

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**Joint Consultation Group (Administrative Etc, Manual and Crafts Staffing)**

Minutes of Meeting of the Joint Consultation Group (Administrative Etc, Manual and Crafts Staffing) held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday, 19 September, 2008 at 10.40 a.m.

**Present**

**Employer's Representatives:**

Mrs C A Wilson  
Mr M Rattray  
Mr A Henderson  
Mr N Donald

Miss J Campbell  
Mr J Finnie  
Mrs P Munro  
Mr J Ford

Also in attendance

Dr D Alston, Budget Leader

**Staff Side Representatives:**

Mr G Reynolds (GMB)  
Ms E Johnston (GMB)  
Mr T McCarthy (UNITE)

Mr S Manning (UNISON)  
Mr S Burroughs (UNISON)  
Mr B Lavery (substitute) (UNISON)

**Officials in attendance:**

Ms M Morris, Assistant Chief Executive  
Mr A Williams, Health and Safety Manager, Chief Executive's Service  
Ms C Christie, Employee Development Manager, Chief Executive's Service  
Ms E Barrie, Personnel Manager, Chief Executive's Service  
Mr B Williams, Head of Corporate Finance, Finance Service  
Mrs S McKandie, Policy and Development Manager/NOSLA Project Manager, Finance Service  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

**1. Chairman and Vice Chairman**

In terms of the Constitution, following an election of councillors, and annually thereafter, the Group was required to appoint from amongst their members a Chairman and Vice Chairman. If the Chairman appointed was one of the Employer's representatives, the Vice-Chairman was required to be one of the Staff Side representatives and vice versa.

In this respect, nominations for the appointment of Chairman were invited.

Mrs C A Wilson, being the only person nominated, was duly **APPOINTED**.

Thereafter, nominations for the appointment of Vice-Chairman were sought.

Mr G Reynolds, being the only person nominated, was duly **APPOINTED**.

## **2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Wemyss, Mr M Ross and Ms L MacKay of the Staff Side.

## **3. Joint Consultation Group (Administrative etc, Manual and Crafts Staffing) Membership**

The Group **NOTED** that at its meeting held on 21 August, 2008 the Resources Committee agreed the following Member appointments to the Group:-

Mrs C Wilson (Resources Chairman) (Ind)  
Mr M Rattray (Resources Vice Chairman) (LD)  
Mr A Henderson (Ind)  
Mr N Donald (Ind)  
Miss J Campbell (LD)  
Mr J Finnie (SNP)  
Mrs P Munro (SNP)  
Mr J Ford (Lab)  
Mr D Bremner (IMG)

## **4. Central Safety Committee Membership**

Members were advised that following recent changes to the Council's Administration, Councillor Graham Marsden was no longer a member of the Joint Consultation Group or the Central Safety Committee.

In this respect, the Group **AGREED** to appoint Mr A Henderson as a replacement representative for the Employer's Side on the Central Safety Committee.

## **5. Budget 2009/10 and Update on 2008/09 Financial Position**

Councillor David Alston, Budget Leader was present at the meeting and together with Mr B Williams, Head of Corporate Finance, they were invited to brief the Group on the new Programme for Highland Council and Budget Planning. In this respect, a copy of the Programme was circulated for information. This was recently approved by the Highland Council at its meeting held on 4 September, 2008.

By way of summary, the Group was advised of the difficult and worsening economic environment which would impact on Council budgets. In particular, exceptional cost pressures to be faced by the Council, including energy cost increases, implementation of the job evaluation scheme, landfill tax increase, pay and pension increases and capital programme costs. In 2009/10 and 2010/11 funding gaps (before considering Service pressures) of £19.6m and £15.1m had been estimated. Therefore the financial outlook for the Council would be extremely challenging for the Council and there would need to be a fundamental review of the way the Council operated its Services.

It was advised that given such budgetary constraints and pressures, it was important for the Council to assess service delivery proposals at an early stage. In this respect, Service Directors had been instructed to develop 2 year savings proposals with 5% annual targets, which should provide flexibility in budget development considerations. The Council's Budget Information Group at a

meeting to be held late October/ early November, 2008 would consider these proposals, with a view to these being considered by political groups in November/December, 2008. Thereafter, the Highland Council at its meeting in February, 2009 would agree the budget and council tax for 2009/10 and indicative figures for 2010/11. At present there were no plans for job reductions although this may require to be reviewed in light of the difficult budget situation.

Finally it was advised that every effort would be made to manage a very difficult financial situation and the Council would be consulting closely with the trade unions and staff throughout the budget process.

In response to a request from the Staff Side, it was advised that consideration would be given to making representations to the Scottish Government for additional funding to cover exceptional energy costs.

Thereafter, the Group **AGREED**:

- i that consideration would be given to making representations to the Scottish Government for additional funding for local government to cover significant increases in energy costs; and
- ii that the trade unions would be kept informed of any significant changes to the budget position of the Council.

Thereafter, the Chairman on behalf of the Group thanked the Budget Leader and the Head of Corporate Finance for their attendance and for the information that they had provided.

## 6. Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Group held on 27 June, 2008 were **APPROVED**.

Arising from the minutes the following matter was raised:

Mileage Allowance Rate – in relation to Staff Side concerns over fuel price increases and the fact that no matching increase had yet been made to the Council's mileage allowance scheme, the Group **NOTED** that the Assistant Chief Executive and the trade unions were to have a separate meeting on this issue. Should it not be possible to reach agreement, this matter would be referred back to the Group for consideration. The Assistant Chief Executive undertook to keep the Group updated on the matter.

