

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 Wednesday 31 October 2018 at 10.35 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mrs Margaret Davidson
Mr Allan Henderson (by telephone conference)
Mr Bill Boyd (substitute)

Staff Side Representatives:

Ms Liz MacKay (UNISON)	Mr Rodger Cram (UNITE/UCATT) – (Substitute)
Mr Paul MacPherson (GMB)	Mr Alister Wemyss (UNITE)
Mr Rikki Selkirk (GMB)	Ms Margaret Macrae (RCN)

In attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Ms S Campbell, Interim Director, Care and Learning Service
Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side
Mr M MacLeod, Council Redesign Lead, Chief Executive's Service
Mr S Walsh, Head of People and ICT, Corporate Resources Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

Mrs M Davidson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie, Mr A Baxter, Mr A MacKinnon and Ms M Smith from the Employer's Side and Mr J Gibson and Mr I Macleman from the Staff Side and Mr D Yule, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources and Mr S Black, Director of Development and Infrastructure.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mrs M Davidson declared a non financial interest as her son was an employee of The Highland Council but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that the interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion at the meeting.

Ms Liz MacKay (UNISON) declared a non financial interest in respect of item 4ii (Vans Home Policy) as she worked one day a week at the Dornoch Building Maintenance Depot, but concluded that the interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion at the meeting.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 3 August, 2018, the terms of which were **APPROVED**, subject to the following amendment: -

Item 6, Redesign of the Highland Council – first sentence of number iv should read:-
“Community Services is considering on how to ensure the right staff and skills are in place to support Members with car parking choices across the disaggregated budget for Community Services.”

4. Matters Arising from Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

i Parking at Diriebught Depot – there had been a commitment to provide additional welfare facilities prior to this Winter, but the Staff Side advised that welfare facilities at Diriebught Depot were not in place yet.

In response, the Director of Community Services advised that at a meeting with trade union representatives, options in respect of portacabins had been provided, but trade union representatives requested more detail and additional specification about this proposal. Thereafter, a draft specification had been produced and six suppliers had been identified. The specification would be issued to the suppliers by the end of October, 2018. A considerable amount of work had been undertaken by Officials in liaison with trade union representatives to try and put welfare facilities in place at Diriebught that was acceptable to trade unions. While the facilities would not now be in place before the end of the year, it was important to ensure that the specification for the facilities was acceptable to all parties.

ii Vans Home Policy – the Staff Side advised that this Policy had due to be considered by the HR Sub Group in September, but the meeting had been cancelled. In response, it was understood that the meeting had been cancelled as trade union representatives were not available. Further, HR had submitted a paper on the Vans Home Policy on 18 October, 2018 and the changes being suggested, to trade union representatives. Feedback on this from trade unions had been sought.

It was requested that the HR paper on the Vans Home Policy be resubmitted to trade union representatives for comment.

iii Trade Union Facility Time – the Staff Side were to provide a report on Trade Union Facility Time for consideration by the HR Sub Group. However, given that the last HR Sub Group meeting had been cancelled, the Staff Side undertook to provide a report for discussion with HR. It was advised that the Council had a statutory obligation to publish facility time and this had now been published on the Council's website.

Thereafter, it was **AGREED** that the issue of Trade Union Facility Time would be conducted outwith the Forum by Officers.

iv Bullying and Harassment Policy – it was noted that trade unions had comments on the Guidance document to the Bullying and Harassment Policy. It was advised that

this had been issued to trade union representatives and that the deadline for comments was 9 November, 2018.

v ASN Allocation – it was noted that there was still an issue with the late notification of allocating Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) hours to schools. It was advised that one to one meetings with PSAs were only being instigated when trade unions became involved and reminded Line Managers of their responsibilities. As this was a potential redundancy situation, there was a need for recognition that redeployment must be offered to these staff members.

