

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **People Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 19 October 2017 at 10.05 am.

Present:

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| Mr B Boyd | Mrs I MacKenzie |
| Mrs I Campbell (video conferencing) | Mr D Macpherson |
| Mr A Christie (Chair) | Mrs B McAllister |
| Mrs M Cockburn | Mrs P Munro |
| Ms K Currie | Mr R MacWilliam |
| Mr J Finlayson (Vice Chair) | Mrs M Paterson (video conferencing) |
| Mr A Graham | Mrs F Robertson |
| Mr A Jarvie | Mr G Ross |
| Ms E Knox | Mr A Sinclair |
| Mr R Laird (Substitute) | Ms N Sinclair (video conferencing) |
| Mr B Lobban (Substitute) | Mr C Smith |
| Mr R MacDonald | Ms K Stephen (Vice Chair) |
| Mr W MacKay (video conferencing) | |

NHS Highland:

Ms M Newdick

Religious Representatives:

Ms S Lamont
Mr A MacLean

Non-Members also present:

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|-----------------|-----------------|
| Mr G Adam | Mrs A MacLean |
| Mrs M Davidson | Ms L Munro |
| Mr R Gale | Mr A Rhind |
| Mrs L MacDonald | Mrs T Robertson |
| Mrs D Mackay | Mr B Thompson |
| Mr D Mackay | |

In attendance:

Mr B Alexander, Director of Care and Learning
Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Mrs B Cairns, Head of Additional Support Services, Care and Learning Service
Ms S Campbell, Head of Children's Services, Care and Learning Service
Mr B Porter, Head of Resources, Care and Learning Service
Ms N Young, Area Care and Learning Manager – West, Care and Learning Service
Ms S Harrington, Senior Manager, Early Years, Care and Learning Service
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Community Services
Mr A Gunn, Head of Revenues and Business Support, Corporate Resources Service
Ms S McKandie, Benefits and Welfare Manager, Corporate Resources Service
Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager, Corporate Resources Service

Ms G Newman, Highland Children's Forum (Third Sector)
Mr F Weir, Highland Parent Council Partnership
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

Also in attendance:

Ms P Burnett, Communications and Business Development Manager, Eden Court
Ms L McGlennon, Acting Creative Manager, Eden Court

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr A Christie in the Chair

Business

**1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr T Heggie, Mr G MacKenzie, Ms J Macdonald, Prof H van Woerden and Mr K Weidner.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 7 – Mrs I Campbell and Mrs M Paterson (both non-financial)

Item 18 – Mr R Gale, Mr A Jarvie, Mr R MacDonald, Mr W MacKay, and Mrs A MacLean (all non-financial), and Mr A Christie (financial)

**3. Outstanding Achievements
Coileanaidhean Air Leth**

There had been tabled a list of outstanding achievements by people and groups.

In addition to the tabled list it, it was explained that the results of the MOD taking place this week in Fort William would be reported in due course, but a group of 11 and 12 year olds from Dingwall Primary and Dingwall Academy had won a folk group award.

The Chair pointed out that Stramash, the providers of outdoor nursery facilities who had given a presentation at the last meeting of the Committee, would be available outside the chamber after the meeting.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the outstanding achievements; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the Director of Care and Learning write to all those involved in recognition of their success.

4. Local Housing Strategy Ro-innleachd Taigheadais Ionadail

There had been circulated Report No PEO/26/17 dated 6 October 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

Additional wording was tabled for Chapter 6 of the Strategy, 'Specialist Housing Provision' as follows:-

'There are a number of young people with complex needs or disability who are now able to live into adulthood and who will require suitable accessible housing in the future. Housing services will work closely with the Highland Joint Transitions Team to identify and plan for the future accessible housing needs of young adults in Highland to enable them to live independent lives with access to the same opportunities as other young people.'

