

**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 1 February 2019 at 10.30 a.m.

**Present:**

**Employer's Representatives:**

Mrs Margaret Davidson  
Mr John Finlayson

Mr Allan Henderson (by telephone conference)  
Mr Alister MacKinnon

**Staff Side Representatives:**

Mr John Gibson (UNISON)  
Mr Paul MacPherson (GMB)  
Mr Rikki Selkirk (GMB)

Mr Rodger Cran (UNITE/UCATT) – (Substitute)  
Ms Margaret Macrae (RCN)

**In attendance:**

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive  
Mr D Yule, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development Service  
Ms S Campbell, Interim Director, Care and Learning Service  
Mr S Walsh, Head of People and ICT, Corporate Resources Service  
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport, Community Services  
Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure, Development and Infrastructure Service  
Mr M MacLeod, Council Redesign Lead, Chief Executive's Service  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

**Mrs M Davidson in the Chair**

**Alister Wemyss**

The Leader of the Council on behalf of the Forum expressed her deepest sympathy to Mr Alister Wemyss family and friends following his sudden death. It was a deep shock and sadness to learn of the passing of Alister who had provided a valuable contribution as an loyal employee of the Council and as a trade union representative for Unite the Union on the Forum over many years. Alister would be sorely missed by all who knew him.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie and Ms M Smith from the Employer's Side and Ms L MacKay (Unison) and Mr I MacLeman, Unite/Ucatt from the Staff Side.

## 2. Declarations of Interest

Mrs M Davidson declared a non financial interest as her son was an employee of The Highland Council and also a member of the GMB union but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that the interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion at the meeting.

Mr A MacKinnon declared a non-financial interest as his wife and daughter were employees of The Highland Council but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that the interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion at the meeting.

## 3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 31 October, 2018, the terms of which were **APPROVED**, subject to the following amendments: -

Item 4ii – Vans Home Policy - second sentence be amended to read:- “In response, it was understood that the meeting had been cancelled as representatives were not available”.

Item 6 – Redesign of the Highland Council – second paragraph, last sentence be amended to read:- “Also, local collaboration with trade unions would be helpful as the costs of employing agency workers were significant.”

## 4. Matters Arising from Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

i Parking at Diriebught Depot – it was queried what progress was being made with the supply of portacabins for welfare facilities at the Depot and what was the expected completion date.

It was confirmed that specifications for these facilities had been finalised and tenders for the work from suppliers were due on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2019. At the last meeting of the Community Services Trade Union Liaison Group, it had been agreed that a Panel, comprising officers and trade union representatives would be arranged to assess these tenders.

In relation to the issue of car parking at the Depot, £10k would be made available for car parking improvements and £30k would be spent on electrical works.

A completion date for the welfare facilities at the Depot would be provided to the Staff Side.

ii Vans Home Policy – it was noted this issue would be discussed at the next HR Sub Group on 28 February, 2019.

iii Trade Union Facility Time – a web link to trade union facility time published on the Council's website would be circulated to the Staff Side and any issues on this would be conducted outwith the Forum by Officers.

iv Bullying and Harassment Policy – this had now been agreed, but the Policy had not been added to the Council's Intranet. The Head of People and ICT undertook to make sure this was done.

v Additional Support Needs (ASN) Allocation – the Staff Side reported that Pupil Support Assistant's (PSA) at Kilchuimen Academy had been advised that due to an overspend in the budget, their hours would be reduced. Pupil equity funding would be used to make up for the hours they were losing. However, the hours to be funded by pupil equity funding was fixed term which would end in June, 2019 and there was no guarantee this funding would continue.

In response, it was confirmed that the specific issue at Kilchuimen Academy had been postponed until there was wider engagement on the issue of allocation of PSA hours to schools. An undertaking was given to ensure PSAs at the school were aware of this.

It was explained that consideration was being given to ASN and PSA allocations and Head Teachers had asked for training in this specific area. There would also be discussions with Head Teachers and PSAs in March, 2019 on the links between PSA and pupil equity funding and thereafter it was intended to have a training and engagement programme as it was recognised that staff needed support on this issue. Staff Side representatives would be informed of the engagement events with PSA staff.

In terms of the role of PSAs, a view was expressed that staff should be reminded that there should be a recognition of the need for flexibility of PSAs in meeting pupil needs. PSAs were valued in their role of providing positive outcomes for specific young people, but that PSAs had no historical right to stay in a situation where there was no requirement for them.

vi PayAward – It was advised that all trade unions were currently balloting their members on the pay award. In particular, Unison and the GMB had recommended to their members to accept the pay award. Unite the Union was recommending to its members to reject the pay award. Clarification was still being sought from the Scottish Government on whether the additional pay award offered to Teachers would be fully funded by the Government.

vii Sustainable Education in Highland Communities – it was noted that the trade union representative had still not received an invite to the Board meeting. The Interim Director of Care and Learning undertook to address this issue at the next Care and Learning Service Trade Union Liaison meeting.

viii Holiday Pay – another meeting between the trade unions and HR would be arranged to discuss this issue.

## **5. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings**

There had been circulated the following Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings for information:- Corporate Resources Service – 12 December, 2018; Care and Learning Service – 31 October, 2018; Community Services – 23 November, 2018; and Development and Infrastructure – 24 October, 2018.

Arising from the minutes, the following matters were raised:-

i Care and Learning Service Minute - Glasses Vouchers for Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) – the Staff Side raised an issue where PSAs were not receiving financial assistance from the Council in relation to the purchase of glasses. The Staff Side advised that there appeared to be a blanket ban on PSAs receiving this financial assistance.

