

**The Highland Council
No. 11 2015/2016**

Minutes of Special Meeting of the Highland Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 24 March 2016 at 2.00pm.

**1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence
A' Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan**

Present:

Dr D Alston	Mr N MacDonald
Mr R Balfour	Mr D Mackay
Mrs J Barclay	Mrs D Mackay
Mr A Baxter (by video-conference)	Mr W MacKay
Mr I Brown	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs C Caddick	Mr A Mackinnon
Mrs I Campbell	Ms A MacLean
Miss J Campbell	Mr T MacLennan
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr K MacLeod
Mr A Christie	Mrs B McAllister
Mr B Clark	Mrs I McCallum
Mr J Crawford	Mr H Morrison
Dr J Davis	Mr B Murphy
Mrs M Davidson	Mr F Parr
Mr N Donald	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Duffy	Mr G Phillips
Mr D Fallows	Mr T Prag
Mr G Farlow	Mr M Rattray
Mr B Fernie	Mr I Renwick
Mr M Finlayson	Mr M Reiss
Mr J Ford	Mr A Rhind
Mr C Fraser	Mr G Rimell
Mr H Fraser	Mrs F Robertson
Mr L Fraser	Mr J Rosie
Mr S Fuller	Ms G Ross
Mr J Gordon	Mr G Ross
Mr B Gormley	Mr R Saxon
Mr K Gowans	Dr A Sinclair
Mr A Graham	Mrs G Sinclair
Mr J Gray	Mrs J Slater
Mr M Green	Ms M Smith
Mr R Greene	Ms K Stephen
Mr A Henderson	Mr J Stone
Mr D Kerr	Mr B Thompson (by video-conference)
Mr R Laird	Mrs C Wilson
Mr B Lobban	Mr H Wood
Mrs L MacDonald	

In Attendance:

Chief Executive	Director of Care & Learning
Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development	Director of Finance
Director of Development & Infrastructure	Director of Community Services

Mrs I McCallum in the Chair

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Bremner, Dr I Cockburn, Mrs G Coghill, Ms J Douglas, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar and Ms L Munro.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

Prior to commencement of the formal business, the Council observed a Minute's Silence to remember the victims of the recent terrorist attacks in Belgium.

3. Re-design of the Highland Council Ath-dhealbhadh Chomhairle na Gaidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No. HC/16/16 dated 17 March 2016 by the Chief Executive which set out proposals for leading and progressing the re-design of the Highland Council.

During a summary of the report, the Chief Executive confirmed that the case for redesign of the Council was clear and that, whilst there would be Highland aspect which would be unique, lessons could be learned from other Councils across the UK who had already gone through this process.

It was clear that the Council would need to operate in future with less funding, with uncertainty over the raising of local taxation and working with national Government to deliver national initiatives. It was also envisaged that the ambition of the Council in terms of localism and democratic renewal would come to the fore in the re-design process and as such the proposals within the report centred on aspiration and ambition. This was evidenced by the recent signing of the City Deal and significant investment in the Capital Programme, with leverage from such investments being crucial to future successes.

In considering specific aspects for change, it was suggested that there could be a focus on liaison with community planning partners and the business sector, the joint working arrangements with NHS Highland, engagement with communities (through participatory budgeting processes) and partnerships with individuals (through initiatives such as self-directed support) which were all examples of successful joint working arrangements.

It was also stressed that the Council needed to become more commercial with an awareness of the opportunities for generating income, recognition of avenues for investments and returns and a focus on the cost and value of initiatives. Addressing new ways of working would include being more fluid and supportive as opposed to siloed and controlling, with a more collaborative and dispersed style of leadership. A systematic approach to the resolution of issues and problems would also be needed whilst maintaining a focus on the priorities of localities across the Highlands.

