

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Customer Services Board** held on Tuesday, 16 September 2014 at 3.00pm in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness.

Present:

Mr D Millar
Dr I Cockburn
Mrs M Davidson
Mr J Gordon
Mr R Laird

Mr B Lobban
Mrs D Mackay
Mr H Morrison
Dr A Sinclair
Mr H Wood

Non-Member in attendance:

Mr A Baxter (by tele-conference)

Officials in attendance:

Ms M Morris, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development
Ms V Nairn, Head of Digital Transformation
Ms A Clark, Policy Officer
Ms T Page, Customer Services Manager
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager

Also in attendance:

Ms L MacKay, UNISON
Mr M Haymer, GMB

Mr D Millar in the Chair**Business****1. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the last Meeting held on 19 August 2014 - which were **APPROVED**.

4. Exclusion of the Public

The Board **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public should be excluded from the meeting for Item 5

on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

5. Customer Services Review – Update (Private Item)

There had been circulated separately to Members only Report No. CSB/3/14 dated 19 August 2014 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which provided an update on the on-going work of the Customer Services Board and reflected the changes requested during the discussion at the last meeting.

Prior to discussion, reference was made to the Key Principles which had been agreed at the last meeting, and specifically Principle 2 which had been amended to reflect agreement that 'it was about providing services not keeping buildings *where appropriate...*'. In this regard, it was highlighted that this amendment had not been carried forward within this report and also the report at Item 6 within the papers. In response, it was confirmed that this had been an oversight and would be corrected within the reports.

At this point, it was also clarified that – in relation to the Access Points Model - reference had been made within the report to Community Hub provision at '12 locations' and this should be corrected to '13 locations'.

Thereafter, and during discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- in terms of the Access Points Model, it was important that further information was provided on the potential jobs impact on communities and it would be helpful if this confidential information could be provided for Members following the meeting;
- further work was required in regard to the potential for moving work to Service Points in rural areas wherever possible;
- local suggestions, such as the use of Police Stations in certain locations, should be taken forward where feasible;
- future reports should contain more detailed information in regard to the Carbon CLEVER implications of proposals coming forward for consideration;
- there needed to be further more detailed consideration given to the specific proposals within the report in regard to Gairloch Library and Lochcarron Library as they could pose potential problems;
- there needed to be consistency in terms of what was being proposed and in this regard it was suggested that further consideration should be given to the suggestions being put forward for Muir of Ord, Invergordon, Fort Augustus and Kyle;
- it was important that the potential impact of welfare reform on communities was also taken account of in terms of the proposals being put forward;
- there was a need for more detailed information on how online 'face-to-face' transactions would be implemented;
- there were some current services which could fit well with proposals for moving work to rural locations and they should be given a high priority as part of future discussions;

- staff consultation should be undertaken as soon as possible in order to highlight and inform as to the current position and to enable discussion of potential future opportunities;
- the importance of jobs to rural communities in particular had to be paramount in any future consultation;
- the updated Service Point Profiles which had been tabled at the meeting were welcomed in regard to the additional information/rural data which had now been provided and which would help to inform process going forward; and
- consultation with staff, communities and Ward Members should now be commenced as soon as possible and, in addition to the proposals within the report, should also take account of the comments made by Members at the meeting.

Thereafter, and taking into account the issues raised by Members in relation to specific locations, the Board **AGREED** the revised model for consultation as detailed in the report.

The Board also **NOTED** the updated Service Point Profiles which had been tabled at the meeting.

6. Customer Services Review: Stakeholder Engagement

There had been circulated Joint Report No. CSB/4/14 dated 8 September 2014 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development and the Head of Policy and Reform which outlined a proposal for further stakeholder engagement as part of the Customer Services Review.

At this point, Ms L MacKay, Unison, and Mr M Haymer, GMB, were welcomed to the meeting.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- a review of the Community Councils listed should be undertaken and they should be consulted in terms of a catchment area thereafter;
- it was imperative that focus groups and tenants groups were truly representative and as demographically balanced as possible in order to ensure a balanced profile of Service Point users;
- in terms of the focus groups to be consulted, it was important that these should include groups representing individuals with visual impairments, older people, individuals with mental ill health, ethnic and faith groups, multi-cultural women's groups, individuals with learning disabilities, individuals with hearing impairments and areas with high levels of deprivation such as the Seaboard area;
- consultation and discussion with Service Point staff was imperative and should be undertaken as soon as possible in order that they were kept continually informed of the process as it was progressed;
- consultation with Local Access Panels and Local Drug/Alcohol Forums should also be included;
- the consultation questions should be as 'open' as possible and should include the opportunity for additional feedback to be provided if necessary;

- it was known that staff preferred ‘face-to-face’ contact and this should be undertaken wherever possible;
- there were on-going concerns about the loss of jobs in rural areas in particular and these had to be addressed;
- a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment which had been undertaken should be forwarded to the Trade Union representatives present at the meeting, along with a copy of the consultation questions for staff before they were issued;
- Audit Scotland had previously published a report on Option Appraisal and it was suggested that cognisance should be taken of the principles of that report wherever possible in terms of best practice;
- it was important that, as well as consulting on the proposed model, discussion should also be undertaken and views sought on whether there were alternative affordable models; and
- in terms of consistency, it was important that all Members followed the approach which had been agreed by the Board as opposed to developing proposals on an individual basis.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the good practice and legal requirements for consulting on proposals for service changes.

The Board also **AGREED**:-

- i. that mixed methods be used to engage the stakeholder groups, including in the geographical areas which Members had already agreed, as detailed in Section 2.3 of the report;
- ii. that the community based consultation should be undertaken in the following order – Inner Moray Firth (North), Inner Moray Firth (South), Nairn & Badenoch & Strathspey, Lochaber, Skye & Wester Ross, North West Sutherland and East Sutherland. In this regard, it was also agreed that Bonar Bridge and Lairg should be included in the North West Sutherland consultation (and not East Sutherland as had been listed) and that Tain and Easter Ross should be included in the Inner Moray Firth (North) consultation;
- iii. that best use be made of consultation already conducted and planned to inform the review;
- iv. that the scope of the review should include: questions building on the earlier feedback from local budget events; views on model(s) under consideration by the Board; whether there were any other affordable models to explore; whether and how some groups might be affected by proposals differently and how any negative impacts might be mitigated;
- v. the methods and phasing as set out in the table at Paragraph 3.1 based on the descriptions in Section 2 of the report; and
- vi. that those involved in the consultation should receive feedback on how their views were taken into account in the final decisions.

7. Staff Consultation

A Verbal Update was provided at the meeting in regard to proposed staff consultation during which it was confirmed that staff briefings, utilising all available methods, would be undertaken before the formal consultation process was commenced.

In this regard, and following a request from the Trade Union representatives at the meeting, it was confirmed that the potential for the outsourcing of work wherever possible would be included in those briefings, along with consideration of any other options and suggestions which might come forward from staff.

The Board **NOTED** the position.

The meeting concluded at 4.30pm.