

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL
RECOVERY BOARD**

Minutes of the Meeting of the Highland Council Recovery Board held remotely on Monday 7 October 2020 at 10.30am.

PRESENT:-

Mr A Christie (Chair)	Mr A Gunn (non-voting) (AG)
Ms C Caddick	Mr R MacWilliam (substitute)
Dr I Cockburn	Mrs D Manson (non-voting) (DM)
Mrs M Davidson	Mr B Lobban
Mr J Gibson (non-voting)	Mr A Mackinnon
Mr K Gowans	Mr M MacLeod (non-voting) (MMcL)
Mr J Gray	

Non-Members also present:-

Mr B Boyd	Mr G Mackenzie
Mr J Finlayson	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R Gale	Mr C Munro
Mr D Louden	Mrs L Munro
Mrs B McAllister	Mr I Ramon
Mr J McGillivray	Mr T Robertson
Mr A MacInnes	Mr B Thompson

Officers Present:-

Mrs L Denovan, ECO Resources & Finance
 Mrs K Lackie, ECO Performance & Governance (KL)
 Ms C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer Communities & Place (CMcD)
 Mr A Maguire, Head of Development & Regeneration
 Mr A McCann, Economy & Regeneration Manager
 Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager
 Mr P Whitham, Programme Manager
 Mr K Masson, Climate Change Officer (KM)
 Mr A MacLeod, Brexit & EU Policy Co-ordinator (AMcL)
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator
 Miss M Zavarella, Administrative Assistant

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 G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr A Jarvie and Mr P Saggars.	
2.	Declarations of Interest	No Action Necessary
	There were no declarations of interest.	

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

**No Action
Necessary**

There had been circulated the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 August 2020, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Recovery Action Plan: Progress Update to 30 September 2020 Plana Gníomha Ath-shlánachaidh: Cunntas às Úr mu Adhartas gu 30 Sultain 2020

AG

There had been circulated Report No RB/15/20 dated 29 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chair proposed that there be two additional recommendations, namely, the appointment of a Vice Chair and an update on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) included in the report to Council;
- It was felt that specific reference should be made to Brexit within the Economic Recovery section of the report and the Chair proposed that a SWOT analysis should be undertaken and reported to the next meeting of the Board. He supported the view that Brexit should be incorporated into the recovery process and advised that a meeting of the Brexit Working Group had been scheduled for 28 October 2020;
- The progress that was being made was welcome and confirmation was provided that further reports would be provided on training and how the acute issue of short terms jobs in Highland would be addressed at the Economy and Infrastructure Committee and reported back to the Recovery Board prior to Council; and
- The importance of PPE in terms of maintaining continued service delivery was stressed and assurance was sought on maintaining supply chains and early identification of any gaps in provision. The Chief Executive advised that there was a very strong partnership approach in terms of Adult Social Care and the needs of each care home were assessed on a daily basis. In terms of schools, the approach and materials being used had changed but good progress was being made and every school had passed the national health and safety unannounced spots checks. Particular consideration would need to be given to Social Work in terms of supporting the most vulnerable people in their own home and the supporting of this was likely to become a bigger requirement.

The Board **NOTED**:-

- i. the latest progress of the Council's Recovery Action Plan to 30 September 2020;
- ii. the associated implications and pressures on resources in the delivery of the Resilience activity and the Recovery programme;

and **AGREED** that:-

- iii. a Vice Chair be appointed to the Board;
- iv. the report to Council include an update on PPE; and
- v. a BREXIT SWOT analysis be undertaken and the outcome reported to the next meeting of the Board.

