

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday 8 September 2022 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr M Baird	Mr A MacDonald
Mr R Bremner	Mr G Mackenzie
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair (remotely)	Mr S Mackie (remotely)
Mr A Christie	Mr D Millar (remotely)
Mr M Green	Mr C Munro
Mr S Kennedy	Mr P Oldham
Mr B Lobban	Mr R Stewart
Mr D Louden	

Non-Members also present:

Mr J Finlayson	Mr T MacLennan
Mr J McGillivray	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R MacKintosh	Mr M Reiss
Ms K MacLean	Mr K Rosie

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Mrs K Lackie, Acting Depute Chief Executive and Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance
Mr E Foster, Head of Finance, 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 Waters, FOI and Data Protection Manager, Performance and Governance
Mr M Bailey, Commercial and Efficiency Team Manager,
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Performance and Governance
Miss R Ross, Administrative Assistant, 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 D Louden in the Chair

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mr R Gale and Mr A Rhind.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Items 5.a, 6, 7, 9.a and 12.i: Mr A Christie

**3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 30 June 2022 did not require to be exercised in relation to the business of the Corporate Resources Committee.

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

The Committee **APPROVED** the membership of the following Sub-Committees, Working Groups etc:-

a. Appeals & Disputes Committee – 10 Members

Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee, Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant Service Committee, Mr M Baird, Mr P Oldham, Mr B Lobban, Mr R Gale and two further members of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Group to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee for approval.

b. Central Safety Committee – 5 Members

Employer's Representatives – Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee, Mr P Oldham, Mr Lobban and Mr R Gale.

Staff Side Representatives – Trade Union representatives from Unison (1 place), GMB (1 place), UNITE (1 place), UNITE/UCATT (1 place), Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (to act on behalf of the teaching unions - 1 place) and 1 representative from BDA, CSP or RCN to be confirmed on a rolling basis.

c. Employment Release Sub-Committee – 10 Members

Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee, Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant Strategic Committee, Mr D Millar, Mr M Green, Mr A Christie, Mr A MacDonald and two further members of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Group to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee for approval.

d. Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum – 9 Members

Elected Member Group – Leader and Convener, Chairs of the Strategic Committees and the Leader of the Opposition (or their Deputies/Vice Chairs).

Staff Side Group – Trade Union representatives from Unison (2 places), GMB (2 places), UNITE/UCATT (1 place), UNITE (1 place) and RCN/CSP/BDA (1 place)

e. Non Domestic Rates Appeals Committee – 5 Members

Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee, Mr G Mackenzie, Mr S Kennedy and Mr A MacDonald.

**5. Corporate Revenue and Capital Monitoring Report to 30 June 2022
Aithisg Teachd-a-steach Corporra agus Sgrùdadh Calpa gu 30 Ògmhios 2022**

a. Corporate Revenue Monitoring to 30 June 2022

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as he had a connection in his capacity as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland and as General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No **RES/10/22** by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Chair paid tribute to the former Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Committee and Budget Leader on working collaboratively during the term of the previous Council and on leaving the Council's finances in a good position particularly given the challenges presented by the pandemic. He referred to the current challenges faced due to the cost of living crisis, and the importance of the Council doing as much as possible to support the public, businesses and charities in Highland. A paper on the cost of living crisis would be brought forward to the full Council on 22 September 2022. From a Council perspective, it was important to maximise commercial activities to generate income, manage assets better and consider new ways of working and workforce planning, and to redesign and re-prioritise services. In this regard, he commended the effective work of the Redesign Board over the last term of the Council and its continuing important role.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- concern at the challenges presented by the cost of living crisis, the pressure on pay awards and forecasted overspend on the budget and the need to explore as rapidly as possible the impact on the Council, its workforce and service users;
- related to the above, there was a need to improve financial systems and provide better and more up to date financial data to inform decision making, recognising this might require investment in technology;
- the need for Members to be provided with more information on the detailed timelines in relation to the delivery of savings;
- the Chair acknowledged the above points in relation to financial information and timelines for savings and confirmed that consideration would be given to both matters going forward. Group Leaders had been invited to meet with the Administration to discuss resolutions as to how to deliver the savings on the budget and it was hoped Members would work collaboratively on this matter;
- the current crisis could not have been predicted, however due to prudent financial management the Council was in a better position than many other local authorities to respond to the crisis and it was hoped that by working collaboratively there would be a positive response for the people of the Highlands and Council staff;

