

AGENDA ITEM 13ii.

The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum – Elected Members/Staff Side Group

Minutes of Meeting of The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum held REMOTELY on Thursday 12 August, 2021 at 11.30 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr Raymond Bremner	Ms Linda Munro
Mrs Margaret Davidson	Mrs Trish Robertson
Mr Jimmy Gray	Mr Ben Thompson
Mr Allan Henderson	

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr Paul MacPherson (GMB)	Ms M Macrae (RCN)
Mr Rikki Selkirk (GMB)	

In attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms S Purdie, (RCN)
Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer – Resources and Finance
Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place
Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer – Education & Learning
Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer, Health and Social Care
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment
Mr A Gunn, Interim Executive Chief Officer – Transformation
Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR, Resources and Finance
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Housing and Property
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance

Mrs M Davidson in the Chair

SUBJECT/DECISION

ACTION

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie, Mr J Finlayson from the Employer's Side and Mr J Gibson, Unison, Ms L Mackay, Unison, Mr I Macleman, Unite/Ucatt, Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side from the Staff Side and Mr M Rodgers, ECO Housing and Property.

2. Declarations of Interest

Mrs M Davidson declared a non financial interest on the items for discussion as a family member was an employee of The Highland Council but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that the interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion at the meeting.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 3 June, 2021, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. Matters Arising from Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

i. Radio Systems Coverage – It was noted that the Airwave Radio system should have been replaced 2 years ago. It was a national system used by all the emergency services and the replacement system was not due to be completed until 2022. The Leader of the Council had undertaken to see what further lobbying of Government could be undertaken to expedite matters. This action was still outstanding and would be progressed as soon as possible.

**Leader of
the
Council**

ii. Preventative physiotherapy for staff in Waste teams – it was advised that preventative physio would commence in August, 2021 and information was available for staff on notice boards and Forepersons were engaging with staff on this.

iii. Digital Overload – it was queried if there had been any further consideration on issuing guidance to staff and Elected Members so that they were safeguarded from digital overload. It was advised that some guidance had already been issued on this matter, such as taking breaks from screens. This advice would be reviewed and would take account of the new ways of working blended approach to work. It was also suggested that those experiencing high volumes of e-mails could leave an out of office message, explaining that due to the high volume a response to their e-mail may be delayed and thanking them for their patience.

**Interim
Head of
HR**

iv. Staff Whistleblowing Policy – an update would be provided to trade unions on the outcome of Audit and Scrutiny Committee's consideration of the final report on the policy.

**Interim
Head of
HR**

v. Training for Elected Members on the role of trade unions – It was advised that there would be Member induction training following the local government election next year. Ways of working collaboratively with trade unions on specific issues could be explored. Trade unions were members of some of the Boards of the Council and there would be a need for more consultation with them on specific issues.

**Interim
Head of
HR**

- vi. Service Structure below tier 3 – information was still to be provided to trade unions on this and on temporary or seconded posts. Service Restructuring would be considered at a Senior Management team meeting next week and a communication would be issued thereafter. There would be engagement and partnership working with trade unions on this.
- CEX
/Interim
Head of
HR**
- A view was expressed that the Health and Social Care Service restructure would be impacted by the outcome of the National Care Service consultation. However, any implementation would take many years and there was a need to carry on the work of delivering social care services in Highland in the meantime. A communication would be issued to staff on this.
- CEX**
- It was highlighted that where there were opportunities for training staff to fill vacancies or help those wishing a change in career within the organisation, this should be encouraged on a regular basis in order to avoid compulsory redundancies.
- Chair
Corporate
Resource
s/
Interim
Head of
HR**
- Consideration would be given as to whether there was a need to have an offline discussion with trade unions on ongoing staffing issues and communications.
- vii. SJC pay negotiations – trade unions had been informed that there would be an update on pay negotiations by the Scottish Government on 18 August.
- viii. Long Covid – some guidance had been issued to trade unions on this matter, pending national guidance. However, it was likely that national guidance would no longer be forthcoming and the Council would issue its own guidance on Long Covid. This would take account of NHS Highland guidance. Currently there were very few staff with Long Covid.
- Interim
Head of
HR**
- ix. Holiday Pay - a formal offer on holiday pay would be submitted soon to trade unions. It had been agreed in principle with trade unions that whatever offer was made to staff who had not submitted Tribunal claims, they would be treated the same as staff who had submitted Tribunal claims. It was likely that trade unions would ballot their members on the offer.
- The Staff Side advised that there was an understanding in principle on the agreement, but that it was now down to the Council to agree the back pay award, so that unions could advise their members on what the offer was.
- Elected Members highlighted the need that the holiday pay issue was progressed as a matter of urgency.

A communication would be issued to staff on the governance process and timeline for an agreement on holiday pay.

**ECO
Resource
s/Interim
Head of
HR**

I
N
5. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

There had been circulated the following Service Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings for information:-

- i Draft Health and Social Care Service held on 7 July, 2021;
- ii Draft Education and Learning on 24 May, 2021;
- iii Draft Communities and Places held on 23 June, 2021;
- iv Draft Infrastructure and Environment held on 30 June, 2021; and
- v Housing and Property Services held on 14 July, 2021.

