

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Redesign Board of the Highland Council** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on 28 November 2022 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr C Aitken (remote)	Ms B Jarvie (remote)
Mr B Boyd (remote)	Mr R Jones
Mr R Bremner (remote)	Mr B Lobban
Ms G Campbell-Sinclair (remote)	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr A Christie	Mr C Munro
Mr M Green	Ms M Reid
Ms J Hendry	Mrs T Robertson
Ms M Hutchison	Ms L Saggars
Mr A Jarvie	Ms M Smith

Non-Members present:

Mr M Baird	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr C Birt (remote)	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Ms S Fanet	Mr D MacPherson
Mr A Graham	

Officials in attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy
Ms A Clark, Head of Communities and Engagement
Mr M Bailey, Team Manager, Transformation
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Gibson, UNISON and Mr P MacPherson, GMB.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Board **NOTED** the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2022, which had been approved by the Council on 22 September 2022.

4. Redesign of Highland Council – Work Programme Update

There had been circulated Report No RDB/06/22 dated 22 November 2022 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

Section 4.3 of the report confirmed that Members of the Redesign Board had been assigned to work alongside officers for each project. In this regard it was felt that this process only worked when Members were embedded in the whole decision-making process from start to finish. Members acknowledged that there had been a transformative difference that resulted from previous projects when this took place.

Members were looking forward to working together as part of the Redesign Board and establishing improvements for the Council going forward. It was suggested that officers reflect on valuable lessons learned from previous projects on the agenda, such as workforce planning.

The Board **NOTED**:

- i. the confirmation of the following major projects coming under the remit of the Board:
 - Asset Management
 - Roads
 - Connected Customer & Digitisation
 - Bus Company;
- ii. the assignment of Board Members to the major projects; and
- iii. the current programme of Lean/Rapid Reviews.

5. **Asset Management Pillar 3 - Asset Rationalisation**

There had been circulated Report No RDB/07/22 dated 22 November 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Property & Housing.

It was important to get the best out of the Council's estate and, taking into account the land that the Council owned, there was an issue with the availability of trades' people and, looking to other local authorities, there was merit in considering setting up an Arm's Length External Organisation (ALEO) to carry out the functions of the property service such as maintenance. Turning to the recurring £1m savings target clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether this was a net or a gross target and that the staffing element of the project team was funded separately.

The Board:

- i. **NOTED** progress on the Asset Rationalisation workstream, including progress made towards the achievement of the £1M revenue savings target, as detailed in section 5 of this report;
- ii. **APPROVED** the next steps for full achievement of the target savings as set out in section 7 of this report; and
- iii. **AGREED** that an options appraisal be carried out for the potential of an establishment of an ALEO model for the property service.

6. **Asset Management – Inverness Town House**

There had been circulated Report No RDB/08/22 dated 21 November 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Property & Housing.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- having one of the most beautiful buildings in Highland used as office space was seen by some as a waste of a valuable asset. However, it was pointed out that the staff accommodation was predominantly in areas which would not be used for civic purposes and it was accepted it was not a suitable 21st Century working environment;
- the Town House was a Category A Listed building of national significance and Highland Council had to be judicious in its management and approach to the building. The target date for vacating the building of 31 March 2023 could jeopardise this;
- reference was made to recent cosmetic upgrades to the Town House but, at a cost of £8m, it was called into question if this could just be considered “cosmetic”;
- moving the City of Inverness Area Committee meetings to Headquarters from the Town House Chamber seemed to remove part of the charm and character of that building as, without these meetings, it became the “former” Chamber;
- it was important this valuable asset was not wasted and that more could be made of the building for events such as weddings. In this regard, this was not solely about what revenue savings that could be made but also about what the Council could do to help the Inverness Common Good Fund to promote this as a venue;
- the Town House had proved popular with tours and perhaps, working in partnership with High Life Highland, it could be incorporated along with the Castle Project;
- leaving the Inverness Common Good Fund only three months to plan how to minimise the long term financial impact of the Highland Council vacating the office accommodation at the Town House was considered by some to be insufficient. The City of Inverness Area Committee had not had an opportunity to discuss this and there had been no risk assessment carried out. It was therefore suggested that exit date be moved from 31 March 2023 to 31 March 2024;
- to fill the gap in income of the Common Good resulting from the Council vacating the premises, the Council had to work closely to ensure this was achieved to help market and identify alternative sources of income;
- the Housing Service and Service Point were in prime city centre locations and moving these functions to Headquarters would make them less accessible to many;
- it was contended that the change of use of the Town House necessitated consultation;
- there were already external tenants in the Town House such as the Department of Work and Pensions and the Police and having such a prestigious address would encourage others to move in;
- there needed to be continued rationalisation if Highland Council was to achieve savings;
- the Common Good Fund was not a separate legal entity as suggested in the report: all 74 Highland Elected Members were custodians;
- if the Highland Council vacated the car park at the rear of the Town House, there was a question if it could still be used for storage space for the Castle Project. In addition, it was questioned if the income from the car park in the evenings would now be directed to the Common Good Fund and, as there were electric charging points in the car park, if the Council would need to hire these charging spaces; and
- the concerns of some Members were acknowledged and, as the project progressed, it was agreed that these would be carefully considered as well as how to mitigate them. It was essential that there was defined and positive progress.

