

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
Joint Consultation Group (Administrative Etc, Manual and Crafts Staffing)

Minutes of Meeting of the Joint Consultation Group (Administrative Etc, Manual and Crafts Staffing) held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 12 December, 2013 at 10.30 a.m.

Present

Employer's Representatives:

Mr D Fallows
Mr A MacKinnon

Mr D MacKay
Mr F Parr

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr R Selkirk, GMB
Mr M Haymer, GMB
Mr J Rosie, UNITE (by video conference)
Mr A Wemyss, UNITE
Mr M Robison-Murphy, UCATT

Mr C Cameron, UCATT (observer)
Ms L MacKay, UNISON
Mr J Gibson, UNISON
Ms S Arch, CSP

Officials in attendance:

Mr D Yule, Director of Finance
Mr J Batchelor, Head of Human Resources, Chief Executive's Service
Mr R Whyte, Regional Officer, UNITE
Mr J Robertson, Programme Manager, Corporate Improvement Programme
Ms C Christie, Employee Development Manager, Chief Executive's Service
Ms E Barrie, Human Resources Manager, Chief Executive's Service
Ms G Falconer, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Chief Executive's Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

Mr J Gibson in the Chair

Mr Cliff Parr

The Chair on behalf of the Group noted with sadness the death of Mr Cliff Parr who had been a Unison Representative for many years. The Chair paid tribute to Mr Parr's contributions to his trade union work and that he would be deeply missed by all his colleagues. The Chair extended the condolences of the Group to Mr Parr's family.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr D Alston (other Council business), Miss J Campbell (other Council business), Mr H Morrison (other Council business) from the Employer's Side and Ms M Nicolson, Unison and Ms M Macrae (RCN) from the Staff Side.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mr A MacKinnon declared a non-financial interest on the items to be discussed at the meeting on the grounds that his spouse was an employee of the Council but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated for confirmation, Minutes of the last meeting of the Group held on 6 September, 2013 the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

Arising from the minutes the following matters were raised:-

- i item 1 – Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair – It was **NOTED** that Mr J Gibson, Unison was the Staff Side's nomination for Vice-Chair of the Group.
- ii Item 6 – Support for Apprentices – It was **NOTED** that the Staff Side's nominations to the Employability Board were Mr A Wemyss, UNITE and Mr C Cameron, UCATT.
- iii Item 8 – Employee Partnership & Engagement Framework – In relation to the establishment of a joint working group to define and develop a partnership and engagement framework that delivers for Highland Council and the democratic nature of the Council, it was advised that the Group had met a few times and would be in a position to report back to the next meeting of the Joint Consultation Group with proposals on how to take the partnership working forward.

The Group **NOTED** that a report on the Joint Working Group's consideration of a partnership and engagement framework would be submitted to the next meeting.

4. Corporate Improvement Programme 2

There was circulated Report No. JCG/14/13 by the Depute Chief Executive which provided an update on the Corporate Improvement Programme 2 (CIP2). It was reported that CIP2 projects had started with projects progressing satisfactorily, targets of £5.93m in savings had been set.

Progress was provided on the following projects:- Asset Management; Business Support; Customer Contact Transformation; Income Generation; Integrated Transport Provision; Mobile and Flexible Working and Managing Information. An assessment of the projects that would most likely affect staff was also provided.

In terms of the Asset Management project, the Staff Side advised that there had been problems with the suitability of accommodation in the Town House, Inverness for a group of staff and their clients that had been relocated there. It was requested that office accommodation reviews in future should take account of all factors, and in particular the type of service provided by staff.

In response, it was advised that in moving forward with the asset management programme lessons would be learned in terms of where staff were located for future office reviews. In terms of the specific query regarding whether there was to be a review of the suitability of the Town House for the staff group referred to, this would be clarified.

Further, the Dingwall Office Rationalisation project Board had met to consider the Dingwall Office Review and within this the interrelationships with Mobile and Flexible working, Managing Information and The Customer Contact Transformation projects will be managed. Also considered at this Board is the technology that would support the office rationalisation. Therefore, all aspects of suitability for the office review will be taken into consideration.

In relation to the self service element of the Personnel Admin/ResourceLink project, it was queried if this would have an effect on Business Support posts. In response it was advised that there would be no additional impact on Business Support Service posts as a result of this project.

In terms of the Purchasing and Financial Transactions project discussions with Health and Social Care, it was noted that circa 300 staff transferred from NHS to Highland Council, and some 80% continued to work out of NHS premises, using NHS, PCs. The Staff Side advised that it was essential that NHS staff that had been transferred to Highland Council still had access to NHS computers to enable them to do their work. It was advised that there was a programme of work to provide technical solutions to enable this to happen.

In relation to the Mobile and Flexible Working project, the Staff Side advised that a number of staff felt that there was a presumption that there was an active encouragement to working from home. Also, in relation to work spaces to staff ratios, the work done, and how this was monitored, it was queried whether this was purely on a headcount or on the type of work staff were doing and when they required to be at their desks. The experience of staff had been that they all needed to be at their desks at the same time to deliver their work, so 'hot desking' would not work.

In response it was advised that the Mobile and Flexible Working (MFW) aspirations were based on trying to make better use of work spaces. This was governed by a policy on how staff worked and where they worked e.g. at home. There was no assumption that staff would work from home. There were formal reviews of work spaces required during office reviews and the outcomes were discussed with staff prior to any changes being implemented. It was further advised that the MFW project had to meet the business requirements of the Services' needs. In terms of 'hot desking' it was intended that health and safety would be involved at an early stage in office reviews and this was the case in the Dingwall office review. Also, health and safety risk assessments should be carried out for those employees wishing to work from home.