- an explanation was sought and provided in relation to the Council's borrowing in terms of the impact of rising interest rates and a reduction in funding from the Scottish Government, the sustainability of the current level of borrowing in the medium and longer terms, any feedback received from the UK Treasury on the level of debt, and risks associated with borrowing from other local authorities and where liability lay for the debt;
- whether the Scottish Government would be the counterparty to the Council's PWLB loan and the need for this to be confirmed in the current financial year. The Chair undertook to initiate advance discussions on this matter; and
- it was important to recognise that Members had a responsibility to provide assurance and confidence to Highland communities in terms of the action being taken to tackle the crisis and the work being undertaken to redesign services;

The Chief Executive advised that the key issue in responding to the cost of living crisis was one of collaboration and relationships, including at a national level. All the Chief Executives across Scotland were working together on this issue. The Council was also working with its community planning partners and there was assurance and confidence that the Council was in a strong position to respond to the challenges going forward. In terms of representing staff, the Council also had strong relationships with trade unions. Strategies and proposals for an extensive engagement process with staff and communities in the Highlands would be brought to the full Council for debate.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. financial position of the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets as at 30 June 2022 and the estimated year end forecast;
- ii. status of budgeted savings in the year; and
- iii. Chair's commitment to undertake discussions with the Scottish Government regarding the Council's PWLB loan borrowings.

b. Corporate Capital Monitoring to 30 June 2022

There had been circulated Report No **RES/11/22** by the Head of Corporate Finance.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the report highlighted that it was highly likely the overall affordability envelope for capital might have to reduce from the current programmed level due to funding challenges. Members should therefore receive an early update on any slippage on the Capital Programme with reference to specific schools projects and impact on the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP). It was confirmed that an update report on the Capital Programme would be brought to the next full Council in September 2022, including on LEIP 2 and 3, and there would be future reports to Council on the review of the Capital Programme; and
- the need for the total costs of capital projects to be provided to all strategic committees as had been requested by Members previously. The Chair provided a commitment that the information provided in reports would be improved for future meetings.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. final position for the 2021/22 financial year;
- ii. position for Q1 2022/23 and the estimated year end forecast;

- iii. progress made with the monitoring of major capital projects;
- iv. level of borrowing used to fund capital expenditure;
- v. challenges affecting the affordability of the capital programme; and
- vi. assurance provided by the Chair that the format of future capital reports would be reviewed with a view to providing improved information particularly in respect of the whole cost of capital projects.

6. Revenue and Performance Monitoring Q1 – 01 April 2022 to 30 June 2022 and Near Final Revenue Out-turn for 2021 - 2022
Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach agus Coileanadh C1 – 01 Giblean 2022 gu 30 Ògmhios 2022 agus Fìor Shuidheachadh Faisg air Deireannach airson 2021–2022

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as he had a connection in his capacity as General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

a. Depute Chief Executive's Service
Seirbheis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigeir

There had been circulated Report No **RES/12/22** by the Acting Depute Chief Executive.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. 2021/22 revenue and capital final outturn position;
- ii. monitoring statement and latest forecasted outturn for Quarter 1 2022/23;
- iii. Directorate was on track to deliver all approved savings by the end of the financial year; and
- iv. performance information.

b. Resources and Finance Service
Seirbheis nan Goireasan agus an Ionmhais

There had been circulated Report No **RES/13/22** by Acting Depute Chief Executive.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. revenue near final monitoring position for 2021/22 and the Quarter 1 period to 30 June 2022;
- ii. statutory performance indicators, local key performance measures and where available, comparisons to Scottish averages; and
- iii. 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.

c. Performance and Governance Service
Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais

There had been circulated Report No **RES/14/22** by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. 2021/22 final outturn position for the Directorate;
- ii. revenue monitoring position for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 June 2022;
- iii. Directorate was on track to deliver all approved savings by the end of the financial year;
- iv. Directorate's performance information.

