

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL
RECOVERY BOARD**

Minutes of the Meeting of the Highland Council Recovery Board held remotely on Monday 24 August 2020 at 10.30am.

PRESENT:-

Mr A Christie (Chair)
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair
Mrs M Davidson
Mr J Gibson (non-voting)
Mr K Gowans
Mr J Gray

Mr A Gunn (non-voting)
Mr A Jarvie
Mrs D Manson (non-voting)
Mr B Lobban
Mr M MacLeod (non-voting)
Mr P Siggers

Non-Members also present:-

Mr B Boyd
Mr R Gale
Mr A Henderson
Mr D Louden
Mrs B McAllister

Mr J McGillivray
Mr D Macpherson
Mrs L Munro
Mrs M Paterson
Mr T Robertson

Also in attendance:-

Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland (SW)

Officers Present:-

Mrs K Lackie, ECO Performance & Governance
Mrs L Denovan, ECO Resources & Finance
Mr M Rodgers, ECO Property & Housing
Ms N Grant, Head of Education Services (NG)
Mr P Whitham, Programme Manager (PW)
Ms R Cleland, Corporate Communications Manager (RC)
Ms J Park, Interim Head of Health
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator

Mr A Christie in the Chair

Item	Subject/Decision	Action
1.	Apologies for Absence	No Action Necessary
	Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs C Caddick, Dr I Cockburn and Mr A Mackinnon.	
2.	Declarations of Interest	No Action Necessary
	Item 5 – Mr K Gowans (Financial)	

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

**No Action
Necessary**

There had been circulated the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 July 2020, the terms of which **APPROVED**.

4. Recovery Action Plan: Progress Update Plana Gnìomha Ath-shlànachaidh: Cunntas às Ùr mu Adhartas

AG

There had been circulated Report No RB/12/20 dated 13 August 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Chair welcomed the report, particularly the format which he indicated would be helpful if replicated at other committees. Continuing he advised that further theme updates would be provided at the next meeting in regard to Supporting the Recovery of the Highland Economy, Climate Change and Leadership, Culture and Performance. He also advised that work was ongoing in respect of BREXIT, Tourism and the Redesign Board and that verbal updates on these would also be provided at the next meeting. He welcomed the significant progress that had been made and in terms of the three actions that were showing slippage, indicated that two were due to be completed at the end of September 2020 and one in October 2020. In addition, he reported that the Director of Public Health had joined the Schools Reopening Programme Board in response to the request at the last meeting for him to have greater involvement;
- It was queried whether expenditure savings could be utilised on IT improvements to help staff work more efficiently and from home. The Chief Executive advised that this issue would be included in the staff survey and would require a full impact assessment. She acknowledged that this impacted on both recovery and also resource which would need to be considered as part of the wider issue in terms of how the new workforce would be shaped. She advised that this wider theme would continue to be reported to the Recovery Board as it would impact across a range of Council services;
- It had been indicated at the previous meeting that information on Understanding experience and impacts of Covid from our most vulnerable people and places would be reported to Area Committees and it was requested that this be prioritised to ensure the best provision for vulnerable people. The Chair provided assurance that confirmation would be provided to Area Chairs on when this information would be reported;
- Confirmation was provided that Revenue Monitoring was being reported at strategic committees and that further information would be reported to the next meeting in terms of benchmarking. Initial indications were that Highland Council was well positioned in terms of the recovery work it had been undertaking and was also leading in some areas;
- Further assurance was sought and provided in regard to the procurement and supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the need for synergies with partners such as High Life Highland was highlighted. The Chair requested that an update on PPE be included within the report to Council;

- Further work was required to promote awareness of the excellent work being undertaken by the Council and it was suggested that this be captured and taken forward via the Leadership, Culture and Performance theme;
- It was recognised that many staff had been working very hard throughout the pandemic and assurance was sought and provided that provisions had been made to ensure that staff were utilising their holiday entitlement; and
- The Chair and Vice Chair of the Redesign Board had met with the ECO Resources and Finance in respect of Workforce Planning, the progress of which would be intensified over the coming weeks, and confirmed that an update would be provided to the next meeting.

