The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held in the Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, and remotely on **Monday, 10 August 2026 at 10.30 am.**

Present:

Mr A Baxter
Mr S Cameron
Mr J C Grafton
Mr T MacLennan
Mr M Prosser
Ms L Saggers
Ms K Willis

Officials in attendance:

Mr W MacKinnon, Community Development Manager (West & Mid Highland)
Ms L Bauermeister, Community Development Manager, Place Cluster
Ms M Maguire, Principal Planner
Mr M Sutherland, Strategic Lead (Operations)
Ms A Martin, FW2040 Project Manager
Mr R Porteous, Operations Manager, Corran Ferry, Place Cluster
Mr M Bain, Project Manager (Corran Ferry), Place Cluster
Mr A Maciver, Principal Engineer, Place Cluster
Mr M Culbertson, Project Officer, Community Regeneration Fund
Mr L MacDonald, Repairs Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr C Scott, Scottish Fire and 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 the 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

   There were none.

3. **Recess Powers**
   Cumhachdan Fosaidh

   The Committee **NOTED** that the Recess Powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 25 June 2026 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Lochaber Committee.

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/27/26 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.

During discussion, information was sought and provided on the following:

- attention was drawn to the wildfire risks associated with the operation of the Jacobite steam train and whether the agreement in place that the diesel rather than steam engine be used during periods of high wildfire alerts was being appropriately adhere to, and what enforcement around this could be undertaken. Attention was drawn to ongoing discussions that were taking place between the operators, national rail, the landowners, the Council and other partner agencies. The SFRS was not an enforcing service but could provide advice and guidance;
- the 'Stay on Side' Fire Skills course was welcomed and it was hoped would be continued; and
- the resources available to the SFRS in Lochaber to tackle wildfires was queried and summarised. In relation to historic land management practices, attention was drawn to the benefits of fire breaks and the provision of fire beaters in key locations. Much more scientific information was available nowadays to understand how wildfires behaved and how best to tackle them, with continuous learning from each incident.

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

5. Fort William Common Good Fund - Q4 2025/26 and Q1 2026/27 (to 31.05.26 only) Monitoring Report
Maoin a' Mhaith Choitcheann a' Ghearasdain - Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteal 4 2025/26 agus Cairteal 1 2026/27 (gu 31.05.26 a-mhàin)

There was circulated Report No. LA/28/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the positive position in relation to the reserves was welcomed and it was queried when the fund might be open to community grant applications. While this was the long term aspiration, further clarity on the Fund's liabilities was required in the shorter term;
- information was sought, and would be provided outwith the meeting, on the following:
    - progress with the seawall of the West End carpark;
    - the situation with the anticipated donation from the Scottish 6-day trials for their use of the West End carpark; and
    - timescales for advertising the putting green shed on the Parade for community use.

The Committee **NOTED** the position of Fort William Common Good Fund as shown in the end of year statement for 2025/26 and Quarter 1 2026/27 (to 31.05.26 only) Monitoring Statement and **AGREED** to provide to Members after the meeting the information requested during discussion.

6. Short Term Let Control Area – Post Consultation Update
Sgìre Smachd Màil Gheàrr-ùine – Cunntas às Ùr às Dèidh Co-chomhairleachaidh

There is circulated Report No. LA/29/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- while the principle of a Short Term Let Control Area (STLCA) was supported, concern was expressed at the inconsistent answers to questions that it was felt had been provided at area and strategic level. A particular query included whether, given the large and diverse nature of the area, specific settlements or communities which were not experiencing housing pressures could be excluded from the STLCA. However, the view was also expressed that excluding a particular village could, over time, shift the housing pressures to that village. A summary was provided of the planning and development plan processes, some of which were relevant to the implementation of the STLCA, and of the localised evidence basis which would be used. It was important to note that while the STLCA boundary could be amended, a STLCA could only be considered in areas which had been subject to consultation;
- concern was expressed in relation to instances where existing operators may need to evidence their planning status, including some who already required planning permission, and the fairness of this on people who had been running a short-term let business for a significant amount of time but did not have proof of their planning permission status. It was suggested that in the past planning advice had sometimes been provided verbally, and that some historical planning permission records had proved difficult to source. In this regard, attention was drawn to the possibility of seeking a certificate of lawful use, which could be obtained by the provision of evidence that planning permission was not required (the use was not a material change of use at that time), or if in the past been required, the change of use could be evidenced to have become lawful through the passage of time, noting that if a letting business had been in operation for more than ten years and where the change of use from residential use to short term letting had continued for at least 10 years without interruption and no enforcement action had been taken, it might become lawful and be capable of being certified through a Certificate of Lawfulness of Existing Use or Development (CLEUD), and could be proven through the provision of receipts, booking, tax or insurance information, then retrospective planning permission might not be required. It was pointed out that HMRC only required records to be stored for six years, not ten, but in Scotland, the 10-year rule generally applied to an unauthorised material change of use, including many changes to or from residential accommodation. The 10-year rule was not set by the Council. It came from national planning legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament and contained within the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended). Local planning

