

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL  
RECOVERY, IMPROVEMENT & TRANSFORMATION BOARD**

Minutes of the Meeting of the Highland Council Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Board held remotely on Monday 24 May 2021 at 10.30am.

**PRESENT:-**

Mr A Christie (Chair)	Mr J Gray
Mr B Boyd	Mr A Gunn (non-voting) (AG)
Ms C Caddick	Mr A Jarvie
Mr C Munro	Mr B Lobban
Dr I Cockburn (Vice Chair)	Mr M MacLeod (non-voting) (MMcL)
Mrs M Davidson (Vice Chair)	Mrs D Manson (non-voting)
Mr J Gibson (non-voting)	

**Non-Members also present:-**

Mr G Adam	Mr D Louden
Mrs J Barclay	Mrs B McAllister
Mr R Bremner	Mr W Mackay
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Macpherson
Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs L Munro
Mr R Gale	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Graham	
Mr A Henderson	

**Officers Present:-**

Ms C McDiarmid, ECO Communities & Place (CMcD)  
 Mr M Rodgers, ECO Housing & Property  
 Mrs K Lackie, ECO Performance & Governance  
 Mrs L Denovan, ECO Resources & Finance  
 Mrs F Malcolm, Interim Head of Integration, Health & Social Care (FM)  
 Mrs C Campbell, Head of Performance & Resources, Communities & Place  
 Mr P Whitham, Programme Manager, Transformation (PW)  
 Mr A McCann, Economy & Regeneration Manager, Infrastructure & Environment  
 Mr J Robertson, Programme Manager, Health & Social Care  
 Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator  
 Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer

**Mr A Christie in the Chair**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Subject/Decision</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>	<b>No Action Necessary</b>
	Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A MacInnes and Mr P Siggers.	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Declarations of Interest</b>	<b>No Action Necessary</b>
	The Board <b>NOTED</b> the following declarations of interest:-	

Items 4, 5, 7 and 10: Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)  
Item 6: Mr A Christie (financial) and Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

**3. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

**No Action  
Necessary**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the previous meeting held on 29 March 2021 which were approved by the Council on 13 May 2021.

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

**AG**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director 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 his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RB/05/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chair reminded that Board, that as agreed at the previous meeting, any slippage of tasks would be reported through the relevant strategic committee for review;
- The progress and the significant work to date was recognised and commended by Members;
- It was confirmed that the Opposition's representative would be invited to the next Member meeting of the Economic Recovery Partnership; and
- Assurance was sought and provided that additional projects/outcomes arising from the Recovery Action Plan would be progressed and the Board would be responsible for overseeing this.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED**:-

- i. the latest summary of progress against the Council's Recovery Action Plan;
- ii. the recommendation or observations to Council in respect of progress on the Recovery Plan and associated actions; and
- iii. the overall status of the Recovery Action Plan including that the majority of actions were now complete or were business as usual, with the remaining actions subsumed within the Transformation Programme plan, which would be reported at the next Board meeting.

**5. Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Programme 21/22: Update Prògram Ath-shlànachaidh, Leasachaidh agus Cruth-atharrachaidh 21/22: Fios às Ùr**

**AG**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director 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 his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RB/06/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The programme was still in the early stages with teams currently being assembled for the nine project strands. An update was sought and provided on the recruitment of the Growth Investment Manager and Planning post, which remained unfilled following an active recruitment process. Members expressed that these roles were vital to the recovery of the Highland economy and it was disappointing and concerning that they had not been filled. It was further indicated that, if these posts could not be recruited to, this work still had to continue to be progressed and different solutions had to be sought to ensure this was achieved. Assurance was provided that investigations were underway to determine why the vacancies remained unfilled and all options, including secondment opportunities or appointing a graduate (for the Planning post only), were being considered to proactively recruit to these posts. In addition economic recovery work continued to be progressed now that the grants distribution work had been concluded;
- There was a need to develop strategic policy which could attract scalable inward investment and demonstrated the importance and long term commitment from the Council to this function;
- A number of Members queried whether staffing levels were sufficient and indicated the importance of ensuring resources were deployed to the right places within the organisation, thus ensuring that transformation could be delivered;
- A large and fully resourced new section would be required within the Council in order to fully develop and address Climate Change. This was a cross cutting theme which impacted on all services within the Council. There was a need for large scale strategic thinking in order to be successful and the Council had to lead on this working collaboratively with partners, including the Scottish Government, to attract inward investment and match funding opportunities to achieve longer term advantages such as cheaper electricity, more jobs and green recovery;
- In terms of Asset Rationalisation and new ways of working, the Staff Engagement survey had indicated a large desire from staff to continue working from home. There was a need to ensure that staff were fully supported and had the right equipment and

