



# In Brief

Corporate Communications for staff

# Gu Geàrr

Conaltradh Corporra do luchd-obrach

# Staff engagement feedback

Throughout November there were over 50 sessions with staff, members and the public which provided an excellent opportunity to hear what was important to people.

There were many great ideas on how we could do things differently and be more efficient - this was an overwhelming theme in our engagement. We also heard lots of examples of good practice and an appetite for innovation.

Thank you again to all staff who participated in these sessions across the Highlands. This has given us a huge amount of information and a much better understanding of how we can do things better and make real improvements across the Council.

A Member seminar in this month is considering staff and public feedback. They are discussing council governance arrangements and the budget in the light of emerging themes from this engagement.

We will then be back out again to meet with staff, trade unions, partners, groups and communities in the coming weeks.

## What you told us – make the Council more efficient

You told us improving our ICT was critical in order to improve productivity. Linked to this was the importance of digital transformation and shared IT systems between departments. Suggestions also included the importance of more online processing, online forms and simplifying internal processes such as recruitment.

You provided ideas about how we work across the organisation. You thought there were opportunities to review functions across departments, where similar tasks were being done in several locations, and combine teams with similar roles in order to achieve greater productivity.

## What you told us – be more commercial and focus on income generation

Your feedback mirrored many of the messages from communities about the need to focus on income generation rather than reducing service delivery. You provided suggestions about potential opportunities for generating income such as selling staff skills, using Council assets (property and land), charging for electric vehicles and investing in energy generation.

## What you told us – change the organisation through redesign and improvement

Feedback suggested that there was support from you to be more involved in improvement processes, such as Lean reviews



# Promoting Staff Wellbeing in 2019

and change programmes. You were able to suggest potential areas for focusing improvement such as simplifying our online processes, rationalising our property assets, spend to save on areas such as (plant) vehicles and IT systems.

## **What you told us – the importance of staff - A flexible and well managed workforce**

A key message from you was the organisation should make better use of the staff we have and have a more flexible staff group. This included developing the skills of staff to do a range of jobs within their community, undertaking more work internally rather than externally procuring, and retraining staff into key service roles locally.

The importance of communication and involvement were key messages; the opportunity for your voice to be heard but also to hear what is happening with your feedback. You suggested we need to get better as an organisation at saying what we do well and working with our communities. You also told us that there was a need for stronger management visibility at a local level to ensure staff are supported.

Senior managers will also be revisiting staff and teams to provide support where issues have been highlighted in previous visits.

We recognise there is a need for a change in culture and we will be working with members and managers to identify how we provide the right training and support for staff moving forward in the coming months.

New Year can be a difficult time for many of us - emotionally, mentally and physically for all kinds of reasons. Our wellbeing is extremely important and there is lots of information and support to help anyone who is going through a difficult period.

Information and guidance on stress, finances, health and wellbeing is posted on the Intranet. Managers are reminded of the support, guidance and information, including toolbox talks to encourage conversations, available to them on this website:

[http://bit.ly/promoting\\_staff\\_wellbeing](http://bit.ly/promoting_staff_wellbeing)

## Skype for Business

Skype for Business is a communication platform for instant messaging, audio and video conferencing and online meetings. It can help us stay in touch with colleagues and staff and save money by avoiding travel. Information on how to use Skype is on the **intranet** in the ICT toolkit.

[www.highland.gov.uk/staffsite/info/69/ict\\_transformation\\_training/238/ict\\_toolkit/23](http://www.highland.gov.uk/staffsite/info/69/ict_transformation_training/238/ict_toolkit/23)

# Message from the Chief Executive

I have been in post for 3 months and have been really inspired by many staff I have met. I have seen good teams with strong relationships and positive values and attitudes. I have been impressed by the quality of services being provided and staff who are really considerate and professional in dealing with sometimes difficult circumstances.

Thank you also to all those who put such a lot of effort into charity work over the festive period which resulted in some very successful fundraising for worthwhile local causes.

I believe there is genuine appreciation by the public for the good work being done by staff and a real empathy towards the challenges we face.

As you know, we've been planning for several months for budget reductions over the next 3 years and have carried out significant engagement to identify local priorities and areas of potential savings.

Considerable detailed work on the budget continues and there are still levels of uncertainty. We anticipate that due to a range of additional cost pressures, risks and new legislative requirements, we will have a gap in our budget of around £30M for 2019/20.

We were already preparing for a significant reduction, and this bigger gap in our funding will mean we may need to bring forward savings identified for future years.

We have taken a new approach to the budget setting this year. This has involved examining every budget in detail and identifying where savings can be made through becoming far more efficient and doing things differently.

We will be re-basing all budgets, focusing on outcomes and national bench-marking measures, simplifying processes and removing all waste and inefficiency.