Arising from the minutes, the following matters were raised:-

- i. Health and Social Care Service - It was advised that the comments on the presentation on the Service restructuring had been very helpful. Senior Management wanted to meet with staff and take the restructuring forward along with staff. A meeting would be held with Area Managers in early September at which the restructure would be discussed as well as the timing for communicating the restructure to staff. Trade unions would be engaged in this process.

ECO HSC

- ii Education and Learning Service – further guidance had been issued on return to schools and this guidance would be issued to the trade unions.

ECO E&L

The Staff Side had been informed that Pupil Support Assistant allocations would not happen until the return to school. The Staff Side requested that they be consulted as soon as possible on this.

ECO E&L

It was highlighted that young people in Highland had received very good exam results and in particular looked after children who were doing very well under continuous assessment which was great to see. The work of all staff involved was acknowledged.

- iii Communities and Places Service – the appointment of GMB trade union representative Mr Paul MacPherson to the post of Waste Management Officer was highlighted and the Forum expressed their congratulations to Paul.

ECO C&P

There had been a good discussion on Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome and in advance of the next meeting there would be a workshop with trade union health and safety representatives to discuss the Service's risk profile.

iv Infrastructure and Environment – This had been a constructive meeting with a number of actions to be followed up. The trade unions had appreciated the update on the Service restructure.

In terms of the Service's Health and Safety Policy there had been a good discussion on this and following this the Policy would be reviewed and circulated to the next meeting.

ECO I&E

v Housing and Property – this had been a positive meeting with a number of actions to be followed up.

6. Budget Update

The Executive Chief Officer Resources & Finance provided an update on the budget. The budget process for 2022/23 had commenced and Officers had been asked to provide savings of up to 3%. The Scottish Government Finance Minister had advised local authorities to expect a challenging year for next year's budget and a positive financial settlement was not expected. Therefore, the earlier the budget process commenced and savings identified the better. Officers were working on submitting savings for consideration to the full Council meetings in October and December, 2021. Trade unions would be engaged in this process.

The Staff Side noted that a 2% pay award had been budgeted for, but nationally it had been announced that the minimum pay award would be 3%. It was explained that Officers were not aware of a specific sum for an award and the current offer was very complicated to determine.

An update was provided on discussions on the pay negotiations at the Cosla Leaders' meetings. A summary of the Cosla's latest pay offer to trade unions would be shared with the Staff Side.

**Leader of
the
Council**

The Forum **NOTED** the budget update and that an overview of funding scenarios would be provided to trade unions at the weekly officer/trade union meetings.

**ECO
Resource
/Finance**

7. Return to the Workplace

The Chief Executive provided an update on the return to the workplace. Guidance had been issued to staff following the announcement by the Scottish First Minister that we are now in a position to move forward in supporting employees to return to the workplace. There would be a phased return to the workplace with the majority of staff by the end of October returning to work on a 60%

office, 40% home working basis. There were a number of policies in place to support this, such as Flexible working and Clear Desk policies. There was a process for receiving regular feedback from staff as this was key to the return to the workplace.

The Staff Side commented that the policies in place to support the return to work should be reviewed in advance to ensure they were fit for purpose. Also, some staff would wish to work from the office full time and it was explained that there was a commitment that staff who wished to work full time in the office would be provided with the accommodation to do so. The guidance would be updated to reflect this.

**ECO
Resource
/Finance**

The Forum **NOTED** the update on the return to the workplace.

8. Redesign of The Highland Council (Project Updates)

**ECO
Transfor
mation**

An update was provided on the work of the Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Board. The next meeting was scheduled to be held on 23 August, 2021 and the papers for this meeting would be issued soon and would include an update on projects. The report would be shared with the Forum and were available for viewing on the undernoted link:-

https://www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/4478/recovery_improvement_and_transformation_board

The role of the Board was to monitor and evaluate projects with the delivery of projects being the responsibility of Strategic Committees and regular updates would be provided at these Committees.

The transformation programme as well as improving performance would support the Council's mid term financial planning by identifying efficiency savings for progressing and implementation. Recognition was given to those involved in the programme for their hard work and effort. There would be ongoing engagement with the Staff Side on the programme and staff in particular would be asked for their views on digital transformation.

In terms of progress with the programme it was advised that there was a significant amount of work being undertaken on projects with governance arrangements on these progressing well. There was a target of £9.2m savings to be achieved in 2021/22 and good progress was being made on most projects, but it was highlighted that some of the savings identified, particularly in adult social care and asset rationalisation would be challenging.

The Forum **NOTED** the update on the work of the Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Board.

9. AOB

National Care Service Consultation – The Scottish Government had launched a National Care Service Consultation setting out proposals to improve the way social care was delivered in Scotland following the recommendations of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care. This had been reported to yesterday's meeting of the Health and Social Care and Wellbeing Committee and a report would also be submitted on the consultation to full Council in September.

There was a need to consider whether organisations will be working together on this or not and how staff side representatives connect in this significant consultation process. There was a need to identify staff impacted by the proposal and keep them updated, including NHS staff and other providers in the Highlands. Consideration would be given to a corporate approach as to how we are dealing with things in Highland and link in with national discussions on this.

It was highlighted that while the Council would be responding to the consultation on an organisational basis people could respond individually on a confidential basis as well.

The Forum **NOTED** the need to consider how organisations work together and how staff side representatives are engaged in the National Care Service Consultation.

**CEX/
Interim
HR
Manager**

The meeting was concluded at 1.00 p.m.