

# Minutes of Meeting – Kinlochberrie Community Council

**Subject:** Winter Road Maintenance and Community Concerns

**Location:** Kinlochberrie Harbour Office (Community Council meeting)

**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> March 2026

**Chair:** Chris Ambler (KLB CC representative)

**Attendees:** Jasmine Clarke &, Sarah Auchinleck (NHS Ambulance Svce) , Julie Allan (Scourie CC), Sophie Clark (Fire Svce) , Denise Mackay (CAB), Don Campbell (Durness CC), Christine Mackenzie, (KLB fish Selling and Norman Elwick Ltd), Neil Macdonald (Scourie CC)

**Councillors:** Hugh Morrison (local NW independent councillor) and Marianne Hutchison (SNP Councillor, North, West and Central Sutherland).

**Apologies:** Allan Cameron and Johan Macleod (Police)

**Highland Council Representatives:** Debbie Sutton (Chief Officer, Operations and Maintenance)

Joanne Sutherland (Sutherland Area Roads Manager), Callum Macdonald (KLB Scourie and Lochinver roads foreman).

**Minute Taker:** Angela Whitlock-Johnson (KLB CC)

## 1. Purpose of the Meeting

The meeting was held to discuss concerns regarding winter road maintenance in the Kinlochberrie and surrounding West Sutherland area, particularly the lack of side-road treatment at weekends and during winter weather events.

Community members wished to explore whether the current policy could be adapted to better reflect the geography and needs of the local area.

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## 2. Key Issues Raised

### 2.1 Geographic Differences in the Area

- The current winter maintenance policy covers Caithness and Sutherland broadly, but the geography of West Sutherland is significantly different from other areas.
- Many residents live on side roads rather than main routes.
- Example routes mentioned include:
  - Sheigra, Achriesgill East and West, Achlyness, Ardmore, Scourie loop, Tarbet, Fanagmore, Tarbet Junction, Moffat Square, Scouriemore, Upper Badcall
- The Tarbet loop alone is approximately nine miles with several steep sections and homes with elderly residents.

Residents and workers expressed concern that access to these roads is critical for daily life, not only emergencies.

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### 2.2 Emergency and Essential Services Access

Several emergency service representatives and workers spoke about operational difficulties.

Concerns included:

- Ambulance staff sometimes needing to walk to their vehicle due to road conditions.
- Returning from long shifts without blue light exemptions for road treatment.
  - *Debbie Sutton response - The Council don't have a Blue Light Policy, in our Winter Service Policy we state the following:*
  - *2.3 The Council as Roads Authority is not responsible for Winter Maintenance on unadopted roads and will not provide a Winter Maintenance service for unadopted roads. It will however make every effort to provide assistance for emergency and medical services during severe weather conditions where there is an urgent need for safe access.*
- Fire crew response times being affected when personnel cannot leave side roads.
- Coastguard and other emergency responders needing reliable access to remote areas.

It was highlighted that blue light policies apply only in certain circumstances, and many essential workers such as carers are not covered.

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### 2.3 Impact on Health and Social Care

Community members reported serious issues affecting care services:

- Carers unable to reach vulnerable residents.
- Elderly people missing essential care visits for several days.

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- Difficulty accessing medication.
- Lone healthcare workers travelling on unsafe roads.

It was suggested that this places significant stress on vulnerable individuals and carers.

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## 2.4 Impact on Local Infrastructure and Economy

Participants noted several wider impacts:

- Primary school staff unable to travel to work.
- Deliveries to local shops delayed or stopped for several days.
- Fish farm workers unable to reach workplaces on side roads.
- Doctors travelling between surgeries experiencing travel difficulties.

It was emphasised that the local economy operates seven days a week, unlike some urban areas.

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## 2.5 Passing Places and Road Safety

Residents highlighted that:

- Passing places are often not cleared during winter conditions.
- Vehicles are forced to reverse into uncleared areas, causing cars to become stuck.
- This creates unsafe driving conditions.

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## 2.6 Perception of Inequality

Community members expressed frustration that:

- Residents pay the same council tax as people in urban areas.
- However, the level of service is perceived to be significantly lower.

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## 3. Explanation of Current Policy (Council Representatives)

Council officers explained the following:

- The Highland Council Winter Maintenance Policy determines road priorities.
- Roads are categorised into primary, secondary, and other routes.
- Weekend operations differ from weekdays:
  - Secondary routes may be treated later in the day.
  - This allows compliance with driver working hours regulations.
- Staffing and equipment levels are designed for normal frosty conditions, not extreme weather events.

The severe snowfall in early January was described as:

- A rare event not seen in around 10 years.
- Complicated by bank holidays and staffing limitations.

Council officers reported that:

- A local resilience partnership met daily during the event.
- There were no fatalities linked directly to the weather conditions.

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## 4. Resources and Operational Constraints

Council representatives highlighted:

- Limited staffing and equipment.
- Legal restrictions on driver working hours.
- Budget constraints.
- Only a small portion of council tax funding goes to roads services.

Staffing shortages and vehicle issues in previous years were also acknowledged.

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## 5. Community Suggestions

Several suggestions were proposed by attendees:]

### 5.1 Review of Road Hierarchy

- Reassess which roads are classified as primary or secondary routes.
- Some side roads may effectively function as main access roads for communities.

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## 5.2 Community Salt Storage

Proposal to:

- Provide community salt supplies in villages such as Scourie or Drumbeg.
- Allow residents to assist with treating local roads.

Issues noted:

- Deer often consume exposed salt.
- Covered bins or storage may be required.

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## 5.3 Local Contractor Use

Residents suggested:

- Greater use of local contractors and agricultural machinery for snow clearance.
- Faster response compared to contractors travelling from further away.

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## 5.4 Improved Communication

Community Council members reported difficulty contacting council staff.

Requests included:

- More regular communication.
- Clear responses to emails.
- Periodic updates on winter planning.

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## 5.5 Rural Resilience Scheme

A suggestion was made to develop a rural resilience plan that better reflects remote communities, since current schemes mainly address areas with pavements.

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## 6. Additional Issues Raised

Other concerns included:

- Lack of suitable winter vehicles for some NHS staff.
- Growing winter tourism and campervan traffic increasing road pressures.
- Wider concerns about rural depopulation and declining services.

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## 7. Actions Agreed

Council representatives agreed to:

1. Review the Sutherland winter maintenance plan ahead of the next winter season.
2. Provide the Community Council with:
  - The Winter Maintenance Policy document
  - Links to maps showing road classifications.
3. Investigate community resilience options, including salt access.
4. Consider possible changes to road hierarchy classifications where appropriate.
5. Explore improved communication with the Community Council.

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## 8. Next Steps

• Minutes will be made available via Facebook and Website	Angela
• Community Council will review the policy and maps once received.	KLB CC
• Further discussion expected later in the year, likely before winter planning reports are finalised (around late summer).	KLB CC

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## 9. Meeting Close

The meeting concluded with thanks from the Community Council to council representatives and community members for attending and contributing.