

**The Highland Council  
Corporate Resources Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Corporate Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 20 August 2020 at 1.00pm.

**Present:**

Mr R Bremner	Mr B Lobban
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Louden
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Mr S Mackie
Mr A Christie (substitute)	Mr A Mackinnon
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs M Davidson	Mr M Reiss
Mr R Gale	Mr D Rixson
Mr T Heggie	Mr P Saggars

**Non-Members also Present:**

Mrs J Barclay	Mr C Munro
Mr A Baxter	Mrs P Munro
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs L Munro
Mr K Gowans	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Henderson	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Jarvie	Mr K Rosie
Ms E Knox	Mr B Thomson
Mr J McGillivray	

**Officials in attendance:**

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive  
Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer ,Resources and Finance  
Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance  
Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Transformation  
Mr E Foster, Head of Finance and Commercialism, Resources and Finance  
Mrs S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Resources and Finance  
Mr B Porter, Head of Support Services, Education and Learning  
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance  
Ms M Zavarella, Clerical Assistant, Performance and Governance

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.**

**Mr A Mackinnon in the Chair**

**Business**

## **Preliminaries**

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Chair thanked Members for their understanding in relation to the cancellation of the scheduled meeting of the Committee, due to the IT issues experienced as a result of storms. He expressed relief that there had been no damage in the area.

The Chair then advised that the thoughts of the Committee were with the families of those who had lost their lives as a result of the train derailment in Stonehaven.

### **1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan**

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs C Caddick.

### **2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

Item 4 – Mr B Thompson, Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie (non-financial)

Item 8 – Mr P Sagers and Mr A Christie (non-financial)

### **3. Corporate Resources Budget Sub-Committee Buidheann Ath-shlànachaidh Buidseit**

There had been circulated Report No RES/14/20 dated 30 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

In discussion, concern was expressed at the proposal that meetings of the Sub-Committee would be held in private. It was appreciated that certain items required to be held in private but in the interests of the wider community it was felt that meetings should be held in public unless there were good reasons to agree otherwise. Therefore, an amendment was proposed to recommendation 4 set out in the report, removing the words '*to be held in private*'.

The Chair advised that meetings of the Sub-Committee were open to all Members of the Council. He was not in favour of any amendments to the recommendations as proposed and that if that was the case, he would ask that this item be recalled and reported back to the next Council meeting.

During further discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern that it was the duty of the Corporate Resources Committee to oversee budget, monitoring and outturn activities across the Council's revenue and capital budgets and in essence the report recommended this be removed from this Committee;
- it was unclear how the Sub-Committee would report to the Corporate Resources Committee and whether Members would have the opportunity to scrutinise the minutes of the Sub-Committee;
- why consideration of future Area Committee budgets could not be done in the open forum of the Corporate Resources Committee;
- concern at the list of those items set out in the report which it was stated should be considered in private;

- there was already a mechanism in place through the Local Government (Scotland) 1973 by which Members were asked on agendas of meetings to decide whether it was appropriate for the reports printed on pink papers to be considered in private. This provided Members the opportunity to challenge and vote accordingly.

\* The Chair advised that in his opinion and in his dealings as Chair and Budget leader he had been open, honest and transparent. However, in view of the debate he was recalling this item and advised that it would be referred to the Council for consideration.

## **FINANCIAL MONITORING SGRÙDADH IONMHASAIL**

### **4. Corporate Revenue Monitoring Report to 30 June 2020 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra gu 30 Ògmhios 2020**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr B Thompson, Mr A Jarvie and Mr T Heggie declared a non-financial interest in this item as Directors of High Life Highland but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to participate in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/15/20 dated 4 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Chair thanked the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance and the Head of Finance and Commercialism and their teams for their work over the past few months in relation to the Council's finances. There was a significant degree of uncertainty in relation to the figures set out in the report and because of that officers had provided some different scenarios. The central case was for a budget gap of £28.259m, and it was acknowledged this position could improve as it was hoped additional funding would be received from Scottish Government. These additional funds could significantly reduce the gap, depending on the detail and if they were as substantial as hoped. However, the risk that the position could get worse had to be acknowledged, and a second lockdown had been modelled on that basis. In summary, the gap in the central scenario were reducing from the figures previously reported to the Council and the Committee, however it was important to be mindful as to how significant the risks were going forward. The overall improvement in the position reported to the Council on 30 July 2020, reflected the holistic look across all individual budgets across the Council and impact of management control on these budgets. The figures would continue to be revised based on the Council's spend and income trend data together with any external factors that impact such as funding announcements.

