

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

Minutes of Meeting of The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum held in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Inverness on **Wednesday 1 February, 2023** at 3.00 p.m.

### **Present:**

#### **Employer's Representatives:**

Mr Raymond Bremner	Mr Ken Gowans
Mr Alasdair Christie (remotely)	Mr Derek Loudon (remotely)
Mr John Finlayson (remotely)	Mr Graham Mackenzie (remotely)

#### **Staff Side Representatives:**

Mr Mike Hayes, UNISON (substitute)	Mr Rikki Selkirk (GMB)
Mr Paul MacPherson (GMB)	Ms Margaret Macrae (RCN) (remotely)

### **In attendance:**

Mrs K Lackie, Interim Chief Executive  
Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer – Communities & Place  
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure, Environment & Economy  
Ms F Duncan, Executive Chief Officer, Health & Social Care  
Mr E Foster, Head of Corporate Finance, Resources & Finance  
Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side  
Mr M Jackson, Regional Officer, Unite the Union  
Ms E Barrie, Head of People, Resources & Finance  
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing & Building Maintenance, Housing & Property  
Mr T Murdison, Service Lead – Corporate Property, Housing & Property  
Mr A MacInnes, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

### **Mr R Bremner in the Chair**

#### **SUBJECT/DECISION**

#### **ACTION**

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Lobban from the Employer's Side, and Mr J Gibson, UNISON, Mr I Macleman, UNITE, from the Staff Side and Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer – Housing & Property.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

**Transparency Statement** – Mr K Gowans declared a transparency statement with the items on the agenda as a member of the EIS trade union, however, having applied the objective test, reviewed his

position in relation to the items and his personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

### 3. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 11 November, 2022, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

### 4. Matters Arising from Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

i Hybrid Working – there had been an action from the last meeting for the Head of People to contact the Hybrid working team to check on staff home working requirements. It was advised that there had been ongoing discussion with staff through the Hybrid working team in terms of requirements, team agreements etc. This discussion would continue with Managers and the Hybrid working team and take account of any changes required through the asset management process.

The Forum **NOTED** that progress with Hybrid Working would be reported at future meetings.

**Head of People**

ii Core Hours – there was an action from the last meeting for the Head of People to look at any information provided by the Staff Side in relation to the issue of some staff feeling pressure to be at work at defined times. It was advised that while there may have been an assumption that core hours were no longer applicable, this was not the case and this required to be clarified with staff.

**Head of People**

### 5. Staff Side Items

Additional Day Annual Leave – the Staff Side had received a number of queries from their members in schools asking about when they could take the extra day annual leave and clarification was sought. It was advised that where staff had childcare requirements they were expected to cover this through their annual leave. The extra day annual leave could also be taken on strike days if staff wished, but that was up to individual staff members and Managers in Education would be asked to communicate this message to staff.

**Head of People**

### 6. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

There had been circulated and **NOTED** the following Service Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings:-

i Health, Social Care & Wellbeing – 19 October, 2022 & draft minute of 12 January, 2023;

ii Education and Learning – 21 September, 2022;

- iii Communities and Place – draft minutes of 21 October & 15 December, 2022;
- iv Performance & Governance/Resources & Finance/Depute CEX Services –15 December, 2022.

Arising from the minutes the following matters were raised:-

i Health, Social Care & Wellbeing

Office closures had been discussed and an assurance given to communicate proposed changes with staff. With the closure of residential homes there was a need to redeploy staff and trade unions and HR had been involved in these discussions.

The Staff Side highlighted the significant workforce pressures and the risk to service delivery in Health & Social Care teams. A Group was to look at workforce planning in the Service and clarification of the Staff Side involvement was sought. It was advised that there were vacancies in teams and staff leaving the Service for a variety of reasons. Agency staff used to be hired to fill vacancies, but there was no longer agency staff to fill vacancies and discussions were taking place on alternative options. Workforce planning would be discussed at the next Health, Social Care & Wellbeing trade union meeting.

**ECO H&S  
Care**

ii Education and Learning

Excess Travel – this related to an historical amount of 22p per mile for excess travel. The Council’s travel and subsistence policy was recently revised and there was no reference to excess travel in that policy. The Head of People undertook to clarify this issue and report back to the Forum.