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the Chair explained that some of the terminology in the report would be updated in the final version;
- the Chair also pointed out that a report on homelessness was due to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee, a Policy Development Group having been held on the matter the previous month. Member engagement with such Groups was urged and Members suggested that all Members should be informed of all Policy Development Groups, not only those on the related Committees;
- attention was drawn to various examples of out of date statistics and references in the draft Strategy and, as the quality was not considered sufficient, deferral was suggested pending further input;
- concern was expressed about the division of housing market areas which were considered illogical. For example the Inverness market including such diverse areas as Dores and Ardersier;
- the focus on Houses of Multiple Occupancy issues in relation to young people was not appropriate as a significant number of younger people required single bedded accommodation;
- a timetabled action plan should be included with the Strategy;
- appropriate Housing Association representatives, and other relevant partners, should be invited to Housing-related Policy Development Groups, or a separate seminar-type event, particularly since other agencies did not have the same statutory obligations towards homeless people, to ensure work practices and protocols were similar;
- it was disappointing that some Housing Association sheltered housing had been re-designated as non-sheltered;
- the number of unused second homes in some areas of the Highlands was disappointing given the shortage of rental accommodation which sometimes resulted in people being housed far from families or work; and
- it was pointed out that the section in the report on homelessness did not appear to reference a suggestion made previously by a Member regarding shared accommodation age limits.

The Committee **DEFERRED** approval of the Council's Local Housing Strategy 2017-2022 to the People Committee on 6 December 2017, pending further input from

Members being sought, including the arrangement of a pre-meeting at which to consider issues raised.

5. Review of the Housing Repairs Service Ath-sgrùdadh air Seirbheis Càraidh an Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No PEO/27/17 dated 6 October 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- there was a feeling among tenants that the housing maintenance budget was unfairly allocated across the Highlands and that not all were not getting their fair share. Further information on this was anticipated in future;
- the protocol for contractors working for the Council should be refreshed to ensure they were made aware of their responsibilities in promoting a positive image of the Council while under contract. The new staffing structure, with more work being taken back in-house, would help to improve this situation;
- although Council budgets were under considerable pressure, it was important the public understood there remained allocated budgets for specific issues, such as housing maintenance;
- concern was expressed about moss on roofs and this would be considered locally through devolved budgets and tenant consultation;
- housing staff in Nairn were praised and the importance of Members and Council officers having positive working relationships was emphasised; and
- Members should be given feedback on work they requested and, if this did not happen, it should be brought to the Director's attention.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the overall principles and actions being taken to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and customer focus of the housing repairs service;
- ii. **AGREED** amendments to the staffing structure to create additional management capacity by creating a new post of Principal Repairs Officer and rationalising layers of management to deliver a more efficient, streamlined and effective service;
- iii. **NOTED** the work taking place to develop further changes to staff roles to achieve greater integration and efficiency, subject to staff and trade union consultation;
- iv. **AGREED** the protocol for sub-contractors be refreshed to ensure they took proper cognisance of representing the Council appropriately while working on Council contracts; and
- v. **AGREED** that investment in moss removal from roofs be considered at local level and contained within available disaggregated budgets to Local Committees.

6. Improving Tenant Participation and Engagement A' Leasachadh Com-pàirteachas Luchd-màil

There had been circulated Report No PEO/28/17 dated 4 October 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the Chair emphasised the governance issues around developing a fair and inclusive mechanism for tenants to elect their representatives;
- consideration was given to the issues that arose between tenants and neighbouring home-owners and how contribution to shared maintenance could be arranged;
- it was important that Members, Council officers and representatives from other relevant organisations such as the Police, attended meetings organised by tenant groups. The value of tenant participation officers and staff availability was referenced;
- it would be helpful if Housing Association representatives attended Ward Business meetings to share and discuss their maintenance programmes; and
- any gritting programme concerns should be addressed to the relevant Community Services management team.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the recent progress in improving tenant participation in Highland and the recognition of this by the Scottish Housing Regulator;
- NOTED** the legislative requirements concerning the management of the Housing Revenue Account;
- AGREED** that two tenant representatives, nominated by tenants themselves, should be invited to attend the People Committee as advisors and the People Committee Policy Development Group in relation to housing items; and
- AGREED** that consideration be given to inviting Housing Association representatives to Ward Business meetings to share and discuss their maintenance programmes.