environment to do so. It was concerning that only 11% of staff indicated a preference to return to the office and these staff should be supported to do so as soon as possible. The Chief Executive explained that it was clear that a blended approach would be required and explained that work was ongoing with the Trade Unions to address issues such as potential changes to terms and conditions and equalities. She confirmed that it was recognised that investment might be required to support staff and to ensure that performance improved and public needs continued to be met;

- It was suggested that financial advice should be sought from the Scottish Futures Trust and the National Investment Bank on affordable borrowing and options available to maximise investment;
- There was not sufficient public awareness of the programme of work being undertaken by the Council and it was recommended that a communications strategy should be developed. The Chair acknowledged this point and proposed that the relevant strategic committees should take this forward; and
- The Recovery Transformation post was a key position and it would have been helpful to have seen the Job Specification and salary grade for this post. With regard to the suggestion of sharing this post, it was clarified that this had been explored but there was no desire from the Highland and Islands Enterprise to do so.

Thereafter, the Board:-

- NOTED** the latest progress on the Council's Transformation Programme's projects; and
- NOTED** the ongoing work in the Programme Management Office investigating the use of existing technologies to deliver enhanced support for a complex and significant programme; and
- AGREED** that the strategic committees develop and take ownership of a communications strategy for each of the relevant transformation projects.

**6. Update on Joint Transformational Programme with NHS Highland**  
**Fios às Ùr mun Cho-phrògram Cruth-atharrachaidh le NHS na Gàidhealtachd**

**FD/FM**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland and Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director 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 their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RB/07/21 dated 5 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health & Social Care.

During discussion, the team was commended on their excellent work and efforts to date but it was highlighted that additional savings would need to be identified in order for the ambitious targets to be achieved. This point was acknowledged and it was reported that the savings continued to

increase with the up to date figures being £1.7m for the unadjusted pipeline and £1.4m for the risk adjusted pipeline. There was confidence that the £3m savings target would be achieved. In response to a comment about risk, it was explained that in accordance with the Revised Integration Scheme the Council shared the risk with NHS Highland for the £3m savings target. In addition, it was highlighted that transformation often required investment and further information was sought on the level of investment required during which it was explained that this work was still in its infancy and would require further exploration and any investment requirements would need to be costed.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## **7. Climate Change: Update Atharrachadh Gnàth-shìde: Fios às Ùr**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director 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 his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated Report No RB/08/21 dated 13 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in order that the Board could monitor improvement/achievement, it was proposed that target completion dates, responsible Service and lead officers be assigned to the 15 point Action Plan and that the revised Plan be resubmitted to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for approval. Focus on the 15 recommendations was welcome and further information was sought on how these would be achieved;
- waste energy was a key component in terms of capital and had the potential to make a significant revenue impact if waste could be treated locally through a waste energy plant. It was urged that this long standing issue be addressed more quickly;
- there was concern about viewing internal recharging as an obstacle, it had been discussed in the past and there would be a clear plan coming forward;
- Highland had a unique landscape of opportunities but in order for the Council to achieve Net Zero it would need to work jointly with the government, potentially doing secondments; and
- rather than focussing solely on reaching Net Zero government targets, success should be measured on how emissions had been reduced in order to show genuine achievement. The Council should set its own meaningful targets in this regard.

Thereafter, the Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the ongoing development of the climate change

- programme;
- ii. **NOTED** the progress being made across Council Services to strengthen the corporate approach to the climate and ecological emergency; and
  - iii. **AGREED** that target completion dates, responsible Service and lead officers be assigned to the 15 point Action Plan.

