

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

Minutes of Meeting of The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 20 January, 2017 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mrs I Campbell
Mr R Greene
Mr A MacKinnon

Mr A Rhind
Mrs A Sinclair (by telephone conference)

Staff Side Representatives:

Ms L MacKay (UNISON)
Mr J Gibson (UNISON)
Mr R Selkirk (GMB)

Mr D Morrison (UCATT)
Mr A Wemyss (UNITE)

In attendance:

Mr S Barron, Chief Executive
Ms M Morris, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development Service
Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Mr S Walsh, Head of People and Transformation, Corporate Development Service
Mr E Foster, Head of Corporate Finance, Finance Service
Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Mr A Rhind in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Davidson, Mr B Fernie, Mr A Henderson, Mr D Millar and Mrs M Smith from the Employer's Side and Mr M Murphy, Ms M Macrae from the Staff Side and Mr B Alexander, Director of Care and Learning Service.

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 4 November, 2016, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from Minutes

There were no matters arising.

5. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

There had been circulated the following Service Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings for information:-

- i. Corporate Development Service – 19 October, 2016;
- ii. Finance Service – 14 December, 2016;
- iii. Care and Learning Service – 23 November, 2016; and
- iv. Community Services – 18 November, 2016.

Arising from the minutes the following matters were raised:-

- (a) Corporate Development Service Minute – 19 October, 2016 – the Staff Side were aware that there were performance issues with the new provider of the Occupational Health Service and that discussions with the company to address these problems had not adequately improved matters. This was having an impact on staff who required occupational health services and an update on this matter was sought.

The Forum was advised that an Action Plan had been agreed and the company had been given three months to provide at least the same level of service previously received. A review meeting had been held with the company to discuss the continued poor performance and the option of terminating the contract was explained to the company should performance not improve. It was explained to the company that this was having a detrimental impact on staff, who were not receiving the support they required. Extra staff resources were also required from the Council to make up for shortcomings in the delivery of the contract. The company accepted that performance was below the required standard and agreed to submit a rectification plan within 10 working days. The Council would then have 10 working days to approve/not approve the plan. The company had recently appointed a local Senior Nurse which was a key appointment, so some progress was being made.

Continuing, if the contract was terminated, the Council was looking at a contingency plan i.e. the appointment of other providers for occupational health services. This work was currently underway to ensure that there was continuity in service if the contract was terminated.

The Chair on behalf of Elected Members appreciated the Staff Side's concerns and they were sympathetic to the effects this situation was having on the support that should be in place for staff. Officials were working to resolve the contract issues as soon as possible.

- (b) Care and Learning Service Minute – 23 November, 2016 – in relation to Management of Schools programme, the Staff Side were concerned that a report on this was to be submitted to the Education, Children & Adult Services Committee on 26 January, 2017. It was their view that the Principal Teacher Primary Management post that was required for the restructuring did not formally exist under Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) guidelines. The Staff Side had repeatedly requested that the Council contact the SNCT and the General Teaching Council for Scotland regarding this and had suggested that a

Depute Head Teacher in each of the schools suggested would be a good solution for this post.

The Chief Executive undertook to speak to the Director of Care and Learning about this matter and would respond to the Staff Side.

- (c) Community Services Minute – 18 November, 2016 – in relation to the depots review affecting building maintenance, it was **AGREED** that the Director of Community Services would provide a written update next week on the review to the Staff Side.

6. Revenue Budget

In highlighting progress on the revenue budget since the last meeting, the Head of Corporate Finance advised that the Council had now received an announcement on the Local Government Settlement for the year ahead and there was a £17m reduction in core funding from the Scottish Government. There was some new monies to be received for new spending commitments e.g. attainment funding for schools of £4m, and there would be extra income from the decision by the Scottish Parliament to raise the Council Tax levels for properties in Bands E to H and this would equate to an additional £5m in Council Tax income. Taking consideration of costs pressures and council commitments, it was estimated that there was a £17m savings requirement to be met. Directors had been asked to come forward with budget savings proposals for the Administration's Budget Group to consider.

In terms of the Administration's Budget Group consideration of savings proposals, these were at an advanced stage compared to last year's budget process, which had been an extremely challenging and difficult process, and Members apologised to the Staff Side for the late changes to budget proposals that occurred last year. It was hoped that there would be no late changes in this year's budget process and to this end the Administration's budget proposals would be shared and discussed with the other Political Groups of the Council in advance of the Council budget meeting in February, 2017. Members were aware of the importance of keeping staff and trade unions informed of the budget position.