The Head of Finance and Commercialism indicated that the level of reserves should relate to the level of risk faced by the organisation. The Council was currently facing an unprecedented level of risk and therefore he urged caution given that while the reserves had increased, there was a need to consider this in the context of the level of risk which was articulated in the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was testament to the sound financial governance which had been put in place that the reserves had increased to the budgeted level, however the continuing risks and uncertainty of the situation going forward had to be emphasised;

- there was a need for more detailed figures to be provided to the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee to allow Members to drill down and consider the opportunities for further savings;
- the realignment of budgets to be progressed to reflect each Executive Chief Officer's area of responsibility;
- the Council would continue to lobby the Scottish and UK Governments in relation to additional funding and the Budget Leader had emailed Ms K Forbes, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, seeking clarification on the income recompense scheme;
- concern at the scale of uncertainty in relation to the income recompense scheme at this stage of the financial year in terms of the Council's financial planning, and the need for all Members to lobby on this issue;
- it was anticipated that the Council would receive some level of recompense in relation to the shortfall to Council Tax and further information was sought on the timescale for this;
- an improving position was being reported in relation to the projected budget shortfalls for both High Life Highland and Eden Court, however these projections were subject to constant change;
- the report was based on the available information at the current time and the financial position would require to be continually updated as new information emerged;
- the increase in the numbers claiming universal credit and also the significant reduction in income levels in Highland compared to the rest of Scotland was sobering;
- the Highlands was particularly exposed in terms of the long-term economic consequences as it was mainly service based with a great dependence on tourism, and therefore the increase in reserves and the cautionary approach being taken was welcomed;
- clarification was sought on the number of staff which had been employed through the Transformation Change Fund, the total cost to the Council and in relation to the allocation of employment costs. It was confirmed that Members would be circulated with more detailed information on the Transformation Change Fund;
- it was surprising the recruitment of a Depute Chief Executive was being progressed at this time and concern that Members had not been aware the post was being advertised. The Chair advised that it was inappropriate to comment on the matter at the present time. However, it was indicated that matters relating to the workforce fell within the Committee's remit in the Scheme of Delegation and therefore questions in relation to the appointment of a Depute Chief Executive were appropriate, and particularly whether this appointment was critical to ensure the safer provision of key Council services;
- the main premise of the senior management restructure agreed in April 2019 was that it was going to generate savings and confirmation was sought on whether there had been an increase in the number of Heads of Service in addition to the appointment of the Executive Chief Officers. In addition, concern was expressed at the level of the severance payments to senior management detailed in the Annual Accounts;
- Responding to concerns raised, the Chair provided an assurance that the restructure had generated savings and that he would arrange for Members to receive more detailed information on the severance payments to senior management detailed in the Annual Accounts;

- \*\*the Chair advised that the Administration and Committee were fully supportive of the Chief Executive. The Council was in a far stronger financial position than it had been for a number of years and this was thanks to the tireless work of the Chief Executive and her team;

*\*\* (Correction to the above bullet point at the full Council meeting on 10 September – wording now to read as follows - the Chair advised that he was fully supportive of the Chief Executive. The Council was in a far stronger financial position than it had been for the past 15 to 20 years and this was thanks to the tireless work of the Chief Executive and her team)*

- the restructuring had taken a period of time to implement and had been delayed due to Covid-19. The agreed senior management restructure had clearly involved the appointment of a Chief Operating Officer and not a Depute Chief Executive as had been advertised and concern was expressed at the lack of consultation with Members on this change;
- this was a unique and unprecedented situation for Members, officers and people in the Highlands. There was a need to show solidarity and work together to promote the Council and the Highlands, and produce and drive forward plans on the way forward for the recovery for the area;
- the need for openness and transparency in relation to funding received from the Scottish Government and for this to be reported with clarity to the Committee;
- along with the financial position there was a need to consider governance and communication when issuing financial information in the public domain, specific reference being made to issues with the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme.

At this point, the meeting was adjourned at 2.35pm and reconvened at 2.50pm.

Thereafter, Mr P Saggars seconded by Mr R Bremner **MOVED** that Members agree to suspend the appointment of a Depute Chief Executive until an immediate review of the current restructure had been reported to full Council.

Mr A Christie seconded by the Chair moved as an **AMENDMENT** that the matter of the appointment of a Depute Chief Executive be discussed at the next Council and a review/evaluation on the Senior Management Structure commences to ensure that the original aims of the Governance restructure were evidenced.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 8 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 10 votes and the **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

**For the Motion:**

Mr R Bremner, Mr J Bruce, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Dr I Cockburn, Mr D Louden, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr S Mackie and Mr S Saggars.

**For the Amendment:**

Mr A Christie, Mrs H Carmichael, Mrs M Davidson, Mr R Gale, Mr T Heggie, Mr B Lobban, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr D Macpherson, Mr M Reiss and Mr D Rixson.

## Decision

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 30 June 2020 and **NOTED** the central case of the estimated year end forecast, along with the range of potential positions subject to external variables;
- ii. **NOTED** that a further report would be provided to the Highland Council on 10 September 2020 with further options to mitigate the budget gap;
- iii. **AGREED** that Members be provided with more detailed information on the Transformation Change Fund;
- iv. **AGREED** that Members be provided with a briefing on the severance payments to senior management detailed in the Annual Accounts; and
- v. **AGREED** that the matter of the appointment of a Depute Chief Executive be discussed at the next Council and a review/evaluation on the Senior Management Structure commences to ensure that the original aims of the Governance restructure were evidenced.

