

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 13 November, 2020 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr Raymond Bremner
Mrs Margaret Davidson
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)

Mr Ian Macleman, UNITE/UCATT
Ms M Macrae, (RCN)

In attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side
Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer – Housing & Property
Mr A Gunn, Interim Executive Chief Officer – Transformation & Economy
Mrs F Malcolm, Interim Executive Chief Officer – Health and Social Care
Mr E Foster, Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism
Ms R Cleland, Corporate Communications and Resilience Manager
Mr B Porter, Head of Resources
Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

Mrs M Davidson in the Chair

SUBJECT/DECISION

ACTION

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie, Mr J Finlayson and Mr A Henderson from the Elected Members Side, Mr R Whyte (UNITE), Ms L MacKay (UNISON) from the Staff Side and Executive Chief Officers Mr M MacLeod, Ms L Denovan and Ms N Grant.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mrs M Davidson, Mr A MacKinnon, Mr R Selkirk and Mr A Bell declared a non financial interest as family members 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 them 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 14 August, 2020, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

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| <p>i. <u>Depute Chief Executive recruitment</u> – the recruitment to this post had been delayed and further consideration of the recruitment would be made at the full Council meeting in December, 2020.</p> | |
| <p>ii. <u>Redesign of The Highland Council</u> – a report on the Redesign of the Council would be submitted to the full Council meeting in December, 2020. Prior to this a Members workshop would be held. This would cover the Depute Chief Executive post and the Executive Chief Officer and Head of Service structure. While it was being recommended to Members that the report to Council be held in private, there may be some generic information in the report that could be shared in advance with the Staff Side. An undertaking was given to consider the engagement with the Staff Side on the Redesign report to Council.</p> | <p>CEX/
Head of
HR</p> |
| <p>iii. <u>Holiday Pay</u> – negotiations with trade unions had not progressed, but it was planned to have a meeting on this around end November, 2020.</p> | <p>Head of
HR</p> |
| <p>iv. <u>Budget</u> – meetings with the Staff Side to discuss the budget would be arranged. It was now estimated that the revenue expenditure overspend for 2020/21 would be reduced to £8.7m. The major challenge next year would be the economic recovery and the tremendous efforts of staff in delivering services and budget recovery was commended and would help with the financial recovery going forward.</p> | <p>ECO
Resource
/Finance</p> |
| <p>In terms of the additional monies promised by the Scottish Government for the Covid-19 crises, it was confirmed that additional money was being received. An undertaking was given to share with the Staff Side all the additional monies that had been received by the Council to help with the Covid-19 crises.</p> | <p>Head of
Corporate
Finance
and
Commercialism</p> |
| <p>v. It was suggested that reports to Council Committees on policy issues should be more reflective of the engagement undertaken with trade unions and their views on policy matters.</p> | <p>CEX/
Head of
HR</p> |

It was advised that there was a review of the Partnership Agreement and trade unions were involved in the review. As part of the Agreement it was intended that where there was consultation, trade unions views would be included and clearly expressed in any reports to Council Committees.

Training for Elected Members on the role of trade unions and recognition of the range of support they provided to staff would be considered through the Training Programme, Induction Programme and Workshops with trade union involvement.

**CEX/ECO
Performa
nce &
Governan
ce/Head
of HR**

5. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

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

- (i) Communities and Places, Infrastructure and Environment and Housing and Property Services (Joint Meeting) held on 31 July and 6 November, 2020.
- (ii) Health and Social Care Service held on 2 September, 2020.

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

i. Communities and Places, Infrastructure and Environment and Housing and Property Services (Joint Meeting) – 6 November, 2020

Issues highlighted in the minute were:-

- a) Radio Systems Coverage - the opportunity for the Council's leadership to lobby the UK Government on the importance of upgrading the Airwave system was highlighted as this was a particular concern for the Winter Gritting team.