7. Presentation: Eden Court Taisbeanadh: Cùirt Eden

Declarations of Interest: Mrs I Campbell and Mrs M Paterson declared non-financial interests in this item as Directors of Eden Court Theatre but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

Ms P Burnett, Communications and Business Development Manager, and Ms L McGlennon, Acting Creative Manager, Eden Court, gave the annual presentation regarding activities at Eden Court, with a focus on the Creative Learning Programme. Other issues covered included funding sources and income levels, employment, the programme range, the benefits of the facility to the local economy and the further community benefits provided. A request was made for continued funding for Eden Court and a gradual approach to any savings measures.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- in response to a query about why Eden Court were given an opportunity to present their annual activities while many other funded projects were not, it was explained that two organisations, Eden Court and High Life Highland, had annual reports to the Committee as an explicit part of their service delivery contracts with the Council and as detailed in the Scheme of Delegation. If other

organisations wished to present to the Committee in future this could be considered by the Chair in the first instance; and

- in response to a question from the Chair, it was explained that joint working with partner organisations could be helpful in engaging with more difficult to reach groups of people in order to include them in Eden Court's programme of activities.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

8. Statutory Consultation – Establishment of a new primary school for Ness Castle/Ness-side

Co-chomhairle Reachdail – Steidheachadh bun-sgoil ùr airson Caisteal Nis/Taobh Nis

There had been circulated Report No PEO/29/17 dated 9 October 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the proposal set out in Appendix 1 of the report to establish a new primary school to serve the Ness Castle housing development, with a consequential amendment to the catchment area of Holm Primary School.

9. Children's Services - Performance Report

Seirbheisean Chloinne – Aithisg Choileanaidh

There had been circulated Report No PEO/30/17 dated 9 October 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- some of the factors impacting on performance were outwith the Council's control and the background information in that regard was welcomed;
- whilst it was recognised that the 18 week target for Allied Health Professional (AHP) services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services referrals was a national target, it was too long for a child in distress to wait and consideration should be given to a more ambitious target;
- concern was expressed regarding self-reporting of smoking by young people and that the Council was not getting the public health message across as well as it could;
- in relation to reducing the percentage gap between the most and least affluent areas for children exclusively breastfed at the 6-8 week review, whilst the increase in the least affluent areas was welcomed, disappointment was expressed that there had been a reduction in the most affluent areas and information was sought on how it could be ensured that closing the gap did not mean bringing the upper figure down;
- information was sought and provided on what recommendations would be made to teachers and learning professionals as a result of the statistics; resource implications; the national technical issue affecting the provision of data for measures relating to health assessments for children at 6-8 weeks and 27-30 months; the review of child's plans; and the Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative; and

- it having been queried why the baseline and performance figures corresponded for every alcohol and drug misuse performance indicator, the Director of Care and Learning undertook to respond to Councillor Laird following the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- scrutinised and **NOTED** the performance information; and
- NOTED** the information provided on quality improvement.