### 5. Resources and Finance Service, Performance and Governance Service and Transformation Service – Revenue Monitoring to 30 June 2020

There had been circulated Joint Report No RES/16/20 dated 30 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance, Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance and Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

The Committee **AGREED** the revenue monitoring position to 30 June 2020.

### **RESOURCES AND FINANCE SERVICE SEIRBHEIS NAN GOIREASAN CORPORRA**

### 6. Treasury Management Rianachd Ionmhais

#### (a) Summary of Transactions Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean

There had been circulated Report No RES/17/20 dated 16 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report.

#### (b) Annual Treasury Management Report 2019/20 Aithisg Stiùiridh Bhliadhnail an Ionmhais 2019/20

There had been circulated Report No RES/18/20 dated 16 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- clarification was sought in relation to the increased borrowing to fund capital expenditure on the Housing Revenue Account. The Head of Finance and

- Commercialism confirmed he would have a separate discussion with Mr D Louden on this matter outwith the meeting;
- the potential to increase the authorised limit for borrowing to take account of ongoing capital projects. It was confirmed this limit was set annually by the Service on the basis of the planned capital investment and took into account any uncertainties with projects. The Head of Finance and Commercialism advised that he would respond directly to Mr D Louden on the authorised limit set for 2020/21;
  - the potential for Public Works Loan Board interest rates which had been increased by 1% in the previous year, to be reduced; and
  - concern the economic update by the Council's Treasury advisors, appended to the report made no mention of the impacts associated with Brexit, and the need for the Council to consider this issue in more detail. The Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance suggested that a session for Members with the Council's Treasury Advisors be arranged to provide for a more detailed understanding of the wider context.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Annual Treasury Management report for 2019/20; and
- ii. **AGREED** that a session for Members with the Council's Treasury Advisors be arranged.

#### **7. Corporate Resources Service Quarterly Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Ràitheil Seirbheis nan Goireasan Corporra**

There had been circulated Report No RES/19/20 dated 17 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Committee **NOTED** the statutory and key performance indicators as outlined in the report.

#### **8. Annual Performance Monitoring: Welfare, Advice and Information Services 2019/20 Sgrùdadh Coileanadh Bliadhnail: Seirbheisean Sochair, Comhairle agus Fiosrachaidh 2019/20**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr A Christie as General Manager Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau and Mr P Saggars as a Director of Nairn Citizens Advice Bureau declared non-financial interests in this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/20/20 dated 17 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Council's Welfare, Advice and Information Services and CABx be commended on their outstanding performance, and excellent services and value for money they delivered. These Services would become more critical for households as the furlough scheme was withdrawn in the Autumn and would make a valuable contribution to the Council's recovery plans;

- Whether plans which were in place ensure the Service was sufficiently staffed given that the demand for benefit and advice services was likely to significantly increase in the current year; and
- the Leader of the Council commented on the outstanding performance of staff and the CAB in 2019/20 and that she would have discussions with the Head of Revenues and Customer Services and CAB in regard to resourcing going forward in the first instance and that consideration would be given to the potential for an update report on the resourcing of the Welfare, Advice and Information Services to be submitted to the new Joint Wellbeing Sub-Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the undernoted performance:

- i. in excess of 26,500 customers were assisted by the Council's Welfare Support Team and Citizens Advice during 2019/20 for support with welfare, debt and housing issues;
- ii. financial gains for customers exceeded £23.7 million. This represented a £14.64 return for every £1 allocated to welfare, advice and information services by the Council;
- iii. a total of £11.6 million of debt (including £2.1m relating to mortgage/other secured loans) was presented to Citizens Advice, which represented a 28.7% decrease compared to 2017/18; and
- iv. Citizens Advice supported 3,029 customers (including social rented, private rented and homeowners) seeking housing-related advice, which highlighted the demand for consistent accessible support on these issues.

The Committee **AGREED** that the potential for an update report on the resourcing of the Welfare, Advice and Information Services to be submitted to the new Joint Wellbeing Sub-Committee be investigated.

## 9. Covid 19 and School Trip Refunds Pàigheadh Air Ais Thursan Sgoile

There had been circulated Report No RES/21/20 dated 20 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair thanked Members for their email responses in agreeing to this item being progressed ahead of the Committee and sought formal ratification of the actions taken as contained in the recommendations outlined in the report.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the steps taken by the Council and its schools to manage the impact of school trip cancellations, and in turn minimise the costs arising by seeking to reschedule trips, or receive refunds or insurance payouts, where appropriate;
- ii. **AGREED** the action taken to refund parents in the situations as described within the report, where no other source of refund was available, and to avoid any financial loss or hardship on parents as a result;
- iii. **AGREED** the action taken to utilise the financial hardship fund, as the funding source for the refunds to parents; and
- iv. **NOTED** the further actions as set out within the report, regarding recovery and other actions to try and recover any further sums possible from providers via refund, or from insurers.



