

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 the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 24 October, 2014 at 11.00 am.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr R Laird	Ms J Campbell
Mr A MacKinnon	Mr F Parr
Mr D Mackay	Ms M Smith

Staff Side Representatives:

Ms S Arch (CSP)	Mr M Haymer (GMB)
Mr C Cameron (UCATT) (Substitute)	Mr J Rosie (UNITE) (by video conference)
Mr J Gibson (UNISON)	Mr A Wemyss (UNITE)

In attendance:

Mr J Batchelor, Head of People and Performance, Corporate Development Service
 Mr D Robertson, Head of Corporate Finance, Finance Service
 Ms J McAlpine, Project Manager, Chief Executive's Office
 Mr M MacDonald, Human Resources Manager, Corporate Development Service
 Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Mr R Laird in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr D Alston, Mr H Morrison and Dr I Cockburn of the Employer's Side and Mr R Selkirk, GMB, Mr M Murphy (UCATT), Ms L MacKay (UNISON), Ms M Nicolson (UNISON), Ms M Macrae (RCN) and Mr R Whyte (UNITE) of the Staff Side.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mr A Mackinnon declared a financial interest in 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 his involvement in the discussion.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated Minutes of the last meeting of the Group held on 8 August, 2014, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Arising from the Minutes, the following issues were raised:-

i Total Mobile System – Reference had been made at the last meeting to instances of equipment not working resulting in staff having to revert to paper based systems and housing repairs being passed on handwritten notes that did not include the necessary health and safety information. The Staff Side had received a communication from Community Services at a Corporate level that this issue would be resolved, but unfortunately the problems were still occurring. This was an issue that should not be occurring and employees should have the necessary health and safety information to deal with housing repairs. There was also the issue of there having to be return visits when they are not needed, as employees did not have all the relevant information. It was requested that this issue be communicated to Management which would resolve the problem. As mobile working was being introduced into other Services as well, it was important to resolve these issues now.

The Chair advised that if there had been a direction at corporate level that had not been communicated to management level this was unusual. If this was not happening, this would be addressed.

ii Pupil Support Assistants – reference was made to the Equality Impact Assessment carried out as part of the review process into Pupil Support Assistant hours, which had been circulated to the Group. The Staff Side advised that the Assessment highlighted their concerns on the way the change in hours had been implemented. It was highlighted in the Assessment that “The model can predict the level of need on the basis of information readily available from the pupil database...”. If this was the case why were changes being implemented in June, when if this model had been up and running, the Service should have had the information prior to that. It showed that something was not quite working with the system. Also, the Assessment had been carried out in September, 2012 and since then the matrix in the way pupils were assessed had changed as well. The Assessment should have been amended as a result. The Staff Side welcomed discussion on these issues with the Care and Learning Service.

The Chair advised that the content of the Equality Impact Assessment justified the Groups decision to request a review of the Pupil Support Assistant review process. In this respect, it was noted that a meeting on this issue with the Care and Learning Service and trade union representatives would be held next week.

iii Annual Leave Pay – It had previously been reported that there had been a legal ruling in The Court of Justice of the European Union that found that a workers annual leave pay should include commission payments if these were part of their normal pay. The Staff Side had sought clarification on how this would affect Staff.

It was reported that there were discussions at national level between trade unions and Cosla to see if a settlement could be reached and the Council was waiting to see the outcome of this, as any settlement would affect all Councils.

5. Staff Savings Proposals 2014/15

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/14/14 by the Director of Finance which explained that the revenue budget for 2014/15 had been agreed in December 2013 and a savings package of £12.1m was required to ensure a balanced budget. The report provided an update on the staffing impact of the agreed savings proposals.

It was explained that a total reduction of 103.9 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts was required to meet the budget savings target. The appendix to the report, which contained the latest information from Services, showed that the total post reduction was only 39.5 FTE with the equivalent of a further 50.7 posts being held vacant to meet the financial target. Savings equivalent to the balance of 13.7 posts were currently also being met from reduced spend in budgets outwith the staffing budget.

In response to a query regarding how Services were achieving their savings targets, it was advised that Service Directors were given a budget, which they are required to bring in on target. The full detail on how the Services manage their budgets was reported through the financial monitoring reports which are available as part of Committee agendas.

The Group **NOTED** the report.

6. Corporate Improvement Programme 2

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/15/14 by the Programme Manager, Corporate Improvement Programme (CIP) which explained that CIP 2 was in its second year with projects progressing satisfactorily and savings targets of £5.93m over the two years having been set. Projects were sponsored by members of the Executive Leadership Team and CIP team staff were involved in supporting the budget setting process by identifying transformation projects that could deliver savings. Detailed aspects of the Programme were discussed with Trade Unions on a six-weekly basis at the CIP Trade Union Liaison Group.

The report provided an update on a number of projects, relating to asset management, business support, customer contact transformation, income generation, managing information, mobile & flexible working, procurement and transport. In particular, it was highlighted that detailed proposals required to achieve the preferred option for Council offices in the centre of Fort William was in progress and local staff briefings were taking place at the end of October. The Personnel Admin/ResourceLink Phase 2 work was progressing with a pilot in Finance to confirm arrangements that will be deployed to allow for self service and automated processes, and a trial with on-line payslips. Also, in order to maximise income generation opportunities the Council was to appoint a Commercial Manager. This role would lead on the initiative to increase the Council's ability to generate income and drive forward a commercialism agenda.

