

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held REMOTELY on Wednesday, 25 August 2021 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr A Baxter (substitute)
Mr B Boyd
Mr R Bremner
Mrs C Caddick
Mrs H Carmichael
Dr I Cockburn
Mrs M Davidson
Mr R Gale
Mr J Gray

Mr A Henderson (substitute)
Mr B Lobban
Mr D Louden
Mr G MacKenzie
Mr D Macpherson
Mr C Munro (substitute)
Mr D Rixson
Mr P Saggars

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Jarvie
Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Paterson

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 M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager, Performance and Governance
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
Ms M Zavarella, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

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

The Chair expressed sadness over the passing of Bryan Longmore, a long-time resident of Inverness who had great interest in local environment and was a big part of the local community.

Congratulations were given to Dougie Melville who had successfully completed the NEBOSH General Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety and Suzanne Reid who was able to secure a permanent role as a Welfare Support Officer. The Chair highlighted that both Mr Melville and Ms Reid would be a great addition to their respective teams.

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr A Mackinnon, Mr S Mackie and Mr M Reiss.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 3 & 4: Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 12: Mr P Saggars and Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 12 – Mr A Christie (Financial)

3. Corporate Revenue Monitoring Report to 30 June 2021 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra

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/**21**/21 dated 11 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, on the High Life Highland figures in relation to the overall deficit position as it was thought that the 'worst case scenario' might have been used in the report and that this might not be the case in the coming months;
- regarding the staff cost savings which had been identified in the report, it was suggested that this might increase the pressure on remaining staff;
- it was noted that temporary workers were not included in the underspend on staff resources as these costs were allocated to a different budget line; and
- it was confirmed that further information would be provided in due

course in relation to a specific query relating to business grants.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the financial position of the General Fund and HRA Revenue budgets as at 30 June 2021 and the estimated year end forecast; and
- ii. the status of budgeted savings in the year.

4. Corporate Capital Monitoring Report to 30 June 2021 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Corporra

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/**22**/21 dated 11 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in response to several specific questions, it was highlighted that the breakdown of spend by Service would be provided in more detail in reports to the respective Strategic Committees;
- re-assurance was sought, and provided, on year to date spend on the Roads budget and whether this spend would be met by the year end;
- it would be important to take a long-term strategic view on the issue of debt liabilities exceeding the lifetime of assets and in this regard concerns were expressed in relation to the burden on future Revenue Budgets;
- it was crucial that assets were properly maintained in order to ensure that they would last over time;
- in response to queries, it was confirmed that there was a piece of work underway to realign budgets and once this had been completed they would be examined and profiled accordingly.; and
- in response to a specific query on budget and spend in relation to the Roads budget, it was confirmed that the relevant Service would provide a direct response to Mr A Jarvie following the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee otherwise **NOTED** the financial position of the General Fund and HRA Capital Programme as at 30 June 2021 and the estimated year end forecast.

5. Resources and Finance – Revenue and Performance Monitoring to 30 June 2021 Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach agus Coileanadh Seirbheis nan Goireasan agus an Ionmhais

There had been circulated Report No RES/**23**/21 dated 6 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

- During discussion, the following issues were raised:-
- clarification was sought, and provided, on the collection of Non-Domestic Rates;
- the Milton Holiday Hub had been a great success and thanks were conveyed to High Life Highland in this regard;
- the commitment and effort towards benchmarking in the report was appreciated by Members; and
- it was positive that the Quarter 1 invoice payments performance was exceeding the target.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED:-**

- i. the Revenue Near Final Monitoring position for 2020/21 and the Quarter 1 period to 30 June 2021;
- ii. the Statutory Performance Indicators, Local Key Performance Measures and, where available, comparisons to Scottish averages;
- iii. the effectiveness of the standard and level of services provided by the Resources and Finance Directorate and alignment with the Council's commitment to Best Value and continuous improvement;
- iv. the actions for the Directorate on the Recovery Action Plan, the slippage and the remarks provided; and
- v. the update on the Procurement & Contract Management Transformation Project.