5. Economic Recovery Strategy
Cunntas às Ùr mu Thaic do Eaconamaidh na Gàidhealtachd

MMcL

There had been circulated Report No RB/16/20 dated 23 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chair recommended that the Opposition's Spokesperson for the Economy and Infrastructure Committee should be invited to the next meeting of the Highland Economic Recovery Partnership. He also indicated that the development of the Economic Recovery Strategy would be a key milestone and therefore suggested that the Highland and Islands Enterprise presentation, which should dovetail with this aspect to help provide greater context to the Strategy, should be made to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee rather than the Recovery Board and this was supported;
- The report was welcome, and the need for a multi-agency approach to develop a long-term economic plan to put the Highlands on a trajectory to address major issues such as the climate emergency and the need for skilled and high paid jobs across the region. However, it was indicated that further information was required on Freeports and the potential risks and benefits as concern was expressed that Freeports distorted local economies and lowered standards/employment rights. In addition, concern was expressed that a consortium had been assembled to progress a bid for Freeport status at the Cromarty Firth. Therefore, further information was sought and provided on the process to date and the Chair drew attention to paragraph 9.4 of the report which advised that a report would be submitted to next meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to seek confirmation of the Council's support for the Opportunity Cromarty Firth project. However, further concern was expressed that this paragraph implied that the decision had already been made in support of the bid prior to an opportunity for democratic debate from Members and it was suggested that an additional recommendation should be made whereby this report informed debate on whether or not to progress with such a bid;
- Appreciation was expressed to officers for preparing the report and for the consultation with local Members. It was felt that the Opportunity Cromarty Firth project comprised of a number of appealing elements including the potential to switch from oil and gas to renewables which was in keeping with the Council's agenda. There was a need for the Council to identify the priorities/opportunities that it was in favour of and wanted to support. Key elements of the Opportunity Cromarty Firth proposals included offshore wind and research opportunities in relation to hydrogen which fitted with the need to develop transport and heat solutions. Although the benefits were recognised, caution was expressed as this was not a new initiative and there was a need to be careful not to undermine ports across the region which had to compete against other ports across Scotland and the wider UK. Therefore, the opportunity for discussion in more detail at the Economy and Infrastructure Committee was welcomed and it was suggested that

the report should contain additional information on why Freeports had not been established previously and the current position in Europe whereby many ports were seeking to exit from Freeport status. The need for more information to enable Members to discuss and make an informed decision was recognised. However, the view was expressed that this matter might need consideration at full Council given the wider implications for the whole of the Highlands. It was also suggested that the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure could undertake a briefing to give Members further information and a greater understanding of the concept of Freeports prior to discussing the matter at the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;

- A request was made for future reports on Economic Recovery to contain more information on innovation and technology and how the Council could work with partners to support this; and
- Officers were commended for their work at Area Committees and further information was sought and provided on the immediate plans to tackle the forthcoming surge of unemployment. It was noted that the Council had an excellent track record in delivering Modern Apprenticeships and it was queried whether consideration had been given to sharing this good practice with partners. The Chair proposed that a showcase event be held highlighting the work that had been undertaken through this initiative via the Community Planning Partnership and partners, businesses and interested parties could be invited to attend.

The Chair gave Mr MacWilliam an assurance that the report to Economy and Infrastructure would contain detailed information on the pros/cons and advantages/disadvantages on whether to support the Opportunity Cromarty Firth project. However, Mr MacWilliam indicated that he wished to proceed with moving his motion to ensure the matter on whether or not to support a bid would be debated prior to the Council adopting a formal position.

On that basis, Mr R MacWilliam, seconded by Mr K Gowans, **MOVED** an additional recommendation requesting that the report coming before Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 4 November 2020 was written as an impartial discussion document to inform debate on whether the Highland Council should support any bid to attract Freeport status for any area of the Highlands.

The Chair ruled that the Motion was not competent on the grounds that the Recovery Board had no control over the Economy and Infrastructure Committee and had no influence over what formed a report.

Thereafter, the Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the latest contextual information available from Highlands & Islands Enterprise and **AGREED** that the agency be invited to present to a future meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- ii. **NOTED** the progress being made on setting out the key priorities for economic recovery;
- iii. **AGREED** that a full report be prepared for the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 4 November 2020, setting out the Economic Recovery Strategy;

- iv. **AGREED** that the Opposition's Spokesperson for the Economy and Infrastructure Committee be invited to the next meeting of the Highland Economic Recovery Partnership; and
- v. **NOTED** that the Chair would undertake to arrange an event being held through the Community Planning Partnership to showcase the Council's work on delivering Modern Apprenticeships.