In relation to the Dingwall Office Review two properties required alterations to meet specific Service requirement. One of these properties - Academy Cottage - it was understood would be ready by the start of the new school session in August. Then it was supposed to have been ready after the October school break, but this was not going to happen now either. An update on when the works would be completed was requested.

Also of concern with the Dingwall Office Review was the old demountable unit across from the County Buildings in Dingwall. It was understood that the Director of Care and Learning Service had been given two options for that building – either to bring it up to standard to be used as teacher training facilities at a cost of £10k, or bring it up to standard to become DDA compliant at a cost of £30k. This was a lot of money to be spent on an old demountable unit. It was queried how much had been spent and where had the money come from.

It was advised that a lot of the initial concerns that staff had on alterations to the County Buildings in Dingwall had been dealt with. However, as this was going to be the main administrative office in Dingwall at no point in the project did anyone consider that it was going to be a single glazed building – no double glazing was planned for the building. The heating system was made up of various systems and the staff required fans in the summer and additional heaters in the winter. No attempt had been done to reduce the Council's carbon footprint. For a building that was to be used for the next 40 to 50 years, the whole building should have been looked at for this office rationalisation project.

In response, it was advised that if these issues were not being considered, then an assurance was given to the Staff Side that they would be. If more capital investment was required in the building to make it more energy efficient and sustainable then this would be done.

The Chair sought clarification as to what had been done in relation to these issues in the County Buildings, Dingwall. There had been concerns over the way the project had been managed both from local Members and staff. Therefore progress that had been made was requested and what had been done to ensure there was not a repeat of this as it was important that lessons were learned.

It was welcomed that the Fort William office rationalisation project would follow the model of the Wick office rationalisation project, as the Wick project had a lot of staff involvement in it and had gone very well.

Thereafter, the Group:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress of the Programme and the engagement with staff and Trade Unions;
- ii. **AGREED** that an update on when works were due to be completed on the Academy Cottage building would be submitted to the Group;
- iii. **AGREED** that the cost and the budget heading used to fund the alterations to the demountable unit opposite the County Buildings in Dingwall would be submitted to the Group;
- iv. **AGREED** that clarification be sought as to what proposals there were to make the County Buildings, Dingwall more energy efficient and sustainable, and what progress had been made in relation to the issues raised by staff and local Members over the way the project had been managed and what had been done to ensure there was not a repeat of these issues.

7. Highland Council Engagement and Partnership Framework

There had been circulated Report No. JCG/16/14 by the Joint Working Group which recommended the adoption and implementation of a Highland Council Engagement and Partnership Framework.

It was explained that, at its meeting on 6 September 2013, the Group had agreed to support the implementation of a Highland Council Engagement and Partnership Framework. The objective of the Framework was to facilitate the success of the Council in its democratic role and in delivering high quality public services. The report summarised the benefits and principles of the framework as well as the consultation that had taken place to date.

It was advised that over the previous weeks the focus of the Joint Working Group had been detailed discussion around implementation of the Framework. In particular, discussion had covered membership of the HC Partnership Forum; the quantification, apportionment and funding of trade union facilities time. The report detailed the conclusions on how the HC Partnership Forum should operate and a schedule of meetings to support partnership working.

During discussion, it was noted that at the end of a period of one year the quantification, allocation and funding of trade union facilities time would be reviewed and necessary arrangements would be put in place for the ongoing support of the Framework. The point was made that it was very difficult for the Staff Side to quantify facilities time, as all the work they were involved in should be partnership working, other than individual representation. However they were content for a review of this after a period of one year and undertook to quantify the time they required to spend on supporting the Framework.

In relation to page 4 paragraph eight of the Framework, it was requested that this be amended to include that trade unions still had the right to act independently of each other and from the partnership agreement. This was approved by the Group.

In relation to page 4, first sentence of the last paragraph, it was requested that this be amended to read "As soon as is practical after a service objective has been identified consultation with partners will be invited". This was approved by the Group.

In terms of the membership of the Management Group and Elected Members Group within the partnership, there was provision for delegates of the identified people to attend the meetings, but it was expected that the people identified should attend the meetings unless there was a very good reason why they could not attend, as delegates frequently attending in their place would undermine the principal of Engagement and Partnership Framework.

Thereafter, the Group **AGREED**:-

- i. to the adoption of the Highland Council Engagement & Partnership Framework as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, subject to the amendments agreed at the meeting;
- ii. the composition of the Highland Council Partnership Forum as set out in section 3.2 and method of operation set out in section 3.3 of the report; and
- iii. the approach to implementation set out in section 3.4 of the report.

8. Dates for Meetings in 2015

The Group **APPROVED** the following dates for meetings of the Joint Consultation Group and Central Safety Committee in 2015:-

Friday, 6 February

Friday, 15 May

Friday, 14 August

Friday, 30 October

The Joint Consultation Group would commence at 11am and the Central Safety Committee at 12.15pm (or following the JCG meeting whichever is the later).

The meeting concluded at 11.30 a.m.

Date of Next Meeting – Friday, 6 February, 2015 at 11a.m.