**8. Economic Recovery Strategy Update**  
**Cunntas às Ùr mu Thaic do Eaconamaidh na Gàidhealtachd**

**MMcL**

There had been circulated Report No RB/**09**/21 dated 13 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment. In support of this a presentation was given at the meeting on the Economic Prosperity Fund and details of the programme initiatives being taken forward.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The Chair proposed that the draft Economic Recovery Strategy be amended to incorporate financial amounts and completion dates for the transformation projects prior to submission to the next meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. An update on this should be provided to the Board meeting on 4 October 2021;
- Appreciation was expressed for the grant distribution work which had provided vital support to local businesses;
- It was indicated that the furlough scheme would cease at the end of September 2021 and it was queried whether there was any indication of the impact this would have on local businesses and what further support measures could be provided;
- The emphasis on supporting businesses to survive within the Economic Recovery Strategy was welcomed. The importance of small scale rural businesses and the need to retain young people in the Highlands was indicated. With this in mind, it was suggested that consideration should be given to how the planning regulations were interpreted to best support these aims. It was proposed that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee should consider incorporating into the Economic Recovery Strategy guidance to the Planning Service on prioritising planning policies that supported small scale rural businesses, e.g. Policy 44 Supporting Tourism above Policy 35 Housing in the Countryside, which often took priority. It was further suggested that the scope of Policy 44 should be expanded to include support for all small scale and micro businesses in rural areas. It was felt this was in line with the discretion offered by the Scottish Government's Chief Planning Officer, i.e. relaxing control where reasonable and appropriate to promote Covid recovery;
- If advice was needed on the viability of businesses, it was recommended that advice should be sought from Business Gateway and Highland Opportunity (Investments) Limited which had expertise in this area as opposed to the planners; and
- There was a need to ensure that the strong supply chains in terms of oil and gas were replicated within the renewable energy sector.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the ongoing work to prepare the Economic Recovery Strategy and **AGREED** that:-

- i. the draft Economic Recovery Strategy, which was due to be submitted to the next meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, be amended to incorporate financial amounts and completion dates for the transformation projects and an update provided thereafter to the Board; and
- ii. the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee be consulted on how the Committee could take forward incorporating guidance on prioritising planning policies that supported small scale rural businesses into the Economic Recovery Strategy.

**9. Visitor Management Strategy**  
**Ro-innleachd Rianachd Luchd-tadhail**

**MMcL/CMcD**

There had been circulated for information a copy of the report to the Tourism Committee by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment on 21 April 2021 and the report to the Communities and Place Committee on 12 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Communities & Place. In addition, a presentation was also made by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment and the Executive Chief Officer Communities & Place on the enhanced improvements to services to improve the visitor experience.

During discussion praise was expressed for the appointment of the Seasonal Access Rangers and the positive public feedback in respect of this, the roadside litter clearances, and the excellent joint working with the Cairngorms National Park Authority. Further information was sought and provided on the proactive promotion of the increased network of waste disposal service points for motor homes.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the progress with visitor management to date and of any further proposals presented.

**10. Levelling Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund**  
**Maoin Dèanamh Co-ionann agus Maoin Ùrachadh Coimhearsnachd**

**MMcL**

**Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director 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 his involvement in the discussion.**

There had been circulated for information a copy of the report to Highland Council by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure & Environment on 13 May 2021. A verbal update was provided from the Executive Chief Officer at the meeting.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Although it was welcome that the bid included installation of crash barriers to the NC500, it was queried whether the bid would include provision for general road improvements such as road widening and confirmation was provided that a variety of road design schemes were being brought forward, examples of which were provided, and details of these were being mapped across the region; and
- The criteria for the Levelling Up Fund would continue to be challenged but focus needed to be directed on influencing the metrics to be used for the priority areas for the Shared Prosperity Fund. The contributions from local MPs was welcomed and the need for a collaborative approach to ensure the best chance of success was emphasised. Further information was sought on the approach being taken by other local authorities and their likelihoods of success. Much work had to be done if the bids were to succeed and the need for full focus on the Shared Prosperity Fund and the consultation that commenced at the end of June 2021 was emphasised.

Thereafter, the Board **NOTED** the progress to date.

The meeting was closed at 12.28pm.