

**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 26 February 2026 at 11.05 a.m.**

Present:

Employer’s Representatives:

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| Mr R Bremner | Mr B Lobban |
| Mr J Finlayson (remote) | Mr G Mackenzie (remote) |
| Mr K Gowans | Mr P Oldham |

Staff Side Representatives:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Ms C Farmer-McEwan, UNISON (remote) | Ms S Purdie, RCN |
| Mr J Gibson, UNISON | Mr R Boyle, UNITE |
| Mr K Allison, GMB | Mr M Smith, UNITE/UCATT (remote) |
| Mrs C A Stewart, GMB | |

In attendance:

Mr A Gunn (**AG**), Assistant Chief Executive, Corporate
 Mrs K Lackie (**KL**), Assistant Chief Executive, People (remote)
 Ms R Fry (**RF**), Chief Officer, HR & Communications (remote)
 Mr B Porter, Chief Officer, Corporate Finance (remote)
 Ms E Barrie (**EB**), Head of People, Corporate
 Mr D Scott, Strategic Lead, Improvement & Performance, Business Solutions (remote)
 Ms G Warburton, Joint Secretary, Teachers’ Side
 Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Democratic Services

Mr R Bremner in the Chair

| <u>SUBJECT/DECISION</u> | <u>ACTION</u> |
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| <p>1. Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie of the Employer’s Side and Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive Place.</p> | |
| <p>2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement</p> <p>There were none.</p> | |
| <p>3. Staff Side Items</p> <p>i.Violence and aggression towards staff – an update was provided in relation to tackling violence and aggression towards staff. An unacceptable behaviour survey was currently open for staff to complete and related to unacceptable behaviour towards staff from the public. Once the survey was closed the data would be analysed to see if there were any particular areas to target interventions. Further, conflict management training was being rolled out to staff and there</p> | |

was also work being undertaken on a single record across the Council of potentially violent customers.

In response to queries, it was advised that the unacceptable behaviour survey was being promoted online and Chief Officers had been asked to issue a reminder to staff regarding the survey, particularly to staff who did not have access to IT. Once information from the survey was analysed an Action plan would be produced.

Reference was made to a phone number for staff to report violence and aggression incidents. It was queried what happened to this information once reported as some staff had said that nothing seems to happen and there was no feedback. An undertaking was given to check procedures on feedback to make sure staff did know their incidents had been logged and what, if any, action was being taken. Also, if staff had been through a violent and aggression incident, it was important to acknowledge this with staff and it would be checked how to build this into management training, to ensure there was contact and support for staff.

The Forum **NOTED** that in relation to violent and aggression incidents, procedures on feedback to staff would be checked, and it would be checked how to build into management training contact and support for staff. **RF**

ii. Personal protective equipment for waste services team - failure to follow the agreed grievance procedure.

The Staff Side advised that timescales for dealing with grievance/disciplinary cases were not being met which led to frustration for staff involved. In response, there was a need to progress cases in a timely manner and statistics were being reported to this Forum to monitor this. An undertaking was given to check with managers where there were delays and address these. There was now an Investigation Officer dealing with grievance/disciplinary cases who was working on more complex cases.

It was suggested that expanding Attendance Officers remit to help the Investigation Officer might help progress cases, as it was acknowledged that ongoing cases had an impact on staff wellbeing and sickness.

It was highlighted that part of the process of investors in people was reviewing Council policies and ensuring these were being followed. The grievance/disciplinary policies were generally being followed, but there would be exceptions and in these instances efforts would be made to deal with these. The Staff Side were asked to raise any particular concerns so that these could be recorded and acted upon, as there was a need to ensure Managers were fulfilling their responsibilities.

The Forum **NOTED** the position and the undertaking to check with Managers delays in processing grievance/disciplinary cases with a **EB**

view to progressing these.

4. Revenue Budget 2026/27 - 2028/29

There was a briefing on the key aspects of the Revenue Budget 2026/27 report to be considered by Council on 5 March.