In response, it was advised that specific training on ASN allocation would be arranged for Head Teachers. This would be discussed at meetings with Head Teachers in November and the information to be discussed would be shared with staff side representatives. Consideration had already been given to the process for allocating PSAs hours to schools for the coming year and guidance on what was expected would be issued to Head Teachers. Any concerns about individual cases should be brought to the attention of the Interim Director of Care and Learning.

It had previously been agreed to investigate how prevalent the issue of late notification of allocating PSAs hours to schools was and report back. It was advised that the Head of Additional Support Needs was undertaking this action.

vi Staff Forums - it had been reported at the last meeting that Redesign Board members would have the opportunity of attending the next round of staff forums in September, 2018. It was noted that these staff forums had not taken place, as it was explained the format of staff forums was changing. Other staff engagement events were being planned instead, for example, to discuss the budget.

vii Pay Award – it was advised that all trade unions were currently balloting their members on the pay award.

viii Agenda for Change Pay Negotiations – it was noted that these negotiations were now complete and implemented.

5. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

There had been circulated the following Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings for information:- Corporate Resources Service – 26 September, 2018; Care and Learning Service – 16 August, 2018; Community Services – 24 August, 2018; and Development and Infrastructure – 17 August, 2018.

Arising from the minutes, the following matters were raised:-

i Corporate Resources Service Minute

ICT Issues – it was reported that a rectification plan was in place for Office 365 issues and the majority of issues that staff have had were now resolved. It was acknowledged that ICT issues were causing staff a great deal of frustration and there was a need for the new device rollout to fully resolve the problems. In this respect, the aim was to speed up the device rollout to staff. The plan to do this had still to be finalised, but an assurance was given that this was a top priority. It was also advised

that continuing issues relating to direct access (which allowed staff to work from home) would not be fully resolved until the new device rollout was completed.

In terms of the effect on staff moral that the ICT issues was having, the new Chief Executive would be undertaking a staff engagement exercise and staff would have the opportunity to raise concerns at these events. As part of the rectification plan for Office 365, Heads of Service had been contacted to understand where the significant ICT issues were in their Service and there had been ICT clinics and floor walking by Wipro staff to resolve problems.

It was important that staff reported ICT issues with the Service Centre so that they could be rectified as soon as possible and thereby avoiding the frustration of continuing with the problem.

It was advised that the chromebook rollout to schools was ahead of schedule and it was a matter for the Care and Learning Service how quickly they could deliver the devices to schools. In this respect, it was proposed by the Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side that if schools were to get their devices ahead of schedule, this could have a big effect on what schools can and cannot do in terms of the working time agreement. Any change to the agreement had to be agreed with schools, as there could be knock on effects in respect of the curriculum, with an earlier than expected rollout.

In response, schools would be notified of the chromebook rollout plan and any issues with workload would be discussed with the schools prior to the rollout. A copy of the chromebook rollout plan would be sent to the Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side.

ii Care and Learning Service Minute

Sustainable Education in Highland Communities - it was noted that there was still no trade union representative on the Board.

iii Community Services Minute

Waste Services Restructure - It was advised that a report on this restructure would not now be reported to EDI Committee in November, pending discussions on wider Service issues with the new Chief Executive.

6. **Redesign of the Highland Council**

There was circulated Report No. SPF/7/18 by the Council Redesign Lead which provided an update for the Forum on redesign, staff engagement and workforce implications since the last meeting in August, 2018.

In discussion relating to the Agency Staff Peer Review, it was advised that some agency staff would be transferred into the Council's employment. Any suggestions from the Staff Side in terms of reducing reliance on the use of agency staff would be welcomed, particularly in respect of Area Social Work and Foster Care. The ambition was to have permanent Council staff and not rely so much on agency staff. Most agency staff were employed in the Care and Learning and Community Services of the Council. Also, anything trade unions could do to influence national policy in this area would be helpful as the costs of employing agency workers were significant.

