

Castlebay & Vatersay Community Council

Meeting of 26th March 2024 - Draft Minutes

CCC members Present:

Paul McGuire (PMG) – Chair

Katie Denehy (KD) - Vice Chair

Sarah Ann MacLean (SAML Via Teams) – Treasurer

Eileen Frater (EF) – Committee

In Attendance:

Cllr Kenneth MacLean (Cllr KML)

Alasdair Allan MSP (AA. via Teams)

Eoin MacNeil (EMN, VABV via Teams)

Cllr Ian MacNeil, (Cllr IMN Via Teams)

Naomi Robarts (NR)

Helen MacKinnon (HMK minutes)

Summary of Actions at the end

- 1) Welcome** – PMG Welcomed everyone to the meeting which started at 19:02
- 2) Apologies** – Rose MacDougall, Donald MacNeil

Alasdair Allan MSP (AA) was present at the beginning of the meeting to update on the Hub, Ferry situation and Kisimul Castle. He spoke for 40 minutes and his updates on each subject have been added to the appropriate agenda item. He left the Meeting at 19:45

- 3) Minutes of previous meetings** proposed by Eileen McLeod Frater and Seconded by Katie Denehy.
- 4) Matters arising/continuing from last meeting:**

a) Playpark, Streetlights & Roads. KD & PMG took a walk with DJ MacDonald from Roads Dept to show culverts, drains, bridge and vermin issues. Some aspects have been dealt with. They drew a drainage map from Horve to the sea but not yet had feedback on it's inadequacy. KD, with a youth group had highlighted the issues through social media to send to Calum MacKenzie (Head of Assets at CnES). This is a decades long issue so when Councillors visit, they will be invited to repeat the exercise.

Road marking painters are on the sisland presently & they would be coming to the causeway on Wednesday 27th March. There is a collaborative input to guide them. Cllr KML said he sought agreement on whether disabled parking was needed at the Square in Castlebay & at St Brendan's Hospital. The C&VCC agreed that it was needed.

Road side maintenance: NR said Shrubs were encroaching upon the road & scratching cars and requested what could be done. KD replied there was a pot of money totalling £10k to pay for both equipment contractors to maintain the road side so they are safe to drive by. The appropriate equipment needs to be identified and purchased and that a maintenance program is planned.

Streetlights: PMG said street lights had been out for a week in Horve but cannot update when they will be fixed. Cllr Kenneth updated that the cut in Street light hours is unlikely to be reversed. Cllr IMN said the team in Benbecula could do it in-house.

Action 1: [Cllr IMN to check if Benbecula team can fix Horve Street lighting](#)

b) Hub Update

Hospital/Care Facility: AA said he wasn't able to make meetings in Barra last week due to bad weather and wished to update following his meeting with Michael Mattheson¹ who cited budgetary issues for the Hospital and care facility. Capital funding is subject to cuts The Scottish Government need to indicate to CnES what the shortfall would be so a proper assessment can be made and may look at a split campus project. A lot of projects in Scotland are 'on ice'. CnES has plans & costing & shortfall is approximately £10m due to rises in cost of materials. There is no confirmation on timescales so shortfalls can be further increased. Scotland's Capital budget has been cut by 10% as a whole. The decision to pull the funding was so sudden that an alternative option hasn't materialised. AA hadn't had news on the Housing 'with extra care' in partnership with HHP. He said it was disappointing that the Health Board took a long time to ask the Scottish Government for financial input to meet the shortfall and is seeking clarification on what this is going to be.

Castlebay School: With reference to the School estate, Cllr IMN said he hadn't received news from the CnES so he was in a similar situation to AA with regards to the hospital & Care facility. They highlighted the issue that it is a Category D building and very few of these type exist in Scotland (i.e. the worst), so the situation should become a priority. KD highlighted that the school estate is poor and rapidly declining, so the funding shortfall is having an impact, parents are worried that portacabins may need to be an option. PMG said the fabric of Barra buildings generally has seen a sharp reduction there is a lack of input & planning and other places have been prioritised. Cllr IMN confirmed that Cllr Paul Steele has been to see the school also. It is all funding reliant & currently experiencing approx £10-15m shortfall but confirmed that commitment remains for new school with sports facilities.

Outcomes/Actions:

Action 2 With reference to the WI Health Board, Cllrs requested AA for input on getting the Hospital & home facility plan ready for when budgets become available.

