

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL
RECOVERY BOARD**

Minutes of the Meeting of the Highland Council Recovery Board held remotely on Thursday 18 June 2020 at 10.30am.

PRESENT:-

Mr A Christie (Chair)	Mr A Gunn (AG)
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr A Jarvie
Ms C Caddick	Mrs D Manson (DM)
Dr I Cockburn	Mr B Lobban
Mrs M Davidson	Mr M MacLeod (MMcL)
Mr J Gibson	Mr P Siggers
Mr K Gowans	Mr B Thompson (substitute)
Mr J Gray	

Non-Members also present:-

Mr G Adam	Mrs I Mackenzie
Mr A Baxter	Mr G Mackenzie
Mr B Boyd	Mr A MacInnes
Mr B Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mr J Finlayson	Mr D Rixson
Mr R Gale	Mr T Robertson
Mr A Henderson	Mr G Ross
Mr D Louden	Ms M Smith

Officers Present:-

Mr P Senior, ECO Education & Learning (PS)
 Ms R Cleland, Corporate Communications Manager (RC)
 Mr A MacLeod, Brexit & European Policy Co-ordinator (AMcL)
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Highland Council

Mr A Christie in the Chair

Item	Subject/Decision	Action
1.	Apologies for Absence An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Mackinnon.	No Action Necessary
2.	Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest.	No Action Necessary
3.	Minutes of Previous Meeting There had been circulated the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 June 2020, the terms of which APPROVED .	No Action Necessary

4. Recovery Action Plan for Highland

AG

There had been circulated Report No RB/07/20 dated 15 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

The Chair expressed appreciation to officers for the report noting that the format was different to reflect the Project Management Office (PMO) approach and clearly set out the key priorities and political governance process. He explained that future meetings would involve monitoring and checking that the recovery programme was on track, take any necessary corrective action, and provide feedback on partnership working with external agencies.

The Board **NOTED** the covering Council report including the detailed Recovery Action Plan .

5. The Phased Reopening of Schools and ELC Settings

PS

There had been circulated Report No RB/08/20 dated 15 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

Due to the speed at which this issue was progressing, the Chair requested that the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning provide a status update. In doing so, he advised that information was changing on a daily basis and much work was being undertaken at a national level as well as locally. The Scottish Government had announced an expectation that learners would be based in school for 50% of their time from August 2020. However, based on the current 2 metre parameters as well as the capacity and staffing restrictions (based on existing staff models) this would be challenging to achieve within existing resources and dialogue continued in regard to this with the Scottish Government. Although a reduction in social distancing to 1 metre would assist with capacity issues, it would have a significant impact on time and resources to revise and implement operational plans. Nonetheless, he provided assurance that he was committed to working within the national guidelines to ensure that as many learners were able to return to school for as long as possible whilst raising attainment which was a key priority along with safety for all children and staff.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- A review from the Scottish Government on reducing social distancing from 2 metres would be helpful. It was queried and assurance was provided that a scenario-based planning approach was being taken in order that a flexible model would be adopted which could be adapted to changing guidance such as social distancing being reduced or increased dependant on the R number. It was further queried whether a unique case would be made for the Highlands for social-distancing to be reduced to 1 metre and whether authorisation was required from the Scottish Government for this;
- It was recognised that guidance was fluid and planning for schools reopening was complex and staff were commended for their diligent efforts during this challenging time;