10. Children's Services - Assurance Report Seirbheisean Chloinne – Aithisg Barantais

There had been circulated Report No PEO/31/17 dated 3 October 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information having been requested on dental services for primary school children, the Chair confirmed that this would be taken up with NHS Highland and a response provided to Councillor Laird;
- information was sought, and provided, on how long the Immunisation Team pilot would last and when it would be rolled out throughout Highland;
- the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland had agreed that reference to Gardasil patient information would be included in the vaccination programme leaflet for 2017/18. Many families believed their daughters had developed serious long-term health problems as a result of the HPV vaccine and it was suggested that all families be urged to carefully investigate the risks for themselves. The Chair commented that parents had a responsibility to read all documentation relating to all treatment their children might receive in school and the local authority had a responsibility to ensure that parents had access to, or knew where to get, the relevant information;
- a report having been requested on the "Attend Anywhere" trial, which would help children access treatment in their own locality rather than having to travel long distances, the Chair suggested that information be provided to Ward Business Meetings;
- a more detailed breakdown of AHP waiting times was sought for workforce planning purposes. In response, the Chair explained that a breakdown of the various disciplines had been provided at the previous meeting and suggested that the figures be refreshed for the next meeting. He emphasised the importance of the Workforce Plan at item 15 on the agenda and the need to measure its success; and
- in relation to the Risk Register, information was sought on the likely timescale for addressing the lack of easy access to NHS Highland's intranet for policies etc. In addition, an explanation of the associated acronyms was requested. The Chair confirmed that a response would be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- scrutinised and **NOTED** the data and issues raised in the report;
- NOTED** that comments would be incorporated into a report to NHS Highland as part of the revised governance arrangements;

- iii. **AGREED** that information on the “Attend Anywhere” trial be provided to Ward Business Meetings;
- iv. **AGREED** that a more detailed breakdown of Allied Health Professional waiting times be presented to the next meeting of the Committee; and
- v. **AGREED**, in relation to the Risk Register, that information be circulated to Members of the Committee on the likely timescale for addressing the lack of easy access to NHS Highland’s intranet for policies etc. It was further **AGREED** that an explanation of the acronyms be provided.

11. Management of Schools Rianachd Sgoiltean

i. **Mallaig Associated School Group (ASG)** **Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte Mhalaig**

There had been circulated Report No PEO/32/17 dated 6 October 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During an introduction of the report, it was explained that parents had been provided with a copy of the draft report in September and four responses had been received, details of which were set out in the table at Appendix 2. One of the responses was from Inverie Parent Council and this should have been specified in the report. In addition, Mallaig Parent Council had responded by email but this had not originally been received by the Service. For clarity, both letters had been circulated to Members of the Committee by email. Attention was also drawn to the diagram on page 125 of the papers and it was highlighted that pupils travelled from Inverie to Mallaig by boat, not on foot as indicated.

During discussion, Local Members commended officers for their efforts in engaging with Parent Councils. Parents were also praised for their interaction with the process and the strength of feeling they had displayed in trying to protect and sustain their local schools. The schools in Mallaig ASG were some of the most remote and rural in Highland and parents were concerned about centralisation towards Mallaig, Fort William and Inverness. Protecting Mallaig High School was key and the proposals in the report supported that. The proposed stakeholder group was welcomed and the importance of proceeding on the basis of decisions being made by consensus was emphasised. A strong and effective stakeholder group and increased investment in Mallaig ASG would mean that schools were in a better position going forward and support was expressed for the recommendations.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** the revised plan for Mallaig High Associated School Group, as set out in section 6 of the report.

ii. **Update** **Cunntas às Ùr**

There had been circulated Report No PEO/33/17 dated 6 October 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

The Chair explained that the Director wished to withdraw recommendation iii relating to Devolved School Management guidance regarding nursery rolls as further work needed to be carried out prior to consideration by the Committee.

Members welcomed the proposed engagement strategy, commenting that the experience in Mallaig ASG demonstrated that engagement was crucial to the success of the process.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED**:-

- i. the key stakeholder engagement process; and
- ii. the list of Associated School Groups to be progressed in phase 2.

