

The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum – Elected Members/Staff Side Group

Minutes of Meeting of The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 15 May, 2015 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mrs J Douglas (substitute)
Mr G Mackenzie

Mr T Prag
Ms M Smith

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr J Gibson (UNISON)
Mr M Haymer (GMB)
Mr R Selkirk (GMB)

Mr D Morrison (UCATT) (substitute)
Mr A Wemyss (UNITE)
Ms M Macrae (RCN)

In attendance:

Mr S Barron, Chief Executive
Ms M Morris, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development Service
Mr B Alexander, Director of Care and Learning Service
Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Mr J Batchelor, Head of People and Performance, Corporate Development Service
Mrs C McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform, Chief Executive's Office
Mr M MacDonald, HR Manager, Corporate Development Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Ms M Smith in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr D Alston, Mr A Christie, Mr D Hendry and Mrs C Wilson of the Employer's Side and Ms L MacKay and Mr M Murphy of the Staff Side.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 6 February, 2015, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Workforce Planning

There had been circulated Report No. SPF/6/15 by the Head of People and Performance which provided an update on the production of Service

Workforce Action Plans and the proposed corporate actions relating to workforce planning particularly in view of the budget challenges facing the Council.

In terms of the training on workforce planning that had been offered to the Executive Leadership Team and Senior Managers, it was queried if this training would be offered to the Staff Side. It was confirmed that it would.

The Staff Partnership Forum **NOTED:-**

- i the updates on the proposed corporate actions and the production of Service Workforce Action plans; and
- ii that workforce planning training would be offered to trade union representatives.

5. Early Retirement/Voluntary Severance Scheme

There was circulated Report No. SPF/7/15 by the Head of People and Performance which proposed a revised Early Retirement/Voluntary Severance Scheme following the meeting of the Staff Partnership Forum on 6 February 2015, a subsequent meeting with the trade unions (including the EIS) on 24 February 2015 and further consideration by the Executive Leadership Team on 16 March 2015.

In particular, it had been proposed that the Forum considers renaming the Early Retirement/Voluntary Severance Scheme, the Early Departures Scheme and the Early Retirement Sub-Committee the Early Departures Sub-Committee. Following consideration, the Forum preferred 'Employment Release' as an alternative name for the ER/VS Scheme and Early Retirement Sub Committee.

In terms of the proposed ER/VS Scheme, it was proposed that Employee's granted employment release by the Council on voluntary redundancy or efficiency grounds will not be re-employed by the Council in any capacity without the specific approval of the Chief Executive. A similar proposal related to employees retired on the grounds of ill health. The Staff Side were concerned that some people may want to come back to the Council in a different capacity at a later date, and it was requested that this issue be considered by the proposed new HR Sub Group. It was confirmed that the wording of the Policy would be looked at. By way of information it was advised that Audit Scotland wanted the Council to have a procedure for not re-employing people who had been granted employment release.

It was advised that the revised proposals would be submitted to the next meeting of the Resources Committee with the proposed changes coming into effect on 1st June, 2015.

The Staff Partnership Forum **AGREED:-**

- i to support the revised proposals and the recommendations as set out in Section 2 of the report and the renaming of the Scheme and the Sub-Committee as 'Employment Release'; and
- ii that the wording of the scheme relating to Re-Employment would be considered by the new HR Sub Group.

6. Flexible Retirement Policy

There was circulated Report No. SPF/8/15 by the Head of People and Performance which outlined the proposal to amend the current Flexible Retirement policy to include a requirement for employees to commit to a retirement date when applying for flexible retirement.

It was advised that following discussion with trade union representatives, the suggested period of notification an employee provides for a leaving date was recommended as 'up to 3 years'. It was also recommended that this is reviewed over the next 2 years to check for any impact on Services' workforce planning. Following a request from the Staff Side, the review date would be included in the Policy.

The Staff Partnership Forum **AGREED**:-

- i that the Flexible Retirement policy should be revised to include the provision that when flexible retirement is requested, the employee must specify a leaving date, which will then be the period of notice to be worked; and
- ii Option 2 – 'up to 3 years' as it provided flexibility for employees approaching retirement, assists with Service's workforce planning, and reduces the legal risks to the Council. This option would be reviewed over the next 2 years to check for any impact on Services' workforce planning. The review date would also be included in the Policy.

7. Human Resources Policy Update

There was circulated Report No. PF/9/15 by the Head of People and Performance which proposed updates to Human Resources policies and procedures.

It was queried how future changes to HR policies and procedures would be approved and where the HR Sub Group would fit in this process. It was advised that where there were legislative and statutory updates to HR policies, these would be actioned as appropriate, and for any other changes to HR policies and guidance, it was intended that they would go through the HR Sub Group. It was requested that a remit for the HR Sub Group be submitted for approval to the next meeting.

The Staff Partnership Forum:-

- i **AGREED** the reformatting of HR policies and procedures as proposed in section 2 and set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
- ii **AGREED** the introduction of the new Maternity, Adoption & Parental Leave Policy as set out in Appendix 1;
- iii **AGREED** the specific changes proposed to the Whistleblowing Policy as set out in section 3;

- iv **AGREED** that a remit for the HR Sub Group be submitted for approval to the next meeting;
- v **NOTED** arrangements for the approval of future changes to policies and supporting guidance as set in section 6.
- vi **NOTED** that further guidance will be prepared to support managers, employees and their representatives in the application of HR policy through the HR sub group.

The meeting concluded at 10.45 a.m.

Date of Next Meeting – Friday, 14 August, 2015 at 10.30 a.m.