

**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, Inverness on **Thursday 17 August, 2023** at 3.00 p.m.

**Present:**

**Employer's Representatives:**

Mr R Bremner (remote)  
Mr Bill Lobban  
Mr David Fraser (remote)

Mr Derek Louden  
Mr Graham Mackenzie (remote)

**Staff Side Representatives:**

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

**In attendance:**

Mrs K Lackie (**KL**), Interim Chief Executive  
Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer – Communities & Place  
Mr M Rodgers (**MR**), Executive Chief Officer – Housing & Property  
Mr P Nevin, Interim ECO Performance & Governance.  
Ms E Barrie (**EB**), Interim Head of People, Resources & Finance  
Ms F Malcolm (**FM**), Head of Integration Adult Social Care, Health & Social Care  
Mr A MacInnes, Interim Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

**Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

**SUBJECT/DECISION**

**ACTION**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie, Mr J Finlayson, Mr K Gowans from the Employer's Side, and Ms M Macrae, RCN, Ms S Purdie, RCN and Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side from the Staff Side.

**2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement**

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

**3. Minutes of Last Meeting**

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum

held on 25 May, 2023, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

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

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

i Core Hours – it was advised that the Flexible Working Policy and Hybrid working guidance would be revised and there was also to be a policy on Right to Disconnect (taking breaks from work). These policies would support staff in providing effective service delivery and Core hours would also be part of the discussion on these policies.

ii Excess Travel – this related to an historical amount of 22p per mile. This had been discussed at the HR Sub Group and following a benchmarking exercise of excess travel payments made by other Local Authorities, the monetary amount would not change and the excess travel amount would be included in the Travel and Subsistence Policy.

iii Access to Wage Slips – there had been some IT issues meaning some staff were not able to access their wage slips due to an extra layer of security being introduced when accessing payslips. This required to be reset and thereafter, further guidance would be issued to the staff concerned. Also, at the Council budget meeting in March, 2023 funds had been set aside for all staff who were not office based to have a Council login so that they could access to Corporate systems, for example, the Council's staff connections, access to wage slips and online learning. Part of the project was to ensure that staff could access these systems through their own personal devices. ICT Services were undertaking this work and an update on when this would be implemented would be advised to the Staff Side. The Staff Side welcomed this investment in ICT for Staff.

**KL**

iv Facilities Management Services – The Staff Side referred to Facilities Management (FM) staff moving to peripatetic roles and queried if contract changes had been made. It was advised that the proposal was that FM staff move to a peripatetic role. Consultation would be held with Staff and trade unions on the proposal. Concern was expressed that not all trade unions had been involved in discussions on this proposal as yet. There would be the opportunity for trade unions to be involved in the consultation at an event to discuss it and in addition, the ECO Housing and Property would arrange a separate meeting with trade unions to discuss the proposal. No changes to working practices would be made without consultation.

**MR**

#### **5. Staff Side Items**

i Asset Rationalisation, communication with staff – staff required certainty about the asset rationalisation of property and how this

affects them. In this respect, the ECO Housing and Property gave a presentation on the current main workstreams for asset rationalisation which were:- Headquarters/Inverness Offices; Dingwall Office properties; Portree Offices; Drummuie/Golspie offices; Nairn Finance office; Depots Project; Health and Social Care – Criminal Justice Services and “Home to Highland”. Properties identified for closure in 2023/24 and the next group of buildings to be considered as well as savings targets, key decisions and risks were highlighted.

Following the presentation, the following main points were raised:-

- Effective communication with staff on proposals and change management was highlighted as key to keeping staff informed and ensuring this was a two way process so there was feedback from staff on the proposals;
- There was a need to ensure that depots identified for closure were fit to be disposed off given contamination at these sites over the years. If depots were not viable to dispose of then other options needed to be identified for them.
- a scoping exercise was being undertaken in relation to the potential to replace depots with Super Depots. Once complete the scoping exercise would inform a business case for a Super Depot. Once the business case was completed there was a need to bid for funding for it.
- Consideration would be given to what staff communication required to be issued in terms of the status of asset rationalisation and projects therein and timescales. Consideration would also be given to submitting an engagement plan on asset rationalisation to the Redesign Board.

The Forum **NOTED**:-

- i the presentation on asset rationalisation; and
- ii consideration would be given to a staff communication on asset rationalisation and an engagement plan on asset rationalisation for the Redesign Board.

**KL/MR**

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

There had been circulated and **NOTED** the following Service Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings, subject to minor amendments referred to at the minute being corrected:-

- i Health, Social Care & Wellbeing – 20 July, 2023;
- ii Communities and Place – 6 July, 2023;
- iii Performance & Governance/Resources & Finance/Depute CEX Services – 27 July, 2023.

Arising from the minutes of the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing

clarification was sought on the issue relating to Annex 21. This related to Health staff who remained on agenda for change terms and conditions and were on the Council's payroll system. However, the payroll system could not process percentages of salaries as would be necessary if staff were trainees so payroll had to manually input this every time. There was no one present at the meeting to provide further clarification on this issue and this item would be continued at the next meeting.

**ECO H&S  
Care/EB**

## **7. Pay Negotiations - SJC**

In relation to The Scottish Joint Council staff pay claim for 2023/24, UNISON's ballot of its members would close on 25 August. It would be known shortly thereafter as to which Councils would be affected by strike action. The GMB union had announced strike days on 13/14 September for their members in certain Councils, but not in Highland.

## **8. Staff Engagement Survey**

The Interim Head of People provided an update on the Staff Engagement Survey. Services had been asked to set up meetings by the end of June, 2023 with their teams to discuss the corporate themes and Service returns of the survey. Some Services engagement with staff was still ongoing and there was also to be online engagement next week with the Interim Chief Executive part of which would cover the staff survey. Once all the Service engagement sessions had been held, staff would be issued with the survey results and the intention was to have further engagement sessions in approximately 6 months time to cover progress on actions arising from the survey.

In particular, the Staff Side would be provided with arrangements for Education Service staff survey engagement meetings.

**KL**

Engagement with non office based staff on the survey was an ongoing process and arrangements for meetings whether it be in person/hybrid or online would be considered to enable as many staff as possible in teams the opportunity to attend.

The Forum **NOTED** the update on the Staff Engagement Survey.

The meeting was concluded at 4.00 pm