Thereafter, the Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the latest progress of the Council's Recovery Action Plan to 30 June 2020;
- ii. **NOTED** the associated implications and pressures on resources in the delivery of the Recovery programme;
- iii. **NOTED** that further theme updates would be provided at the next meeting in regard to Supporting the Recovery of the Highland Economy, Climate Change and Leadership, Culture and Performance as well as verbal updates on BREXIT, Tourism and the Redesign Board as well as further benchmarking information;
- iv. **AGREED** that confirmation be provided to Area Chairs on when the vulnerable household data would be reported to local Area Committees;
- v. **AGREED** that the report to Council be amended to provide an update on PPE; and
- vi. **AGREED** that capturing and promoting awareness of the positive work being undertaken by the Council be taken forward as part of the Leadership, Culture and Performance theme.

5. High Life Highland High Life na Gàidhealtachd

SW

Declarations of Interest: Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in this item on the grounds that a family member was an employee of High Life Highland, but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No RB/13/20 by the Chief Executive of High Life Highland (HLH). The HLH Chief Executive gave a presentation on the progress being made with the HLH Recovery Action Plan and how this was being underpinned by the HLH Bounceback campaign. During his presentation, he provided information on the learning points that had been gained from responding to the pandemic; the financial progress that had been made, mainly reducing the projected deficit from £11.4m to approximately £1.55m; emphasised the importance of good governance; set out the strategy for recovery; and outlined the strong partnership working that had taken place and the importance of this continuing.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chair thanked the HLH Chief Executive for his presentation and for the excellent information contained in the report. He acknowledged the points raised in regard to protecting jobs, increasing services and working collaboratively to achieve synergies, particularly in regard to property rationalisation;
- The Board expressed their appreciation to the HLH staff for their support and flexible approach to help in the recovery process and it was requested that the Council's gratitude for this be conveyed to them;
- It was explained that two key pieces of strategic work would be coming forward in the Council in regard to the Integrated Strategic Plan and Community Development. It was requested that the HLH Chief Executive give consideration to how HLH could enable and help co-ordinate getting people active in communities. The Chair advised he would liaise with the Chair of the Education Committee regarding a report being submitted to the Committee on the role of Community Development but he felt that development of the wider strategy should be progressed through the new Joint Wellbeing Sub-Committee. In addition, it was explained that once the new Partnership Agreement had been finalised with NHS Highland, the Integrated Strategic Plan would be developed and reported to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee;
- The reduced projected overspend was welcomed and further information was sought and provided on the impact that being furloughed had had on staff, particularly in terms of morale;
- Further information was sought and provided on the timeline for the reopening of libraries;
- The importance of the services provided by HLH, including the continued provision of non-income generating services, was emphasised and it was suggested that there should be a public awareness raising campaign on the gradual reopening of HLH services;
- It was queried whether the additional 'one-off' funding support that would be required could be quantified and whether any assistance could be provided from the Inverness Common Good Fund, particularly in terms of supporting vulnerable people;
- Concern was expressed that HLH staff had been furloughed on reduced pay, i.e. 80% and this needed to be further examined; and
- Further information was sought and provided on the revised safety procedures that would be adopted for the reopening of swimming pools.

The Chair thanked the HLH Chief Executive for attending the meeting and thereafter the Board **NOTED**:-

- i. that despite projected income losses of £9.345m, extensive mitigation meant that the HLH reasonable worst-case year-end deficit had been reduced from initial estimates of £11.4m down to £1.55m (with a sensitivity of £0.8m to £1.8m(deficits));
- ii. that the current projected year-end deficit of £1.55m equated to 5% of HLH overall turnover (£30.8m);

