

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Customer Services Board** held in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Tuesday, 17 March 2015 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Dr A Sinclair
Mrs M Davidson

Mr B Lobban
Mr H Wood

Officials in attendance:

Ms V Nairn, Head of Digital Transformation
Mr A Gunn, Head of Revenues and Business Support
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing
Ms T Page, Customer Services Manager
Miss J Maclennan, Principal Administrator

Dr A Sinclair in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr I Cockburn, Mr J Gordon, Mr R Laird, Mrs D Mackay, Mr H Morrison and Mr G Rimell.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

There had been circulated Minutes of the last Meeting held on 17 February 2015 which were **NOTED**.

4. Customer Service Board – Consultation Update

There had been circulated Report by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development regarding the Customer Services Review consultation.

In this regard, Members were reminded that the consultation had been launched on 22 January and was due to close on 19 March 2015. To date, 65 responses had been received online and 118 written responses had been submitted. A full analysis would be undertaken once the consultation had closed but a number of key themes had emerged and were relayed to Members. Individuals had been asked which Service Point they were responding about and the highest number to date had related to Dornoch. There could be a number of reasons for this but there was clearly a concern regarding the future of the Tourist Information Point. It was also reported that there had been significant difficulty in forming Focus

Groups and getting engagement from the public in a number of areas and as a result the process had been augmented by the use of telephone interviews.

During discussion, Members referred to the disappointing response from Community Councils, Access Panels and Community Groups and suggested that a contributory factor might have been that when completing the form as a download, it had not been obvious who it was to be returned to and on completion there was no message confirming its submission.

In response, the Head of Digital Transformation confirmed that most forms had been received successfully, 183 responses had been received and, to the best of her knowledge, there had been difficulty with only 3 submissions. Information as to which groups had submitted responses would be provided and Members should where possible encourage their Community Councils to participate.

There would be reports submitted to the next Board meeting – one from UHI summarising the key findings from the User Engagement and the second outlining the key findings on the Public Consultation, including the feedback received during the Ward Consultation sessions. In relation to the latter, Members asked if it would be possible for them to receive either sight or a summary of the Public Consultation responses, a matter which Officers undertook to investigate.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the content of the report and **AGREED**:-

- i. that information as to which groups had submitted responses to the consultation should be provided for Members; and
- ii. that Officers should investigate the feasibility of providing Members with information regarding the consultation responses.

5. Potential Reallocation of Work to Service Points

Members were reminded that, at the last meeting on 17 February, it had been requested that Officers should explore any potential opportunities to move work from other Services/Central Offices into rural Service Points.

In this regard, there had been circulated Report No. CSB/2/15 dated 16 March 2015 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which provided an update on the exploratory work to date, highlighted where Officers had identified opportunities to move work to affected Service Points and the various discussions which had taken place to identify further cross Service opportunities.

In particular, it was explained that, within Customer Services, work representing 1.5 FTE posts had been identified and potentially work representing 3.1 FTE from within the Business Support Service in Finance, the specific detail of the roles and the Service Points in scope for the relocation of work being provided. In addition, information was provided as to which Community Services functions were already carried out in Service Points and the issues surrounding moving any others to Service Points.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues:-

- there was a need for clarification on who would undertake tenancy signing where Service Points were closed. In response, it was explained that this would be carried out in Area Housing Offices or at Community Hubs. Ideally, this process would be done with tenants in their homes but this had resource implications;
- to allow more tasks to be carried out in Service Points, there was a need to re-define the duties of Service Point Officers;
- part of the consultation included the proposal that the selling of lairs be carried at Community Hubs;
- if duties transferred from a Service to Service Points, it was important to bear in mind that this represented a re-distribution of resource and that, whilst some savings wouldn't therefore be made in the Service Point budget, there would be savings elsewhere in the Council. Members were advised that if this approach was pursued, it would result in a different model for Service Points than the one contained in the consultation and, as it would affect the savings target that the Board had been tasked with identifying, this would need the agreement of the Resources Committee;
- while it was recognised that there were limitations to the duties which could be passed to Service Points, it was noted that there was potential for the retention of reasonably well-paid jobs in rural communities;
- the possibility of including duties from organisations such as Housing Associations and High Life Highland was highlighted. Furthermore, there were regulatory matters in Community Services which had the potential to be passed to Service Points. To explore these and other possibilities in more detail, it was suggested that the Council's Community Planning Partners be approached;
- a report for the next meeting giving an indication of what other work might come forward in the future for Service Points was requested on the basis that it should also identify where these duties would be best placed;
- whilst recognising that the process would take longer, a community-by-community approach was needed. It would also mean that some savings would be unrealised in the short term but it was suggested that there was capacity within the overall Council budget to meet this. The Service Point network would continue to evolve and it was necessary therefore to take a long term approach; and
- once a Service Point was closed, it was unlikely to ever re-open so careful and detailed consideration was necessary. However, it was recognised that the exercise did need to be carried out expeditiously.

Taking account of the views expressed at the meeting, it was suggested that a way forward would be for Officers to draw up a Business Case for each of the 23 Service Points under review, including costs and volumes for each location. This would allow Members to make a decision on the current proposals in conjunction with consultation feedback.

In addition, Officers were requested to review how the additional work potentially identified could be factored into a revised Service Point model, acknowledging that this may affect the consultation model and savings profile, and present that back to Members in a business case format for consideration at the next meeting. In this regard, it was acknowledged that Members would need additional time at the next meeting for a full review of all information and in order to agree an approach for reporting back to the Resources Committee.

Thereafter, the Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the work undertaken to review what work could be moved to remote and rural Service Points from the Service Centre;
- ii. **NOTED** the work identified for potential relocation from other Services within the Council, namely Business Support, but that further work needed to be done;
- iii. **AGREED** that an update should be submitted to the next meeting giving an indication of what other future work might come forward for Service Points from partners, such as High Life Highland;
- iv. **NOTED** the impact of any changes to the consultation proposal in terms of the operational model, number of offices and savings target;
- v. **AGREED** that, for the next meeting, an overall Business Case on the current consultation model should be provided, together with detail for each individually affected Service Point and a revised savings spreadsheet;
- vi. **AGREED** that Officers should review how the additional work potentially identified could be factored in to a revised Service Point model, acknowledging that this might affect the consultation model and savings profile, on the basis that this would be presented to Members in a business case format for consideration at the next meeting; and
- vii. **AGREED** that Officers should recommend the Service Points best placed to take on the potentially re-allocated work.

6. 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 the following item 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.

7. Customer Services Review 3

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. CSB/3/15 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development which provided details of savings to be made at each of the Service Point locations and information on where these savings were linked to necessary investment in Community Hubs, the new Website and technologies to support self-service.

Following discussion, the Board **NOTED** the recommendations, subject to:-

- (i) investigations being undertaken regarding the possibility of property costs associated with closed Service Points being included as part of the savings; and
- (ii) savings in relation to proposed arrangements for two specific Service Points being included in the respective Business Cases and updated savings profile.

The meeting concluded at 3.55 pm.