

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL
RECOVERY BOARD**

Minutes of the Meeting of the Highland Council Recovery Board held remotely on Monday 23 November 2020 at 10.30am.

PRESENT:-

Mr A Christie (Chair)
Ms C Caddick
Dr I Cockburn
Mrs M Davidson
Mr J Gray
Mr A Gunn (non-voting) (AG)
Mr A Jarvie

Mr B Lobban
Mr A MacInnes
Mr M MacLeod (non-voting) (MMcL)
Mr R MacWilliam (substitute)
Mrs D Manson (non-voting)
Mr P Saggars

Non-Members also present:-

Mrs J Barclay
Mr R Bremner
Mr B Boyd
Mr J Bruce
Mrs I Campbell
Mrs H Carmichael
Mr R Gale

Mr A Henderson
Mr D Louden
Mr J McGillivray
Mr D Macpherson
Mrs L Munro
Mr T Robertson

Officers Present:-

Mrs L Denovan, ECO Resources & Finance (LDe)
Mrs K Lackie, ECO Performance & Governance
Mr M Rodgers, ECO Housing & Property (MR)
Ms C McDiarmid, ECO Communities & Place
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing & Building Maintenance (DG)
Mr J Shepherd, Head of ICT & Digital Transformation
Mr P Whitham, Programme Manager (PW)
Mr M Bailey, Commercial and Efficiency Team Manager
Mr A MacLeod, Brexit & EU Policy Co-ordinator
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator (LD)
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 Mr J Gibson, Mr K Gowans and Mr A Mackinnon. | |
| 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 7 October 2020, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

**4. Appointment of Vice Chairs
Cur Iar-Chathraichean an Dreuchd**

LD

- * The Board **AGREED** that nominations for Vice Chairs be submitted to Council for agreement.

**5. Recovery Action Plan: Update and Exceptions Report
Plana Gnìomh Ath-shlànachaidh: Aithisg Ùrachaidh agus Eisgeachdan**

AG

There had been circulated Report No RB/19/20 dated 12 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chair welcomed the report format and recommended that this approach be rolled out across the strategic committees and service plans to enable Members to drill down into the detail of the data. He also commended officers for their progress to date noting that there had been slippage to only three Key Priority actions from a total of 69 tasks and that a timescale had been set to bring each of these back on track. Although the report format was welcomed, it was suggested that replication of this across the strategic committees be deferred until the start of 2021 to coincide with the refreshed Service Plans;
- Appreciation was extended to officers for their support in regard to IT and it was requested that further information be provided on the complex range of contracts. The Chair proposed that the Corporate Resources Committee/Sub-Committee be tasked with compiling a report on the IT contracts in place including their expiry dates and how this linked into Project Dochas; and
- In terms of Procurement, further information was sought on how much cognisance was being given to developing and improving local supply lines. It was explained that a review was currently underway of the existing Shared Services Agreement, an update on which could be provided to the next meeting, and this was welcomed as Members were unclear as to how effective this model had been. Although the Council performed well nationally in terms of local spend, it was felt that there was a need for higher ambition including the development of a Community Wealth Strategy. The Chair proposed that a review be undertaken of the current Shared procurement model and this be reported to the strategic committee to ascertain their view prior to being reported to Recovery Board.

Thereafter, the Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the latest summary of progress against the Council's Recovery Action Plan including exceptions;

- ii. **NOTED** the associated implications and pressures on resources in the delivery of the Resilience activity and the Recovery programme;
- iii. **NOTED** the example of the Performance and Risk Management System (PRMS) at Appendix 1 to the report to support future Recovery Action Plan reporting;
- iv. **AGREED** that Corporate Resources Committee/Sub-Committee be tasked with undertaking a review of all existing IT contracts; and
- v. **AGREED** that an update report be provided to Corporate Resources Committee and thereafter to the Recovery Board on the effectiveness of the Shared Services Agreement.

6. Redesign Board Update – Workforce Planning and Development Project **LDe/DG**
Fios àn Ùr mun Bhòrd Ath-dhealbhaidh – Pròiseact Planadh is Leasachadh Sgioba-obrach

There had been circulated Report No RB/20/20 dated 12 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources & Finance.