- The news that the Scottish Government would consider additional resources once all local authorities and individual school plans had been considered was welcomed. However, this was a significant task and concern was expressed at the time that this would take. Increased resources would have a significant impact in terms of the percentage of pupils that could be returned to schools therefore it was critical that the right level of resource was put in place;
- Further information was sought on how attainment gaps would be identified and confirmation was provided that a strategy would be developed to restore deficiencies;
- A clear and consistent communications strategy was vital to ensure that parents felt confident in the measures being implemented. Further information was provided on the methods of engagement that had been provided with parents and how this would be continued;
- A number of points/concerns were raised with regard to Facilities Management (FM) including ensuring that back-up arrangements were in place for FM staff members that were shielding; cleaning requirements including any additional staffing needs, scenario plans for delivery and cost implications; and utilising chemical fogging systems to sterilise schools quickly and safely. Assurance was provided that contingency FM support would be provided and that Operational Plans would be developed in respect of cleaning and that chemical fogging would be explored as part of these processes;
- There were many areas across the Highlands where broadband provision was limited. Given that there would be an ongoing need for blended learning it was queried whether financial assistance would be available for families reliant on 4G data plans to ensure that children were able to continue with their online learning requirements. The Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment advised that he would explore the feasibility of financial support for those families reliant on the 4G network being provided via the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) voucher scheme. The Chair requested that all Members of the Recovery Board and Councillor Baxter be emailed on the outcome of this;
- Concerns were expressed with regard to the pressure Head Teachers were under and assurance was provided that pastoral care was being offered and that a wellbeing strategy was being developed;
- A request was made for the Education Committee to consider ramping up recruitment and it was confirmed that a recruitment advert was due to be issued imminently; and
- Assurance was sought and provided that opportunities for collaborative working with partners including High Life Highland, Eden Court and third sector organisations particularly in regard to wellbeing and personal development were being explored. In addition, further assurance was sought and provided that a core offer of learning would be provided for children shielding/vulnerable.

In conclusion, the Chair provided assurance that the programme sub-groups, as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report, would investigate the operational and financial implications in detail and that many of the issues that had been raised would be addressed as part of this process.

Following discussion, the Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the recent developments in relation to schools reopening, as set out within the report, and that a full report on schools and ELC return was due to be considered in detail by the Education Committee on 2 July 2020; and
- ii. **AGREED** that an email be circulated to all Members of the Recovery Board and Councillor Baxter on HIE supporting families with vouchers for 4G network costs.

6. **BREXIT and European Update**

AMcL

There had been circulated Report No RB/09/20 by the Brexit & European Policy Co-ordinator.

During discussion, the Board recognised the need for the Brexit Working Group to be reconvened as soon as possible. It was unlikely that the Transition Period would be extended beyond 31 December 2020, therefore preparation works comprising a scenario planning based approach should be commenced as quickly as possible. The importance of partnership agreements with other agencies and councils was emphasised. If achieved, a Shared Discretion Fund would be for the Highlands and Islands area and a strong single message could have a significant impact. It was important that partnership working continued, particularly with Moray and Aberdeenshire to maximise synergies.

In addition, the installation within the Inverness Service Point of an ID Scanning terminal to assist EU Citizens to access the EU Settlement Scheme was welcome news.

The Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report in relation to the current position on Brexit, EU Settlement Scheme and NORA;
- ii. **AGREED** that a report be submitted to a future Recovery Board or workshop exploring the options in relation to renewables as set out in section 7 of the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a meeting of the Brexit Working Group be convened later in the summer to consider the latest developments, the current situation, associated risks and any action which could be undertaken to mitigate.

7. **Tourism Committee**

MMcL

There had been circulated Report No RB/10/20 dated 15 June 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Board recognised the need for a meeting to be scheduled as quickly as possible. It was reported that a meeting was being scheduled for either 15 or 16 July 2020 and this was welcomed;

- Requests were made for a number of issues to be addressed in preparation of tourism resuming including Parking Enforcement and development of a communications strategy to address safety perceptions to build public confidence;
- It was emphasised that the west coast was heavily reliant on tourism and did not have the economic resilience of more urban areas across the Highlands. The Board was informed that much of the tourism activity in this area was connected to Calmac who had announced that there would be no summer timetable thus frequency of services had been greatly reduced as would the passenger carrying capacities on each service;
- The airline strategies for resuming services to Highland would be a key element of the tourism recovery process;
- The tourist season was normally March to October and it was queried whether licences for caravan parks could be extended; and
- Tourism was vital to the economy of the west coast and it was important that once lockdown restrictions had progressed to the third phase of the route map a message should be clearly communicated to visitors encouraging and welcoming them to return to the Highlands.

Thereafter, the Board **AGREED** that a meeting of the Tourism Committee be held when practicable to ensure that Council support for the recovery of the tourism sector be promoted.

The meeting was closed at 11.35am.