6. Performance and Governance – Revenue and Performance Monitoring Q1 – 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021 and Near Final Revenue Out-turn for 2020-2021

Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais – Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach

There had been circulated Report No RES/**24**/21 dated 8 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

- During discussion, it was suggested that when graphs and charts were being used to illustrate data, it was important that they were as intuitive as possible.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED:-**

- i. the financial out-turn position of the Performance and Governance Revenue budget for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021;
- ii. the revenue monitoring position for the period 31 March 2021 to 30 June 2021;
- iii. that the Directorate was on track to deliver all approved savings by the end of the financial year;
- iv. the Directorate's performance information; and
- v. the actions for the Directorate on the Recovery Action Plan.

7. Transformation Service – Revenue and Performance Monitoring to 30 June 2021

Seirbheis Cruth-atharrachaidh – Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach is

Coileanaidh

There had been circulated Report No RES/**25**/21 dated 10 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the revenue outturn position for the 20/21 financial year;
- ii. the 21/22 revenue monitoring position for the period to 30 June 2021;
- iii. the progress update provided in relation to budget savings delivery; and
- iv. the performance information.

8. Corporate Resources Capital Monitoring – Out-turn for 2020/21 and Quarter 1 2021/22

Seirbheis Ghoireasan is Ionmhais, Seirbheis Coileanaidh is Riaghlachais agus Seirbheis Cruth-atharrachaidh – Sgrùdadh Calpa

There had been circulated Report No. RES/**26**/21 dated 12 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the capital outturn position for the 2020/21 financial year; and
- ii. the financial position as at 30 June 2021 and the estimated year end forecast.

9. Treasury Management Rianachd Ionmhais

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**a. Summary of Transactions Quarter ended 30 June 2021
Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/**27**/21 dated 11 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

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Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions report for the period from 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021.

**b. Annual Treasury Management Report 2020/21
Aithisg Stiùiridh Bhliadhnail an Ionmhais 2020/21**

There had been circulated Report No RES/**28**/21 dated 10 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- further information be provided on the trends in relation to the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream for the general fund from 2012/13. It was confirmed that Members would be circulated with this information;
- the need to have a strategic discussion at full Council on the significant opportunities though capital borrowing, taking advantage of current lower interest rates, to meet the challenges the Council

faced in the future and its aspirations in terms of future capital investment;

- the potential to re-profile the debt over next five years would be reported to Council in September 2021 and it was confirmed that in advance of that meeting further information would be provided to Members on the difference between Capital Finance Requirements and external borrowing; and
- capital borrowing could not meet all of the Council's ambitions and need in Highland and there was therefore a requirement to explore alternatives to deliver capital investment schemes in partnership with Government and wider public and private partners through capital grants and funding.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Annual Treasury Management report for 2020/21.

10. Transformation Programme: Digital Transformation Project Prògram Cruth-atharrachaidh: Pròiseact Cruth-atharrachadh Didseatach

There had been circulated Report No RES/**29**/21 dated 10 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the resources and costs involved in digitising records should not be underestimated given this was potentially a major and complex task;
- in moving towards a hybrid way of working, there was a need to establish at a relatively early stage, the cost to the Council of working from home in terms of equipment, IT and health and safety requirements, and also to accommodate staff who were unable or preferred not to work from home;
- there was also a need (through the project) to enable staff to work remotely without having to return to hubs; and
- this was critical work and there was a need for urgency in moving the project forward on the basis that the investment required would achieve a more flexible and agile Council workforce in future.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the overall progress to date, including that the project status was being delivered on-time and within budget;
- ii. the 3 key projects and 7 key products as detailed in Section 5 of the report; and
- iii. the activity planned for the next reporting period.

11. Project Dòchas Progress Report Pròiseact Dòchais – Aithisg Ùrachaidh

There had been circulated Report No. RES/**30**/21 dated 9 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Transformation.

The Committee, having thanked the relevant Officers for the work undertaken

to date, otherwise **NOTED** the terms of the report as circulated, including the project status and that reports would continue to be provided to the Committee to deliver governance.