During discussion officers were commended for the progress that was being made with this workstream particularly in respect of the management discussions. The feedback on this aligned with the other work be undertaken by the Council in terms of process improvements, e.g. updating and standardising Job Descriptions and rationalising HR systems. In addition, Covid had demonstrated what could be achieved in terms of redeployment and it was important that these good working practices were continued.

It was clarified that the workshop sessions held during October 2020 had been used as a basis to collect qualitative research and that attendance levels had been sufficient to support this process. The Chief Executive also provided assurance that work was ongoing in regard to reconnecting with staff and an extensive Engagement Strategy was being developed the details of which would be the subject of a future report.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the progress of the Workforce Planning and Development Project.

7. Economic Recovery Strategy **MMcL**
Cunntas às Ùr mu Thaic do Eaconamaidh na Gàidhealtachd

There was a verbal update by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment during which he gave an update on four key themes as follows:-

- **Engagement with Economic Partners:** included regular meetings with the Economic Recovery Partnership, Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Business, Scottish Development International as well as local discussions with Area Recovery Groups. These engagements had been helpful to identify areas of joint working;
- **Labour Market:** there had been collaborative working with Skills Development Scotland, Department for Work and Pensions and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to determine how the Council could

lead and provide support to address the anticipated rise in unemployment over the coming months. There would be a report to Council on the multiagency response to the provision of Employability Services the purpose of which was to ensure support to prepare for and access the labour market ideally through a single point of contact. Key focus areas would be around the UK Government Kickstart Programme and the Scottish Government Young Person's Guarantee scheme which would include additional funding. In addition, the team and Employability Service would be strengthened as part of the Service restructure;

- **Economic Recovery Strategy:** a forward planning strategy would be developed setting out how all the different economic strands would be drawn together. A variety of work was being undertaken and it was important that Council aligned with existing local initiatives to ensure they were translated into delivery, particularly in terms of capital projects and community planning buy-in; and
- **Financials/Funds:** There was a need to ensure that projects were identified and funding in respect of the Coastal Communities Fund and Town Centre Funds committed by the end of the current financial year. There was also a need to develop a capital strategy which identified areas that would have the most significant impact and provided opportunities to lever in additional sources of external financial support.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chair advised the intention was for the Economic Strategy to be ready towards the start of 2021 and reported to Economy and Infrastructure Committee and Recovery Board as well as full Council. This approach was welcomed, particularly the continued reporting to the Recovery Board and it was also important that the work with Community Planning and public partners was captured;
- Employment, along with Mental Health and Welfare, were major concerns within local communities and it was therefore important that there was clear and concise signposting in regard to the employment support available;
- The launch of the Scottish National Investment Bank was welcomed and a similar approach was needed with regard to climate change particularly in terms of identifying the opportunities for green jobs; and
- The strategy needed to address a wide range of issues including ensuring fair compensation for the Highlands from the Shared Prosperity Fund, access to global markets, and the continuation of Covid secure measures.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the update.

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

**No Action
Necessary**

There was a verbal update by the Chair of the Brexit Working Group during which the Board was informed that assistance had been sought from the

University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) in developing a Brexit SWOT analysis but they had indicated that it was too soon to undertake such an exercise as there was insufficient definitive information. However, they would be willing to do this in the future on a Highlands and Islands wide basis.

Current priorities agreed at the Brexit Working Group were for the Council to continue on a risk analysis basis and determine appropriate mitigation measures. There were only 39 days to the end of the Transition Period, negotiations were ongoing and speculation continued that a deal was imminent. The Chair gave a summary of the key issues that had yet to be resolved and he urged Members to read the National Audit Office report *The UK Border: Preparedness for the end of the transition period*. The Scottish Resilience Partnership EU Exit Group had met on 10 November 2020 and concluded that it was not feasible for businesses to adequately prepare for the new arrangements in the required timescales. In addition, he also urged Members to read the Scottish Government's position paper on the Shared Prosperity Fund, for which there would be an announcement from the UK Government on 25 November 2020.

