

AGENDA ITEM 17iii

The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum – Elected Members/Staff Side Group

Minutes of Meeting of The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 4 December, 2015 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mrs M Davidson
Mr B Fernie
Mr A Henderson
Mrs I Campbell

Mrs A Sinclair
Mrs M Smith

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr M Haymer (GMB)
Mr R Selkirk (GMB)

Mr A Wemyss (UNITE)

In attendance:

Ms M Morris, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development Service
Mr D Yule, Director of Finance
Mr B Alexander, Director of Care and Learning Service
Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Mr K Matthews, Regional Officer, UNISON
Mr R Colman, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side
Mr J Batchelor, Head of People and Performance, Corporate Development Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Mrs M Davidson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Rhind and Mr D Millar from the Employer's Side and Ms L MacKay (UNISON), Mr J Gibson (UNISON), Mr M Murphy (UCATT) and Ms M Macrae (RCN) from the Staff Side.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 20 November, 2015, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from Minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. Budget Update/Conditions of Service

The Director of Finance provided a verbal update on the current budget position for the Council. There had been a significant change in the budget position since the last meeting of the Forum on 20 November, 2015. At a Cosla Leaders meeting on 27 November, Leaders were informed that Local Government was facing a cash reduction in its grant of 4-5% in 2016/17. For planning purposes the Council had been forecasting a 1.6% grant reduction, so the reduction was significantly worse than had been assumed. If a 5% reduction were the final position then the Council would have to find additional savings of £15.5million.

Also, there had been a Scottish Government press announcement which indicated that they were going to put forward an amendment to the Education Bill currently going through the Scottish Parliament which would require all Local Authorities to provide a minimum of 25 hours a week teaching time. One of the savings the Council was considering was to reduce class teaching hours down to 22.5 hours for primaries 4 to 7, with a saving of £4 million. Currently primaries 1 to 3 had teaching time of 22.5 hours and the extra teaching hours proposed would cost an additional £2million. The loss of this potential saving and an additional cost meant an additional £6m of savings required to be made.

Therefore the total savings required in 2016/17 were £43.4million which was in addition to savings of £10m agreed last year. By way of comparison, this would mean a 10% reduction in the Council's resources next year compared to this year. Even if all the savings proposals advised at the last meeting were approved, this would still leave a budget gap of £27 million.

There was still a level of uncertainty regarding the Local Government grant reduction for 2016/17 but the Council had to plan for the worst case scenario. The Local Government financial settlement would be announced by the Scottish Government on 16 December, 2015.

In terms of the scale of the savings to be made, these would have a significant impact on staff, and Officers briefed the Staff Partnership Forum on options for potential staff reductions in order to meet budget targets next year. The trade unions would be informed of the outcome of discussions planned for next week, and before any wider communications with the workforce.

A comment was made that there had been a UK Government announcement of their intention to put a cap on the amount employees could receive from severance packages. Further details on this would need to be clarified.

Other potential options for meeting budget targets were discussed in order to ease budget pressures, but it was stressed that no decisions had been made as yet. In particular it was advised that an analysis of the statutory and non statutory services that the Council provided had been undertaken. There were very little savings to be made on the non statutory services, but there may be a greater potential for savings if the Council could change the way it provided statutory services. The Forum requested that they be provided with information on this analysis. Also information was requested on where agency staff were used in the Council and a breakdown of the cost of this.

A point was made that if there were to be job reductions, then the staff that were left should not be expected to do the same amount of work that was currently being done.

It was requested that further meetings of the Forum be arranged to discuss the budget and potential staffing implications once the Local Government financial settlement was known.

Thereafter, the Staff Partnership Forum:-

i **NOTED** the budget position;

ii **AGREED** that the following information be circulated to the Staff Partnership Forum:- information on the analysis of the statutory and non statutory services that the Council provided; where agency staff were used to provide services and a breakdown of the cost of this; and

iii **AGREED** that further meetings would be arranged before the Christmas holiday period and early in the New Year to discuss the budget and potential staffing implications.

The meeting concluded at 2.40 p.m.