

The Highland Council
Community Services Committee
20 August 2015

Agenda Item	19
Report No	COM 47/15

Roads Collaboration Programme - Governance First

Report by Director of Community Services

Summary

This report presents the background to the “Governance First” approach to collaborating and sharing services between Councils.

The report seeks the nomination of two Councillors to work on the short life Northern Roads Collaboration Forum.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Developing formal collaborative practices in road services strongly aligns with the Scottish Government’s shared services agenda.
- 1.2. Exploration of opportunities for collaborative working is currently being carried out in the context of the Roads Collaboration Programme, in response to the National Road Maintenance Review (NRMR). The NRMR final report was published in July 2012, following a recommendation from Audit Scotland to:

“Consider a national review on how the road network is managed and maintained, with a view to stimulating service re-design and increasing the pace of examining the potential for shared services.”
- 1.3. The NRMR so-called “Option 30 Report” explored the optimum delivery of roads maintenance services, concluding that sharing of services should be explored by all roads authorities, with the onus on authorities to demonstrate that change could be delivered effectively and driven forward at local level.
- 1.4. The Roads Collaboration Programme is facilitated by the Improvement Service and has a Board drawn from COSLA and SCOTS (Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland.)

2. Benefits of collaborating in the Roads Sector

- 2.1. The long-term objective of any collaborative activity in this sector is to improve the performance and condition of the road network for road users. Although this may lead to direct financial savings, through for example reduced overhead costs and greater buying power, the primary benefits of formal collaboration are more associated with greater effectiveness,

resilience and sustainability.

3. Transparency and Accountability

- 3.1. Managing collaborative activity/shared service under a legitimate governance arrangement involving local Elected Members increases the likelihood of achieving these benefits by ensuring local authorities are working to an agreed common vision for the future. It also avoids any potential legal barriers or opposition to collaborating. The Governance First mechanism allows participating local authorities to develop a strategy and approach to sharing within a legally sound and secure environment of clear accountability.
- 3.2. Creating a formal governing body to act as an 'umbrella' under which to deliver improvements ensures transparency, simplifies the processes associated with sharing and removes the complexities of putting in place a succession of legal agreements to cover further collaborative initiatives which are taken forward over time.

4. Implications

- 4.1. The concept of 'Governance First' is essentially the creation of a formalised governing body as the fundamental first step to developing collaborative activity/shared services, undertaken prior to the design of any operational delivery models.
- 4.2. The Governance First concept advocates that sharing should be seen as the default position and not one which must be demonstrated as being preferable to the status quo in lengthy business cases developed over a number of years.
- 4.3. By flipping the approach on its head, and setting up governance arrangements first, roads authorities could avoid common issues and barriers and benefit from working under a formal governance 'umbrella' where a common vision for the service could be agreed and options for working collaboratively could be explored and implemented.
- 4.4. Creating a governing body inclusive of Elected Members at the early stage has the added benefit of ensuring that Members are involved in setting the strategic direction from the outset, creating an opportunity where an authority could agree to devolve some decision-making to that body, offering significant opportunity to escalate the process of designing and implementing change.
- 4.5. Over the past year, the Roads Collaboration Programme has been introducing the Governance First concept to all Councils in Scotland. Cluster groups of Councils, represented by senior roads officers, have been forming.
- 4.6. The North area Governance First Group comprises the broad clockwise sweep of nine Councils from Argyll and Bute round to Angus including the

Islands with Highland forming the southern edge in the centre of the area.

- 4.7. The concept of 'Governance First' is essentially the creation of a formalised governing body as the fundamental first step to developing collaborative activity/shared services, undertaken prior to the design of any operational delivery models.

5. Early involvement of Elected Members

- 5.1. Collaborating under a formalised governing arrangement early on in the process of implementing sharing of services, allows for early engagement with Elected Members. Members can be given an opportunity to take an active role, being involved in key decisions relating to strategy and design from the very early stages, helping to shape the direction of travel and the design of any collaborative projects.
- 5.2. By involving Elected Members in early pivotal discussions, common Member concerns regarding how to take account of local needs and priorities can be addressed and accounted for from the outset.
- 5.3. Senior Members across Scotland have been briefed by representatives of the aforementioned Roads Collaboration Board and COSLA Committees have also received reports around the Roads Collaboration Programme.

6. Proposal

- 6.1. In the context of the foregoing the Officers on the North area Governance First Group have considered the governance of any collaborative approach and believe that a Joint Committee approach should underpin the way forward.
- 6.2. The proposal is to form a short life Northern Roads Collaboration Forum to prepare for consideration of the formation of a Joint Committee in the future. The Forum would comprise two Councillors from each of the Councils involved and be supported by the Senior Officers on the North area Governance First Group. It should complete its work by the summer recess in 2016.
- 6.3. The other Councils in the northern group are considering similar reports during their August/September cycle of meetings.

7. Implications

- 7.1. This report has no impact on equality, Gaelic, Climate Change/Carbon Clever or rural considerations, nor are there any resource, legal or risk implications arising from the recommendations.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

- (i) note the development of the North area Governance First group, and the methodical approach undertaken to develop the case for creating a new joint committee governance body of Elected Members to oversee the development of collaborative activity within the roads service.
- (ii) note that this collaboration may provide a framework for future collaborative activity across the whole range of Council functions.
- (iii) nominate two Councillors to work on the short life Northern Roads Collaboration Forum.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 5 August 2015

Author: Richard Evans, Head of Roads and Transport

Background Papers: None