- iii. that £4.7m was projected to be drawn down from the UK Government Job Retention Scheme (JRS);
- iv. that total in-year mitigation of £7.75m (JRS income plus other costs mitigations) equated to 25% of HLH overall turnover;
- v. the significant amount of joint working between High Life Highland and the Highland Council to serve our citizens and communities during the pandemic;
- vi. the governance and due diligence arrangements for recovery;
- vii. Recovery Action Plan (RAP) progress against the Plan and the seven key themes;
- viii. the vital importance of early HLH access to the school estate;
- ix. that strategic alignment with The Highland Council would be critical to realisation of overall benefits, with rationalisation a particular area of potential joint working;
- x. that HLH's main effort was now shifting from mitigation to strategic business recovery planning;
- xi. that HLH was confident that it could recover in FY21/22 with some one-off support; and
- xii. that HLH services that support vulnerable groups, music tuition and project management of the Inverness Castle Project have continued throughout lockdown.

6. Digital Transformation Cruth-atharrachadh Didseatach

MMcL

There had been circulated Report No RB/14/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was explained that Orkney had 5G coverage as result of taking part in a pilot project and the Leader of the Council advised that an update would be provided at the forthcoming seminar on whether there were any similar project opportunities that Highland could participate in. The importance of maximising opportunities and continuing to work collaboratively with the Highlands and Islands Enterprise were emphasised;
- It was recognised that there were challenges due to the geography of the Highlands but it was critical that Highland was at the forefront of digital connectivity. In addition, there was a significant amount of private sector investment had been received, which was welcomed, and these opportunities needed to continue to be maximised;
- The rolling out of the City Fibre scheme was welcomed as was the Broadband Voucher Scheme and it was highlighted that awareness of this needed to be promoted to maximise take-up up thus helping recovery in local communities;
- The complexities of the R100 project were recognised and there should be continued lobbying of the Scottish Government for a resolution; and
- Assurance was sought and provided that there was good collaborative working across the Digital Partnership and it was anticipated that a replacement Project Manager would be recruited soon.

The Board **AGREED** that:-

- i. a lobbying document be prepared by 30 September 2020 to set out the key areas for co-ordinated action with local Highland partners, Scottish Government and UK Government;
- ii. a paper on any potential alternative options for the delivery of the digital funding available through the Highland City region Deal be prepared and reported to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- iii. an options paper be prepared on the practicality of delivering full fibre capability within future Highland Council capital projects, recognising the important role of commercial providers and the potential need to amend both national and local policy and procedures; and
- iv. the Economy and Infrastructure Committee arrange a Members Seminar to discuss digital issues and the way forward and that a paper be brought to the Highland Community Planning Partnership in due course (once the outcomes of the current legal issues relating to R100 were known).

7. Update on Schools Reopening Cunntas às Ùr mu Sgoiltean a' Fosgladh às Ùr

NG

i. Schools Reopening

The Chair expressed appreciation to all parties involved, including staff (teaching and non-teaching), pupils and parents, in terms of excellent work that had been undertaken and the complexities that had been overcome in order to ensure the safe reopening of schools

The Head of Education then gave a verbal update on the reopening of schools during which the Board was advised that 203 schools and 245 ELC settings had been opened by 17 August 2020. All schools continued to take account of local circumstances, updating detailed Risk Assessments with local Members. Local Project Boards continued to operate on a weekly basis with a focus on individual, school and community issues relating to transport, catering, facilities management and digital. Catering provisions were being reviewed on a per setting basis along with Head Teachers and in line with Scottish Government guidance and full service would be returning in a number of settings. Schools were currently staggering breaks and lunchtimes to minimise group contacts, particularly in secondary schools. In terms of pupil groupings, efforts had been made in accordance with Scottish Government guidance, to keep children and young people in the same group settings for the duration of the school day and further information was provided on how pupils had been grouped.

It was further reported that following Scottish Government and National Health advice, an instruction would be issued to all Head Teachers stating that schools must consult with parents, pupils and staff regarding the use of face coverings within the senior phase and in particular, S4 to S6 students. At present the use of face coverings was not mandatory and Highland schools were being advised that there must be evidence of consultation with key stakeholders and

that exemptions would apply and all communications must go through Corporate Communications and the Highland Council Resilience Group to ensure that protocols and Public Health advice were being followed. Further information was provided from the Corporate Communications Manager during which she advised that this was a fast-changing situation but that NHS Highland Public Health was responsible for interpreting and providing advice on the Scottish Government national guidance. Once the guidance for teachers had been updated, this would be shared with Head Teachers and Members. In addition, although there had recently been a small number of positive Covid-19 cases, there was no evidence of widespread community transmission. A tactical response group had been established and was meeting on a daily basis to monitor the position both in Highland and also nationally.

