

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held (REMOTELY) in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 26 May 2021 at 10.30 am.

### **Present:**

Mr B Boyd	Mr A Jarvie (substitute)
Mr R Bremner	Mr B Lobban
Mr J Bruce	Mr D Louden
Mrs C Caddick	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr D Macpherson
Dr I Cockburn	Mr C Munro (substitute)
Mrs M Davidson	Mr M Reiss
Mr R Gale	Mr D Rixson
Mr J Gray	

### **Non-Members also present:**

Mr J Barclay	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Christie	Mrs L Munro
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Henderson	Mr I Ramon
Mrs L MacDonald	Mr T Robertson

### **Officials in Attendance:**

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive  
Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance  
Mrs K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance  
Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer Transformation  
Mr E Foster, Head of Finance and Commercialism, Resources and Finance  
Mrs S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Resources and Finance  
Mr J Shepherd, Interim Head of ICT & Digital Transformation, Resources and Finance  
Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR, Resources and Finance  
Mr B Porter, Head of Resources, Care and Learning  
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance  
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance  
Ms M Zavarella, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

### **Also in attendance:**

Mr C Innes, Head of Commercial and Procurement Shared Service, Aberdeenshire Council  
Mr A Collins, Strategic Commercial and Procurement Manager, Aberdeenshire Council

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.**

**Mr J Gray in the Chair**

## **Preliminaries**

Prior to the commencement of the formal business the Chair paid tribute to Mr A Mackinnon for his commitment and work as former Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee and for helping guide the Council's finances through one of the most difficult periods for local government.

The Chair advised Members that normally the first substantive items on the agenda for the Committee were the revenue and capital budget monitoring reports. As officers had explained separately to the respective group leaders a slightly different process was being followed this year, where the outturn position would be fully reported to the Council meeting at the end of June. This change was for operational reasons to address some of the challenges brought about by the very unique circumstances faced over the last year. This change would in no way affect Members' ability to scrutinise the overall position with a full suite of reports going to Council in June and service outturn positions being reported to the August round of Strategic Committees.

Thereafter, an update was sought and provided in relation to the staffing of the Corporate Finance team going forward.

## **BUSINESS**

### **1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr S Mackie, Mr A Mackinnon and Mr P Sagers.

### **2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Items 4, 6 and 9: Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)  
Item 7: Mr R Bremner (non-financial)

### **3. Appointments to Sub-Committees, Working Groups, etc Cur an Dreuchd gu Fo-Chomataidhean, Buidhnean-obrach is eile**

- \* The Committee **AGREED** that Mr Donnie Mackay replace Mr D MacLeod on the Appeals and Disputes Committee.

### **4. Directorate Service Plans 2021/22 Planaichean Seirbheis na Buidhne-Stiùiridh**

**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.**

## a. Resources and Finance Service Plan

There had been circulated Report No RES/11/21 dated 13 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the significant improvement in the Council's financial position was welcomed and thanks were conveyed to the Corporate Finance Team for their exceptional work in challenging times over the past year;
- the Service Plan be supported and officers encouraged to drive forward the improvements and plans for the future given the challenges presented by the pandemic and Brexit;
- the Business Grants Team be thanked for their professionalism and flexibility and the fact the Council had granted the highest number of Small Business Bonus Awards in Scotland;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Money Worries leaflet would be translated into Gaelic;
- the importance of the Council generating its own business intelligence to strengthen the Council's case in negotiations for funding at a UK Government level;
- concern at the decisions being made around spend in relation to the Council's improved financial position and on the impact on staff given the bulk of savings had been achieved through staff underspends;
- further information was sought and provided on progress with the transitioning of staff, and on the need to ensure that as part of the redesign, processes and procedures supported a flexible workforce going forward;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the Council was a living wage employer and further information was provided on the project to fully consolidate the living wage rate into the Council's pay model; and
- the need to make provision for unexpected events such as fires, flooding, landslips and to pre-empt this by seeking assurances from the Scottish Government that the Council and residents of the Highlands would not be disadvantaged as a result.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the broad extent of the Service's strategic leadership responsibilities to enable business as usual activities, one off projects, the Transformation Programme and for delivery of the ambitious Health & Prosperity Strategy 2021/22;
- ii. **NOTED** strategic leadership and support for the Council's Service Redesign, which was one of nine priority projects in the Council's Transformation Programme, remained a key priority for the Resources & Finance Service, in particular the Human Resources (HR) section;
- iii. **NOTED** that the Service Plan was subject to review and would be updated as required to respond to internal changes and external influences; and
- iv. **AGREED** the Directorate Service Plan appended to the report for the Resources & Finance Service and **NOTED** that arising changes would be reported to Committee for consideration.