The Group **NOTED:-**

- i the progress of the Corporate Improvement Programme 2 and the engagement with staff and trade unions; and

- ii In terms of the query regarding whether there was to be a review of the suitability of the Town House for the staff group referred to, this would be clarified, and an update provided to the next meeting.

5. Budget Update

There was tabled a report by the Director of Finance on the Revenue Budget and Council Tax 2014/15 which was to be submitted to The Highland Council meeting on 19 December, 2013. The report set out budget proposals to address the residual £3.6m budget gap for 2014/15, therefore allowing the Council to agree the revenue budget and council tax for that year. An update on the Council's longer-term financial planning arrangements was also set out within the report.

It was advised that on 7 February, 2013, the Council agreed the revenue budget for 2013/14, a savings package for two years totalling circa £24m, including savings proposals totalling £12.148m to largely address the estimated budget gap for 2014/15. A 2014/15 budget gap of £3.3m remained at that time.

A number of adjustments to the 2014/15 budget estimates had been made, resulting in the residual gap still to be addressed being revised to £3.6m. The Senior Management Team had reviewed the budget estimates for 2014/15, and identified a number of further budget proposals and adjustments, which would allow the Council to address the residual budget gap for 2014/15 without the need to seek further service reductions. However, there were significant challenges in delivering this package of savings and the focus would be on implementing savings already agreed.

The report set out a number of risks and assumptions in determining the budget for 2014/15. These would be challenged over the next year to ensure that the savings required were not over estimated. In terms of the longer-term financial planning it was forecasted that there would be a circa £80m gap over the period 2015/16 – 2018/19. The Senior Management Team had held a number of budget strategy meetings to further consider how the budget strategy can be taken forward, and the types of review which can lead to the service change and savings over that period. The review areas were highlighted in the report, however it was advised that many of these areas were challenging and would require time to allow proper research, analysis and consultation to ensure that the implications were fully assessed. There would be consultation leading up to budget decisions.

The Group **NOTED** the budget position and the financial challenges that lay ahead.

6. Budget Savings – Staffing Impact

There was circulated joint Report No. JCG/15/13 by the Director of Finance and Depute Chief Executive on the staffing impact relating to current year budget savings. Savings totalling £11.6m had been agreed with an estimated staffing impact related to those savings of 63.6 full-time equivalent (FTE).

It was advised that compared to the forecast 63.6 FTE staffing impact, the revised forecast was 43.6 FTE. The lower staffing impact could be explained

through; savings achieved with no staff impact or a lower impact than had been assumed, and in some cases slippage in the timescale for implementing the savings. The majority of savings had been achieved from vacant posts, through natural turnover of staff and vacancy management.

In terms of the staffing impact of 5 FTE posts in ECS, Primary Devolved it was noted that all staff had been redeployed elsewhere. It was queried whether an actual saving had been made in this case. The Director of Finance undertook to clarify this point and report back.

Further, it was advised that there were significant pressures in terms of additional support needs and therefore there had been no net reduction in staffing numbers as the demand for this service had increased. The Service was trying to manage this across its entire budget and the latest forecast was that this was on target.

The Group **NOTED**:

- i the updated staff impact forecast and that further update reports on this would be submitted to future meetings; and
- ii the Director of Finance undertook to clarify if an actual saving had been made in relation to the 5 FTE posts staffing impact, in ECS, Primary Devolved.

7. Employee Survey 2012 – Progress on Action Plan

There was circulated Report No. JCG/16/13 by the Depute Chief Executive which outlined the progress to date on the actions agreed as a result of the Employee Survey 2012.

It was advised that progress on the Employee Survey actions would be reported to Finance, Housing and Resources Committee in April, 2014 and the report provided a summary of progress under each of the high level actions. Overall good progress had been made on the corporate actions although there were still areas for further work particularly in developing leadership and management styles that support staff engagement; reviewing and improving communications and staff engagement and implementing a partnership approach to communication, consultation and negotiation.

Services had also reported their Service specific action plans to the Strategic Committees and would be reporting progress.

In response to a query it was advised that from responses to the Employee Survey, circa 59% of staff had taken part in the personal development planning process. Once the ResourceLink project was completed a more accurate figure could be ascertained. Further, the roll-out of the new Employee Review and Development (ERD) process required to be completed across all Services. ERD briefings were being offered for Managers and Managers were being encouraged to offer staff regular ERD and health, safety and wellbeing reviews.

It was suggested that it may be helpful to Staff Side representatives to attend courses for Managers for awareness purposes and in this respect reference

was made to the Mentally Healthy Working training and details would be sent to the trade union representatives.

The Group **NOTED**:

- i the progress made so far in the Employee Survey actions; and
- ii that details on Mentally Healthy Working training would be sent to the Staff Side representatives.

8. Dates for Future Meetings

The Group **APPROVED** the undernoted dates for their meetings and that of the Central Safety Committee in 2014:-

Friday, 7 February
Friday, 11 April
Friday, 8 August
Friday, 24 October

The meeting ended at 11.25 a.m.

Date of Next Meeting – Friday 7 February, 2014 commencing at 11.00 a.m.