**10. ICT Transformation Update**  
**Cruth-atharrachadh ICT agus Ùrachadh Lìonraidh**

There had been circulated Report No RES/22/20 dated 16 July 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Chair commended the ICT Service on their exceptional work over the past few months during the emergency period and on behalf of the Committee conveyed his thanks to the Head of ICT and Digital Transformation and his team. Confirmation was also provided that Councillor D Rixson would be provided with an explanation on the additional colours being used within the RAG status column.

The Committee **NOTED** the update on the ICT Transformation and Network Programmes.

**MINUTES OF MEETINGS**  
**GEÀRR-CHUNNTAS CHOINNEAMHAN**

**11. Minutes of Meetings**  
**Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan**

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of Meetings of the Central Safety Committee held on 7 February 2020 and the Staff Partnership Forum held on 7 February 2020.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm.

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

Minutes of Meeting of The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum held REMOTELY on Friday 14 August, 2020 at 10.30 a.m.

**Present:**

**Employer's Representatives:**

Mrs Margaret Davidson  
Mr Allan Henderson  
Mr Alister MacKinnon

Ms Linda Munro  
Mrs Trish Robertson  
Mr Ben Thompson

**Staff Side Representatives:**

Mr John Gibson (UNISON)  
Mr Paul MacPherson (GMB)  
Mr Rikki Selkirk (GMB)

**In attendance:**

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive  
Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side  
Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer – Resources  
Mr P Senior, Interim Executive Chief Officer – Education & Learning  
Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place  
Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer – Performance & Governance  
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer – Housing & Property  
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment  
Mr A Gunn, Interim Executive Chief Officer – Transformation & Economy  
Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR  
Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager  
Ms E Johnston, Corporate Audit & Performance Manager  
Ms D Sutherland, Corporate Audit Manager  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

**Mrs M Davidson in the Chair**

**SUBJECT/DECISION**

**ACTION**

**Preliminaries**

**Employee Response to Covid-19**

The Chair expressed her sincere thanks to all employees for the hard work, flexibility and goodwill in addressing the Covid-19 crises. These were unprecedented times and the Council was working through it as best it could. Particular mention went to cleaning and facilities management service, teachers and non teaching support staff for their efforts in enabling schools to be reopened. Also, acknowledgement was made of the work of housing staff given the extraordinary circumstances that they had to cope with. Covid-19 had created

challenging circumstances for everyone and the flexibility and dedication of employees and partnership working was commended.

## 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie, Mr J Finlayson and Ms M Smith from the Elected Members Side, Ms M Macrae (RCN), Mr R Whyte (UNITE), Mr I Macleman (UNITE/UCATT) and Ms L MacKay (UNISON) from the Staff Side

## 2. Declarations of Interest

Mrs M Davidson declared a non financial interest as a family member 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.

Mr A MacKinnon declared a non-financial interest as his wife and daughters were employees 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 him 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 7 February, 2020, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

## 4. Matters Arising from Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

- i. General Election – 12 December, 2019 – It was noted that a debrief with staff involved in the Election was to have been arranged. It was confirmed that there would be feedback from the General Election and preparations for the By-Election in November, 2020. It was **AGREED** that a presentation be arranged on this matter for the Staff Partnership Forum, the arrangements for this to be discussed between the Chief Executive, Head of Performance and Governance and the Elections Manager.

**CEX/  
ECO P&G/  
Elections  
Manager**

In terms of arrangements for the Scottish Parliament Election in May, 2021 it was suggested and **AGREED** that a staff working group be involved in these arrangements in order that staff experiences in Elections could be shared to ensure that the process of arrangements were well informed.

**CEX/ECO P&G/  
Elections  
Manager**

- ii. Lack of technology for Community Staff (Health Visitors & School Nursing Teams) – it was understood that there were still some ongoing ICT issues for Community staff in Health Visitors & School Nursing Teams. There had been contact between Trade Unions and the Head of ICT and Digital Transformation on this matter. It

**Head of ICT &  
Digital  
Transformation.**

was requested that a briefing be provided for the Forum in advance of the next meeting on the current status of the issues to be resolved and what improvements could be made.

- iii. Redesign of The Highland Council – it was advised that the Depute Chief Executive and ECO Health and Social Care posts had now been advertised and the timelines for the recruitment process would be forwarded to the Forum. Interviews for an Interim ECO Health and Social Care would be held soon.

**Interim Head of  
HR**

The current Interim ECO Education & Learning would be leaving the Council at the end of August and an advert for this vacancy on a temporary basis would be issued soon. It was highlighted that a confidential briefing had been held with Members regarding the appointment of a Consultant to the Interim ECO Education and Learning. It was stressed that what had been reported in the press about this appointment was inaccurate. Members had requested that the process of the appointment would be considered at the Audit and Scrutiny Committee which would give an opportunity to learn and reflect on the matter. It was confirmed that the conclusions of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee consideration of this matter would be shared with the Staff Side.

