

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 **Thursday 25 May, 2023** at 11.00 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr Bill Lobban	Mr Derek Loudon (remote)
Mr John Finlayson	Mr Graham Mackenzie
Mr David Fraser (remote)	

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr Paul MacPherson (GMB)
 Mr Rikki Selkirk (GMB) (remote)
 Ms Margaret Macrae (RCN)
 (remote)

In attendance:

Mr M MacLeod (**MM**), Interim Depute Chief Executive
 Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer – Communities & Place
 Mr M Rodgers (**MR**), Executive Chief Officer – Housing & Property
 Ms T Urry, Interim Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure & Environment
 Ms E Barrie (**EB**), Interim Head of People, Resources & Finance
 Ms F Malcolm, Head of Integration Adult Social Care, Health & Social Care
 Mr B Porter, Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism, Resources & Finance
 Ms D Sutherland, Strategic Lead, Corporate Audit & Performance, Performance & Governance
 Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side
 Mr A MacInnes, Interim Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

SUBJECT/DECISION

ACTION

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Bremner, Mr A Christie, Mr K Gowans from the Employer's Side, and Mr J Gibson, UNISON, Ms L MacKay, UNISON, Mr M Hayes, UNISON, Mr I Macleman, UNITE, from the Staff Side, Mrs K Lackie, Interim Chief Executive and Mr P Nevin, Interim ECO Performance & Governance.

2. **Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement**

There were no declarations of interest/transparency statements.

3. **Minutes of Last Meeting**

There had been circulated the Minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 1 February, 2023, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

4. **Matters Arising from Minutes**

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

i Core Hours – The Staff Side referred to different understandings from different staff groups on core hours. Under new ways of working and hybrid working it was not clear how this fitted with staff having to be present during core hours. In response, it was acknowledged that there was a need for clarity on this issue. There was still business hours and opening hours in terms of the Council delivering services to the public. Service Managers were asked to look at Service team agreements which tied in with new ways of working and flexible working arrangements and this would take account of how business hours would be covered. In terms of business continuity and there being no detriment in service provision, there was also a need to ensure that teams had the ability to communicate and work together. Further consideration on this issue would be undertaken with an update provided at the next meeting. Any specific examples on this issue that the Staff Side wished to be covered should be forwarded to Officers.

MM/ECOs

ii Excess Travel – this related to an historical amount of 22p per mile for excess travel. The Staff Side suggested that this should be discussed further at the HR Sub Group. The Staff Side also raised the issue that when staff were claiming back mileage costs they had to have evidence that they were business insured in order to receive payment. In response, it was advised that the Travel and Subsistence Policy did state that this documentation should be provided and this would be emphasised to claimants.

EB

5. **Staff Side Items**

i Access to Wage Slips – a number of months ago ICT introduced an extra layer of security when accessing payslips, this meant that staff had to enter a code through authenticator. This disadvantaged some staff groups and we were assured that the 2 stage authentication would be removed and staff would get access to payslips. This has still not happened and some staff are unable to get their pay advice or P60's. Until this has been resolved the Council are duty bound to provide staff with their payslips and should therefore send staff payslips by post.”

In response, a separate meeting would be arranged with Staff Side/ICT Services and Interim Head of People to consider what could be done to support staff accessing their payslips.

EB

ii Facilities Management Services – The Staff Side referred to staff being classed as mobile janitors and there had been no consultation with Trade Unions on this. In response, there were proposals on what a future Facilities Management service might be and discussions were ongoing on this. When a final proposal was ready it was intended to arrange an away day to discuss this, and Trade Unions would be invited.

MR

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 – 27 April, 2023;
- ii Education – 20 April, 2023;
- iii Communities and Place – 31 March, 2023;
- iv Housing & Property – 17 April, 2023;
- v Infrastructure and Environment – 27 January and 5 May, 2023;
- vi Performance & Governance/Resources & Finance/Depute CEX Services – 12 April, 2023.

7. Budget Position

The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism gave an update on the budget. It was highlighted that the projection at end Quarter 3 was a £3.3m overspend and it was hoped there would be an improvement on this at the year end as a result of cost and recruitment controls etc. Aside, from the Service budget position, there would be a significant underspend in the budget overall, as part of the savings proposals agreed at the budget Council meeting in March, the Council had agreed to take a loans fund principal holiday. This amounted to a £29m one off benefit to the Council and this would add resilience to the financial pressures facing the Council.