## 7. Shared Services Update

- i Shared Services Diagnostic Project

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/6/08 dated 10 September, 2008 by the Assistant Chief Executive enclosing for information a copy of an earlier report submitted to the Resources Committee on 21 August, 2008 which provided an update of the progress to date on the Shared Services Diagnostic Project.

The Council along with all Scottish Councils had initiated a project to identify where efficiencies could be achieved against a range of common functions. The project used a nationally developed diagnostic tool to develop a strategic view of potential improvements and efficiency savings across all Services of the Council.

The project was split into four stages of which the Council was currently in stage 4 – Business Case Development. This involved developing high level business cases for the short listed opportunities which would then be presented to the Senior Management Team for approval. The business case development stage would end in December, 2008 at which time a further progress report would be submitted to the Joint Consultation Group. It was further advised that the project had the potential to deliver significant efficiencies for the Council over the next 10 years.

The Group **NOTED** the updated information provided in relation to progress being made on the Shared Services Diagnostic Project, and that a further progress report would be submitted to the next meeting.

ii North of Scotland Local Authorities (NOSLA)

A presentation was made at the meeting by Mrs S McKandie, Policy and Development Manager/NOSLA Project Manager, providing an update on progress being made in relation to the NOSLA feasibility study. The purpose of the study was to examine the feasibility of creating Shared Services for revenues and benefits administration, billing and collection. Seven local authorities were included in the study.

The presentation covered the key stages in the project, and in terms of the options appraisal stage (whereby a preferred model was selected), creating a single NOSLA Revenues and Benefits organisation had received the highest score in this exercise. Currently work was ongoing to develop this option which would be based on a number of agreed design principles. The functions and responsibilities of the new single organisation would also require to be developed. Consideration still had to be given to a number of issues such as - whether the change to a single organisation should be done all at once or on a phased basis; in terms of governance arrangements of the project, whether there should be a lead authority; and the resource needs of the project team.

In response to questions, it was explained that it was intended to use the expertise of in-house staff in the various organisations to develop the project. However bringing in external expertise could not be ruled out. It was confirmed that contractors bidding for the Council's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) contract were aware that there maybe a requirement for them to deliver an ICT Service for Shared Services should the Council so desire. It was also advised that none of the work currently being undertaken on Shared Services would preclude the option of the ICT contract being carried out in-house.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** progress being made in relation to the North of Scotland Local Authorities feasibility study.

The Chairman on behalf of the Group thanked the Policy and Development Manager/NOSLA Project Manager for her presentation.

**8. Fourth Employee Survey – Corporate Improvement**

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/7/08 dated 4 September, 2008 by the Assistant Chief Executive which outlined the proposed corporate improvements to be taken in response to the views expressed in the fourth Highland Council Employee Survey.

The Group was advised that an Action Plan would be developed from the improvement actions specifying responsible officers and targets. Progress against the action plan would be monitored by the Employee Survey Reference Group, which had representatives from all Services, and through the Chief Executive's Quarterly Performance Review meetings with all Services. It was advised that a report on progress would be presented to Resources Committee in September, 2009 and staff would receive an update on progress through a newsletter and Service channels in September, 2009. It was also reported that Directors would report to future meetings of the Joint Consultation Group on Service specific improvements.

The Group **NOTED**:

- i the corporate improvements in response to the fourth Employee Survey;
- ii the proposals for monitoring progress on the corporate improvements as outlined in Section 4 of the report; and
- iii that Directors would report to future meetings of the Group on Service specific improvements.

## **9. Highland Council Workforce Management Plan 2008/11**

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/8/08 dated 4 September, 2008 by the Assistant Chief Executive which presented the revised Highland Council Workforce Management Plan setting out new objectives for 2008/11.

The Staff Side were invited to submit any observations/comments on the Plan by 30 September, 2008. In this respect, the Staff Side requested that the consultation period be extended in order to allow them more time to consult with their members, and this request was accepted by the Group.

Thereafter, the Group:

- i. **NOTED** the revised Highland Council Workforce Management Plan 2008/11;
- ii. **AGREED** to support the objectives identified within the Action Plan;
- iii. **NOTED** that any observations/comments from the Staff Side would be submitted to the Assistant Chief Executive prior to the next meeting of the Group on 12 December, 2008; and
- iv. **NOTED** that any final amendments, following consultation with the trade unions, were delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of the Resources Committee.

## **10. Professional Fees and Subscriptions**

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/9/08 dated 9 September, 2008 by the Assistant Chief Executive which outlined a proposal which would be submitted to the Resources Committee on 1 October, 2008 to amend the current policy of non-payment of professional fees / subscriptions / registrations.

In response, the Staff Side raised concerns that only one category of staff would benefit from these proposals. There were other categories of staff where the payment of professional fees and subscriptions would have an equally detrimental impact on their pay, given their lower salary levels.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** that a further report should be submitted to a future meeting of the Group addressing the concerns raised at the meeting.

### **Post Meeting Note:**

*Following the meeting of the Group, the Staff Side were provided with further clarification and information on this issue and had now confirmed their support for the proposals as follows:*

- i* **AGREED** to support the proposal to amend the existing policy for professional fees as follows:
- the Council would reimburse staff for professional fees where those fees exceeded £400 per annum with staff required to pay the first £400;*
  - the rate would be adjusted in line with the cost of living; and*
  - reimbursement would only apply to payments to one professional body per employee.*
- ii* **NOTED** that a report would be presented to Resources Committee on 1 October, 2008 to seek approval for the revision of the policy.

### **11. Date of Next Meeting**

The Group **NOTED** that the next meeting would be held on Friday, 12 December, 2008.

The meeting ended at 11.55 a.m.