted: - the Gorsten fish farm was now fully secured and confirmed that 75,000 farmed fish had been released during the storm; they would upgrade the fish pens at Gorsten; Mowi had co-operated with the River Lochy Fisheries Association and agreed a 3 year study to look at the impact fully funded by Mowi and the results published; Mowi would sample rivers at the various salmon development stages; Mowi had offered the opportunity of continued community engagement in order to strengthen environmental protection and fish farming standards.

In light of Mowi's planned infrastructure improvements, point 3 of the motion was amended to delete the following wording - "any proposals for new or expanded aquaculture developments in Loch Linnhe be paused pending a full environmental assessment of cumulative impact."

The Committee **AGREED** the Motion as amended by the Proposer.

Decision

Escape of Farmed Salmon from Gorsten Fish Farm, Loch Linnhe

The Lochaber Committee expresses its deep concern at the recent large-scale escape of an estimated 75,000 farmed salmon from the Mowi-operated Gorsten Fish Farm in Upper Loch Linnhe following damage to the site during Storm Amy.

This incident represents one of the most significant escapes in Scottish aquaculture in recent years. Experts have warned that even a small proportion of these fish surviving in the wild could have a long-term impact on Lochaber's delicate river systems, including the Sallachan, Kaichnish, Lochy, Lundy, Loy and Nevis, by:

- introducing maladapted genetic material into already endangered wild salmon stocks;
- spreading disease and parasites such as sea-lice; and
- competing with native species for food and habitat.

The Committee notes that:

- The BBC and scientific experts have highlighted the risk that inter-breeding between farmed and wild salmon could cause “major genetic changes” in wild populations;
- Previous Scottish Parliament committee reports have identified under-regulation of fish farming, a lack of transparency, and the need for a robust penalty system for escapes—yet such measures are not expected to be implemented until 2026/27;
- Similar incidents at Colonsay, Kames and Loch Shin demonstrate that lessons are not being learned across the industry.

Accordingly, the Committee resolves that:

1. The Area Chair should write to Mowi Scotland requesting: full disclosure of the number, size and age of escaped fish; details of the company's emergency and preventative procedures; what steps are being taken to recover escaped stock and mitigate the ecological impact.
2. The Area Chair should write to Marine Scotland, NatureScot, SEPA, and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to ask what investigations and enforcement actions are under way and how they intend to strengthen monitoring of aquaculture operations in Lochaber.
- * 3. The Leader of The Highland Council should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands urging that: the Scottish Government bring forward its planned penalty regime for farmed fish escapes without delay; greater resources be provided for environmental inspection and regulation.

The Committee further agrees to refer this issue to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for wider consideration of the implications for marine environmental management and regulatory reform across the Highlands.

13. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated for information, Minutes of Meeting of the Lochaber Committee held on 11 August, 2025 which were approved by the Council on 18 September, 2025, the terms of which were **NOTED**.

14. Exclusion of the Public
Às-dùnadh a' Phobail

The Committee **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

15. Amenity Issues – Middle Street, Fort William
Cùisean Goireis – Sràid a' Mheadhain, An Gearasdan

There was circulated to Members only Report No. LA/35/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place. The report updated the Committee regarding amenity issues at Middle Street, Fort William and have the Committee select an option for dealing with the Site.

Following commentary on the report by officers and consideration by Members, the Committee **AGREED** to proceed with Option 2 as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 1.55p.m.