Overall, the emphasis had to be not on services but on place and consideration would firstly have to be given to what the Council currently did (and what it should do in the future) before deciding on how this should be done.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- it had to be acknowledged that there would be an ongoing impact on the Council as a result of the budget decisions which had been taken and the loss of staff through voluntary redundancy;
- the report had clearly illustrated the potential decline in local authority spending and as such consideration required to be given to new ways of addressing funding for future years;
- in terms of adult social care, it would be vital to shift the balance of care to deal with the expected increase in the adult population;
- a focus on the increase in charges for children's services also had to be considered as a priority;
- the opportunity now existed to rebuild momentum and enthusiasm for the future through a Member led restructure of the Council which was locally focused and Highland based;
- there was a need for the Board to work closely with the Commission for Highland Democracy;
- it was imperative that the Council maintained an outward looking focus across all areas of service and that local communities were included wherever possible;
- there was need to be clear about the calculated risks which would need to be taken;
- there was now an enhanced and much stronger role for the Audit & Scrutiny Committee in terms this work, including a focus on the calculated risks to be taken, what needed to be changed and overall performance;
- this work represented a huge commitment for the Re-design Board and as such there was a need to communicate its work with a web page for posting minutes, papers and a communications plan;
- there was a need to consider proposals for the long term, including capital investment, and to liaise with partners at all stages of the process;
- there was real concern about the effect of budget reductions on local communities, most specifically vulnerable people and marginalised groups, and it was essential that proposals were transparent, fair and equal for all;
- the financial position of the Council had to be clearly identified from the outset in order that any communication strategy started from a basis of realism, openness and honesty;
- the loss of staff in the short term represented a considerable reduction in hours of work and it was therefore essential that there was a focus from the outset on the remaining staff and specifically the identification of the standards of service which could be provided which needed to be commensurate with the resources available;
- the use of the most up-to-date technology was essential in terms of helping and assisting the work of the Board;
- it was important that every single option was considered as part of the determination of future services to be provided;
- the proposal to renew the Council's purpose and ambition (which meant being clear about the difference the Council wanted to see made to the lives of Highland citizens and making a regional contribution to the country's success) was welcomed;
- external challenge from outwith the Council would be essential as the work of the Board was taken forward;
- more clarity was needed on what represented the statutory duties of the Council;
- staff within the Council, and frontline staff in particular, were in regular contact with the public and could offer valuable insight into what mattered to people;

- it was imperative that mechanisms were in place to offer support to staff given the recent changes;
- there was a need for more delegation to local staff and managers;
- it had been proposed that a programme should be put in place which placed staff at the centre of making change happen and which valued and supported them as excellent public servants but it was essential that Elected Members, and specifically the importance of their role, was also highlighted;
- it would be helpful if all Members of the Council could attend Board meetings and have access to both agendas and reports at an early stage in order that full consideration could be given to all proposals coming forward;
- the Audit & Scrutiny Committee would have a significant role in this process as it progressed and it was suggested that lessons could be learned from the process which had been adopted for the previous Customer Services review;
- the outcome of the work would mean difficult decisions for Members; and
- there was a need to recognise the downstream consequences of the changes and that not all communities would be able to take on responsibility for services.

Decision

The Council **AGREED** as follows:-

- (i) that there was a need for re-design of the Council given the financial position and outlook;
- (ii) that a re-design process should be inclusive of the views from a range of stakeholders with its purpose and scope as described in Sections 3 and 4 of the report;
- (iii) that a Board should be established to lead and oversee the work which would have a title and 16 Members throughout its term and that Groups should identify their Members as per the formula within one week;
- (iv) that the work should start immediately to meet the first deadline for budget proposals in December 2016 and the second deadline of March 2017 for proposals on operations, public participation and staff development programme, with progress reports being brought to each Council meeting over that period;
- (v) that a budget of £150,000 should be drawn from the 2015/16 year end underspends and used to resource a small internal team and a range of external support for the Board; and
- (vi) that the Board should consider adopting the methods proposed in Section 6 of the report.

4. Membership of Committees, etc Ballrachd Chomataidhean, is eile

Members were advised that Mr D Millar had confirmed that he had left the Highland Alliance and joined the Independent Group.

In addition, Mr D MacKay had confirmed that he had now joined the Highland Alliance.

On that basis, the political make-up of the Council was now as follows:-

Independent – 32 / SNP – 20 / Liberal Democrat – 12 / Labour – 8
Highland Alliance – 5 / Non Aligned – 3

The formula in respect of the number of places on Strategic Committees remained unchanged at 9/6/3/2/2.

In this respect, revised Committee membership lists were **AGREED** at the meeting.

Ross County Football Club

At this point in the meeting, the congratulations of the Council were conveyed to Ross County on their recent achievement of winning the Scottish League Cup.

Recognition was also given to the fact that both the Scottish Cup (which had been won by Inverness Caledonian Thistle in the previous year) and now the League Cup were in the Highlands.

The meeting ended at 3.00pm.