A further update was provided by the ECO Property and Housing regarding the clean and safe supply of water. He confirmed that buildings which had a water tap supply which fed off the rising water main were safe for consumption. However, taps which were supplied from cold-water storage tank systems were not suitable for use. A survey of the school estate was currently being undertaken to ensure that each safe tap supply was clearly marked suitable for use/consumption and a range of water bottle dispensers was being examined with a view to water bottles being filled without having to touch the dispenser to minimise risks. Installation of this would be through a rolling programme for which a timeline could be provided once finalised. The Chair advised that Members contact their Area Education Manager for a detailed update in regard to specific local schools.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was critical that there were clear and timely communications and that Members were included in these as they were released to parents;
- It was felt that there should be a corporate approach to the guidance across the Highlands, with small local variances as required. Further clarity was sought on the Head Teachers framework for decision-making and it was indicated that the flowcharts in regard to this process would be circulated;
- Staff were commended for their work to ensure the safe reopening of schools during these challenging times. It was noted that it was policy to retain pupils within the same group settings and, in response to concerns raised, it was queried whether this good practice approach should be extended to support staff to enhance their safety protection measures; and
- Concern was expressed that the reopening of some schools had been delayed due to facilities management issues as the need for regular building inspections had been raised at the first briefing held during the lockdown. The Council had a large school estate and confirmation was provided that the necessary health and safety checks had been made for all school buildings. In addition, it was further confirmed that advice was being followed in terms of the ongoing management of these premises.

The Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the verbal update;
- ii. **AGREED** that the Council's appreciation be conveyed to all parties involved for the excellent work that had been undertaken and the complexities that had been overcome in order to ensure the safe reopening of schools;
- iii. **AGREED** that Members be kept informed of changes to protocols and/or communications to parents and **NOTED** that the updated guidance for teachers would be circulated to Members;
- iv. **AGREED** that the Head Teachers decision-making flowcharts be circulated to the Board.

ii. Children's Learning

There was a verbal update by the Head of Education during which the Board was advised that children's learning would remain a priority as well as the importance of wellbeing. To support this, an online survey had been produced for staff to capture the highlights and lessons learnt from lockdown experiences. There would also be a pupil, staff and parent survey running throughout September 2020 and Members would receive copy of this prior to issue. Members were encouraged to support constituents to complete the survey the results of which would be reported to the Education Committee and would influence the service plan priorities going forward. The Education Improvement Team along with staff were focussed on obtaining feedback from young people. Early indications were young people were positively engaging and discussing new skills that had been developed. Staff had indicated that the positive impacts of Covid had included the decluttering of the traditional curriculum and a more targeted approach to the key areas of numeracy, literacy and wellbeing. Further additional information was then provided regarding increased grades of approximately 5,000 across Highland, continuation of the Highland Virtual Academy and the ongoing work with Head Teachers and Unions to develop blended learning approaches in the event of further lockdowns including the support provisions for disadvantaged families. In conclusion, pupils had returned to school with resilience and positivity and schools were delivering a high-quality experience.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- It was queried, and confirmation was provided, that children and young people would be assessed in terms of numeracy, literacy and wellbeing to determine the level of learning that had been lost as a result of the lockdown. It was stressed that addressing this needed to be prioritised;
- The support measures that were being implemented for disadvantaged families was welcomed but concern was expressed at those out with the threshold, i.e. the working poor, but still required assistance. Further information and assurance was provided that support would be extended to families on low incomes; and

- Confirmation was provided that the verbal update would inform a written report for submission to the next meeting of the Education Committee.

The Board **NOTED** the verbal update.

The meeting was closed at 12.30pm.