6. Climate Change Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde

MMcL/KM

There had been circulated Report No RB/17/20 dated 16 September 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the report which gave a concise snapshot of the current position. The Chair explained that the role of the Recovery Board would be to review the actions determined by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Climate Change Working Group and Corporate Resources Committee in regard to paragraphs 6.6.1 – 6.6.4 of the report and consider how this related to the overall Recovery Plan;
- A request was made for partners to be identified to work collaboratively with the Council to develop new and emerging technologies to create an innovative industry within the Highlands for renewables and climate change and work towards being a world leader in this sector;
- It was suggested that there should be greater focus on fuel poverty and dialogue was required with Ofgem to determine how they could support the Council on this aspect. The Leader of the Council confirmed that a meeting was being arranged with Ofgem and the Chair advised that a cross service approach needed to be adopted on fuel poverty;
- The more difficult problems to overcome related to transport and heat and further exploratory work was required on these aspects to establish alternative solutions such as the development of a hydrogen economy. There should also be a plan for retrofitting all of the Council's assets with solar/solar thermal PV systems;
- With reference to Target Setting (paragraph 6.6.2 of the report), there was a need to be careful to ensure this target was clearly defined and further information was sought and provided in respect of the likelihood of being able to achieve the target of a carbon neutral Highland by 2025. The Leader of the Council felt that this commitment related to the wider Highlands but acknowledged that there was a need for the Council to commit to achieving net zero emissions from its operations. The Leader of the Council advised that she would raise this matter with the Chair of the Climate Change Working Group;
- The key strengths of the Highlands, its vast landscape and the amount of energy that it produced, needed to be maximised and it was important that the partnership arrangement with the University of Edinburgh was progressed. There were also significant opportunities for inward investment in the Highlands and a clear strategy needed to be developed to drive this forward. There was a need for more

clarity on what benefits could be generated for Highlands and the local communities from renewables. The resource implications of driving the climate change agenda forward were recognised and it was confirmed that good progress was being made with staff appointments to strengthen the team; and

- With regard to paras 6.6.1 and 6.6.2 of the report, it was highlighted that minimal millage was being incurred by Members and staff due to current circumstances and thus a budgetary saving was being generated in regard to car hire and mileage expenses. It was therefore queried and confirmation was provided that the reduction in travel could be quantified and it would be feasible for further information on the impact of this on Council's emissions to be reported to a future meeting of the Climate Change Working Group.

The Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** the Recovery Board consider how the actions, to be determined by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee/Climate Change Working Group/Corporate Resources Committee, outlined at paragraphs 6.6.1 – 6.6.4 of the report related to the overall Recovery Plan with any decisions arising from this being submitted to Council; and
- iii. **NOTED** that the Leader of the Council would liaise with the Chair of the Climate Change Working Group on having a future agenda item on the need for setting a corporate target to achieve net zero emissions.

7. **Leadership, Culture & Performance Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Cheannardas, Cultar & Coileanadh**

KL

There had been circulated Report No RB/18/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following key points were raised:-

- The Leadership Development Programme was vital following the reorganisation of the Council and to ensure the success of the new structure. Unfortunately, training and development budgets were often the first to be cut as soon as there were any financial pressures and it was welcomed that this was being prioritised as it would be essential to moving the organisation forward;
- It was essential that the Programme delivered business impact and this should include ensuring that senior managers had full responsibility and accountability for budgets;
- It was noted that the Programme comprised of a combination of both mandatory and voluntary elements and this was supported. Group coaching and mentoring were important but it was vital that learning was transferred into practice. Although welcome, concern was expressed that the refresh of the Employee Review and Development Process had not been reported to the Workforce Planning Project and further information was sought and provided on this process. It was important to have these measures in place to ensure that the right outcomes were being achieved. It was queried

whether the refresh of the Employee Review and Development Process had been applied across all levels of the organisation or only at senior level. In addition, it appeared that there were two pieces of work being taken forward separately via the Workforce Planning Project and through the Leadership Development and Culture workstream that were completely related but not connected and further clarification was sought and provided on the performance process including who was undertaking this and at what level. The Chair recommended that this be reviewed at the next meeting of the Redesign Board to ensure that these aspects were aligned;

- It was suggested that the word '*Supportive*' should be added to the Council's strapline instead of '*Caring*' as this was more wide-ranging;
- Improving Education would require a resource allocation and there was a greater need for online resource to support the blended learning approach but this too would require investment to drive the programme forward. Overall, the delivery of education would require seismic change and a resourced team to ensure delivery;
- It was noted that para 3.3 of the report, Resource Implications, indicated that the resources would need to be provided to support the Programme and confirmation was provided that the detailed costings had yet to be determined and this information would be provided once known;
- The Chief Executive advised that the need for staff training and strong financial awareness had been recognised. Consequently, the Council was currently working with CIPFA to provide Financial Management training for Leaders and this also included sharing of best practice. The Council senior management team was also involved in a peer learning project with the National College for Leadership Programme working with 100 leaders across the UK and a strong theme within this two-year programme related to looking at how 100 organisations across the UK were working together to deliver a sustainable financial footprint. In addition, the Chief Executive was working with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to develop a public sector engagement strategy across the Highlands. A key strand of this would be how senior leaders deliver a financial approach in partnership with other organisations on a place-based approach to ensure best value for the public purse. In terms of the ongoing work within the organisation, every Executive Chief Officer (ECO) had had their budget unpacked and rebuilt by the Finance Team and each ECO had to share their knowledge and understanding of their budget including their HR and staffing resource. Members would be invited to a seminar on the outcome of this work which would set out all the budget headings and the ECO directly responsible. In conclusion, the Chief Executive also advised that the Big Blether on Blended Learning across the Highlands would be held during the month of November 2020. As part of this, feedback would be sought from pupils and teachers which would be incorporated into a whole Council approach commencing with listening, learning and sharing. In addition, work had already started in terms of developing the IT provision and talent already within the organisation would also be used to move blended learning forward.