We are working very hard to identify savings to balance the budget on 14<sup>th</sup> February. Protecting jobs is a priority and everything possible is being done to avoid redundancies, which impact on both individuals and the local economy. Big changes to how we currently do things, and a more flexible workforce are key to us achieving this goal.



## In Year pressures 2018/19

As you will be aware, we are also continuing to work on current in-year pressures with tighter financial controls and a freeze on filling vacant posts. This is essential in helping us to protect jobs. It is important that everyone is as flexible as possible moving forward. Thank you to everyone who has helped in achieving significant progress with reducing our overspend and we appreciate this has not been easy.

However, despite the measures we have taken, there are a number of unachieved in-year savings and considerable pressures from pay awards, teacher pensions and inflation.

With such a big budget gap looming for 2019/20, we simply cannot afford to dip into our Reserves so it is imperative that we bring the current budget under control.

### This will mean a range of additional measures which will remain in place until the end of the financial year:

- ◆ We will be calling in all purchase cards
- ◆ There is to be no non-essential travel for the next 3 months
- ◆ There is to be no non-essential budget spend and to ensure this we will be implementing controls on ordering and removing some areas of discretionary spend
- ◆ We will continue to freeze all vacant posts, except a very small number which have statutory implications
- ◆ There will be a ban on all unauthorised overtime
- ◆ There is to be no unauthorised use of agency work.

I hope that you understand how necessary these additional measures are. It will not be easy, but it is vital that we are on the soundest financial footing moving into the next financial year.

If you have any concerns, please discuss these with your line manager in the first instance. I have briefed the senior management team who will be working with staff to ensure measures are implemented and to find interim solutions to resolve any impacts. Detailed guidance will be provided to managers to help them in this.

Everyone has a part to play in making The Highland Council a more efficient and effective organisation which will be a resilient, secure and successful place to work in the coming years.

*Donna Manson*  
**Chief Executive**

# BREXIT (EU EXIT) Briefing Note

Various strands of work are taking place across the Council to prepare for the EU Exit on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

There is much uncertainty around what will happen and the potential impacts on the Highland region. The Council is working extensively with different national groups to look specifically on impacts on Local Authorities, workforce, economy and resilience planning based on best assumptions. Various workshops are taking place early in the year including a COSLA event in January and a Local Resilience Partnership workshop on 6<sup>th</sup> February. EU Exit has also been considered at a range of other forums.

## National Assumptions

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The Council is linked into the national Resilience Partnership work on EU Exit risks and assumptions.

The latest information as it becomes available is made known and shared with the Council and partners, and potential impacts and mitigation is considered at this forum.

There is much uncertainty, however shorter term impacts may include interruption of essential supplies, with potential longer term impacts on the workforce and the economy.

## How can we prepare?

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The EU Exit is a stated risk on our corporate Risk Register.

One of the ways in which we can plan for any eventualities affecting our critical business areas is to review our Business Continuity Plans (BCPs). BCPs for all services should be urgently reviewed in the light of potential EU Exit impacts, mitigation should be considered and plans should be exercised prior to 29<sup>th</sup> March.

If you have any queries regarding your Business Continuity Plans, discuss this with your line manager or contact the Resilience Team on: **[emergency.planning@highland.gov.uk](mailto:emergency.planning@highland.gov.uk)**

## Technical Notices

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The UK Government has published a series of Technical Notices that set out information to allow organisations, businesses and citizens to understand what they would need to do in a 'no deal' scenario, so they can make informed plans and preparations.

These Technical Notices are on the UK Government website and include information on a range of topics such as trading standards:

**[http://bit.ly/UK\\_leaves\\_EU\\_no\\_deal\\_brexit](http://bit.ly/UK_leaves_EU_no_deal_brexit)**

## Workforce

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The Council is working with COSLA and Scottish Government to develop clarity on issues and to design an approach to help SLA's understand workforce implications and prepare readiness plans. The Council is also working to help mitigate the impact on our existing and future workforce.

A strong message of reassurance was made in the spring of 2018 to EU nationals. Following this a workforce audit was carried out to identify staff who are EU Nationals and offer direct communication and support. The staff survey identified that around 5% of the total respondents (152) identified as EU/EEA national. Focused engagement has taken place through line managers with hard to reach staff groups within Services. (e.g. Toolbox talks in CS to encourage completion of the Survey).

Web pages have been developed to disseminate information and link to latest published updates and ongoing communication includes:

- ◆ FAQ's webpage
- ◆ Specific forums (e.g. application support)
- ◆ Guidance surgeries (Area based)
- ◆ Support for applying for relevant documentation

## Brexit Seminar

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EU funding has brought hundreds of millions of pounds of assistance to the region over the past 40 years and there would be a considerable impact to the economy if this level of support is not replaced.

