

## The Highland Council

### Adult and Children's Services Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the **Culture and Leisure Contracts Scrutiny Sub-Committee** held in Committee Room 2, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Tuesday 27 August 2013 at 10.00am.

#### **Present:**

Mr A Christie  
Mr B Fernie  
Mr B Gormley

Mr E Hunter (Video Conferencing)  
Mr G MacKenzie  
Mr G Ross

#### **In attendance:**

Mr H Fraser, Director of Education, Culture and Sport  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

#### **Also in attendance:**

Mr I Murray, Chief Executive, High Life Highland

#### **Business**

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs I Campbell, Mr M Greene, Mrs B McAllister, Mr M Rattray and Ms J Slater.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

##### **3. Appointment of Chair**

On being nominated by Mr B Gormley seconded by Mr G Ross, the Sub-Committee **AGREED** to appoint Mr A Christie as Chair.

##### **4. High Life Highland Progress Report**

There had been circulated Report No CLCS/07/13 dated 15 August 2013 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which presented information on the performance of High Life Highland during the operating period January to June 2013.

In summary, it was noted that High Life Highland had met or exceeded the outcomes expected in the Service Delivery Contract with the Council for the period January to June 2013. In this regard the quarterly performance indicators which monitored progress were set out in Appendix 1 of the report. The report also advised that the performance of High Life Highland against annual performance indicators/actions would be reported to a future meeting. An update was also provided on recent/current activity under a range of headings.

In discussion, Members queried the process for evaluating the performance information provided by High Life Highland to ensure outcomes were evidenced.

Mr I Murray reported that the evaluation and monitoring of High Life Highland's performance information was carried out by the Education, Culture and Sport Service as client manager, through HMI and other inspections, and using the available comparator information for other local authorities. However, he welcomed Members comments in regard to this issue.

Following further discussion, the Sub-Committee **AGREED** that the monitoring and evaluation of High Life Highland's performance information be considered, and a report brought back to the next appropriate meeting.

Thereafter, Members suggested that there was a perception that High Life Highland delivered an excellent service in regard to sport and leisure activities, but required to focus more on the development of libraries and cultural activities.

Mr I Murray explained that the changes to sport and leisure activities under High Life Highland had been more visible than for other services which may have contributed to the perception there was less focus on cultural activities. However he explained there had been a partial necessity to focus on sport and leisure to maximise income generation in this area to meet targets and minimise any reductions to other High Life Highland services. He further explained that budget restrictions had already been applied to libraries and cultural activities prior to the establishment of High Life Highland, but suggested that more was being delivered within the available resources than in the past. He referred in particular to the level of arts provision, and increased visitor numbers at galleries and museums in this regard. He also confirmed that High Life Highland's focus in the current year would be on libraries and youth work.

In response the Chair requested that more detailed statistics be provided in future reports in regard to activity at libraries and cultural centres to help address some of the concerns which had been expressed.

Responding to further questions, Mr I Murray confirmed that he would circulate Members with further information on new partnerships and areas of work being developed as referred to in the report, as part of the empowering communities approach.

In regard to the impact of welfare reform on low income families, it was confirmed that the High Life scheme currently in operation for leisure centres was to be extended to cultural centres, noting that the scheme offered reduced admission fees for those on benefits.

A further point was raised in regard to the importance of transport provision in making facilities accessible to low income families. It was confirmed that, at the request of the Council's Children's Champion, discussions were to be held between the Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the relevant bus companies in regard to the issues associated with transport provision.

Thereafter, the Sub-Committee **NOTED** that High Life Highland had met or exceeded the outcomes expected in the Service Delivery Contract with the Council for the period January to June 2013.

## 5. High Life Highland Adult Learning Services

There had been circulated Report No CLCS/08/13 dated 19 August 2013 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which presented information on the Adult Learning services provided by High Life Highland, focusing particularly on courses and classes. The report noted the success of the Adult Learning class programme commissioned by High Life Highland.

During a presentation on this item, Mr I Murray provided information on the adult learning service and performance in 2012/13; a summary of the courses and classes which had been commissioned; and trends in terms of outputs and outcomes from 2009/10 to date which were improving year on year. He also provided a summary of those courses which were linked to employability at which learners were given the opportunity to develop work related skills within their communities.

The presentation also focused on the successful outcomes for the Service in 2012-13 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, in regard to supporting the employment agenda and economic development; supporting older learners; health and well being; support for rural communities; overcoming the digital divide; and reducing re-offending.

In response to questions, Mr I Murray confirmed that he would circulate Members with information on the courses and classes provided by the Adult Learning Service on a ward basis, and information on the discounts applied to course fees for those people and families on benefits.

Discussion followed on the information set out in the report on equalities monitoring with specific reference to people of an ethnic origin, and it was suggested that there was a need to improve links with communities to raise awareness about the courses and classes available. Mr I Murray acknowledged the point made but also cautioned that the figures in regard to ethnic minorities may be understated on the basis that some people were reluctant to complete the equalities monitoring form.

Thereafter, the Sub-Committee **NOTED** the success of the Adult Learning class programme commissioned by High Life Highland and that it was improving year on year.

## 6. High Life Highland Libraries

There had been circulated Report No CLCS/09/13 dated 19 August 2013 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which presented information on the Library services provided by High Life Highland and compared performance, in terms of value for money, with other local authority areas. The report noted that Library performance compared favourably with comparable Local Authority areas in other parts of Scotland.

Arising from the report, Mr I Murray gave a presentation on some of the current activities and developments which were taking place in libraries in the context of the Government's proposals for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Libraries in terms of value for money and the core services offered. This included that libraries should provide a neutral space, increasingly be multi-purpose shared buildings, and a hub of community activity.

In regard to libraries in Highland, he outlined the range of core services and activities offered. This included lending both in traditional and electronic formats; Bookbug

sessions, author visits, intergenerational IT classes; public access to computers; provision of a community space; digital taster sessions using a range ICT equipment; outreach work delivered by library staff in nurseries, schools and care homes; and literacy programmes in schools. He also reported on the current shared arrangements with libraries and schools, service points and leisure centres.

Mr I Murray continued that in terms of performance with comparator authorities, High Life Highland libraries achieved good value for money, with slightly less expenditure to deliver the service, despite Highland having the largest geography and higher than average use in terms of physical visits and borrowers. He also reported that recent investment in new facilities in the Highlands had resulted in an increased number of visits and active members being recorded. Finally he provided an update on current and planned investment at Thurso Library and Wick High School, and early discussions on the potential for a Highland Gallery/Museum/Library in Inverness to be developed.

In regard to performance monitoring the Chair requested that information on trends within Highland compared to national average trends be provided to allow comparisons over a longer term period.

Arising from the presentation Members welcomed the role of libraries in contributing to the preventative/early years agenda, and particularly the success of the Bookbug sessions which supported early years literacy, parent/child attachment and social interaction between children. Members also referred to the fact that the scheme had also assisted some of the parents involved in the scheme with adult literacy issues.

During further discussion, Mr I Murray responded to a number of questions from Members during which he explained that currently publishers would not give permission for books to be uploaded onto a Kindle at libraries but that this was currently the subject of a national debate. In regard to the age ranges of visitors to libraries in Highland he advised that the use of new technology had resulted in an increase in the number of young people using libraries.

Thereafter, the Sub-Committee **NOTED** that library performance compared favourably with comparable Local Authority areas in other parts of Scotland.

The meeting concluded at 11.10 am.