

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 2 February 2018 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr Andrew Baxter (by Video Conference)
Mr A MacKinnon
Mrs T Robertson

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr Michael Hayes (UNISON)	Mr Alister Wemyss (UNITE)
Mr Paul MacPherson (GMB)	Ms Margaret Macrae (RCN)
Mr Rikki Selkirk (GMB)	

In attendance:

Mr S Barron, Chief Executive
Mr D Yule, Depute Chief Executive/ Director of Corporate Resources
Mr B Alexander, Director of Care and Learning Service
Mr W Gilfillan, Director of Community Services
Mr S Black, Director of Development & Infrastructure Service
Mrs C McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform, Chief Executive's Service
Mr S Walsh, Head of People and ICT, Corporate Resources Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

Mr A MacKinnon in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Davidson, Mr A Christie, Mr A Henderson and Ms M Smith from the Employer's Side and Ms L MacKay, Mr J Gibson and Mr M Murphy of 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 2 November, 2017, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from Minutes

There were no matters arising from the Minutes.

5. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

There had been circulated the following Service Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings for information:-

- i. Corporate Resources Service – 16 November 2017;
- ii. Care and Learning Service – 2 November 2017;
- iii. Community Services – 24 November 2017; and
- iv. Development & Infrastructure – 16 November, 2017.

6. Budget

In providing an update on the latest position with regards to the budget, the Chair welcomed the last minute deal to provide additional funding to Local Authorities. The additional £7.5m to the Highland Council had reduced the budget gap significantly. This had allowed the Administration Budget Team to greatly reduce the amount of savings required and largely protect frontline services.

The budget gap had taken into account the proposed pay settlement for 2018-19 as announced by the Scottish Government of 3%, 2%, 1% across the various pay bands. Some previous savings proposals had now been deleted as a result of the additional funding and this was welcomed. There were still challenges ahead for savings, efficiencies and income to reduce the budget gap and these would be worked on with the Staff Side with a view to limiting the impact on jobs.

The Administration Budget Team's final proposals for the 2018-19 Budget would be submitted to Council on 15 February, 2018 for approval.

Further, the Budget Team would look at the Budget process for the future and in particular would consider introducing zero based budgeting and a four year budget plan, which would include the priorities of the Administration and where they wished to see resources targeted. There was also a need for greater consultation with the Staff Side. The Staff Side's input into the process was important and their suggestions for savings and income were carefully considered.

The Director of Corporate Resources explained that the Council had also benefitted from an error in the original grant settlement, which meant the Council would now receive an additional £1.5m. This latter amount in addition to the £7.5m had allowed the Budget Team to remove the more challenging budget savings that were having to be considered.

The anxiety that the budget process had on staff was acknowledged, which was made more difficult as, similar to last year, the Council did not receive a final grant settlement until the end of January, 2018. The financial position of the Council would continue to be challenging for the foreseeable future.

Now that savings proposals for grass cutting and street cleaning had been deleted, it was queried if this could be announced to the staff, given the anxiety that this was

causing them. It was advised that staff could be informed, with the caveat that the proposals still required Council approval at the meeting on 15 February, 2018.

In relation to savings proposals for staff in the Business Gateway, these would not now go forward, and consideration was being given to savings proposals for staff in Employability services to be managed by vacancy control.

In terms of savings proposals for staff in Family teams, Care and Learning Service, it was intended that a reorganisation would take place within Family teams, but any impact on staff would be managed by vacancy control.

An updated budget savings schedule would be issued to the Staff Side.

Thereafter, having heard the Chair thank the Staff Side for their input into the budget process and express his appreciation to them for maintaining confidentiality on the budget proposals throughout the process, the Forum: -

i **NOTED** the intention for further engagement with the Staff Side on the budget process in future; and

ii **NOTED** that an updated budget savings schedule would be issued to the Staff Side.

7. Redesign of the Highland Council

There was circulated Report No. SPF/1/18 by the Head of Policy and Reform which provided an update for the Forum on redesign and staff engagement since the last meeting in November, 2017.

In discussion, it was suggested that ideas for reviews be published, as this could generate further ideas from staff. There should also be feedback to staff on the consideration of their ideas and, where appropriate, staff be involved in the review of their ideas.

The Forum:-

i **NOTED** the up-date of the Board's activities since the last Forum meeting in November. This has focused on:

- a. Peer reviews – with one concluded in the period, 4 nearing conclusion and a new review initiated. Trade Union representatives are involved in each review team;
- b. Local staff briefings reaching over 500 staff in 14 different locations. Trade Union representatives participated in most briefings. Ideas emerging from staff are helping to develop the work programme for redesign. This includes the new peer review into Building Trades Services and seven new areas for Lean reviews;
- c. Initiating discussion on what redesign means to different stakeholders to develop the Board's Communication Plan.

ii **NOTED** that looking ahead the Board would continue to focus on reviews and complete its Communications Plan. New work to be programmed included

developing the Council's approach to being more community-minded and supporting staff and Members through a programme of organisational change.

iii undertook to identify any new areas for review; and

iv **AGREED** that ideas for reviews be published and that staff be provided with feedback on the consideration of their ideas.

8. Talent Attraction, Retention and Returns

There was circulated Report No. SFP/2/18 by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources, previously circulated to the Highland Council at their meeting held on 14 December, 2017. The report presented an update on workforce sustainability issues in the Highland region and those specific to the Council.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was noted that the Corporate Workforce Plan would be sent to the Staff Side prior to its publication;
- With a four year budget plan being proposed, this along with a Workforce Strategy would allow the Council to plan its priorities better.
- In terms of the Transition Portal, this was now live and was currently being used for those staff at risk of redundancy for redeployment purposes. The aim was to eventually use the Portal for any staff who wanted to upskill and be redeployed elsewhere in the organisation. An undertaking was given to provide a briefing on the Transition Portal to the Staff Side.
- The ResourceLink project would provide establishment data including vacancies in services. The delivery of this project was a priority for the Council given the benefits it would provide for Workforce Planning.
- Increasingly it would be challenging for the Council to recruit in certain areas, given the competition for staff from other major Employers in Highland, particularly in remote and rural areas, and as a result of the effect of Brexit on employees. Recruitment challenges being faced related to both high skilled and low skilled jobs. The lack of affordable housing in remote and rural areas also made it difficult to attract employees. Therefore long term Workforce Planning was very important.
- In terms of the redeployment process, it was felt that more could be done to provide training for staff to do other jobs. It was explained that the best opportunity to retrain staff was through the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme, which covered any staff, of any age, at any stage of their career. If staff needed to upskill then they could be enrolled in one of the Scheme's programmes to transition them to another job in the Council. The Scheme needed to be fully used to maximise investment in staff training.

The Forum **NOTED**:-

- (i) The workforce sustainability challenges facing the Highland Council.
- (ii) The importance of collaboration with partners to develop a Talent Attraction, Retention and Returns Strategy and Action Plan.
- (iii) The requirement to prepare for the workforce challenges presented by Brexit; and
- (iv) that a briefing would be provided to the Staff Side on the Transition Portal.

The meeting was concluded at 11.15 a.m.