

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Redesign Board** held VIRTUALLY on Tuesday, 23 March 2021 at 10:30am.

Present:

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| Mr B Boyd | Mr L Fraser |
| Mr R Bremner | Mr B Lobban |
| Mr J Bruce | Mr G MacKenzie |
| Mrs C Caddick | Mr D Macpherson |
| Mrs M Cockburn | Mr P MacPherson, GMB |
| Mrs M Davidson | |

Officials in attendance:

Mrs L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer, Resources & Finance
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure & Environment
Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Transformation
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Property & Housing
Mr S Fraser, Head of Corporate Governance
Scott Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager
Caroline Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources
Kathleen Urquhart, Corporate Improvement Project Manager
Mr M Bailey, Team Manager, Transformation
Ms M Zavarella, Committee Officer

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs H Carmichael, Mr J Gibson, Mr A Jarvie, Mr D Louden, Mr A Mackinnon and Mr P Saggars.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Monday, 1 February 2021 were **AGREED**.

4. Review of Engineering Services

There had been circulated Report No. RDB/2/21 dated 12 March 2021 from the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- Members commended the report and efforts of the review team;

- Members expressed confusion regarding the cost multiplier and suggested it may have to be reviewed;
- the value of staff engagement was clear, and this method of working was the way forward;
- regarding management of workload and lines of communication, it was important that staff knew the process;
- managers had significant professional remits thus it was suggested that processing administrative tasks may not be the best value for money, and it was important that the balance was right to ensure these tasks did not inhibit their ability to discharge their responsibilities;
- regarding apprenticeships, ensuring a continuity of support in mentoring, developing and education was imperative;
- heating and ventilation was a skilled area of engineering, this expertise in the context of Covid-19 would be required and the Council would have to be strategic about securing these roles;
- regarding departments working together, it would be useful to have a built-in process for feedback to determine progress and satisfy constituents;
- it was highlighted that staff insight was invaluable, staff were mindful of areas of improvement and ought to be continually consulted;
- the report was an enormous task, Covid-19 had delayed progress however, the recommendations had to be embraced and distilled into workable elements and this had to be done in collaboration with finance;
- the budgetary situation with respect to roads was highlighted and it was emphasised that this service had to be rebuilt so it could cope with the demands;
- it was important to be mindful of staff, training together to encourage cohesiveness of the service was one recommendation easily resolved;
- information technology systems had to be aligned so all engineers were working off the same remotely accessible software to allow resources to be used more efficiently and effectively;
- in order to get maximum benefit and retain momentum it would be useful to have an implementation plan detailed through the Redesign Board so once the report was received at Full Council it was clear what was envisaged and how the recommendations could be executed;
- it was important for staff that contributed to the review to have the confidence that the Council would take their concerns forward and act to make improvements;
- if this project was implemented properly, much more of what constituents needed would be delivered and costs would be under control;
- in a response to a question about the cost multiplier, it was clarified that when the elements of the Council such as the Project Design Unit was recharging costs a multiplier was applied to the original cost in order to generate a surplus. This meant it appeared to be an expensive service and it was confirmed that this internal recharge mechanism was on the action plan of the Resources and Finance service to determine where this could be eliminated appropriately;
- in response to several comments, it was explained that the opportunity to improve the administration system could cut across a number of issues that had been raised such as consolidating/coordinating teams, skills and workload across the service, helping communities understand priorities and helping communications for the Council; and
- the strengths of the Board were highlighted in the report with collaboration between Members, staff, senior management and unions

bringing good ideas forward and it was important to ensure the recommendations were delivered and did not end up unrealised.

Thereafter, Members **AGREED** the Engineering Services Peer Review recommendations as follows;

