

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 November 2019 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mrs Margaret Davidson
Mr Allan Henderson

Ms Linda Munro (substitute)
Mr Matthew Reiss (substitute)

Staff Side Representatives:

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

Mr Ian Macleman (UNITE/UCATT)
Mr Richard Whyte (UNITE)
Ms Margaret Macrae (RCN)

In attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side
Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer – Resources
Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place
Mr S Black, Executive Chief Officer – Transformation and Economy
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment
Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR, Corporate Resources Service
Mr A Gunn, Interim Chief Officer – Resources, Care and Learning
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

Mrs M Davidson in the Chair

SUBJECT/DECISION

ACTION

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie, Mr J Finlayson, Mr A MacKinnon and Ms M Smith from the Elected Members Side and Ms L MacKay 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 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.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 9 August, 2019, the terms of which were **APPROVED**, subject to the following amendment:-

Item 5 iii – Community Services Minute – 4th sentence should read:-

“There was also a request for the rollout of the pilot Trades project to Sutherland and Skye areas where there were difficulties in accessing contractors in these areas.”

**Dem
Services**

4. Matters Arising from Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

i. It was **NOTED** that a meeting of the HR Sub Group had been held in October, 2019 to consider the Partnership arrangement. A further meeting will be held on 13 November.

ii. It was **NOTED** that the Standby Policy was to be reviewed and this would be considered at HR Sub Group in November and reported back to a future meeting of the Community Services TU & H&S Group.

**ECO
(C&P)**

iii. It was noted that a timetable had been produced in order to progress discussions on holiday pay between Trade Unions and HR.

**Interim
Head of
HR/
Trade
Unions**

It was **AGREED** that a monthly update on holiday pay discussions be provided to the Elected Members Leadership team in order that they be kept informed of the potential financial implications of holiday pay to the Council when considering the budget for next year.

CEX

iv. It was advised that the Corporate Service ICT device rollout had commenced at the beginning of October, 2019 and there had been good progress to date. However, the speed of rollout of devices needed to increase significantly if targets were to be met. In this respect, Officers would meet with Wipro to discuss Wipro’s plans for increasing the speed of the rollout. Also, a communication would be issued to staff in order to remind them to ensure they arranged an appointment for their device to be delivered to them.

It was highlighted that there was a short timescale for staff to confirm a date to receive their device, and if they were on holiday for example, they would miss the deadline. There was a need for a longer period of time for staff to choose a date to receive their device. It was **AGREED** that the Executive Chief Officer –

**ECO -
Resource**

Resources would look into the issue of timescale for appointments for device refresh.

- v. A communication would be issued next week regarding which Executive Chief Officer would be assigned to each local area. The Executive Chief Officers would have a remit regarding what their commitment in each area will be and part of this would be engagement with a Staff Partnership Forum. The views from Trade Unions on how best to arrange the staff partnership forums in the areas was sought.

**Trade
Unions**

The Staff Side advised that some groups of staff would find it easier to attend forum meetings than others, as for example, Pupil Support Assistants could not attend meetings during the day.

It was explained that staff would be released from their duties to attend Forum meetings and area Forums should have representatives across all Services. The Chief Executive and representatives of the Executive Leadership team had already met with specific groups of staff i.e. roads staff, and there was an undertaking to meet Pupil Support Assistants early in the New Year. These meetings had been very productive and action points arising therefrom would be addressed and follow up visits and feedback to staff would be arranged.

It was **NOTED** that the staff engagement plan would be shared with Trade Unions and a communication would be issued next week to staff regarding the formation of Area Staff Partnership Forums and there would be ongoing development of the forums.

**CEX/
Interim
Head of
HR**

- vi. In relation to the current review of the HC/NHS Highland Integration agreement an undertaking was given to update the Staff Side on progress with the review. In this respect, the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care and the Interim Head of Health would contact the Staff Side to arrange a meeting.

**ECO
Health &
Social
Care/
Interim
Head of
Health**

- vii. It was confirmed that the Acting Head of Policy had met with Ward Managers regarding a new organisational structure. Now that the Executive Chief Officer, Policy and Governance had been appointed, further meetings with Ward Managers on this issue would be held.

**ECO
Policy &
Govern/
Acting
Head
Policy**

- viii. In relation to the review of the Staff Partnership Agreement, one workshop on this had been held and Elected Members would be consulted on the outcome of this.

**Interim
Head of
HR**

- ix. In relation to the General Election to be held on 12 December, 2019, the Forum was advised that extra funding would be given to

Councils for arranging the Election. A communication would be issued soon regarding arrangements for the Election which would include information on ensuring staff safety given the difficult circumstances in holding a winter Election. There would also be a reduced level of service on Friday, 13 December, 2019 in order that all staff working at the Election were given the full day off, given that a count declaration was not expected until between 5am and 6am on Friday, 13 December. The Forum expressed their support for this proposal.

It was **AGREED** that a joint communication between the Returning Officer and Trade Unions would be issued to reflect the proposals for ensuring staff safety for staff working at the General Election.

**CEX/
Trade
Unions**

5. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

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

- (i) Corporate Resources Service – 28 October, 2019;
- (ii) Care and Learning Service – 9 August, 2019;
- (iii) Community Services – 23 August, 2019; and
- (iv) Development & Infrastructure – 2 October, 2019.

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

i. Community Services Minute: –

Diriebught Welfare facilities – it had been planned for the welfare facilities to be on site Mid October. However, there had been a set back with this project as there were issues with the Building Warrant application. Officers were currently trying to resolve these issues and failing this an alternative footprint would be needed for the buildings that had been purchased. Also, it was proposed to ask the Scottish Futures Trust to visit the depot to have a longer term look at the best use of space at the depot.