Action 3: AA offered another meeting for the CC with a Minister to keep the situation viable. This was accepted by the CC. Cllr KML to action

Action 4: Cllr IMN to update from Malcolm Burr re Hub. He is due to meet with Jenny Gilruth, but this isn't yet fixed.

- c) *Local Health & Social Care Action:* Cllr KML said he will feedback from the Locality Planning Group (LPG), meeting scheduled 9th April. Concerns will be taken forward then. He said he had a meeting with the Integrated Joint Board (IJB) re Dentistry and Mental Health. There is a meeting this Thursday & will update afterwards. We now have one permanent GP covering the hospital & GP surgery with additional locum supply.

Action 5: Cllr KML to raise Dentistry, mental health issues with HHP, Health Board & CnES & feedback at next meeting

- d) *Public Bins* - Cllr KML will be meeting with Ian Campbell of CnES. KD gave him photos of issues with the bin surrounds in the area, so he could take the issue up with the Officer. He requested information for extra bin requirements. NR said the Calmac bins were an Issue.

Action 6 : Cllr KML to speak to Calmac about the bin situation & also feedback at the next meeting about the bin surrounds issue after meeting IC

¹ Michael Matheson was the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health & Social Care, succeeded by Neil Gray

e) *Castle* – AA updated that he was due to meet the ‘MacNeil’ of Barra. He understood a lot of work is due on the castle & that there was a schedule of works for surveys on ramparts, hall and walk-ways. They need to take out enormous quantities of concrete put in by MacNeil’s’ Grandfather in the ‘50’s from the roof of the Great hall. Staff would ordinarily be due to start 1st April if the arrangements are similar to last year, but they haven’t been notified of where or when they might start. Sarah Ann updated that she had emailed SNH. They replied that they planned to use Castlebay Hall on an Ad-Hoc basis; negotiations were on going about an visitor ‘Augmented reality cube’. They confirmed there was a schedule of works in planning stage but that the District Architect & internal specialists would be working on preparatory work in advance of tendering works.

Action 7: SAML was requested to go back to Historic Environment Scotland (HES) for confirmation on provisions for visitors and works

f) *Area Forum* – *The Island* Plan position has been agreed with funding to for an Area Forum Officer but there is no further update since MB needed to leave early.

Action 8: Cllr IMN to arrange a TEAMs meeting with Malcolm Burr to get an update on release of funds for the Area Forum post

g) *Transport Committee (TC)* – the update is that it is now reformed with well attended meetings and is now an opportunity to take strategic planning forward; working holistically, with a united voice. A Local area Forum (LAF) officer could facilitate this with other partners (see item above). A representative from the TC is collating feedback on the residents discount scheme about impact on tourism. It was felt that the reduced fare for residents could reduce numbers for day-trippers, who don’t hugely contribute much to the local economy.

EMN said he will be coming off the Calmac Board in the Summer & that he would be looking for a replacement, he stressed it is an important voluntary position.

Ferries: AA confirmed Calmac were looking at all options for their reduced fleet & replacing the ‘Isle of Lewis’ with the ‘Isle of Arran’. However the ‘Lewis’ failed berthing trials at Uig. AA said Calmac needs to improve communication, he would prefer Senior staff based in the Islands rather Gourock with a relocation policy etc & generally improve their performance. AA said Calmac Board have little practical experience of work at sea & appointments to the Board have more corporate/admin experience than matters directly related to islanders. AA said CalMac need to be more responsive to local queries at meetings. EMN said about 70% of the community had reservations about the tendering process with most wanting a split tender to go out. AA concluded that the community understood the limitations of the fleet & level of service as a consequence. Every island has unique issues.

Local Transport: EMN raised the issue of local transportation provided by VABV. Their £40k allocation has been cut by 55% with effect from July 2024. In the last meeting by a margin of 18-8, Councillors voted to cut the annual grant which makes the service financially unsustainable on top of other rising costs such as fuel & insurance.

Organisations supported include Cobhair Bharraigh & Garadh a Bagh a Tuath; essential 3rd sector organisations that have developed services for years, improving on depleted statutory services, they have expanded for more than 10 years to meet the growing needs of the community. He requested lobbying for the service from the C&VCC in the form of letters of support. Cllrs KML & IMN confirmed they voted in favour of the cut to the transportation budget. EMN said he felt there was a lack of understanding on how

the Third Sector functions locally and how the 55% cut will impact on the vulnerable and elderly in the community along with possible redundancies. Extra funding from Scottish Government & elsewhere may compensate for this but there is no guarantee.