12. Closing the Attainment Gap A' Dùnadh na Beàirn Buileachaidh

There had been circulated Report No PEO/34/17 dated 6 October 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought and provided on whether the Council was using the guiding principles and strategies recommended by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in the policies it was devising to close the attainment gap; and the Scottish Government consultation on how progress on closing the attainment gap would be measured;
- reference was made to the percentage of Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) monies that could be spent in conjunction with the third sector and it was suggested that schools be encouraged and supported to utilise specialist third sector services in terms of youth work and development, as exemplified by other authorities such as Scottish Borders Council;
- information was sought on how the Council could ensure that schools did not attempt to use PEF monies to plug general budget gaps, as had been a concern in other parts of the country. The Chair explained that schools had to use their School Improvement Plans and develop a plan as to how the funding would be used to provide additionality. In addition, PEF Central Support Officers had been appointed to support schools through the process and would be sampling plans to establish whether the intended outcomes had been achieved;
- reference was made to the use of Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funding to appoint Family Link Workers and it was queried whether there was any scope, through the PEF or revised SAC funding, to widen their deployment. Attainment gap issues arose not only through what happened in schools but outwith and the importance of nurturing and protecting the link between parents and schools was emphasised;
- information was sought on whether there was a policy to support parents in closing the attainment gap and reference was made to a successful project in Glasgow. The Chair expressed support for this area of work and explained that improvements were already being seen in Highland in terms of engaging with parents, wider families and communities. He acknowledged that there had been some innovative projects in other parts of Scotland and that the Council should be learning from them; and
- the development of measures relating to mental wellbeing was welcomed.

The Committee otherwise scrutinised and **NOTED** the progress in the use of additional resources provided by the Scottish Government through Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and the Pupil Equity Fund.

13. Education of Looked After Children Foghlam Chloinne a Tha air an Coimhead às an Dèidh

There had been circulated Report No PEO/35/17 dated 9 October 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- introducing the report, the Chair explained that it set out the definition of Looked After Children (LAC), the factors impacting on them, the poor academic results and those LAC cared for outwith Highland. Key to addressing these issues would be a radical approach detailed in the improvement plan that would be considered at the Committee's next meeting. Major changes and interventions were required if improvements were to be made to address disadvantages and improve the lives of LAC to set them on a positive journey into adulthood;
- to ensure proper scrutiny of this matter, reporting was needed not only at Strategic Committee level but to Area Committees and Ward Business Meetings. Despite the Council's best efforts the current situation could not continue as, in terms of education, the Council's performance was unacceptable;
- a further breakdown as to where LAC were located in the "South" area was sought;
- there were marked differences in terms of attainment between LAC cared for at home and those placed away from home and this needed to be taken into account by the Children's Panel when considering the best placement for the child;
- not only should comparison be made between LAC in care settings but also how LAC compared to children who were not Looked After so LAC's educational attainment could be brought up to standard;
- finding out what had and had not worked from those LAC who had been through the system was important;
- in addition to a health assessment, it was vital than an education support plan was put in place as soon as a child entered the care system;
- it was disturbing that some children had to wait more than 16 months for a permanency decision to be made and it was acknowledged that this was due in part to the lack of foster carers. However, it was suggested the role of the Social Worker should be re-examined to ensure best use was made of their time;
- some Members suggested that early intervention was important. However, other Members argued that placing more children in care settings would not address the issue but that more appropriate care and support in the local community was necessary;
- there was good work taking place and the GIRFEC model was making a difference in Highland but it was still important to look at ways of improving;
- the identification of LAC within the SEEMIS system had improved year by year but it was important that this reached the 100% level; and
- it would be useful for Members to be made aware of the educational attainment of young carers.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to endorse the strategy described in the report;
- ii. that an updated improvement plan should be prepared for the next meeting of the People Committee; and
- iii. that, in future reports, the number of Looked After Children in the South Area be broken down further.