authorities must apply the law; they did not have discretion to create their own immunity periods. It was also clarified that if planning permission was required at present for a property, this was the case regardless of a STLCA, and that the planning permission and STL Licensing processes were separate. It was queried whether the system would place additional pressure on the planning application process;

- Members asked what the response would be to a member of the public who suggested that the STLCA was being introduced because of the Council's failure to build adequate new homes, and it was explained, with reference to the Council's housing policies, that STLCA was not a replacement for home-building, but a means of tackling housing pressures, with particular reference to the number of new build homes that were being converted to short-term let properties. It was also explained why a STLCA was preferable to using planning permission conditions to control the use of properties for short term lets;
- it was queried whether there was a difference in housing pressures between Wards 11 and 21 and attention was drawn to the statement of reasons in the report which showed there was no significant evidence base that supported the removal of either ward from the STLCA;
- attention was drawn to the importance of prioritising the housing needs of young people in the area; and
- it was clarified that there could be significant differences in material considerations for a single detached house in the countryside being used as a short term let, versus an urban flat which had issues such as parking, waste management, and shared communal areas with other residential properties.

Following further discussion, although some reservations were expressed about the proposals, there was consensus among Members to agree the recommendations unopposed.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the consultation feedback and the potential implications that a STLCA will have on communities within Lochaber as set out in Appendix 2 and summarised in Sections 8, 9 and 10; and
ii. **AGREED** to recommend to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee that Lochaber be included within the proposed Highland Rural STLCA, should any decision to submit a proposal for designation to Scottish Ministers be taken.

7. Winter Service Plan 2026/27
Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh 2026/27

Due to officer availability, the Committee **AGREED** to consider Item 7 between Items 11 and 12.

There was circulated Report No. LA/30/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion, confirmation was sought and provided that the Roads and Amenities review would not result in job losses but was a means of those services working more closely and cooperatively with one another. Further information was sought and would be provided outwith the meeting on the following issues:

- confirmation that Juniper Wynd was included in the Plan, and whether reference to Elm Road was an error;
- the arrangements in place, including the location of maintenance workforce, for the repair of leased gritters;
- information on the provision and replenishment of grit bins on the Fersit road, off the A86; and
- progress with the adoption of roads in the vicinity of The Grazings, on the Blar Mhor.

The Committee:

i. **APPROVED** the Winter Service Plan for 2026/27;
ii. **APPROVED** the additional roads on route maps Appendix B; and
iii. **AGREED** to provide the information requested during discussion outwith the meeting.

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

There was circulated Report No. LA/31/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

The Committee **NOTED** that the application that had been circulated had since received the amount requested (£54,160) from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the CRF application had been withdrawn. A further request for EV fast-charging points might be made in future.