In discussion, the Staff Side said that in the past they had been consulted earlier in the budget process and as a result had not been able to give any input into this budget. In response, the Council did launch a budget engagement exercise in December which everyone was invited to submit their views. Also, Councils were informed of their grant settlement a month later this time, due to the UK Government and Scottish Government budgets being set later. This meant a more compressed timeline for the budget process. It was acknowledged that engagement with the Staff Side prior to the budget was important and would feed into the Administrations consideration of budget proposals and this would be reflected on in the future process for budget engagement.

The budget package was a blend of growth and savings to balance the budget, with proposed savings focused on efficiency improvements and growth and additionality with new posts being created. Vacancy management would be used to control any effect on staff numbers and it was intended to bring more services in house.

It was queried how it was checked that sub contractors for NHS Highland and the Council were paying their staff Scotland's real living wage. An undertaking was given to provide this information.

The Forum **NOTED:-**

- i. the briefing on the revenue budget report; and
- ii. information would be provided on how it was checked that sub contractors for NHS Highland and the Council were paying their staff Scotland's real living wage.

AG/KL

5. Investors in People update

The Forum were updated on progress relating to Investors in People (IIP) rollout across the Council. The Corporate 1 Cluster, Legal and Governance was now complete and they had an action plan setting out what they were going to do, working together to improve things. IIP rollout in the rest of the Corporate cluster was well underway and had achieved the standard accreditation for IIP and an action plan was being drafted.

The rollout of IIP to Place 1 cluster - Property and Assets; Housing and Community services, was underway and the survey was now closed. The importance of reaching out to staff who did not have easy access to IT was highlighted. The remaining rollout of IIP was planned for the People cluster.

The Forum **NOTED** the update on Investors in People.

6. Disciplinary/Grievance/Redeployment Statistics/ill health & Capability cases

Disciplinary/grievance/redeployment/ill health & capability case statistics for quarter 3 2025-26 were circulated and **NOTED**.

7. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 11 November 2025, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

8. Matters Arising from Minutes

The following update on actions from the last meeting was provided:-

i Investors in People - an update would be provided on progress with all staff who were not office based to have a Council login so that they could access the Corporate systems.

The Strategic Lead-Improvement & Performance, Business Solutions was in attendance and gave a presentation on Council Login and Access to Corporate systems for staff who did not have accounts to access these systems. The work being carried out including engagement and communication with staff was highlighted. There was not a straightforward solution to this issue and the potential options and costs to resolve this were highlighted.

In discussion, it was acknowledged that one of the options would incur significant annual costs and it was queried what the cost would be to improve security so that staff could access systems on their own devices. It was explained that the Council would not have control if staff used their own devices and therefore there would be threat to its data security. Further, there was a need to clarify the various options, consider them in more detail, a way forward decided and then implementation.

A point was made that some staff could still not access their payslips online. In response, payslips were available to be accessed by all staff online, whether they had a Council login or not, by following instructions on the Council's website to login to 'MyView'. It was acknowledged that for someone without an account to corporate systems the process for accessing payslips was not straightforward. Work was being undertaken to update guidance and the user experience to resolve this. In terms of staff who did not have electronic devices to access payslips they should contact their manager for a printed copy.

ii. An undertaking was given to replace trade union representatives' names with the name of the trade union in future statistics being reported to the Forum. Completed.

iii Review of Disciplinary Appeal Process - An undertaking was made to improve the gender balance on the Appeals Committee. It was intended that a revised membership of the Appeals and Disputes Committee would be submitted to a meeting of the full Council in March.

9. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

There were circulated the following Service Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings, the terms of which were **NOTED**:-

- i. Corporate – 18 December 2025;
- ii. Education – 29 October 2025;
- iii. Health & Social Care – 22 January 2026
- iv. Place – 4 February 2026

The meeting concluded at 12.30 p.m.