**Interim Head of  
HR**

- iv. Wider Wallet – Pension Contribution Decision – it was advised that the issues raised at the last meeting in relation to this matter had now been resolved.

- v. Holiday Pay – negotiations with trade unions had not been concluded prior to the Covid-19 crises. It was intended to resume these negotiations as a matter of urgency.

**Interim Head of  
HR**

- vi. Corporate Risk Board – Reference was made to the previous meeting where it was advised that there was to be a change in the Council's approach to risks and there would now be monthly meetings of a Corporate Risk Board. Consideration would be given to how the Staff Side could be part of the Corporate Risks monitoring process. The ECO Performance and Governance was asked to check on progress on this matter.

**ECO P&G**

## **5. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings**

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

- (i) Care and Learning Service – 7 February, 2020;
- (ii) COVID-19 Partnership Forum – 21 July, 2020; and
- (iii) Communities and Places, Infrastructure and Environment and
- (iv) Housing and Property Services (Joint Meeting) – 31 July, 2020.

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

i. Care and Learning Service

Reference was made to restructuring in both Education and Health & Social Care. The Council had agreed a recovery plan and within this plan would be a service redesign which would include restructuring across the Council. A review of service redesign was to be completed by end December, 2020 and implementation by 2021. However, it was stressed that these timescales may not be achievable due to the ongoing Covid-19 crises.

It was highlighted that this was the end of the first week of the new School term and it was a great achievement that all Schools were open.

ii. Covid-19 Partnership Forum

Staff Returning to Work – The Staff Side welcomed a recent communication from the ECO Housing and Property clarifying arrangements about entering HQ. This had been a concern for cleaning and facilities staff and the clarification was welcomed. Also, the Scottish Government guidance was that most office staff should not return to the workplace until a least mid September, 2020. It was highlighted that working from home seemed to suit most employees.

The Staff Side also acknowledged the heroic efforts of CCFM and Property staff with their efforts and hard work with arrangements to reopen schools.

The Interim ECO Education and Learning advised that 203 schools were now open in Highland which was a fantastic achievement and a result of a great team effort across all Council services.

The involvement of Trade Unions in the process of opening schools was formally recognised which had been a huge benefit to the Council and the partnership working was commended.

Highland had 60 more school establishments than any other local authority in Scotland, this combined with the rural area of Highland highlighted the scale of the challenge in reopening schools. It had been highlighted in a letter to parents that safety would not be compromised and schools would only be reopened when it was safe to do so. Therefore it was disappointing to see some negative media reports regarding some schools not being reopened at the start of the new term. It was stressed that Highland had been one of the most successful areas in dealing with the virus and it was important that any actions taken would not compromise the safety and wellbeing of the people in Highland. The Chief Executive would be issuing communications to various groups of staff to thank them for their work.

**CEX**

iii. Communities and Places, Infrastructure & Environment and Housing & Property Services Minute

It was noted that the correct version of the draft minute had been circulated immediately prior to the start of the meeting. In order that the Forum had an opportunity to read the draft minute, it was **AGREED** to circulate the approved minute to the next meeting as by then the draft minute will have been considered at the following joint services and TU partnership meeting.

Clerk

Issues highlighted in the minute were:-

- Sadness was expressed at the passing of Angus Cameron, GMB representative;
- Some actions from previous service meetings put on hold due to Covid-19, would now be addressed;
- Managing the agenda for the meeting – with 3 Services, organising the agenda to follow the partnership working arrangement may make meetings more manageable. The effectiveness of having 3 Services meeting together would be monitored and reviewed if necessary and considered at the next CSC meeting given concerns about risk across the three services affected.
- Risk assessments were being carried out more routinely, building confidence in the task and supported by H&S representatives;
- A pilot project was to be set up on preventative physiotherapy for the Waste team;
- Reference was made to poor reception coverage for Roads team radio systems and actions to address this, including liaising with Police and Fire Services as they used the same system and could have the same issues. Further, there may be an opportunity to lobby at UK level in relation to a UK wide project on this issue.
- Diriebught Welfare facilities – It was understood that the welfare facilities had still not been completed and that there was an issue with one of the neighbouring properties to the site. It was queried why this was suddenly now an issue, given that it was nearly 3 years since the start of this project. An update on progress with the project would be shared with the Staff Side.

Interim Head of HR

ECO Housing & Property

## 6 Budget Update

The Executive Chief Officer Resources provided a budget update. By way of summary, it was advised that the latest estimates were that the Council still faced a significant budget gap of £28m and consideration was being given to measures to close the budget gap. This budget gap included extra funding received from Government. There was also the possibility of further Government funding from the income loss compensation scheme. It was hoped that clarification on this would be received before the full Council meeting in September. The Council

was facing great uncertainty on its budget given the impact of Covid-19 and the budget position would be monitored closely. The Local Government Grant settlement for next year was also a concern.

