

Lewis Association of Community Councils

Chair: Alex-John Murray

Clerk: Jacqui Ferguson

lewiscommunitycouncils@outlook.com

Minute of Meeting held on:

13th April 2021 at 7 pm via MS Teams

Present :

Alex John Murray – Chair (Point)
Rhiannon Teather – V Chair (Bernera)
Joanne Dixon – Treasurer (Point)
Jacqui Ferguson – Clerk (Breasclete)
Margaret Ann Maciver (Back)
Calum Ritchie (Bernera)
Angus Alex Mackenzie (Breasclete)
Angus Macleod (Carloway)

Karis Beattie (Pairc)
Susanne Erbida (Stornoway)
Norman Morrison (Tong)
Lois Darley (Uig)
Graham Attrill (Uig)

Apologies:

Cathy Macinnes (Back)
Iain D Macleod (Carloway)
Iain Watson (CnES)

Iain Macaskill (North Lochs)
David Skene (Pairc)

In attendance:

Cllr Norman Macdonald (Cnes)
John Maciver (HHP)
Dena Macleod (HHP)

Donna Smith (TIG)
Stewart Wilson (TIG)

Minutes

The Chair welcomed everyone to what was the first meeting of the recently constituted Lewis Association of Community Councils.

Minutes of Previous Meeting: Approval of the previous minutes were **proposed by Joanne Dickson and seconded by Rhiannon Teather.**

Matters Arising: Jacqui Ferguson had accepted the position of clerk.

Housing

The Chair thanked the representatives of the various housing agencies who had agreed to attend this meeting to hear the views of the various communities.

The discussion began with a statement from Bernera Community Council, who spoke about the problems being faced in that area, and also the positive changes that are happening through community action. They had two specific questions for the representatives.

1. Do you have any plans to address the current inequality in the distribution of the investment in housing projects across the Western Isles? This currently affects rural communities disproportionately and has serious ramifications for our long term viability. Bernera is at least a generation behind more urban areas of the island and this does need to be addressed urgently.
2. Will you commit to working with our community to formulate an achievable plan for affordable housing, which will help us to overcome the obstacles we face in terms of land procurement and financial support?

This was backed up by Pairc and Carloway Community Councils, where the last new housing was built in the 80s and 70s, respectively. All agreed there is a demand for housing and people do want to move to the rural communities. The rural communities are experiencing severe depopulation and feel very much left behind.

D Macleod explained the CnEs local housing strategy was last done in 2016, and that currently 20% of housing in the Western Isles was social housing. Under the Scottish Government Housing to 2040 plan, and in conjunction with CnES, 60% of all new housing will be built outside Stornoway. The problem was the issue of available land. CnES say they are in regular contact with Grazings Clerks and community groups, who say they do not have demand in their area.

This strategy was felt to be a problem by the members present, and that a more holistic community engagement was needed. Grazings clerks were not the ones who should lead on this, but the wider community should be consulted.

It was acknowledged that Grazings Committees were often reluctant to identify land as they were wary of big developments. HHP and TIG both said that rural developments would always be small builds. 4 – 6 houses

Access to developable land was a huge issue. Ownership issues mean that land that may be suitable cannot be accessed while grazings and institutions are reluctant to release land.

HHP do want to build housing if suitable land is available. If any one has any knowledge of land, they are urged to get in contact with Iain Watson, CnES housing manager. HHP will then carry out a demand needs assessment. Consultants would then engage with key community stakeholders as part of this.

Demand must be assessed robustly. HHP had carried out a recent survey in Uig, which identified a need for further housing. This showed the benefit of community engagement in specific areas.

There was discussion on other ways of house building Croft House Grant scheme was mentioned, and ideas of communities working collectively to give young people the wherewithal to build their own.

Vacant houses were also discussed. There is a Vacant House Officer within the Comhairle, and more needs to be known of the scale of this problem. Tied in with vacant croft issue and the feeling that the Crofting Commission are not dealing with absentee crofters.

TIG highlighted the Island Housing Fund, which allows community groups to build their own housing project, if they have land they can develop. This has been extended for a further 5 years. Empty properties have been brought back into occupancy through this scheme.

The main points agreed in this discussion were:

- There is a definite need for housing in rural areas
- There is a strong belief from Community Councils that people will move to rural areas if housing is available.
- Community Engagement needs to be holistic, so the needs of communities are balanced.
- Community Councils should be the initial point of contact for community housing engagement.
- Community Councils best placed to engage with whole community.
- Housing Agencies will engage fully with specific communities on housing needs.
- Housing Agencies should be more visible in communities
- Housing Reps should visit communities in person.
- Community Councils will contact housing agencies and arrange local visits and meetings.

HHP, TIG and CnES will pass on contact details to the Clerk who will forward them to each Community Council.

Smoke Detectors

S. Wilson from TIG explained the new regulations for Fire and Smoke alarms in domestic premises.

All housing to have one smoke alarm installed in room most frequently used.

One smoke alarm in hall or landing on each storey

One heat alarm in every kitchen

All alarms to be ceiling mounted and interlinked.

The average cost for equipment per household is likely to be in the region of £300, not including installation.

TIG are in discussion to access funding for vulnerable households, and will inform community groups if they are successful. Literature will also be sent when available, but information was on the Scottish Government Website.

Fire Scotland were also involved and would be engaging with the public.

All HHP housing stock had been updated to standard..

Close of Meeting.

The Chair thanked all for attending and for taking part in what had been a very useful meeting.