The Staff Side also highlighted concerns regarding ICT provision and the Airwave system. However, the Police and Mountain Rescue service used the same radio system as the Council, but did not seem to have the same problems regarding coverage.

It was stressed that this was a health and safety issue and the need to expedite improvements in radio systems coverage was needed and the Leader of the Council undertook to lobby the UK Government on this matter.

**ECO
Environm
ent &
Infrastruc
ture**

b) Mechanical Aides for Street Cleaning -

The Staff Side highlighted that in the 2017/18 Budget report in

relation to reduction in street cleaning, it stated that mitigation could also be provided through improvements in efficiency and productivity through increased mechanism and use of technology. However, it was pointed out that staff in Ross and Cromarty were cleaning leaves with brushes and shovels, which was a health and safety issue and this was unacceptable.

The Staff Side were asked to contact the Operations Manager (Waste) to discuss this issue and whether it was a local issue or an issue in other areas of the Council.

Staff Side

ii. Health and Social Care Service

Issues highlighted in the minute were:-

- a) There had been IT provision issues for Health commissioned staff who required to access the office, but this was being addressed.
- b) Thanks were extended to Sam Purdie, RCN, for her contribution in the Stakeholder Participation Panel event as part of the interview process for the appointment of the ECO Health and Social Care.
- c) In terms of closer working with NHS Highland there was a need to reflect on and consider whether the right staff partnership links were in place.

In terms of the transitioning of the service user between acute services and community services, it would be helpful to consider Link Workers to facilitate service users leaving hospital and returning home.

It was **NOTED** that the Service Trade Union draft minute of meeting for the Education Service held on 2 November, 2020 would be circulated to the Forum.

Head of Resources

6 Consultation on Homeworking and Related Issues (Joint Staff Side/Employer item)

The Staff Side highlighted that while homeworking did suit some employees, it did not suit everyone and perhaps for some employees working from home was not a safe working environment for various reasons.

The Council as an Employer had a duty to ensure that when employees did work from home, it was safe to do so in terms of health and safety, appropriate insurance was in place and that staff were able to afford to heat their home. Allowances could be paid by the Council and there were also HMRC allowances available. Also, if the pandemic ended, then some employees may wish to continue to work from home. This may create an opportunity for the Council to have less

offices, but this should not be to the detriment of staff who required to meet costs of working from home.

In discussion, reference was made to Members and Staff not knowing what would happen at the start of lockdown in March, or for how long they would have to continue in the current new way of working. Members and Staff had adapted extremely well in challenging circumstances. There was a need to have discussion on the issues highlighted by the Staff Side to find a way forward in a planned way.

A communication was to be issued to all Staff that would set out some immediate steps to be taken such as HMRC allowances and welfare payments for fuel and other welfare benefits for staff. In terms of staff wellbeing, staff would be informed that they had a right to have a workplace.

There would be a process of engagement with staff in order to gather information regarding how they feel working from home. This information would help identify how we move forward and address homeworking issues.

Work had been undertaken on what buildings were required going forward and what a model Hub building might look like.

Details of how staff could be supported in the workplace and also working from home were provided and included areas such as equipment (including ICT); DSE checks and risk assessments; costs working from home – electricity, heating, house insurance; wellbeing of Staff; staff communications and access to offices.

A summary sheet of all the welfare benefits available had been produced and it was suggested that consideration be given as to whether it would be appropriate to send this to staff.

**Head of
HR**

The Staff Side welcomed the positive information regarding what the Council was doing in terms of homeworking and related issues. It was confirmed that the Council's Health and Safety team and Staff Side Health and Safety representatives were involved in the work regarding homeworking issues. They played an important role in supporting staff and keeping everyone safe.

Thereafter, the Forum **NOTED** that prior to the communication on homeworking issues being issued to staff, a meeting would be arranged with the Staff Side to get their feedback on the communication plan.

**CEX/
Corporate
Communi
cations
and
Resilience
Manager**

The meeting was concluded at 12.20 p.m.