In relation to the Employee Early Release Scheme the indications were that the number of applications that would require to be accepted would be considerably less than last year's Voluntary Redundancy Scheme.

The Staff Side requested that an update on the budget proposals be provided at the scheduled budget meeting next week and this was agreed by the Forum.

Thereafter, the Staff Partnership Forum:-

- i **NOTED** the budget position; and
- ii **AGREED** that an update on the budget proposals be provided to the Staff Side at the budget meeting next week.

7. Redesign of The Highland Council – Update

There was circulated Report No. SPF/1/17 by the Head of Policy and Reform which provided an update on the work of the Redesign Board which included Trade Union representation. It described the progress made since the up-date to the Forum on 4th November 2016 and the next steps. The Board continued to meet fortnightly in order to report its recommendations to Council in March 2017.

The Forum was invited to comment on the developments reported and to identify any feedback it seeks to give the Redesign Board.

Trade Union representatives continued to participate as Board members and Members appreciated their constructive input into these meetings. In this respect, it was felt that this was a good way of conducting business and it would be good to continue this approach in future when there were opportunities to do so. It was advised that from a Management perspective being able to hear challenges early in the process and to consider impact on staff side issues earlier in the process would be helpful. Further, it was hoped that the Redesign Board would be making a recommendation to the new Council to continue using this format and also the method of peer reviews with Staff Side representatives which would be a good way of working together effectively in future.

In response, the Staff Side advised that they would welcome the continuation of joint working as used in the Council Redesign process. They appreciated being able to hear the views of Elected Members when they meet staff, share ideas and the Council as a whole would benefit from this. The greatest asset of the Council was its staff and it was important to listen to their ideas. It had been a good example of partnership working and for the Staff Side to be involved early was good for all concerned.

Thereafter, the Staff Partnership Forum **NOTED** progress on the redesign process to date.

8. Employee Early Release Scheme

The Head of People and Transformation explained that the Employee Early Release Scheme (EERS) had been implemented along with vacancy controls and control over the use of agency staff to avoid, where possible, compulsory redundancies. The Scheme closed to applications on 20 January, 2017 and to date there had been 291 applications for early release. Directors had early access to applications from within their services to enable them to do some contingency planning on potential redeployment of staff in scope for prospective budget savings. A report would be submitted to the full Council meeting on 16 February, 2017 for Members to consider the number of applications to be approved. Thereafter, the first agreements for staff to leave the Council would be in April, 2017.

There would be continuing budget challenges in the next few years, and therefore the Staff Side queried if staff who had applied unsuccessfully this year for early release, could be informed that the Council may reconsider their application in future depending on budget circumstances.

In this respect, there was an opportunity in the report on the EERS to Council in February to suggest to Members that the Scheme be held open until later in the year, as the new Council will need to consider proposals for a 3 to 5 year financial plan and the expectation would be for further reductions in the Scottish Government Local Government Grant in the next two years, so more savings will be required and potentially more jobs deleted from the establishment. The Staff Side were asked if this suggestion had their support.

In response, the Staff Side advised that they would consider the suggestion and report back to the Chief Executive next week. They did feel it important that there should be a review of how well the current EERS worked and learn the lessons from it before it was continued. It was advised that the Administration's Budget Group would be discussing this matter with Officials.

Thereafter, the Staff Partnership:-

- i **NOTED** the update in respect of the Employee Early Release Scheme; and
- ii **AGREED** that the Staff Side would respond to the Chief Executive next week with their views on a potential continuation of the Employee Early Release Scheme.

9. Attendance Management – New Support Activities and Interventions

There was circulated Report No. SPF/2/17 by the Head of People and Transformation which presented an assessment of the impact on attendance management from new support activities and interventions, and a look ahead at how interventions are expected to provide for sustainable improvements and longer term benefits.

The Staff Partnership Forum **NOTED** the report.

10. AOCB

2017 Pay Award Negotiations

The Staff Side advised that Cosla had been due to speak to trade unions in December, 2016 on negotiations on the 2017 pay award, but that they cancelled this meeting. The Staff Side expressed their disappointment that this meeting had been cancelled.

It was advised that there was to be a meeting of Cosla on 27 January, 2017 and the Chief Executive undertook to brief the Staff Side on the non confidential parts of those discussions in relation to the pay award.

The meeting concluded at 11.10 a.m.