In response, all staff were required to meet the requirements of the Policy prior to receiving assistance towards the cost of glasses and it was not a case of whether they were a PSA or not. Therefore some PSAs might meet the terms of the Policy and be eligible for financial assistance. It was suggested that the issue may be more to do with PSAs sometimes being asked to do things that were not part of their job remit. An undertaking was given to discuss this issue further at the next Care and Learning Service Trade Union Liaison meeting.

In terms of the PSA engagement events in March, 2019, an agenda of issues to be addressed would be developed in conjunction with trade union representatives.

ii Community Services Minute

a) Standby Building Maintenance – it had been agreed that the policy would be reviewed, but this had not happened as yet. An update on this would be provided to the Staff Side by the Head of Housing and Building Maintenance.

b) Vehicles Idling – it was understood that night heaters were to be fitted to Gritters to limit vehicle idling. The cost of installing the night heaters and that there had been no recognition of bin lorries had not been included in these minutes. Gritters and Bin lorries were the two biggest causes of vehicle idling, as staff in these vehicles used the vehicles during rest periods. It was confirmed that this issue was being looked into and an update on this would be provided to the Staff Side.

c) Training – An Operational Support Officer had booked training and accommodation for staff, but was not aware the training had been cancelled at short notice. There was a need for better communication in terms of what training was available for employees.

It was explained that training had been cancelled between now and the end of the current financial year in order to reduce travel expenditure. All staff booked on a training course should have been contacted directly to ensure they were aware of the cancellation. If staff had not been informed, their details should be sent to the Head of People and ICT who undertook to write a letter of apology to them.

d) Flexible Working (Potential Village Officer type remit) – it was understood that Village Officer posts had been deleted some time ago. It was explained that there were still some posts where Community Services had made arrangements with communities to part fund posts of this type. Also, as a result of consultation, it was known that communities were keen to see the return of the Village Officer type post, but this would require the Council to look at its existing resources and whether changes could be made through flexible working to give communities this type of post.

## 6. Redesign of the Highland Council

The Council Redesign Lead provided an update for the Forum on the Council's redesign since the last meeting of the Forum in October, 2018.

It was explained that emphasis was now on ensuring that the outcomes of redesign work were implemented effectively. Also, the development of the Council's Change programme, closely tied in to the preparation of the Council's budget savings proposals, recognises the need to maintain a strong emphasis on redesign and improvement. It was intended to set up a Programme Management Office function to co-ordinate the projects in the programme and in house resources such as the Asset Management team; Commercial Efficiency team and Climate Change team would be used in this process.

An overview was provided on progress of key redesign projects such as Trade Services; Grey Fleet (staff travel); Transport Services; Waste Management; Visitor Levy and Tourism Developments; Energy and Renewables; Asset Management, Property Rationalisation and Investment; ICT Implementation and Development; Workforce Planning. The Redesign reviews on Catering and Cleaning and Facilities Management had not yet commenced, but would be an early priority once the budget was agreed by Council. A further review on Engineering Services was also proposed.

Information was sought on how the Council's Car Club had been performing since its inception. It was advised that Officers were confident that significant savings would be made from the Car Club and performance information, including non financial benefits, would be available soon and this would be shared with trade union representatives.

Thereafter, the Forum **NOTED:-**

- i. the update on progress with the Redesign of The Highland Council; and
- ii. that performance information on the Council's Car Club, including non financial benefits, would be shared with the Staff Side.

## 7. Budget Update

The Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development Service provided an update on the Budget.

It was highlighted that the Scottish Government's revised budget settlement would mean additional funding of £4.228m for The Highland Council. While this additional money was welcomed, this still left the Council facing a very challenging budget.

In relation to Teachers' Pensions, the Scottish Government had also clarified that they would pass on all the money to Local Government they received from the UK Government to fund this budget pressure. It was anticipated that the budget provision for higher cost of Teachers pensions could be reduced and therefore releasing money for other purposes.

The Council's Administration wanted to support the Council redesign and to ensure this process was adequately resourced. Also of priority was to restore the Council's Reserves which were below the recommended amount.

The Scottish Government had also now given Local Authorities the ability to raise additional money from charging communities higher Council Tax, by lifting the cap above 3%. This was an option to give the Council more flexibility, but no discussions had yet taken place by the Administration, on whether or not to do this. There was also additional funding for Local Authorities for Health and Social Care.

There would be staff engagement events commencing next week on the budget proposals.

The Staff Side's support for the changes that were required to the way the Council operated would be welcomed. This change was necessary given the significant budget challenges and every effort would be made to protect jobs in the Council.

In terms of the current financial year's budget pressures, the Staff Side requested that Staff be informed how much the Council recognised their efforts in maintaining a high standard of service despite the financial challenges facing the Council. Some groups of staff had reduced their overtime, but were still maintaining the same level of service. An undertaking was given to convey this message to Staff.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Chief Executive and the Interim Director of Care and Learning Service for their recent engagement events with Head Teachers and school staff. An engagement plan for meeting staff and communities would be shared with the Staff Side.

Thereafter, the Staff Partnership Forum:-

- i **NOTED** the budget position;
- ii **AGREED** to convey a message to staff which recognised their efforts in maintaining a high standard of service despite the financial challenges facing the Council; and
- iii **NOTED** that an engagement plan for meeting staff and communities would be shared with the Staff Side.

## 8. Any Other Competent Business

There was no other business.

The meeting was concluded at 11.55 a.m.