7. Draft Service Plans Dreachd Phlanaichean Seirbheis

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as he had a connection in his capacity as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland and as General Manager of Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

a. Depute Chief Executive's Service Seirbheis an Iar-Àrd-Oifigeir

There had been circulated Report No **RES/15/22** by the Acting Depute Chief Executive.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- whether the Council's had a derogation from its obligations under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act, and the current level of performance against the targets to improve performance. It was explained there was no such derogation and performance was reported to the Scottish Information Commissioner on a quarterly basis. Within the Council, performance was reviewed on a weekly basis by a Performance Board attended by the Chief Executive and all ECOs and a significant improvement in performance had been achieved, the intention being to reach and exceed the Service's target;
- concern that freedom of information requests were extremely time consuming for officers and should be a process of last resort and Members should reflect on the pressure such requests were placing on Council's resources, particularly as they had opportunity to contact officers directly for responses and build good relationships. The Chair indicated that he would have further discussion with Mr R Stewart in regard to any specific concerns outwith the meeting;
- the format of all draft Service Plans required to be more outcomes focused and referenced back to the Council and Corporate programmes to ensure they were interlinked and to allow the benefits for people in the Highlands to be measured and evaluated. The opportunity should therefore be taken to revise the format of the draft Plans while the Council Programme was being developed to ensure there was reference to inputs, outputs and outcomes. These comments also applied to items 7 (b) and 7 (c) below; and
- good progress was being made with the Council Programme and the input of all political groups in terms of the format of the draft Plans would be welcomed and the Administration Leaders would be content to have further discussions in this regard.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. draft Depute Chief Executive's Directorate Service Plan for 2022/23; and
- ii. draft plan would be subject to review following the approval of a new Council Programme and Corporate Plan and completion of development work outlined in section 5 of the report.

**b. Resources and Finance Service
Seirbheis nan Goireasan agus an Ionmhais**

There had been circulated Report No **RES/16/22** by the Acting Depute Chief Executive.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. draft Resources & Finance Directorate Service Plan for 2022/23; and
- ii. draft plan would be subject to review following the approval of a new Council Programme and Corporate Plan and completion of development work outlined in section 5 of the report.

**c. Performance and Governance Service
Seirbheis a' Choileanaidh agus an Riaghlachais**

There had been circulated Report No **RES/17/22** by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

The Committee **NOTED** the draft:

- i. Performance and Governance Directorate Service Plan for 2022/23; and
- ii. Plan would be subject to review following the approval of a new Council Programme and Corporate Plan and completion of development work outlined in section 5 of the report.

**8. Review of ICT Acceptable Use Policy
Ath-sgrùdadh air Poileasaidh Cleachdadh Cothromach ICT**

There had been circulated Report No **RES/18/22** by the Acting Depute Chief Executive.

In discussion, it was confirmed that the ICT Acceptable Use Policy applied to all Highland Council staff, elected members, pupils and any contractors using Council ICT systems. The policy did not state what would happen if someone were to breach the policy. If there was improper use, this would be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedure when staff were involved and there would be different processes for elected members, pupils and contractors. The policy only referred to improper use in a general manner rather than detailing specific websites which could change frequently. Therefore, there was an element of judgement on improper use if an investigation was to be undertaken. In terms of the Council's disciplinary procedure, it was understood it did contain reference to unacceptable use of ICT policies, however, this would be checked and if required this would be reinforced in the disciplinary procedure.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:

- i. the revised ICT Acceptable Use Policy (AUP); and

- ii. that future updates to the ICT AUP be agreed by the ICT Strategy Board and would come back to Committee for approval where necessary.

9. ICT and Digital Strategies Ro-innleachdan ICT agus Didseatach

a. ICT Strategy Review Ath-sgrùdadh Ro-innleachd ICT

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item as he had a connection in his capacity as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No **RES/19/22** by the Acting Depute Chief Executive.

In discussion, the ICT strategy review document was commended and the hard work and professionalism of the ICT team was acknowledged. It was queried if there should be reference in the document recognising that not everyone engaged with the Council by digital means, had access to digital devices or the skills to use them. Having more people engage with the Council digitally could save the Council money and thought should be given to how to empower people to give them the confidence to go online, perhaps by opening up Service Points to provide training. A specific example was provided of bank closures meaning more people were being forced to bank online which was not easy for some people.

It was highlighted that digital inclusion was a key issue for both the public and Council staff. A digital champions network was being considered for staff and some thought would be given as to how this could be replicated in the wider community. In terms of the new Council's programme, it would be considered how to make digital technology and digital inclusion a more enhanced and educated experience for everyone.