A meeting with Trade Unions would be held in advance of the full Council meeting in September at which a further budget update would be provided. There was a need to identify a process to engage and share information with Trade Unions on the budget.

In terms of the economy of the Highlands, the need to retain Council jobs was stressed.

The Forum **NOTED** the position and that a process of engagement with trade unions on the budget would be established.

**ECO Resources**

## **7. Staff Wellbeing and Recognition**

There was a need to ensure staff wellbeing was being addressed given Covid-19 and assess what more could be done in recognising the good work of staff.

In discussion, while it was important to recognise staff efforts, employees should not be singled out as it was more of a team and combined effort. The message had to be communicated to the public that Highland Council staff were as dedicated as other Partner agencies such as the NHS. The way staff had dealt with the Covid-19 crises had been a fantastic effort and a way needed to be found of demonstrating this to the public.

The Recovery Board had a section on leadership and culture and it had been shown during the Covid period that there had been great leadership shown by staff. There should be some form of event to recognise this and build internal praise into the organisation and perhaps invest more in technology that allows Managers to communicate directly with staff such as a Mobile App.

Reference was made to the emotional impact that the Covid crises had on some staff groups such as call handlers and those involved in providing humanitarian assistance. Arrangements had been put in place to offer counselling support for staff.

The Forum **NOTED** the position and that further consideration would be given to recognising the good work of staff.

**All Forum  
Members  
/Officers**

## **8. HR Issues during COVID-19**

There was circulated Report No SPF/01/20 dated 11 August by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources.

In terms of seeking just one Trade Union nomination to be involved in developing the Wellbeing Action Plan, given the collaborative work already taken place, all the Trade Unions would now be consulted on this.

The high response by staff to the Wellbeing Survey was welcomed. There was a need to understand who still wished to work from home and how could this be accommodated and who wanted to work from the Office as they could not effectively work from home.

Further, because of the cleaning regime for Schools, Teachers were finding class preparation etc in School difficult and the majority of such activities now had to be done from home. It was queried what support they would be receiving in the long term.

It was advised that Officers were having discussions regarding the issues of staff working from home, looking at the results of the Wellbeing Survey and what other organisations/businesses were doing. At present there was not a budget for supporting staff working from home. Also, consideration would require to be given as to what to do with Council buildings that would no longer be required. It was suggested that a report on the outcomes of the Wellbeing Survey be submitted to full Council as a resourcing issue and options appraisal of what lies ahead.

Thereafter, the Forum:-

i **NOTED** the HR activity which has taken place over the last 3-4 months to support the Council's emergency response to COVID;

**Interim Head of  
HR**

ii **NOTED** the extensive consultation which has taken place with Trade Unions during COVID and recognising the good partnership working of all participants to achieve positive outcomes for the health, safety and wellbeing of staff;

iii **NOTED** developments in delivery of Learning and Development and the resumption of SQA and MA programmes in September; and

iv **AGREED** that all Trade Unions would be involved in developing the Wellbeing Action Plan.

## **9. Relief Staff Payments during COVID-19**

There had been circulated Scottish Joint Council for Local Government Employees guidance relating to the impact on casual workers of Covid-19. The Staff Side enquired as to when a decision will be taken for relief staff. Many members have been left to struggle financially throughout the pandemic, with one only receiving £9.50 for 1 month and then no pay in other months. All relief staff should have been treated the same as full-time equivalent staff who were shielding as they can show that they have worked continuously for the Council pre-Covid.

It was advised that there had been consultation and consideration of costings on this issue. While the scheme was guidance only, there was a moral duty to make payments and an assessment of costs



would be made in order to identify staff that would fall into this category. A decision would require to be made as to whether the Council was prepared to meet the cost.

It was recognised that this issue had taken some time to address and therefore immediate action would be taken to review the options at Executive Leadership Team (ELT) next week with a view to making payments to those staff who were eligible for payment under the scheme. The Chief Executive undertook to apologise to the staff involved for the delay in payment and by way of resolving the issue quickly an emergency payment would be made.

The Forum **AGREED** that an urgent briefing on the options for making payments under the Covid-19 Casual Worker Scheme be submitted to ELT and Members WSM next week with a view to making payments to staff urgently.

**CEX/ECO  
Resources/  
Interim Head of  
HR**

## **10. 2018 Court of Appeal Ruling on Public Sector Pensions**

The Staff Side queried if the Council were aware of the 2018 Court of Appeal ruling around public sector pensions. The ruling found that the error came about when public sector employers ended costly 'final salary' schemes and moved members into career average ones. Under a Government scheme, people close to retirement were protected from the changes to their final salary pension and allowed to stay in their existing pension schemes and made other reforms to accrual rates and pension ages. While this is a UK wide issue it was queried if the Council knew how many staff are potentially affected and are the Council making representation to the Scottish Government on how any repayments will be funded.