COSLA and SOLACE continued to lobby both governments for additional funding to deal with the EU exit environmental standards. The Council had advertised for four Covid-19 Compliance Officers which would help alleviate pressures on Environmental Health Officers and a report was being presented to the Communities and Place Committee on 25 November 2020 on Export Health Certificates. The Highland Council Brexit Tactical Group continued to meet on a regular basis whereby each service lead examined the impacts of Brexit based on a reasonable worst-case scenario with service risks being updated on the Corporate Risk Register and fed into the Business Continuity Plans. Resilience Partnerships were working on the preparedness and self-assessments and were taking on the wider concurrent issues such as Covid-19, general winter preparedness and home security. A further concurrent issue included the potential impact of the Internal Markets Bill on climate change and ecological emergency and a letter had been issued to the Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Ms Roseanna Cunningham MSP, in this regard. The Chair also gave an update on the staffing implications of Brexit for which an HR Brexit Action Plan had been prepared and outlined the work being undertaken in this regard.

In conclusion, he advised that Brexit, and the many arising concerns such as Exporting and Importing to and from the EU, flow of freight and supply chains and Border Control, had to be managed in parallel to significant concurrent issues. However, although the uncertainty and lack of definitive information was concerning, overall the Council had adopted a very proactive and participatory approach and as a result was as prepared as it could be.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Highlands currently received £90m of structured funds and there was a need to ensure that this loss of funding would be recovered from the Shared Prosperity Fund to ensure the Highlands was not

- worse off as a result of Brexit;
- There appeared to be three key issues that had yet to be resolved and there was a need for a scenario-based approach including planning for the worst-case, i.e. no deal, and thus trading under World Trade Organisation regulations which would likely result in duty being imposed on goods both to and from the EU;
 - Maintaining food and medicine supplies need to be addressed as a matter of urgency;
 - The Highlands was in a unique position to benefit from the green new deal and mitigate the impact of Brexit on local communities;
 - In their statement, the Scottish Government indicated their support for the Shared Prosperity Fund to be devolved and ongoing dialogue was required on this. It was suggested that Council Leaders should prepare a joint statement in response to the Shared Prosperity Fund announcement;
 - It was important that there was cross-party working to share knowledge and to use COSLA for the benefit of the Highlands; and
 - If a deal was reached, this would be based on the previous agreement which was not a good deal. Therefore, all mitigating options had to be considered.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the update.

9. COVID: Readiness of Buildings
COVID: Deisealachd Thogalaichean

MR

There was a verbal update by the Executive Chief Officer Housing & Property during which he advised of the two key strands namely Education and the general use of buildings. He expressed his appreciation to the Area Education Managers for their support and assistance to ensure Education buildings were kept open safely. Going forward, the key challenge in this area would be keeping schools heated to the required standard whilst maintaining ventilation which would also create a budget pressure. In regard to the return of general buildings, there was a meeting of the Lockdown Agility Board on 24 November 2020 whereby issues such as readiness of buildings, ensuring they were used correctly and returning to Headquarters and the timelines for this would be considered.

During discussion, the Chair requested that an update report be submitted to the next meeting of Housing and Property Committee on the reopening of buildings and responding to a further request the Executive Chief Officer Housing & Property confirmed that an update was also being provided on the Corporate Landlord Model. Concern was expressed at the budget pressure that would be incurred from having to maintain heat in schools whilst they were being ventilated. It was clarified that that this was an unbudgeted pressure which would need to be met by the Council and assurance was sought that schools would not be individually responsible for these costs. The Chair proposed that further information be provided on how this unbudgeted pressure would be managed in the report to Housing and Property Committee.

Thereafter, the Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the update;
- ii. **NOTED** that an update report on the Corporate Landlord Model was being presented to the next meeting of Housing and Property Committee; and
- iii. **AGREED** that a report be issued to the next meeting of the Housing and Property Committee on the reopening of Council buildings including management of the unbudgeted pressures arising from additional school heating costs.

10. Performance Risk and Management System (PRMS) Demonstration

PW/LD

The Programme Manager gave a demonstration on the PRMS during which he explained that the system enabled Members to access real time information and reporting in an intuitive and interactive manner via existing IT systems.

The Chair urged Members to access the system and drill down into the data and proposed that a workshop be held immediately prior to the next meeting at 10.00am (with the Board meeting commencing at 10.30am) to enable user feedback to be provided. He explained that it was intended that the system would be trialled by the Recovery Board to monitor progress of the Recovery Action Plan for approximately six months with a view to it being rolled out across other services. It was clarified that the system only had functionality to provide a basic level of budget monitoring information but it was intended that detailed financial information would be reported through Power BI.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the demonstration and **AGREED** that the link be circulated to all Members and that a workshop be held immediately prior to the next Board meeting commencing at 10.00am.

The meeting was closed at 11.55am.