## **b. Performance and Governance Service Plan**

There had been circulated Report No RES/**12**/21 dated 12 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- an assurance was sought and provided that arrangements were being made to engage with Members on the training provided during this term of the Council and on developing induction training for the new Council in 2022;
- concern at the lack of detail in the report and the fact this was not being reported to the Corporate Resources Committee as the accountable body;
- in regard to the above, while the Recovery, Improvement and Transition Board should fulfil its function, it should not duplicate the decision-making process which rested with the Committee;
- confirmation was sought and provided that a response would be provided to Mr A Jarvie outwith the meeting on the status of his subject access request;
- in terms of promoting and supporting the Gaelic language and culture, the importance of linking with the ECO Infrastructure, Environment and Economy in developing the cultural strategy and economy in the Highlands;
- benchmarking be undertaken not only against other local authorities but also periodically over time within the Council to allow trends to be analysed;
- confirmation was sought and provided that Performance and Governance would be the lead service for climate change and energy underlining the importance of a corporate approach being taken to this key priority for the Council;
- the need to understand the barriers and focus on the key priorities within the Council's Climate Change Plan to ensure the Council could deliver and lead on climate change wherever possible;
- it was hoped the new Policy Development Unit would be functional as soon as possible to respond to national consultations and funding opportunities;
- the importance of bringing the workforce planning and employability services strands together in terms of sustaining communities, supporting young people and those not in employment; and
- a response would be provided directly to Mr D Macpherson on the treatment of fines for fly tipping and dog fouling on Council land, and on any penalties imposed for abandoned cars and breaches of planning.

Thereafter, the Committee **APPROVED** Directorate Service Plan for 2021/22.

## **c. Transformation Service Plan**

There had been circulated Report No RES/**13**/21 dated 17 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

During discussion, an update was sought on the new ways of working the project and the move towards more remote working, and specifically the complex range of issues to be considered around equipment, IT and health and safety with regard to home working and the rebalancing of the workforce as the impact of the pandemic eased. The primary focus on people within the Service Plan was welcomed and reference was made to the need to invest in training for managers and staff in relation to new ways of working to ensure they had the relevant skillsets and support. The need for a blended approach going forward to reflect the needs of staff and Members was also emphasised.

It was confirmed that the new ways of working project was considering the issues raised in the discussion and that Members would be kept up to date with progress on significant amount of work ongoing.

The Chief Executive thanked Members for the concern shown for staff wellbeing and welfare as a priority within the Council and advised she looked forward to bringing the results of the wellbeing staff survey to Members. She paid tribute to the work of the Trade Unions in new ways of working and their key role in overcoming the challenges and bringing new ideas and solutions to the table.

Thereafter, confirmation was sought and provided that some of KPIs detailed in the report were statutory and others within the gift of the Council and the aim was to achieve a balanced approach by which to measure performance.

The Committee **AGREED** the Transformation Directorate Service Plan for 2021-22.

