

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 11 February, 2022** at 11.00 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mrs Margaret Davidson
Mr John Finlayson

Mr Jimmy Gray
Mr Allan Henderson

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr John Gibson, Unison
Mr Paul MacPherson (GMB)
Mr Rikki Selkirk (GMB)

Mr I Macleman, Unite/Ucatt
Ms Margaret Macrae (RCN)

In attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Mrs K Lackie, Interim Depute Chief Executive/Executive Chief Officer – Performance & Governance
Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side
Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer – Resources and Finance
Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer – Education & Learning
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
Mr A Gunn, Interim Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place
Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care
Ms E Barrie, Head of HR, Resources & Finance
Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property & Facilities Management, Housing and Property
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance

Mr J Gray in the Chair

SUBJECT/DECISION

ACTION

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Bremner, Mr A Christie, Mr L Fraser, Ms L Munro, Mrs T Robertson from the Employer's Side, and Ms L MacKay, Unison from the Staff Side.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 5 November, 2021, the terms of which were **APPROVED**, subject to the following amendment:-

Item 6i Health and Social Care Service – first sentence to read:-
“A new Head of Social Work Services had been appointed and would commence post in February, 2022”.

4. Matters Arising from Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

- i. Digital Overload – guidance on safeguarding from digital overload had been issued to staff and was available on the Intranet. Further guidance would be issued to staff and Managers on new ways of working that would support the general wellbeing of staff and would cover digital overload.
- ii. Recruitment of posts below Head of Service level - A peer review of the organisational structure had taken place in December and there had been meetings between Services and trade unions on what was being proposed. Also, work had been undertaken to ensure the proposals on structure aligned with affordability. Once the work on the budget had been finalised, trade unions would be informed of when final proposals on structures would likely be brought forward to them.
- iii. HC Pension Fund – there was no further update on the Government’s proposals and decisions in respect of the consultation on local government pension funds.
- iv. National Care Service – all the Chief Executives from Highlands and Islands and Northern Councils attended a meeting at which all had failed a risk assessment procedure for the National Care Service (NCS) strategy. The NCS would not work for these Councils or their staff if it was directed from Glasgow or Edinburgh. There had been a follow up from the Director General for Rural Affairs to seek more detailed information on what needs to happen to make a NCS work. Therefore, there was an opportunity to work with trade unions on this and a separate process to engage with the NHS locally.

**Head of
HR**

Also, the Chief Executive and the Chief Executive of NHS Highland met the Director for Social Care and NCS Development and it was indicated that the Highlands would like to pilot a way forward for a NCS based on good practice. There was also an opportunity to identify funding to support opportunities for redesign of care services for children and adult services as part of the NCS model

going forward. Within the next month there would be a need for a process for staff engagement in the pilot scheme and redesign work.

**CEX/
Head of
HR**

v Guidance on wearing face masks – the waste services team were required to wear face coverings while travelling in vehicles. Once collections commenced they could remove face coverings when they were out of the vehicle. The same rules would apply to other Services.

The ‘task and finish’ was brought in for the waste team for Covid measures so that staff were not congregating in depots and would disperse quickly. As the lessening of Covid restrictions continued, this would be looked at as to when it could be reverted back to normal practice. The Staff Side highlighted that ‘task and finish’ was now having the opposite effect in that waste team staff were trying to complete collection runs as quickly as possible, so they were not taking their statutory breaks, so ‘task and finish’ did need to be reconsidered. The relevant Manager would be informed of this and there would be further discussion with the Staff Side to ensure this issue was appropriately addressed.

**Head of
HR**

vi – Budget – In terms of previously agreed savings for 2021/22 it was queried if these had been achieved and if not how was the budget gap to be closed. It was advised that if Services identified that they could not deliver a saving then this would be reviewed as part of the budget process.

Continuing, the governance process for next year’s budget would include a monthly update on progress with savings and this information would be shared with trade unions.

ECO R&F

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5. Staff Side Items

i. Service Senior Structures – it was queried if the Council had considered a date when all Services can finally have the peer review and their senior structures finalised. In response, it was expected to be completed by the end of this financial year.

ii. Pupil Support Assistants Temporary Contracts – It was advised that there was an Education Service Minute of Meeting on this issue that was not accurate. The Minute stated that if staff were coming up to 2 years in a temporary post then they would be let go. This was not the Council’s practice. An undertaking was given to correct this Minute and a communication issued to staff concerned with an apology for any offence caused.

ECO E&L

There was a mapping exercise in relation to the work being undertaken in schools. Following this there would be confirmation of what is required going forward in relation to Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs)

allocations. Also, staff length of contract, service and employment rights were being reviewed to ensure the Council was complying with the correct legal position for its staff and to ensure the Council was delivering on the strategic aims on Additional Support Needs (ASN). Information on the mapping exercise would be shared with trade unions.