The Highland Council agreed key policy areas on which to lobby post BREXIT at its meeting in September 2018. There is a need to ensure that Scottish and UK policy addresses the economic circumstances of Highland, to ensure that the challenges of living and working in the region are identified, and that the case for investment and support is made to enable the region to realise its full potential. In this context, the Council has agreed that regional policy; inward migration, access to markets and agriculture crofting and land management, are priority issues to be progressed.

In order to support the Council's continued engagement and ensure the needs of our businesses and communities are recognised, a Brexit seminar was held on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2018 at Council Headquarters. This considered potential impacts but also how these might be addressed.

## Preparedness Notices

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The European Commission has developed a number of Preparedness Notices aimed at preparing citizens and stakeholders for the withdrawal of the UK.

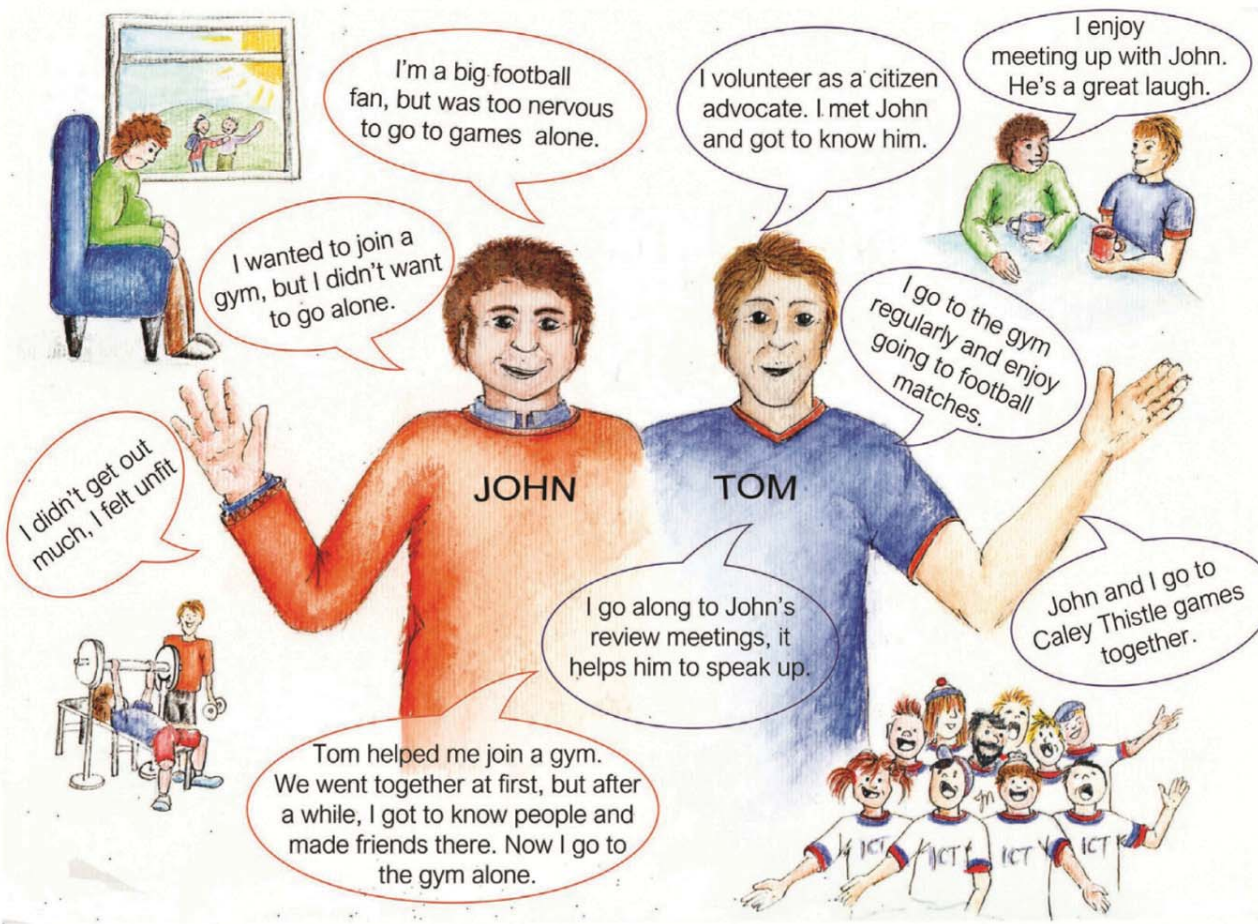
[http://bit.ly/preparedness\\_notices](http://bit.ly/preparedness_notices)



# Volunteer as a Citizen Advocate



Make a difference to someone in your community



## Citizen Advocacy Inverness

Connects a person with a disability with a volunteer in their community.

Full training is provided as well as ongoing support to all Volunteer Citizen Advocates.

### Contact Us

#### Citizen Advocacy Inverness

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