The Board:-

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed inclusion of 'Caring' in the Council's organisational values;
- ii. **NOTED** the progress that had been made to date to develop a Leadership Development Programme and steps being taken to deliver a strengthened corporate performance approach;
- iii. **NOTED** the intention to engage with Members, managers and staff on the further development of the Programme;
- iv. **NOTED** the work also being progressed for staff training and development more broadly which included a focus on staff welfare and wellbeing;
- v. **NOTED** the proposed next steps at section 12 of the report;
- vi. **AGREED** to recommend that the Redesign Board ensure that the relevant Leadership Development Programme workstreams were aligned with the Workforce Planning workstream;
- vii. **NOTED** that there would be a Member Seminar on the work that had taken place in respect of Financial Management.

8. **BREXIT Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu BREXIT**

RC/AMcL

There was a verbal update by the Chair of the Brexit Working Group during which the Board was advised that ongoing preparations included updating businesses on the new obligations and environmental standards. The Society of Chief Officers Environmental Health Scotland were pursuing both the UK and Scottish Governments and support was being provided through CoSLA and SOLACE. The Scottish Government Stakeholder Group had been established to discuss the policy and deliver designations of border control in Scotland. The Local Resilience Partnership had set a timeline commencing on 19 October 2020 to consider preparation, self-assessment and gap testing. On 7 December 2020 the National Co-ordination Centre (NCC) would start familiarisation and the Scottish Government Resilience Room would activate. Highland Council had appointed a single point of contact within each Service to consider the impact of Brexit. The key known issues related to import and export changes for business, immigration changes and the speed at which freight flowed was likely to be reduced. The current transition period would conclude on 31 December 2020 when the UK would formally leave the European Union and the Prime Minister had advised that there needed to be agreement by the time the European Council met on 15 October 2020 or the UK would move towards a no deal outcome. However, the EU felt that the end of October/beginning of November 2020 was a more realistic timescale for the deal.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- An update was sought and provided on the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) during which it was reported that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets Mr P Scully MSP had announced on national TV that any repatriated EU funds would be administered by the UK Government and not via the Scottish Government. In terms of the Internal Market discussions, mechanisms were in place for the UK Government to deliver directly on what was EU funding. The

Chair recommended that there should be an update to the next meeting of the Brexit Working Group on the SPF;

- Scotland would be losing Northern Ireland as a trading partner and the Brexit Working Group should consider how this trade route would be maintained; and
- The Chair of the Brexit Working Group recommended that Members reread the previous documentation as he felt this would be helpful. He advised that the risks were extremely high and the information gave an indication of the complexities of the position. With regard to the SPF, he advised that the Islands were already having ongoing dialogue with the UK Government on this matter. He explained that there was a need to ensure that the Council was informed of the options available to ensure it did not miss out on any opportunities.

The Board **NOTED** the update and **AGREED** that an update be provided to the Brexit Working Group on the SPF.

9. **Tourism Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Thurasachd**

MMcL

There was a verbal report by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment during which the Board was advised that the next meeting of the Tourism Committee would consider the Infrastructure Plan and give thought to any gaps in provision; examine a draft Visitor Management Plan which impacted across all Council services; a report on Motorhomes and Wild Camping – a meeting had been held with local Chambers of Commerce and Scottish Water on the need to develop a strategic network of campervan waste disposal facilities; and provide a verbal update on the bids that had been submitted to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. He further highlighted that there were resource implications for each of the reports and consequently there was a need to prioritise investments in order to deliver the best outcomes across the Highlands.

During discussion, the resource implications were recognised but it was highlighted that there were income generating opportunities to develop self-sustaining solutions. It was further indicated that there was a need for the right messages to be conveyed to encourage visitors to be responsible.

The Board **NOTED** the update.

The meeting was closed at 12.25pm.