In terms of employing agency staff, it was queried if there was a standard rate for a job, e.g. for a Social Worker. It was advised that there was a standard rate for each job. However, in some specialist areas, particularly in Social Work, where it was difficult to recruit, this could increase the cost when hiring agency staff. Therefore, as a solution an option was for the Council to grow its own staff through apprenticeships and to do this there would need to be more investment in training. A good example was provided in relation to apprentice mechanics in Community Services, who would soon be coming to the end of their apprenticeships and would then have the opportunity to apply for vacancies. Also, the Council's Modern Apprenticeship Scheme would enable the Council to grow its own staff.

It was suggested that there may be benefit in contacting the staff bank team in NHS Highland in relation to hiring staff. This team now had responsibility for the management of agency staff and had significantly reduced costs.

It was confirmed that the Agency staff peer review would look at appropriate linkages with partner organisations and would review the current use of agency staff including the contract with a view to identifying efficiencies.

Thereafter, the Forum **NOTED**:-

- i. The Peer review into Commissioned Children's Services had now concluded and was being considered by Council on 25th October 2018. This had identified the opportunity and benefits associated with providing an in-house hub;
- ii. The review on building trades services was nearing completion. The review will highlight the benefits of building and re-aligning in-house capacity to reduce costs of procuring from the private sector. It is intended this will be considered at the November Redesign Board and at Council thereafter;
- iii. A new peer review is to be carried out on our approach to recruiting agency staff and casual labour with a target to report back by end of January 2019. This will take forward a lot of work already undertaken on our approach to such staff. New review teams are to be tasked for the catering service, cleaning service, and for early years and child care provision;
- iv. The Lean programme continues to grow from staff suggestions and we are training more staff, especially from out with HQ, in facilitating Lean reviews. On 22nd August all staff involved in completed Lean reviews came together to share their learning, identify any supports they need for implementation and to celebrate their achievements. This identified the need to ensure implementation and an officer group has been set up to ensure that happens; and
- v. A stock take of the work of the Redesign Board had been undertaken and there is a clear emphasis to ensure that recommendations are implemented effectively. The Council Redesign Lead is carrying out a full review of work to date with the intention of setting out a plan of action to pick up key projects that may need to be revisited or reinvigorated to ensure that change happens.

7. Holiday Pay

An update was provided in respect of holiday pay. The Council had agreed to pay holiday pay as from 1 June, 2018 and this had now been implemented. The Council

was now in consultation with trade unions in relation to closing out of the collective agreement on holiday pay. Once this had been done, consultation would be carried out with trade unions in relation to holiday back pay pre 1 June, 2018 with the aim of coming to an agreement between both sides.

The Staff Side advised that the collective agreement had also been applied to agenda for change staff, and in their view this was not appropriate as it was likely that some of this group of staff would be over or underpaid. An undertaking was given by the Interim Director of Care and Learning to look into this issue.

Further, trade unions were still waiting on the Council's position in relation to the collective agreement and back pay. In response, it was advised that the collective agreement had been circulated to trade unions, but the Council was waiting for responses whilst this was being considered by union legal advisers. Once the Collective Agreement had been finalised, consultation on the back pay would be carried out. The issue of back pay was complex and both sides would require legal advice on this. A formal proposal to settle the back pay issue would in due course be made to trade unions.

The Forum **NOTED** the position.

8. Dates for Meetings in 2019

The Forum **APPROVED** the undernoted dates for their meetings in 2019:-

Friday, 1 February
Friday, 3 May
Friday, 9 August
Wednesday, 30 October

All the meetings would be held at Council Headquarters, Inverness commencing at 10.30 a.m.

9. Any Other Competent Business

Staff/Public Engagement Process

The Chief Executive gave a briefing on a public and staff engagement process to be carried out at various locations throughout the Highlands, seeking the staff and public views and opinions about what was important to them, what they believed the Council should be focusing on and their thoughts on how money should be spent, so that an ambitious shared vision could be developed and progressed. The engagement process was to be supplemented by a video entitled "your Voice, your Council, your Future" which was shown at the meeting.

The Staff Side support was sought to promote the engagement process to their membership across the Highlands.

The meeting was concluded at 11.45 a.m.