Action 9: EF to do Letters of support to MB in support of the VABV transport services.

Action 10: EMN of VABV will forward information & statistics to EF to enable her to write letters on behalf of the CCC

h) EE Signal – Action PG will follow up on emergency calls with Angus Brendan MP

Other Items for the Agenda

5) CBaB through the Spagan fund has offered £5k annual donation to distribute in small tranches as they see fit. KD confirmed they agreed & funds are expected shortly and looking to have a meeting regarding remit beneficiary feedback, and will update at the next meeting.

Action 11: KD to meet with CbaB re distribution & remit of funds and feedback

6) Herring Walk - KD & HMK have met twice with Bumblebee trust & Thomas Rowse about cutting back brambles with a strimmer & mowing (approximately 5), to create a park. There is an allocation on the part that has been eroded and waiting for the contractor to complete works.

Action 12: KD to make an application to Spagan for the initial strimming & cutting work

7) Cllrs Visits/meetings –

i) The whole CnES Council is down Wednesday 24th April in Vatersay Hall to present their reports. David Macleod, Callum MacKenzie, Malcolm Burr are confirmed to be attending. The meetings are open to the public and PMG said he would encourage attendance & asked that it could be advertised in the Guth Barraigh. There will be an update closer to the time, after Easter.

ii) Transport Scotland are holding a public meeting at UHI Learning Centre Tuesday 16th April 6:00 – 7:30 pm Structured workshop, 7:30 – 8:00 pm drop in session

AOCB – KD brought up a request for a note of thanks to Robert the Dentist for his 25 years of service.

Action 13: KD to write a letter of thanks on behalf of the CCC to Robert McIntosh

Action 14: PMG to do a letter of thanks to Chloe MacNeil for her minute taking for the minutes for 2 years

Finances: SAML updated on finances as follows:

£23,704.44 is the account total, of which most is ring-fenced as follows:

- £11k Grass cutting grant,
- £8,700 Bus Stop,
- £1,500 Playpark.
- £1,400 Pensioners party

All the above amounts are restricted so when these amounts are allocated, the balance will drop drastically.

j) Date of Next Meeting: **Wednesday 29th May 7pm at Barra Learning Centre.**

Summary of Actions:

No	Description	Who	Completed ✓
1	Cllr IMN to check if Benbecula team can fix Horve Street lighting	Cllr IMN	
2	Cllrs requested AA for input on getting the Hospital & home facility plan ready for when budgets become available.	Cllr's IMN & KML	
3	AA offered another meeting for the CC with a Minister to keep the situation viable. This was accepted by the CC. Cllr KML to action	Cllr Kenneth	
4	Cllr IMN to update from Malcolm Burr re Hub. He is due to meet with Jenny Gilruth, but this isn't yet fixed.	Cllr IMN	
5	Cllr KML to raise Dentistry, mental health issues with HHP, Health Board & CnES & feedback at next meeting	Cllr KML	
6	Cllr KML to speak to Calmac about the bin situation & also feedback at the next meeting about the bin surrounds issue after meeting IC	Cllr KML	
7	SAML was requested to go back to Historic Environment Scotland (HES) for confirmation on provisions for visitors and works	Sarah-Ann	
8	Cllr IMN to arrange a TEAMS meeting with Malcolm Burr to get an update on release of funds for the Area Forum post	Cllr IMN	
9	EF to do Letters of support to MB in support of the VABV transport services	Eillean McLeod Frater	
10	Eoin VABV will forward information & statistics to Eillean McLeod Frater to enable her to write letters on behalf of the CCC	Eillean McLeod Frater	
11	KD to Feedback on Spagan distribution and remit of funds from CBaB	Katie Denehy	
12	KD to make an application to Spagan for the initial strimming & cutting work	Katie Denehy	
13	KD to write a letter of thanks on behalf of the CCC to Robert McIntosh	Katie Denehy	
14	PMG to do a letter of thanks to Chloe MacNeil for her minute taking for the minutes for 2 years Continuing action: Follow up on emergency calls with Angus Brendan MP	Paul McGuire	

Abbreviations:

C&VCC – Castlebay & Vatersay Community Council

CnES – Coimhairle nan Eilean Siar

CBaB – Coimhearsnachd Bharraigh & Bhatarsaigh

VABV – Voluntary Action Barra & Vatersay

LAF – Local Area Forum

MB – Malcolm Burr

LPG – Locality Planning Group

IJB – Integrated Joint Board