- (i) create a consolidated structure for the delivery of engineering services within the Infrastructure and Environment Service which continues the focus on local service delivery, performance and value for money;
- (ii) encourage the adoption of a single service approach and a collective sense of ownership, supported by a clear vision and strategy developed in conjunction with staff. It is essential that the Service ensures there is greater transparency on the associated resource and funding requirements in delivering local and national outcomes;
- (iii) create a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to the management of engineering staff, projects and assets recognising the close inter-relationship and need for integration across all parts of the new service and wider Council;
- (iv) review the measures for forecasting and allocating the resources required for the effective delivery of all engineering services, including recognition of the feedback on asset management functions and strategic transport planning;
- (v) identify and explore opportunities to streamline process-based functions and associated administrative tasks in the new service structure, including, where appropriate, the undertaking of lean review(s) and electronic methods of workload management;
- (vi) review current overhead costs recovered under the cost multiplier to see if further efficiencies can be made;
- (vii) prioritise a comprehensive review of the current means of budgeting for the PDU including the surplus income requirement (budget pressure) and exploration of alternative charging models for the services supplied to in-house clients;
- (viii) explore longer term potential for supplying in-house design services to partners and private clients;
- (ix) create a service wide workforce plan which encourages agility, flexibility and diversification across all functional areas and aligns the training and development of staff through CPD and on the job training, coupled with a 'cradle to grave' approach to create a culture of knowledge sharing and nurturing staff development; and
- (x) develop and build on the existing relationships with external parties including Transport Scotland and Northern Roads Collaboration as well as Hitrans and family group of local authorities.

and **AGREED** to have progress reports and implementation plans taken back to a future meeting of the Board.

5. Amenities Project

There had been circulated Report No. RDB/3/21 dated 3 March 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- Members welcomed the report;

- communication played a central role in amenities and high visual impact was recognised whether a success or a failure, so this had to be managed cleverly in order to benefit communities, employees and meet the expectations of the public;
- regarding communication, there tended to be a disconnect between the decision makers and those delivering direct services, it was important for employees to feel comfortable engaging and for there to be a fluid feedback process;
- redesign was about efficiency and improving services, the goal was not to replace jobs and it was important that the messaging to employees and communities was accurate around this; and
- when employees came forward with their ideas there would be an expectation that improvements would be made, in this review it was clear that the outcome of employees' work was in the spotlight of the public and there was a need to be cognisant around this.

Thereafter, Members **NOTED**:-

- (i) the re-setting of the amenities review as a project, as per presentation on 27th November 2020 and the inclusion of any learning from Covid-19;
- (ii) the 6 project objectives and the progress made to date, with the project overseen by the Redesign Board;
- (iii) the anticipated project timescales and estimated date for completion; and
- (iv) Covid is an ongoing factor which may impact on the projects progress against estimated project timescales, as a result slippage in any agreed timescales could occur or tasks could be paused.

6. Workforce Planning & Development – Progress Update

There had been circulated Report No. RDB/4/21 dated 12 March 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources & Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: -

- Members welcomed the report;
- this project was one of the most critical pieces of work the Council had to do to enable other departments to manage absence, holidays, cross team working and qualifications;
- it had been known for the last 4-5 years that the Human Resources (HR) system was not fit for purpose and had previously not been given top priority;
- the work done by the Board had been very thorough and was critical to the business of the Council;
- the procurement of an HR system was not an easy or quick fix and it was crucial to follow through with the plan as it was more than a payroll management system, it was a complete management system;
- in response to a question about timelines, it was explained that it would be approximately 2 years before the new system was fully implemented;
- it was suggested that a progress report on the procurement of an HR System be provided to the Board;
- the importance of setting out the business requirement for a new system was highlighted
- regarding implementation of the project, it would be beneficial if staff and employees who were involved at the onset of the project were kept

informed on how the Council had taken their feedback into account as this would encourage employees to remain engaged;

- in response to a question, it was clarified that the reference to Appendix 2 in the report was an error;
- regarding staff involvement, it was suggested by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance that the Workforce Planning Strategy was ready to be launched and would be an opportunity to reach out to involved staff to gather their feedback in advance of the next Corporate Resources Committee.

Thereafter, Members:-

- (i) **NOTED** the presentation of the Workforce Planning and Development Action Plan;
- (ii) **AGREED** a progress report on the procurement of an HR System be taken back to a future meeting; and
- (iii) **AGREED** staff feedback would be sought in relation to the launch of the Workforce Planning Strategy.

Closing Remarks

The Chair suggested that the next logical step for the Board was to review asset rationalisation and new ways of working. The Chair requested Members volunteer and send an email if they wished to become involved in the project.

It was highlighted that there was low Member attendance at the Board and it was hoped that Member attendance would improve at future meetings.

The meeting ended at 11:48am.