9. Fort William 2040 Bi-Annual Update
Cunntas Leth-bhliadhnail a' Ghearasdain 2040

There was circulated Report No. LA/32/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

Following a summary of the report, the following issues were raised:

- Members expressed concern that there was no political representation on the FW2040 Board and the Council's Leader and Chief Executive be asked to consider this, noting that FW2040 funding requests might impact on Members' need to declare a financial interest when making Council decisions;
- a summary was sought and provided on progress with the bus gates on the Blar Mhor (which was moving towards the final stages) and at Upper Achintore (which was still going through the Planning process;
- it was important that bus station plans did not adversely impact parking availability in the vicinity;

- it was hoped the Blar Mhor Liaison Group would be able to take forward issues around the land for community use on the Blar Mhor;
- in relation to active travel, updates were sought and would be provided after the meeting on the Upper Achintore Path adoption and maintenance issues; and
- the need for a community approach to the management of waste and litter on the High Street was emphasised and assurance was provided that work to coordinate this was ongoing.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the progress that has been made with the individual projects within the FW2040 Masterplan as summarised at Appendix 1: FW2040 Bi-annual Masterplan Project Update, July 2026;
ii. **NOTED** the findings from the Greater Fort William Culture and Leisure Options Appraisal as per section 6.2 of the report;
iii. **NOTED** the public consultation on the Fort William Integrated Transport Plan (FW ITP). Further detail is provided in section 6.4 of the report; and
iv. **NOTED** the identified priority FW2040 work areas for the coming year also summarised in section 6 of this report;
v. **AGREED** information be provided after the meeting on the Upper Achintore Path adoption and maintenance issues; and
vi. **AGREED** to request that the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive review the governance of the FW2040 Programme Board to consider appropriate councillor representation from both a political administration and Lochaber level.

10. Corran Ferry Update
Cunntas air Aiseag a' Chorrain

There was circulated Report No. LA/33/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

Following a summary of the report, Members thanked the staff for their effective management of the recent service outages. The plan to introduce smart ticketing was welcomed and information was sought on the estimated revenue from foot passengers, and whether this was predicated to reach the budgeted levels. It was clarified that 'Bhusa' as referenced at para 7.5 of the report referred to straw debris. Attention was drawn to the potential lack of clarity about bicycles being listed as 'free' when the rider would still have to buy a foot passenger ticket.

The Committee:

i. **NOTED** the Corran Ferry Infrastructure Improvement Scheme & Corran Ferry New Electric Vessel updates;
ii. **NOTED** Corran Ferry Service update; and
iii. **AGREED** to provide Members with information on the foot passenger income as requested during discussion.

11. Housing Repairs and Capital Report – 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026

Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais- Càradh Thaighean agus Pròg̀ram Calpa – 1 Giblean 2026 gu 30 Ògmhios 2026

There was circulated Report No. LA/34/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive Place.

During discussion the following issues were considered:

- assurance was sought and provided that no further complaints had been received from residents about water issues in Mallaig;
- in response to a query about why the Caol and Mallaig re-let times were slightly longer than those of Fort William and Ardnamurchan, it was explained that the re-let times were largely dependent on the condition of the properties, and the volume of work required; and
- the capital programmes detailed in para 8.2 of the report were welcomed for improving energy efficiency. Information on the number of properties included was sought and would be provided outwith the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026 and **AGREED** to provide information on the number of properties impacted by the work detailed in para 8.2 of the report.

12. Lochaber Local Access Forum
Fòram Inntrigeadh Ionadail Loch Abar

The Council has a statutory duty under Section 25 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 to establish Local Access Forums for its area. There were six Local Access Forums in the Highland area which advised on matters in relation to the exercise of access rights, the existence of delineation of rights of way or the drawing up and adoption of the Core Path Plan. In addition, they also offered and gave assistance to parties in terms of the resolution of any disputes in this respect.

There was currently a vacancy for Ward 11 on the Lochaber Local Access Forum and the Committee **AGREED** that Councillor S Cameron be appointed to the Forum.

13. Ward Discretionary Fund 2026/27
Buidseat fo Ùghdarras Uàird

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

Ward 11
- Isle of Eigg Resident Association - Community Orchard - £300
- Mallaig Football Club - Mallaig All Weather Pitch - £2,000

Ward 21
- Nether Lochaber Community Association - Maintain and enhance floral displays - £982.60

- Morvern Community Development Company - Improvements Lochaline Harbour - £600
- National Trust for Scotland, Altnafeadh parking design Devil's Staircase & Buachaille Etive Mor - £2,000

14. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There was circulated and **NOTED** the minutes of the Lochaber Committee held on 11 May 2026 which had been approved by the Council on 25 June 2026.

The meeting ended at 12.55pm.