Given that staff had been waiting for improved welfare facilities at the depot for some considerable time, it was suggested that there should be an on site discussion to consider what the issues were. There was a commitment to resolving this issue as a matter of urgency.

Thereafter, the Forum **AGREED**:-

i the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment would investigate the Building Warrant application issues relating to the Diriebught Welfare facilities;

ii an urgent solution with timescales be sought for the issues and

ECO I&E

**CEX/ECO
– C&P**

these be communicated by the Chief Executive and Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place at an on site meeting next week with staff. The Leader of the Council and the Chair of EDI would also attend the on site meeting, diaries permitting; and

iii it was recognised that the provision of Diriebught Welfare facilities was a long standing issue and staff understanding and patience in waiting for the issues to be resolved was acknowledged and appreciated and the Council would resolve the issues as a matter of urgency.

Diriebught resurfacing – it was **NOTED** that funding for the resurfacing had been approved and the works would now be programmed.

- ii. Development & Infrastructure – it was advised that work was ongoing with regard to arrangements for the Festive period office closure. In particular, Service Points were still finalising their festive opening arrangements but good progress was being made in this respect. Work would continue on the IT and health and safety requirements for all staff working during the festive office closure period.

The Staff Side advised that staff needed to be kept informed of progress regarding working arrangements over the festive period and in this respect, it was acknowledged that communication would need to be improved. An update on the festive closure arrangements would be included in the staff communication “Staff Connections”.

**ECO –
T&E/ECO
- I&E/
Interim
Head of
HR**

It was understood that the Service Point in the Town House was going to have to move due to building works. Clarification was sought on when this would happen. An undertaking was given to provide information on this to the Staff Side.

**ECO –
T&E**

- iii Corporate Resources Service Minute:-

ICT Corporate Refresh – it was explained that progress was being made with the corporate refresh, but that the end December target for completion would be challenging. The new devices were excellent so it was important that staff should receive their devices as soon as possible.

Wellbeing Workshops – trade union representatives and staff were encouraged to attend these workshops to ensure that they were doing the right things for their own wellbeing and in supporting colleagues. Feedback so far from the workshops was that staff were finding them beneficial. It was suggested that the views of staff taking part in the workshops could be published in the staff communication “Staff Connections” which

may encourage more staff to attend. Also, it was suggested that information on the workshops could be relayed to staff who did not have e-mail, by way of tool box sessions or Personal Digital Assistant devices used by some groups of staff.

The Forum **AGREED** that an update on the Wellbeing Workshops be submitted to a future meeting.

**Interim
Head of
HR**

6 Budget Update

The Executive Chief Officer Resources provided a budget update. By way of summary, it was advised that budget preparations were ongoing, but that the announcement that there would be a General Election on 12 December, 2019 had changed these preparations. It had been proposed to take Officers proposals on budget savings to the full Council meeting in December, but this was not likely to happen now. However, work on the budget would continue with Officers and Members.

**ECO -
Resource**

It was advised that while there was good progress on the budget preparations, there was still a budget gap of between £5m - £6m and work would continue to reduce this. Information on Officers proposals for the budget would be shared with Trade Unions, noting that these still had to be considered by Members.

The Forum **NOTED** the position.

7. Organisational Transformation and Transition

There was circulated Report No. SPF/1/19 by the Chief Executive which was considered at The Highland Council meeting on 31 October, 2019

It was advised that the post of Executive Chief Officer – Education would be advertised in November, 2019. It was also proposed to approach recruiters early in the New Year to test the market for potential applicants for the Chief Operating Officer/Depute Chief Executive post.

Work was ongoing with Heads of Services regarding a number of restructures within the Council and a Members Seminar on this was to be held on 13 November. Aligned with this restructure work, the Council had agreed a new Committee structure which would take effect from January, 2020. It was intended that the new organisational structure would be in place by April, 2020.

The Council would also commit to undertaking CIPFA accreditation. CIPFA would undertake a wide ranging evidence gathering exercise, including Members, Officers and Trade Union representatives in order to assess the Council's current financial management capability.

Further, the aim was to produce an underspend in the budget this year in order to stabilise the Council's finances. While the budget was still challenging, it was felt that there was much better control and clarity about the budget compared to previous years and Officers were commended for their work on this. It was also aimed to create jobs by bringing services in-house and for there to be no redundancies.

In relation to the new devolved school management guidelines it was confirmed that discussion on the guidelines would be included in the consideration of budgets for schools and an initial meeting on this had already taken place with the Interim Chief Officer, Resources (Care & Learning), Interim Head of Education and representatives of Primary and Secondary schools. Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side would be invited to the next meeting of this Group.

**ICO- Res
(C&L)**

Insofar as winter maintenance was concerned, it was queried if it had been budgeted for a good or bad winter. It was advised that the budget for winter maintenance was based on an average winter. Over the last 4 years, despite reductions in the Council's finances, there had been no reductions in the winter maintenance budget. Staff undertaking winter maintenance duties, often in difficult conditions, were commended for their work by the Forum.

The Council also needed to consider claiming from the Bellwin scheme which could provide emergency financial assistance to Local Authorities for significant events such as, for example, flooding or forest fires.

The Forum **NOTED** the position.

8. 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 August, 2019.

It was advised that there had been good progress on the redesign projects that had commenced, such as catering and engineering services. It was proposed to undertake a number of rapid reviews as discussed at the last Redesign Board workshop, such as stores; depots; cashless catering and the use of Council properties for events and festivals. The Executive Leadership team were to look at these review areas over the next few weeks and determine which reviews would be progressed for consideration by the Redesign Board. The work carried out on these reviews by staff volunteers was commended. An update on the redesign projects would be included in the next staff communication "Staff Connections".

**ECO –
I&E**

The Forum **NOTED** the position.

The meeting was concluded at 12 noon.