12. Welfare Support Taic Sochaire

Declarations of Interest: Mr P Sagers and Mr A Jarvie declared non-financial interests as Directors of the Nairn and the Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureaux respectively 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 them from taking part in the discussion.

Mr A Christie declared a financial interest as the Manager of the Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau but confirmed, having applied the test, that he would remain in the meeting and take part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No RES/**31**/21 dated 4 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- there was widespread concern about the impact of the loss of the Universal Credit uplift in the coming months, specifically on the most vulnerable across the Highlands who could find themselves more reliant on services offered by Council Officers. In this respect, there was an urgent need to ensure that the relevant Services across the Council were adequately resourced in order to cope with this level of increased demand and a further report on this issue should therefore be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee;
- the ending of the Furlough Scheme was also likely to further impact on this situation and as such it was vital that the situation was closely monitored and the Committee updated accordingly;
- homelessness was also an issue which was likely to increase in the next few months and was therefore of equal concern;
- it would be important to take account of the geographical nature of these issues as it was the case that some parts of the Highlands were currently experiencing higher levels of poverty than others and this had to be addressed;
- the inclusion of case studies in the report had been very helpful and informative and was welcomed;
- the issue of surplus food was very worrying, both in terms of the current tactical approach being taken but also at a strategic level in terms of how this would be addressed in the long term;
- the level of joint working between Council teams and Citizens Advice Bureaux was unprecedented and highly commended;
- it was imperative that it was acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic was far from over and would continue to impact the Highlands in the coming months;
- an additional recommendation should be added to the report in order to convey the thanks of the Committee to the numerous unpaid volunteers

across the Highlands for their time and effort in helping to address issues within their local communities; and

- it was also suggested that a further report should be submitted to the next meeting to map out data (in line with the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) to highlight the main issues associated with significant deprivation within the Highlands and not least to illustrate the differences with other parts of the country. In this respect, it was pointed out that the SIMD might not be as appropriate in terms of data when focusing on the more remote and rural parts of the Highlands and that other options might have to be considered in that regard.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the undernoted performance:-

- i. in excess of 20,600 residents were supported by the Council's Welfare Team and Citizens Advice during 2020/21 with welfare, debt and housing services, resulting in excess of 61,600 contacts (on average, 3 contacts per resident). Measuring the number of contacts provided workload and throughput provided important context when reflecting upon the overall effectiveness of welfare services being provided;
- ii. financial gains for clients exceeded £21.6 million. This represented a £1 for every £1 allocated to these welfare services;
- iii. a total of £7.4 million of debt (including £1.5m relating to mortgage/other loans) was presented by households seeking support to prioritise their debts and manage their debts, and wherever possible to lower the interest charges were due to pay;
- iv. support was provided for 3,106 clients (including social rented, private homeowners) seeking housing-related advice, thus highlighting the consistent accessible support on these issues; and
- v. FareShare provided in excess of 570 tonnes of quality food to the Highlands. This was estimated to be equivalent to over 1.36m meals with an estimated value around £765,000.

It was also **AGREED** that:-

- a further report should be submitted to the next meeting to provide assurance that the relevant Services across the Council were adequately resourced to cope with the anticipated increase in demand which follow the loss of the Credit uplift and the ending of the Furlough Scheme (amongst other issues);
- the thanks of the Committee should be conveyed to the numerous volunteers across the Highlands for their time and effort in helping to address issues within their local communities; and
- a further report should be submitted to the next meeting.

13. Minutes of Meetings Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

The Committee **NOTED** the following Minutes of Meetings as circulated:-

- i. Central Safety Committee held on 3 June 2021;
- ii. Staff Partnership Forum held on 3 June 2021 and 12 August 2021.

14. 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 should 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.

15. 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/**32**/21 dated 27 July 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

The Committee **AGREED** the recommendations as detailed.

16. Staff Pay Negotiations
Duais Pàighidh Riaghaltais Ionadail

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. RES/**33**/21 dated 13 August 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer. Resources and Finance

Following discussion, the Committee **NOTED** the terms of the report as circulated.

The meeting ended at 1.35pm.