In terms of the budget for the current financial year there were £22m in savings to be delivered and £23m had been taken from reserves. There was a focus on delivering these savings and there would be a mid year budget report to Council. There were still risks and uncertainties facing the budget in terms of pay awards, inflation and interest rates.

It was highlighted that good progress was being made in achieving savings and this would continue to be closely monitored. There would always be challenges in making savings and some savings would take a little bit longer to achieve. It was important to achieve savings not

just for this financial year but for the next and future financial years and therefore work would continue on existing transformation projects and plan for future projects. Vacancy monitoring was undertaken weekly. The majority of posts that could be funded within the current revenue budget and were not affected by savings proposals, particularly front line staff, were being released for recruitment.

The Forum **NOTED** the budget update.

8. Pay Award - Update

The Interim Head of People provided an update on the current position in respect of pay negotiations. The negotiations for the Teachers pay award covering the period to 2024 had now concluded and the award paid. The NHS pay award had also now concluded. There was ongoing negotiation in terms of The Scottish Joint Council non teaching staff pay claim for 2023/24.

The implementation of the Scottish Local Government Living Wage and pay modelling exercise had now concluded and would be included in May's pay. There had been considerable work and extensive discussions with Trade Unions in this process. The work of the teams in various Services involved was recognised by the Employer and Trade Unions as it had taken considerable work to achieve this outcome.

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

9. Asset Management Progress

The Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property advised that there were a number of workstreams ongoing or about to start in terms of asset management. There were ongoing staff moves in the office estate and discussions would be held with staff that were affected. Considerable work had been undertaken on condition surveys of Depots which would inform what opportunities there may be for investment or disinvestment in these premises. In terms of the Education estate work had been undertaken on mothballing some schools in the short term and discussions were being held between Education and Housing and Property Services on what future stages of this may look like as there were mutual benefits in making more efficient use of space in the school estate. The ECO Housing and Property was happy to discuss at any time with trade unions progress on these workstreams.

Continuing, all offices would be in scope in the asset rationalisation process, but there were a number of strategic office bases that it was felt should be retained. Also, in the redesign process there was a project in Portree, Tigh Na Sgìre, where the Council would work with other public sector partners to co-ordinate co-location at Tigh Na

Sgire. This was a good example of not just freeing up Council properties, but allowing the Council's property to allow Partners to vacate their properties.

The Forum **NOTED** progress on asset management.

10. Redesign Update

The Interim Depute Chief Executive referred to a Redesign Board meeting to be held on 31 May, 2023 at which there were 3 main reports in relation to My Council Programme; Redesign of Highland Council work programme and Renewable investment in Solar and Battery Storage.

The Forum **NOTED** the Redesign update.

11. Hybrid Working

An update on Hybrid working was provided by the Interim Head of People. There had been extensive work undertaken over the last 2 years in relation to Hybrid working and this took account of any changes required through the asset management process. There was information on Hybrid working on the Council's website covering general principles of hybrid working, smart ways of working; team agreements and support information for the wellbeing of staff.

The Staff Side referred to some staff still using old laptops and queried if these would be refreshed. It was advised that the capital programme was currently being reviewed and the ICT refresh was part of this discussion. There may be some flexibility with staff who have old laptops being provided with new laptops already purchased.

The Forum **NOTED** the position.

12. Staff Engagement Survey

The Interim Head of People provided an update on the Staff Engagement Survey. This survey took place last year and work was ongoing to progress work on the survey responses. Services had been asked to set up meetings by the end of June, 2023 with their teams to discuss the corporate themes of the survey. The outcome of these engagement sessions would be for Service Leads to bring forward actions on how they are contributing to the key corporate themes and trade unions would be involved in these discussions.

The Forum **NOTED** the update on the Staff Engagement Survey.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The Forum **AGREED** the following change in date of the next meeting – from Wednesday, 16 August to Thursday, 17 August at 3pm.

The meeting was concluded at 11.50 a.m.