ECO E&L

In terms of the needs based ASN allocation model, this was being reviewed with recommendations being submitted to full Council.

In terms of job stability if the Council received a 3 year budget settlement and ring fencing issues were addressed the Council would be able undertake proper workforce planning.

Further, the Staff Side highlighted that most PSA posts were being advertised as fixed term contracts and were mostly undertaken by female employees. At the same time other posts were being advertised as permanent in workforce groupings that were mostly male. As an Employer the Council should be careful it was not breaching any equality rights by doing this.

iii. Trade Union Facility Time – The Staff Side were aware that trade union representatives who previously had facility time were not using this at present due to Covid related work issues. This affected the ability to support partnership working. The Staff Side sought reassurance that Managers were not hindering trade union representatives from undertaking union duties. In response, the Council was committed to the staff partnership which did require trade union facility time and a reminder would be issued to Managers to ensure they gave facility time to trade union representatives.

**Head of
HR**

iv. Health and Safety additional £2.2m allocation - At last year's budget setting process £2.2m was set aside for Health & Safety. The spend profile for this budget would be circulated to the Forum.

**Head of
Property/
Facilities**

v. Guidance on wearing face masks in vehicles – this item was previously discussed at item 4(v) of this minute.

vi Additional Support Needs Review – this item was previously discussed at item 5ii of this minute.

6. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

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

- i Health and Social Care Service - 1 February, 2022;
- ii Education and Learning - 23 November, 2021;
- iii Communities and Places - 24 January, 2022;
- iv Housing and Property Services - 19 January, 2022;

v Resources & Finance/Performance & Governance – 2 February, 2022.

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

i Communities and Places – Defibrillator Project – The Staff Side had concerns on defibrillators through the Council's estate, particularly who was responsible for maintaining them. It was advised that a survey was being carried out to look at suitable office accommodation to install defibrillators. There were also a number of defibrillators in communities, so there was a need to ensure there was no duplication when looking at locations. Regular maintenance of this equipment and a communication to staff on their location and how to use them would also be addressed. An update on progress would be submitted to the next meeting.

**Head of
Property/
Facilities**

Depot Surveys – It was advised that these surveys were almost complete and a meeting would be arranged with trade unions and the relevant Executive Chief Officers to discuss the results.

**Head of
Property/
Facilities**

7. Budget Update

The Executive Chief Officer Resources & Finance provided an update on the budget. It was advised that this year the budget process had been more challenging than normal with significant inflationary problems adding to the pressure in closing the budget gap. The budget would be considered at a special Council meeting on 3 March. The Council's budget settlement from Scottish Government was a reduction of £4m compared to last year's settlement. An additional £5m one off funding had also been announced, although this was still to be confirmed.

The Staff Side requested that for their next budget meeting with Officers they be provided with figures for the budget assumptions.

ECO R&F

The Forum **NOTED** the budget update.

8. Pay Negotiations

The Head of HR provided an update on the current position in respect of pay negotiations. The Teachers pay negotiations for 2021/22 had not yet concluded and the most recent offer had been rejected. It was understood that a revised offer was expected soon.

In terms of non teaching staff and Chief Officers on the Scottish Joint Council there were various elements to their pay claim for 2022/23 which included a £3k flat rate increase on all spinal column points. The overall pay claim would equate to £31.2m which would be a considerable cost to the Council. An update was also provided on the Craft Worker pay award.

Trade unions had sent Cosla further clarity on their pay claim and they were waiting to hear back from Cosla on this.

The Forum **NOTED** the update on pay negotiations.

9. **Redesign of The Highland Council (Project Updates)**

The Redesign Board would meet next week to consider key projects on Roads and Asset Rationalisation.

An update on the overall transformation programme would be included in the papers for the next meeting of the Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Board to be held on 28 February, 2022. The papers for this meeting are available by clicking on the following link:-

https://www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/4604/recovery_improvement_and_transformation_board

In terms of cashable benefits from transformation, the key risk was to achieve savings for 2021/22 from asset rationalisation. All the other savings in the transformation programme were on target including a £3m saving in adult social care.

It was confirmed that the office rationalisation project was working alongside the new ways of working project. However, the Council could not wait too long to progress asset rationalisation. The Council's financial challenges were significant and if more savings could be gained from asset rationalisation, this could protect other resources including staff.

The Forum **NOTED** the update on the work of the Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Board.

10. **Return to Workplace**

**Head of
HR**

A communication would be issued soon to staff with guidance on the return to the workplace which would reflect government announcements of a return to a more hybrid way of working.

The Forum **NOTED** the update.

The meeting was concluded at 12.45 p.m.