**Head of  
People**

iii Communities and Place –

Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) – The Electricity at Work Regulations make it a statutory requirement to maintain safe and efficient electrical systems. It does not provide specific technical detail on how you achieve compliance with the regulations. For fixed wiring installations we achieve compliance by following BS7671. For PAT the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provide a guide for employers to consider. Some desk top computers can have an interval up to 4 years, hand held power tools in construction could be subject to 3 monthly testing. The HSE guide is available at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg107.pdf>

The preferred option was for an inhouse team to undertake PAT testing. The Staff Side highlighted that the recruitment of an in house team had been ongoing for a considerable period of time.

Condition Surveys of Buildings – this was being carried out to ensure urgent maintenance work was being undertaken. The Staff Side highlighted that while maintenance was being carried out on depots it was the wrong type of work being carried out. For example, work on a fire alarm system was being carried out at Lotland street depot whereas the roof needed repaired and this would be more beneficial to staff. It was advised that there was a legal requirement to undertake a fire risk assessment at sites the Council operated from. There was a programme for roof repairs for depots but the resources available were not sufficient to meet demand. The programme of works on buildings and depot survey reports would be shared with the Staff Side.

**Service  
Lead –  
Corporate  
Property**

Preventative Physiotherapy – there was no further progress on this issue at this time.

iv Performance & Governance/Resources & Finance/Depute CEX Services

Office Rationalisation – The Staff Side highlighted that there was a commitment that staff who were asked to move accommodation would be consulted but this had not happened. Reference in particular was made to staff moving out of the Town House and Dochfour Drive. A separate meeting would be arranged with the Staff Side to brief them on staff who would be impacted and when by the office rationalisation process.

**Interim  
CEX/  
Head of  
People**

## 7. Budget Position

The Interim Chief Executive provided an update on the budget. It was highlighted that all local authorities were experiencing significant challenges with their budgets. Work was ongoing in respect of consideration of staffing and non staffing budget savings as well as increasing income for the Council. There was also a review of monies held in reserves and a capital programme review. A Report on the budget would be submitted to the full Council meeting on 2 March, 2023.

The Staff Side appreciated the budget briefings that they had received recently. It was requested that the Staff Side be provided with additional information in terms of budget proposals and the most appropriate way to do this would be access through a sharepoint site.

**Interim  
CEX/  
Head of  
Corp  
Finance**

The Forum **NOTED** the budget update and that additional information on budget proposals would be submitted to the Staff Side.

## 8. Pay Award - Update

The Head of People provided an update on the current position in respect of pay negotiations.

The current pay award for Teachers had still not concluded and strikes continued. There did not seem to be an early resolution to the dispute.

The Scottish Joint Council non teaching staff pay claim from Unite/Unison/ GMB for 2023/24 had been received. The claim was for a pay increase of 12% or £4k and a minimum hourly rate of £15 per hour.

Insofar as the NHS pay award, the Scottish Government's pay offer in October, 2022 had been rejected by some of the trade unions. There was an agreement to pause strike action until the end of February, 2023 with the aim of having the 2023/24 pay award discussions sooner, so that a 2 year settlement could be considered. Discussions were ongoing which would include non pay elements of an award. While negotiations were still ongoing there had been an imposed pay award element and this was being processed to be paid to staff in February, 2023.

The Forum **NOTED** the update on pay negotiations.

#### **9. Asset Management Progress**

The Forum **NOTED** that a separate meeting with Officers and trade unions would be arranged on asset management progress.

**Interim  
CEX/  
Head of  
People**

#### **10. Hybrid Working**

There was ongoing discussion with staff through the Hybrid working team in terms of requirements, team agreements etc. This discussion would continue with Managers and the Hybrid working team and take account of any changes required through the asset management process.

The Forum **NOTED** the position.

#### **11. Changes in Senior Staffing**

An Interim Chief Executive, Kate Lackie had been appointed and commenced the post on 1 February. An Interim Depute Chief Executive was to be appointed and some backfilling of Executive Chief Officer positions would be required on a temporary basis. The permanent post of Executive Chief Officer Resources & Finance had been advertised and the post of Head of Corporate Finance would soon be advertised. There would be temporary cover for the latter post until a permanent appointment could be made. The Head of ICT post had been advertised and the Strategic Lead (Corporate Audit & Performance) had been appointed.

The Forum **NOTED** the update on Senior Staffing changes.

The meeting was concluded at 4.15 p.m.