It was advised that a report on this issue was to be submitted to the joint meeting of the Pensions Committee and Pension Board in September, 2020. The Pension Fund's Actuary would also be giving a presentation on this at the meeting.

The Forum **NOTED** that a briefing on the 2018 Court of Appeal Ruling on Public Sector Pensions would be submitted to ELT and Members WSM and it would be shared with Trade Unions.

**ECO Resources**

## **11. Review of Highland Council Staff Whistleblowing Policy & Processes**

There was circulated Report No SPF/02/20 by the Corporate Audit & Performance Manager on a review of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy & Processes.

In discussion, the following main points were considered:-

- The number of issues that could be raised under the policy was restrictive and it was confirmed this was standard across most Councils;

- It was highlighted that if the handling of the policy was outsourced, this may lead to double handling of complaints which would be a cost to the Council. Also, investigations could be lengthy and the costs to the Council substantial. It was advised that out of 26 Local Authorities looked at to date, 25 of them dealt with Whistleblowing in house.
- The policy would allow an independent and confidential route for staff to report concerns and was in addition to other routes open to staff to report concerns, such as the grievance process.
- The Staff Side advised that they were not supportive of outsourcing handling of the Whistleblowing process as they did not see the need for it and it could be dealt with effectively in house. The costs of going external would also be substantial. An external organisation would also be unfamiliar with the Councils structures and processes and it was felt that outsourcing would not be in the best interests of staff.
- There was a need to be more positive about the processes and procedures currently in place for staff to raise issues of concern and be more open to ideas to improve on how staff can disclose concerns in the workplace.
- There was a need to raise the profile of the policy and ensure it was included in staff induction.
- It was suggested that a review date should be incorporated in the policy. It was advised that an annual report would be submitted to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in terms of the outcomes of using the policy. A review could be done before that report went to Committee that took account of feedback from Trade Unions and lessons learned that could improve the policy and engagement with staff.
- The policy would be submitted to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in September, 2020 and thereafter full Council for discussion and approval.

Thereafter, the Forum **NOTED**:-

- i the feedback on the draft Highland Council Staff Whistleblowing Policy & Processes, and that a flow diagram was being prepared and would be circulated as soon as possible. Any further feedback was to be submitted by Friday, 21 August, 2020; and
- ii that the final report would be submitted to Audit and Scrutiny Committee in September and thereafter full Council.

**Corporate Audit  
& Performance  
Manager**

The meeting was concluded at 12.55 p.m.

**The Highland Council  
Central Safety Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Central Safety Committee held REMOTELY on Friday 14 August, 2020 at 1.00 p.m.

**Present:**

**Employer's Representatives:**

Mr D Louden  
Mr G MacKenzie  
Mr S Mackie  
Mr A MacKinnon

**Staff Side Representatives:**

Mr D Griffiths, GMB  
Mr M Hayes, UNISON

**In attendance:**

Mrs L Denovan, ECO Finance and Resources  
Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR  
Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager  
Mr T Murdison, Acting Property Manager  
Ms D Sutherland, Resources & Finance Health & Safety Welling Co-ordinator  
Mr A Yates, Communities and Places Service Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator  
Ms H Ross, CSER Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group  
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group  
Mr R Cattle, Ross, Skye and Lochaber Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant

**SUBJECT/DECISION**

**ACTION**

**Preliminaries**

**Employee Response to Covid-19**

The Chairman expressed his sincere thanks to all employees for the hard work in addressing the Covid-19 crises. These were unprecedented times and the Council was working through it as best it could. Covid-19 had created challenging circumstances for everyone and the flexibility of employees and partnership working was commended.

**Angus Cameron – GMB**

The Committee with great sadness paid tribute to Angus Cameron, GMB representative based in Caithness who passed away recently.

Angus was a stalwart and dedicated member of the GMB trade union and the workforce, who worked hard at his job, trade union role, partnership working and his health and safety responsibilities.

Condolences were expressed to Angus's family, friends and work colleagues.

### 1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Gale of the Employer's Side; and Mr I Macleman, UNITE/UCATT from the Staff Side and Mr C Howell, CSER Health & Safety Working Group.

### 2. **Declarations of Interest**

Mr A MacKinnon declared a non-financial interest as his wife and daughters were employees 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 him from taking part in the discussion at the meeting.