#### **5. Treasury Management - Summary of Transactions Quarter ended 31 March 2021 Rianachd Ionmhais - Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/**14**/21 dated 26 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- officers be thanked for all their work in relation to Treasury Management, and the reassurance this provided in relation to the Council's finances in challenging times due to the pandemic, Brexit, and climate change;
- clarification was in relation to the additional borrowing capacity that was available to fund spend to save projects going forward. It was confirmed that a report was to be brought to the next full Council in relation to creating capacity through borrowing that was sustainable over the medium term;
- a summary was sought and provided on progress with the repayment of older higher cost loans; and
- it would be helpful for Members to be provided with more in depth information on the gearing of the Council's finances to inform discussion on the opportunities and strategies for the medium term going forward.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 January to 31 March 2021; and
- ii. **AGREED** that further work be undertaken with Members to provide a more in depth understanding of the gearing of the Council's finances.

#### **6. Transformation Programme: Procurement and Contract Management Project Fios às Ùr mu Sholar**

**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 RES/15/21 dated 13 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the importance of place-based procurement and the role of the Council in supporting SMEs and communities across the Highlands, and it was hoped lessons had been learned from the past in this regard;
- in particular, consideration be given to the delivery of services in the remote and rural areas of the Highlands to ensure SMEs were not disadvantaged. The Highlands was unique in terms of geography and therefore decisions on pricing should have a weighting for travel and timescales;
- concern in relation to rising electricity costs and the opportunities to consider this issue more widely and generate alternative methods of power in the area to achieve significant savings and also help tackle fuel poverty in the area. A more enlightened approach from suppliers was also required;
- frustration that access to the grid was denied in respect of solar PV and other forms of energy generated in the Highlands and the need for pressure to be placed on the Government to change the legislation on this matter. It was confirmed that further discussions would be progressed offline in relation to this issue;
- clarification was sought and provided on the savings generated in 2020/21 and the extent to which these were due to the Covid-19 lockdown situation;
- the need to move from managed printing contracts to printing in-house and more tasks being done electronically to significantly reduce costs in this area;
- Members be strongly encouraged to move towards electronic papers and not rely on the high volume of papers printed each month for full Council and Committee meetings;
- in term of the savings targets outlined in the report, an explanation was sought and provided on the new framework for agency teachers; and
- an explanation was sought and provided on the training, support and methodologies to be rolled out in respect of the supplier relationship management.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the initiation of the Procurement and Contract Management project and the key components of the project as set out in Section 5 to the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the project's alignment with strategic priorities, including the Health and Prosperity Strategy 2021/22, net carbon zero, and delivering value for money;
- iii. **AGREED** that project updates be provided periodically to this Committee;
- iv. **NOTED** that an integral component of this project was to undertake a review of capital procurement;
- v. **NOTED** that savings of £0.565m were delivered in 2020/21 together with cost avoidance and enabled savings. A further amount of £0.183m in carry over savings into 2021/22 were created;
- vi. **AGREED** the opportunities to improve best value through continuous improvement, further enhancing the performance of procurement activities for both revenue and capital spend, and ongoing effective collaboration across the shared service partnership; and
- vii. **NOTED** that further discussions would be progressed offline in relation to access to the grid in respect of solar PV and other forms of energy generated in the Highlands.

## 7. Royal National Mòd Am Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail

**Declarations of Interest: Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest in this item as as the Convener of the Committee of the Local Organising Committee of the National Mòd in 2010 and as the Convener of the Local Branch of An Comunn Gàidhealach in Caithness which could have an interest in bidding to host a future National Mòd and, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, left the meeting during the discussion of this item.**