The Committee **AGREED:**

- i. the ICT Strategy; and
- ii. that future updates to the ICT Strategy be agreed by the ICT Strategy Board and would come back to Committee for approval where necessary.

b. Digital Strategy and High Level Implementation Plan Ro-innleachd Didseatach agus Plana Buileachaidh Àrd-Ìre

There had been circulated Report No **RES/20/22** by the Acting Depute Chief Executive.

In discussion, it was highlighted that by making more of Council services digital enabled resources to be freed up to help people who felt excluded from this process.

In terms of digital inclusion for Members, it was planned to survey all Members soon asking about their digital capabilities and what they would like in terms of further training and development. There would also be information on the Members Intranet following this process with further guidance and help on this matter.

In relation to case load management, it was highlighted that at a recent meeting of the Redesign Board one of the projects agreed to take forward was improving customer engagement by ensuring the Council's systems and processes were helpful in terms of managing and tracking progress of public enquiries.

The Committee **AGREED** the Digital Strategy and associated High Level Implementation Plan.

10. Information and Data Strategy Ro-innleachd Fiosrachaidh agus Dàta

There had been circulated Report No **RES/21/22** by the Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

In setting the context to the report, it was highlighted that in terms of comments at the meeting on further requests for information on data, there had been significant improvements within the Council on this. More than half of the workforce were front line staff and therefore there was a need to get the right balance with data, targets and leadership. The Council was still dealing with the impacts of Covid and dealing with the Ukraine and cost of living crises. Therefore, as well as managing targets, data and outcomes, Council staff were heavily involved in responding to these significant issues. Member support was sought in terms of what was required in terms of legislation, leadership and data and this had to be balanced with the need to spend time with people and staff. Therefore, there was an opportunity to look at data and legislation and set out what data was important, such as for example the number of unaccompanied children coming to the Highlands. Therefore, there was a need for balance to the strategic approach to the Information and Data Strategy.

A point was made that data and information strategies were a management tool and supported the understanding of the Council's operations, to know if things were being done right and understand where improvements to service delivery and/or performance were necessary. Going forward, the information in the report had its place in supporting the understanding of Council operations, but there had to be a balance and it could not replace the practicalities of the human side of providing services and this should be recognised in the Council's programme.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the benefits and context for the Information and Data Strategy;
- ii. **AGREED** the Strategic principles set out in the Strategy; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the Information and Data Strategy.

11. Treasury Management Rianachd Ionmhais

a. Summary of Transactions Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean

There had been circulated Report No **RES/22/22** by the Head of Corporate Finance.

A point was made that in terms of increasing interest rates, if non-essential expenditure could be reduced, then there would be more money for essential projects such as new schools. The Council's borrowing was one of the highest of any local authority in

Scotland, due to its unique geography and the Council had previously halved its capital plan in order to reduce borrowing costs. The Council's general reserves were also forecasted to be halved this year and practical ideas to reduce non-essential expenditure needed to be considered, such as three weekly bin collections and switching off streetlights during the night in some areas. It was queried what the appropriate mechanism was for Members and the public to submit ideas for savings. The Chair advised that further information would be provided offline on the most appropriate route to submit suggestions and indicated that all ideas would be welcomed.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions reports for the periods 1 January to 31 March 2022 and 1 April to 30 June 2022.

b. Annual Treasury Management Report 2021/22
Aithisg Stiùiridh Bhliadhna an Ionmhais 2021/22

There had been circulated Report No RES/**23**/22 by the by the Head of Corporate Finance.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Annual Treasury Management report for 2021/22.

MINUTES OF MEETINGS
GEÀRR-CHUNNTAS CHOINNEAMHAN

12. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie made a Transparency Statement in respect of item 12.i as he had a connection in his capacity as a Non-executive director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

The following Minutes of Meetings had been circulated for confirmation:

- i. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Central Safety Committee held on 4 February 2022;
- ii. **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Staff Partnership Forum held on 11 February 2022;
- iii. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Recruitment Panel held on 1 March 2022 and 20 April 2022; and
- iv. **NOTED** the Minutes of the Appeals and Disputes Committee held on 22 April 2022.

The meeting was closed at 12.22pm.