

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 31 May 2023 at 2pm.

Present:

Mr C Aitken (remote)	Mr R Jones
Mr B Boyd	Mr B Lobban
Mr R Bremner (remote)	Mr G MacKenzie (remote)
Mr A Christie	Mr P MacPherson, GMB
Mr M Green	Mr C Munro
Mrs J Hendry	Ms M Reid
Ms M Hutchison (remote)	Mrs T Robertson
Mr P Logue	Ms L Saggars (remote)
Ms B Jarvie (remote)	

Non-Members present:

Mr M Baird	Mr D Louden (remote)
Mr C Ballance (remote)	Mr R MacKintosh
Ms S Fanet	Ms K MacLean (remote)
Mr R Gale	Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr A Graham (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Ms L Johnston (remote)	Mr D Millar (remote)

Officials in attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Chief Executive
Mr M MacLeod, Depute Chief Executive
Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property
Ms A Clark, Head of Communities and Engagement, Communities and Place
Mr J Shepherd, Head of ICT & Digital Transformation, Depute Chief Executive
Mr A McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager, Depute Chief Executive
Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property & Facilities Management, Housing and Property
Mr R Campbell, Property and Facilities Management, Housing and Property
Mr A MacDonald, Project Manager, Infrastructure and Environment
Mr D Scott, Service Lead, Corporate Improvement and Redesign, Depute Chief Executive
Ms E MacIver, Principal Engineer (Roads)
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer, Performance and Governance

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Ms M Smith, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, and Mr M Hayes (UNISON).

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were none.

3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2023, which had been approved by the Council on 11 May 2023.

4. Redesign of Highland Council – Work Programme Update Ath-dhealbhadh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd – Cunntas às Ùr mun Phrògram Obrach

There had been circulated Report No RDB/07/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- clarification was sought and provided on the completeness of the relocation of staff from the Inverness Town House to Headquarters. Some Housing staff remained in offices elsewhere, and this had been discussed and agreed with team managers. Further information, including on any associated costs, could be provided outwith the meeting if required; and
- the Convenor clarified that all Members were invited to and welcome to attend Redesign Board workshops.

The Board:

- i. **NOTED** the Work Programme Update;
- ii. **NOTED** the proposed series of Redesign Board Workshops to be scheduled for 2023; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the review of the Community Support and Engagement structure is progressed through Redesign.

5. My Council Programme – Progress Update Prògram na Comhairle Agam – Cunntas às ùr mu Adhartas

There had been circulated Report No RDB/08/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the importance of improving the customer contact journey was emphasised;
- it was suggested that, given the specialist skills required to redevelop the Council's website and other projects being undertaken, it might be good value for money to outsource those resources. It was explained that external resources would be sought when appropriate but a significant proportion of the website work was to tackle the content, not the technical structure of the site, which remained up to date. It was also suggested that discussions take place with other Local Authorities and COSLA on their experiences in this regard. Members suggested that the search facility on the Council's website would benefit from improvement;
- several Members pointed out that some customers, particularly the elderly or those with poor internet connections, preferred telephone or face to face contact with the Council. It was clarified that streamlining the website / online service would allow people who preferred to deal with issues online to do this, and free

up resources for the service centre and service points to deal with people whose preference was not to use the internet, and avoid having to take phone calls from customers who had tried and failed to use the internet because, for example, they could not find the information they required. Equitable accessibility for all was key. Areas which attracted high volumes of calls and contact were being focused on;

- it was clarified that the £150k being sought was an initial request to get the project underway. Additional funds would be sought when required;
- the reasons for the recent alteration of hours of operation of the Inverness Service Centre were sought and provided. It was unfortunate that this had not been sufficiently publicised;
- the development of generic email addresses was important, for equity of access to services and to avoid reliance on individual members of staff; and
- further information on timescales, and visualisations of the projects would be useful in future reports.

The Board:

- i. **NOTED** the update against the work of the My Council Programme;
- ii. **NOTED** that a Programme approach will be taken to managing the projects contained within My Council; and
- iii. **AGREED** the proposal to draw down £0.150m from the £0.500m agreed at the Budget Council to support web development work on the My Council project as outlined at section 6 of the report.

6. Renewable Investment in Solar and Battery Storage Tasgadh So-ùrachaidh ann an Stòradh Grèine is Bataraidh

There had been circulated Report No RDB/09/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the proposals in the report were welcomed and should be taken forward as early as possible;
- the cheapest source of energy was energy not used though efficiency and reduction;
- the creation of an energy company was being considered but was not likely to be standard in nature;
- energy produced from landfill gases was not considered renewable and this was not being undertaken at the present time;
- noting that Salix was a main source of funding, information was sought on the ability of individuals to invest in renewable resources. It was clarified that Salix would be the main fund for smaller installations on the estate, but larger solar farms and battery storage would require an investment decision by the Council. It was hoped that Salix funded projects would become self-funding in due course;
- in relation to use of the school estate for solar panels, the existing estate was being brought up to full efficiency and expansion plans would be considered thereafter;
- solar panels in car parks were being considered but to date no site had been found that offered greater potential than putting the panels on the building;
- appropriate training programmes with Skills Development Scotland or UHI should be developed;

- an outline was provided of intended action following consideration of the projects by the Council on 29 June 2023, with the aim of coming to the Board with an investment decision by March 2024;
- the importance of generating energy, rather than just supplying it, was emphasised;
- information was sought and provided on discussions underway with insurers in response to fire safety concerns around the installation of solar panels on schools. Some mitigation in the form of changes to maintenance regimes to tackle this was likely but progress was encouraging;
- information was sought and provided on possible returns on investment and the likely timescales for connection to the grid, and with this being between 2 to 15 years, depending on site issues; and
- the North of Scotland was the biggest producer of renewable energy and it was important to continue to work to ensure the Highlands received appropriate benefits in return.

The Board:

- i. **NOTED** progress to date in evaluating and identifying a plan of action to ensure all energy assets across the Council estate provides optimum cost-saving benefits to the Council;
- ii. **AGREED** the proposed changes for the operation of self-generating assets to ensure future management and reporting reflect the importance of energy assets within the Council;
- iii. **NOTED** the potential for developing a commercial onsite Power purchase agreement (PPA) model across tenanted properties within the Council's commercial estate;
- iv. **AGREED** the development of a pilot business case for the development of solar PPA self-generation model;
- v. **NOTED** progress to date in identifying and assessing the potential for the development of utility-level solar generation and storage on Council owned land;
- vi. **AGREED** the engagement of an independent Grid consultant to establish grid constraint and connection viability across all sites;
- vii. **AGREED** the development of sites identified as viable to a full business plan for development potential; and
- viii. **AGREED** that a separate report is brought to Highland Council to seek investment funds to proceed to investment decision stage on the projects set out in the report.

The meeting ended at 3pm.