### 3. **Minutes of Last Meeting**

There had been circulated Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 7 February, 2020, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

### 4. **Matters Arising from the Minutes**

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

- i. It was intended to have a presentation by the Employee Assistance Programme Provider at the next meeting; **OHSW Manager**
- ii. Some Service Health and Safety Groups had met, but not within the timeline of the consultation process and not all Service Health & Safety Welling Co-ordinators had been appointed. These matters would be rectified. **OHSW Manager**
- iii. a report had been due to be submitted to this meeting with a timeline on how the issue of violence and aggression incidents in schools was to be addressed. It was explained that due to Covid-19, Schools had been closed and there were no violence and aggression incidents to report. However, incidents would continue to be monitored and **it was NOTED that an update would be reported to the next meeting.** **OHSW Manager**

## 5. Minutes of Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups

There had been circulated, for information, the Minutes of the:-

### Area Health and Safety Groups

- (i) Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Joint Health and Safety Working Group held on 2 August, 2020;
- (ii) Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Health and Safety Working Group held on 30 June, 2020; and
- (iii) Ross, Skye and Lochaber Health and Safety Group held on 19 March, 2020.

### Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups

- (iv) Care and Learning Service held on 7 February, 2020;
- (v) Communities and Places, Infrastructure and Environment and Housing and Property Services on 31 July, 2020.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups Minutes.

## 6. Occupational Health Service Update

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/7/20 by the Interim Head of Human Resources. The Appendix to the Report had been omitted from the papers and would be circulated to the Committee.

**Democr  
atic  
Services**

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- There had been a significant decrease in this quarter in Did Not Attend appointments. This was encouraging and may reflect that appointments were by telephone only.
- It was queried if there was a correlation between the workplace and stress and in particular, the relationships amongst work colleagues. This point would be looked into in more detail and the information would also be useful for Managers.

**OHSW  
Manager**

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Occupational Health activity for the last 3 months.

## 7. Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Guidance

There was circulated Report No. CSC/8/20 by the Interim Head of Human Resources which provided new Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing guidance relating to changes in working/returning to work as a result of Covid-19 for discussion. Discussion focused on ensuring that staff were safe working from home. The following main issues were covered:-

- It was imperative that staff who were going back into Council premises had the permission to do this from the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property for their own safety and that of others they were in contact with. It was also important that staff had safe working conditions at home. This would form part of the further report and that an online return to the workplace resource for managers had been produced. 70% of Managers have undertaken the module which covers the importance of keeping in to contact with their staff. Efforts would be made to ensure the remaining 30% of Managers did contact their staff and guidance on the requirements of a Manager would be issued to them.
- In relation to any costs associated with homeworking, further work required to take place and would form part of a further report.
- There was a need to ensure staff were sitting comfortably working from home and therefore the importance of workplace ergonomics was highlighted.
- House insurance policies for employees working from home should be updated and this was the responsibility of the policy holder. However, the Council should ensure that this had been done.
- It was explained that Responsible Premises Officers would be responsible for undertaking risk assessments in the building they were responsible for. These risk assessments would be shared with Managers who would inform their teams. Managers would require to inform the RPO who was requesting to enter a Council premises. The default position was that don't go into offices and work from home if you can do this safely.
- Education Service had previously used interview rooms in other Council premises for meetings with pupils. It was understood this was not permitted under the current use of buildings. It was confirmed that this was correct, and the Education Service had been advised that staff should not be in more than one premises a day. Therefore, additional premises could not be opened up for extra meeting rooms.

- It was queried how the enhanced cleaning would be resourced in the school estate and other Council offices. It was explained that there would be general cleaning by all users of schools. and there was a need to ensure that responsibility for this was passed onto pupils, support staff, teachers. Ensuring premises were clean was all users responsibility and not just that of Cleaning Service staff. If more premises were opened on a phased basis or closed permanently, then this should allow additional cleaning service resources to be diverted to premises that were required to open. It was requested that an update on enhanced cleaning in Council premises be circulated to the Committee.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

i **NOTED** the content of the report

**OHSW  
Manager**

ii **AGREED** to a future report on costs and benefits of homeworking be submitted to Committee; and

**OHSW  
Manager**

iii **AGREED** that an update on enhanced cleaning in Council premises would be circulated to the Committee. **(Action: Cleaning & Facilities Management Manager)**

## 8. Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/9/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The report provided an update on health and safety issues and developments for the Highland Council. It reviewed activities arising from HSE interventions; proposed changes to the health and safety management system and other activities undertaken since the last Central Safety Committee, including a review of the Covid-19 related work of the OHSW team.

During discussion, the following main issues were raised:-

- The Chairman on behalf of the Committee recognised the hard work carried out by the Occupational Health team and their efforts during this challenging time were commended.
- In terms of RIDDOR reporting, as Covid-19 was a notifiable disease, it was queried if the Council held information if an employee had contracted Covid-19. It was explained that the OHSW Manager would only know if someone had Covid-19 if this had been contracted in the workplace. The Council were asked to supply weekly returns to Cosla in respect of Covid-19 related sickness and this information would be available through Resource Link to report

on. There was no information to suggest that someone had caught Covid-19 in the workplace.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.

**OHSW  
Manager**

**9. AOB**

The Committee **AGREED** that a report on Property Related Health and Safety Issues would be circulated to the Committee in advance of the next meeting.

**Acting  
Property  
Manager**

The meeting ended at 1.50 p.m.