There had been circulated Report No RES/16/21 dated 13 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Royal National Mòd was one of the largest cultural events in Scotland and unique in its celebration of Gaelic language and culture;
- the opportunity to host the event in 2021 was aligned with many aspects of the Council's Programme and policies in terms of its commitment to the Gaelic Language Plan and supporting and promoting the Gaelic language and culture;
- the wider picture in relation to the Mòd supporting economic recovery in the Highlands. It was listed as one of the commitments in the Recovery, Improvement and Transformation Board's economic recovery plan, would showcase the Highlands as a first class venue and destination and generate significant income for the local economy;
- the mental health benefits in supporting social and cultural interaction following the pandemic and the positive impact it would have on young people by giving them the opportunity to participate in the event;
- concern that no breakdown had been provided in relation to the additional funding being sought and that the Council was being asked to contribute a significant amount of funding at a time when there was no programme for the Mòd, indication of participation levels, and no certainty the event would go ahead in 2021;
- An Comunn Gàidhealach had recently provided the Gaelic Committee with a full explanation in relation to the level of funding being sought, the costs that had been incurred in delivering the virtual Mòd in 2020 and the potential for a blended event in future to reach a wider audience;
- funding from Inverness Common Good Fund had been agreed towards this year's event; and
- any award of funding should be with the proviso that the Mòd takes place in 2021.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the initial outline of events for the Royal National Mòd 2021; and
- ii. **AGREED** to a one-off budget feed of up to £80,000 to retain the Mòd in the Highlands for another year with the proviso that the event goes ahead in 2021.

## 8. **The Haven An Caladh**

There had been circulated Report No. RES/**17**/21 dated 21 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the project had been a herculean effort over a sustained period by a very determined group of people and this was to be commended;
- The Haven would benefit an enormous amount of people in Inverness and the wider Highland community, for those with multiple disabilities it would be a great source of hope;
- regarding governance, the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance and the Head of Support Services (Resources, Care and Learning) agreed to connect to ensure the appropriate level of governance was in place for the project; and
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the source of the capital funding and land sale.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** and welcome the progress made by the Elsie Normington Foundation in securing full funding for the capital costs of the Haven Centre project;
- ii. **NOTED** the business case assessment and other due diligence work undertaken by Council Officers in relation to the Haven Centre project; and
- iii. **AGREED** to the release of the Council's previous funding commitment of £250,000 capital to the Haven Centre project, with detailed written terms attached to the funding to be prepared by Officers.

## 9. **ICT Transformation and Contract Performance Cruth-atharrachadh ICT agus Coileanadh Cùmhnaint**

**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 RES/**18**/21 dated 30 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Head of ICT and Digital Transformation and their team were commended on their remarkable efforts over the past year supporting the Council in the move to remote-working, inspirational results in Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the ICT Contract coming in under budget;
- credit was due to WiPro staff for their efforts in KPI results; and
- it was agreed that the Head of ICT and Digital Transformation would circulate to Members the full details of KPIs.

The Committee:-



- i. **NOTED** the update on the Wipro ICT Transformation Programme and overall Wipro performance, noting the significant achievement in the completion of the Programme;
- ii. **NOTED** that the priority for the Council now would be the successful transition of ICT services from Wipro to in-house provision (noting also that a separate report on the transition followed later on the agenda) supporting the Council's Digital Transformation project as part of the Council's Transformation Programme contained in the Health & Prosperity Strategy; and
- iii. **AGREED** that Members be circulated with full details of the Key Performance Indicators set out at section 5.1 of the report.

**10. Minutes of Meetings**  
**Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan**

There had been circulated and **NOTED** the following Minutes of Meetings:-

- i. Appeals Committee held on 10 March 2021; and
- ii. Non-Domestic Rates Appeals Committee held on 20 May 2021.

**11. Exclusion of the Public**  
**Às-dùnadh a' Phobail**

The Committee resolved that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**12. Project Dòchas Update Report**  
**Pròiseact Dòchais Aithisg Ùrachaidh**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. RES/**19**/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED** the recommendations as set out in the report.

**13. Debts Recommended to be Written Off**  
**Fiachan a Thathar a' Moladh airson an Dubhadh Às**

There had been circulated to Members only Report No RES/**20**/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as set out the in the report.

The meeting was closed at 2.41pm.