**14. Joint Transition Service for Young People aged 14 to 25 years
Co-sheirbheis Eadar-ghluasaid do Dhaoine Oga aois 14 gu 25**

There had been circulated Report No PEO/36/17 dated 6 October 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

In discussion, it was welcomed that people with direct experience of these key issues were continuing to be involved in the development of a new service and it was to be congratulated that there was general consensus for this approach with specific praise being expressed to Ms Sandra Campbell and Ms Joanna MacDonald and their teams for the work they had undertaken so far. Furthermore, clarification was sought regarding the proposals being cost neutral and it was explained that the current workload would be reorganised and restructured to allow for the plan to be implemented by existing staff. However, if there were any unintended consequences on the performance of other tasks then it would be brought back to the Committee to decide on resources at that stage.

The Committee **AGREED** the implementation plan as set out in the report.

**15. Care and Learning Service Workforce Plan 2017 - 2021
Plana Sgioba-obrach Seirbheis a' Chùrain agus an Ionnsachaidh 2017-2021**

There had been circulated Report No PEO/37/17 dated 9 October 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- it was an excellent report which highlighted current concerns and issues but there was a need for wider consideration of workforce planning alongside Community Planning Partners, other statutory agencies and large employers in Highland to form a comprehensive plan for Region. In terms of the Council, the creation of a workforce plan was a positive step forward and could be shared with other people;
- workforce planning was central to the work of the Administration and the Council over the next few years and, recognising that collectively Community Planning Partners were the biggest employers in the Highland, there was a lack of apprentices being recruited with apprenticeship levies being a main impediment. In this regard, the Leader would speak to the Chair of the Community Planning Board to raise the issue of improving the employment of young people and LAC at the next meeting; and
- it was suggested that a study be undertaken in conjunction with HIE and UHI to identify push and pull factors for professionals in terms of migration in and out of the Highlands to use as an evidence base for future policy.

The Committee **AGREED** to endorse the Care and Learning Service Workforce Plan 2017–2021.

16. Socio-economic Duty Consultation **Co-chomhairle Dleastanas Sòiseo-eaconamaich**

There had been circulated Report No PEO/38/17 dated 12 September 2017 by the Acting Head of Policy.

It was welcomed that the socio-economic duty, which was originally intended to be included in the Equalities Act 2010, would be implemented in Scotland by the end of the year and the Council's response to the consultation was also welcomed. It was also recognised that the Council already undertook much of the requirements of the duty but the effect on local authority decision making depended on how well Councillors and staff responded to the new duty. In this regard, a commitment was sought, and received, from the Administration that roll-out of a training plan to staff across the Council would be discussed.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to homologate the consultation response submitted on 12 September 2017 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. that as further information was received from the Scottish Government on the requirements of the duty, this would be considered by the People Committee's policy development group.

17. Minutes **Geàrr-chunntas**

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Strategy Group – 14 February 2017;
- ii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group – 21 March 2017;
- iii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership Group – 6 June 2017;
- iv. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Strategy Group – 13 June 2017;
- * v. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Welfare Reform Working Group – 20 September 2017 with the exception of item 6, which was the subject of a separate report at item 18 on the agenda; and
- vi. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Adult Services Development and Scrutiny Sub-Committee – 5 October 2017.

18. Review of Debt Advice and Related Services **Ath-sgrùdadh air Comhairle Fhiachan agus Seirbheisean Co-cheangailte**

Declarations of Interest:

Mr R Gale, Mr R MacDonald, Mr W MacKay and Mrs A MacLean declared non-financial interests in this item as a former employee of East and Central

Sutherland Citizens Advice Bureau and Directors of Skye and Lochalsh, Caithness, and Ross and Cromarty Citizens Advice Bureaux respectively but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest as a Director of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau but, given the nature of the item, elected to leave the room.

Mr A Christie declared a financial interest as General Manager of Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau and left the room.

In the absence of Mr Christie, Ms K Stephen took the Chair.

There had been circulated Report No PEO/39/17 dated 5 October 2017 by the Director of Corporate Resources.

During discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- to ease the impact of the proposed budget saving of £130,000, it was suggested that it be recommend to the Council that the saving be implemented over a two year period, ie £65,000 in year 1 and £65,000 in year 2;
- appreciation was expressed for the comprehensive report and to all those providing advice, both in-house and external agencies, to vulnerable people. It was important to encourage the take-up of benefits given the improvements this would make to people's lives as well as the local economy;
- in some rural areas, where deprivation might not be so apparent, the need for benefits was often hard to identify. In such instances, the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) bringing services to them demonstrated their commitment to accessibility in Highland and they were encouraged to build on the excellent work they had already undertaken in working with people in their locality;
- although the proposed saving required from the CAB was unfortunate, the Council was working within a very difficult financial climate. In this regard, continued reports on the positive benefits, highlighting the Council's budget for procured advice and information services from the CAB, would be welcomed;
- in the last financial year, the benefit to customers from the advice given by the CAB money advice and welfare rights teams was £15m, an increase of 16% over the previous financial year. This put money back into the pockets of the region's most vulnerable people and, in 2016/17, support had been provided to 12,406 customers. This was a significant increase on the previous year demonstrating an increasing demand for their services;
- whilst the report emphasised the importance of reducing poverty, there were concerning statistics in terms of the number of children in Highland living in poverty. One of the aims of the Council's Programme was that all people should live a life free from poverty. However, the proposed budget saving sought from this contract would make this aim more difficult to deliver. Community Services had commissioned, at a cost of £1.6m, the provision of short term housing support to any persons threatened with homelessness and/or who were intentionally homeless;

- the success of the work undertaken by all involved around those suffering from Mental Health illness was welcomed, as was the considerable financial benefits gained for clients;
- the Council too has good models of welfare reform support but there were still individuals who were unaware of the help that was available to them;
- it was argued that CABx and the Council were having to address issues caused by the impacts of welfare reform including the adverse impact of Universal Credit. Universal Credit was being rolled out in England and the negative aspects were now being recognised on a wider scale. It was important to take advantage of this momentum and lobby the Scottish and Westminster Government for changes, particularly for the housing cost element to be removed from Universal Credit;
- the delay in receiving Universal Credit payments was unacceptable;
- in providing new models of service delivery it was important to ensure that they were fit for purpose and people were not being excluded, eg online delivery of forms; and
- the resources and equalities implications section of the report acknowledged the detrimental impact the proposals would have on vulnerable individuals but also recognised the difficult financial position the Council was faced with.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. that the post-April 2018 service delivery contract should as minimum meet the Council's statutory obligations and only if and when they were fully achieved, the Council should seek to fund non-statutory services which were not adequately provided by other bodies;
- ii. that the contract would provide that customer accessibility requirements would be met;
- iii. that targeted support for customers accessing midwifery and mental health services would be a key element of the standard service delivery contract from April 2018 onwards;
- iv. that the current service to support young people would also be incorporated into the standard service delivery contract from April 2018 onwards to enable the annual funding of £20,000 to be re-directed within Children Services;
- v. that the standard service delivery contract should make provision for financial education to prepare young people for the world of work. This preventative measure should be included, where appropriate, within schools and delivered by advice services to enhance financial awareness amongst learners;
- vi. to support the introduction of a new Performance Management Framework as outlined in section 9.3 of this report;
- vii. to adopt the changes to governance of the Advice and Information service delivery contract from April 2018 as described in section 9.4 of the report;
- * viii. in recognising that the budget for procured advice and information services from April 2018 was to have been to a maximum of £1.150m delivering the £0.130m budget saving from 2018/19 as agreed by Council in December 2014, to recommend to the Council that the saving be implemented over a two year period - £65,000 in year 1 (2018/19) and the remaining £65,000 in year 2 (2019/20);
- ix. to identify and implement means to significantly increase the awareness of the available Advice and Information services;
- x. to review support for Council tenants impacted by Universal Credit; and
- xi. that the provider of the service delivery contract from April 2018 take steps to

attain the Disability Confident Employer Status within 12 months of the commencement of the contract.

The meeting concluded at 12.55 pm.