Thereafter, Mr B Lobban, seconded by Mr A Jarvie, **MOVED** the recommendations as detailed in the report.

Mr A Christie, seconded by Mrs T Robertson, moved as an **AMENDMENT**, that an additional decision be incorporated that the exit date for staff to vacate the premises be 31 March 2024.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 13 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 4 votes, with no abstentions, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion

Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr M Green, Mrs J Hendry, Ms M Hutchison, Mr A Jarvie, Mr R Jones, Mr B Lobban, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr C Munro, Mrs M Reid, Ms L Sagers.

For the Amendment

Mr C Aitken, Mr A Christie, Mrs T Robertson, Ms M Smith.

The Board:

- i. **APPROVED** the proposed approach to be taken to realising savings to the general fund from a changed approach to the use of Inverness Town House (section 7 of the report)
- ii. **NOTED** the recommendation for the Inverness Common Good Fund to seek commercial advice over maximising profits from civic and hosted events (section 8.1 of the report); and
- iii. **NOTED** the recommendation to commission a feasibility study for the longer-term use of the Inverness Town House to ensure the site is sustained beyond any transition towards a net zero estate (section 8.2 of the report).

7. Roads Improvement Project - Update

There had been circulated Report No RDB/09/22 dated 14 November 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

Members recognised that there had been changes in staff, particularly at senior level, in the Roads and Transport section and those Members who had been part of the Roads Improvement Project and it was important that this new cohort connected in how this was moved forward. The holistic view that the Project Board was adopting was welcomed (in terms of the fleet, material, partnership working with organisations such as Bear Scotland and methodology of the process) so that the service was delivered as efficiently as possible but also as soon as possible.

The Board **NOTED** the progress of the Roads Improvement Project.

8. Redesign of Highland Council – Connected Customers and Digitisation Review

There had been circulated Report No RDB/10/22 dated 18 November 2022 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive and which was augmented with a presentation setting out the purpose of the Project Brief and its scope, objectives, outcomes and the proposed next steps.

The Project was welcomed and Member involvement from the start was key. In recognising the public's frustration, a lot of work had already taken place and abandonment rates at the Council's call centre had already reduced but this needed to reduce further. It was important to bear in mind too that this was not just about the initial contact with the Council but also the end of service outcome.

The Board **AGREED** the Project Brief for Connected Customers and Digitisation which could be found at Appendix 1.

9. Bus Company Project – Update

There is circulated Report No RDB/11/22 dated 17 November 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was important to bear in mind that this was not just about providing school transport but also about providing a public bus service and it was important therefore to make timetables available as soon as possible if damage to the Council's branding of this new provision was to be avoided;
- when using it for school transport it was also important to ensure maximum use was made of vehicles on their return journey;
- information was sought as to what interaction had taken place with commercial bus companies and to details surrounding the lease of the depot, as reported to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to the breakdown of the £1.4m annual savings; and
- information was also sought, and provided, as to the number of buses purchased and how they were to be powered. It was also reported to Members that in April 2023 there would also be an opportunity to bid into the Scottish Government's Local Carbon Fleet Fund.

The Board **NOTED** the progress of the Bus Company Project.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am