

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Corporate Resources Committee** held in the Chamber, Council Headquarters, Inverness on Thursday 8 June 2023 at 10.30 am.

Present:

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

Non-Members also present:

Mr C Ballance (Remote)	Mr K Gowans (Remote)
Mr J Finlayson	Mr J McGillivray (Remote)
Ms S Fanet (Remote)	

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Interim Chief Executive
Mr M MacLeod, Interim Depute Chief Executive
Mr P Nevin, Interim ECO Performance and Governance
Mr B Porter, Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism, Resources and Finance
Mrs S McKandie, Head of Revenues and Customer Services, Resources and Finance
Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property and Facilities Management
Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR, Resources and Finance
Ms G Falconer, Occupational, Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager, Resources & Finance
Mr S Fraser, Head of Legal and Governance, Performance and Governance
Mrs O Marsh, Committee Officer, Performance & 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 M Green and Mr A Rhind.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following:

- Transparency Statement: Item 5c – Mr A Christie

3. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

The Chair referred to the following items of good news:-

Carer Positive Policy – It was highlighted that this week was Carers' week and the Council had formally launched its Carer Positive Policy. The policy recognised the valued role its employees had with caring responsibilities. The policy would better support the needs of staff with caring responsibilities and sought to encourage staff to join a carer support network. Staff would be eligible for up to 5 day's paid leave to undertake caring responsibilities.

Staff Recognition Awards – the Staff Recognition Awards Ceremony was to be held on 9 June, 2023. It was great to see staff being recognised for their dedicated work and valuable input to the range of services to the public as well as internal customers. A selection of shortlisted nominations from the Services were highlighted as – Project Dochas - ICT; Livestreaming of Elections; Ukrainian Refugee Resettlement; Green Freeport and Preventing Poverty through Partnerships.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news stories.

4. **Late Submission of Expenses Claims** **A' Cur A-steach airson Cosgaisean Anmoch**

It had previously been agreed by the Corporate Resources Committee that late submissions of Elected Members expenses claims would be presented to the Committee for approval.

The Committee **APPROVED** the following claims:

- i. Mr Laurie Fraser £30.60 mileage for the months of January and February 2023; and
- ii. Mr Thomas MacLennan £1,116.90 mileage for the months of May, June, August, September, October, November and December 2022 and January 2023.

5. **Performance Monitoring - 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023** **Sgrùdadh Coileanaidh – 1 Faoilleach 2023 gu 31 Màrt 2023**

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/10/23 by the Interim Chief Executive/Interim Depute Chief Executive.

In discussion, it was highlighted that there was a lack in consistency in the 3 Services performance reports on how the information was presented and it would be preferable to see them in the same format to make it easier for Members to compare performance among the three Services. It was confirmed that the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance & Governance was currently reviewing consistency of performance reporting.

It was welcomed that staff absences were being well managed. Also, in relation to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests performance was quite varied, and it was queried if this was a result of some requests being more complex to answer than others. Also, in order to minimise work for staff it was queried if publishing information online in an open data format would reduce the number of FOI requests and it was confirmed that

this was something that was being looked at.

In relation to the statistics on ICT services it was highlighted that the focus was always on customer satisfaction and other statistical information shown was more likely to be used inhouse to look at, for example, trends in the service provided. In relation to the number of incidents, these had reduced significantly since 2019 and the reason incidents were still showing as Amber was that the easier incidents had been dealt with quickly, leaving more complex incidents to be resolved which by their nature took a longer period of time to deal with. Further, there was an ICT Strategy Programme and one strand of this dealt with how to improve processes. Also, the annual ICT Services survey was currently taking place and the outcomes from this would be reported to a future Committee meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** performance information provided in the report.

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

There had been circulated Report No RES/11/23 by the Interim Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance.

The Committee **NOTED** the performance information provided in the report.

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

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 & Strathspey Citizen's 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/12/23 by the Interim Chief Executive.

In particular, it was noted that the Council Tax collection rate had increased despite the cost of living crises. The Non Domestic Rate collection rate had also increased and was a reflection on how businesses had not fallen behind on their payments and this was commended.

There was a large number of freedom of information (FOI) requests and it was queried where the majority of these came from. It was advised that they tended to come from a variety of sources such as media, members of public and a breakdown of where FOIs came from would be provided to Councillor C Munro. If there was more information the Council could provide proactively, then FOI requests could be pointed in the direction of where that information was available and the FOI performance results would be better.

The Committee **NOTED** the:

- i. the Service's performance information; and
- ii. the update provided regarding the People and Finance Systems Programme.

**6. Treasury Management - Summary of Transactions
Rianachd Ionmhais - Geàrr-chunntas Ghnothaichean**

There had been circulated Report No RES/13/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism,.

Following commentary on the report by the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism, Members raised the following main points:-

- there was a requirement in the Code of Practice for Treasury Management that there was a programme of Elected Member training on treasury matters and training sessions for Members would be arranged;
- It was queried if the Public Works Loan Board were comfortable with the Council's level of borrowing. Also, if other lenders were raising any questions about the Council's level of borrowing. It was advised that the Prudential Code gave discretion to the Council to set its level of borrowing in line with the Code and borrowing should be prudent, affordable and sustainable. Members were aware of the financial challenges facing the Council and the affordability of the capital programme was a significant risk to the Council and there had been an acknowledgement by the Council that the capital programme had to be reviewed.

The Committee **NOTED** the Treasury Management Summary of Transactions reports for the period from 1 January to 31 March 2023.

**7. Financial assessment of Notices of Motion
Measadh Ionmhasail air Brathan Gluasaid**

**a. Lets
Màil**

There had been circulated Report No RES/14/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

It was highlighted that it was the Committee's role to assess the financial information as set out in the report and any wider matters in accordance with Standing Orders relating to the Conduct of Meetings were matters for the Council. There was a review of governance arrangements which would go before Council later in the year.

Members raised the following main points:-

- It was queried how the financial impact to communities from services being slowly eroded due to punitive charges to Lets activity could be quantified. Also, it was queried that if charitable organisations stopped using the range of facilities currently on offer through letting activity, what impact would there be on income. A point was made that the correct place to discuss the impact of charges on letting activity was at full Council. The Committee's role was to assess the financial information provided.
- The Scottish Government had announced a £4m programme for after school care and Officers were engaging with the Government on the detail of this. A report on this would be reported to the Education Committee.
- The likely costs of the Notice of Motion was from £128,000 to £192,000 per annum. It was confirmed an assessment of savings opportunities had not been undertaken as this was not the purpose of the financial assessment on the Notice of Motion.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the financial assessment of the Notice of Motion relating to lets;
- ii. the financial implications of the Notice of Motion which were assessed as in the region of £128,000 to £192,000 per annum;
- iii. the financial risks and implications as set out in the report, and that a clear and agreed funding solution would need identified for the Notice of Motion to progress; and
- iv. that the Notice of Motion and the financial assessment will be considered by
i. Council on 29 June.

**b. NC500 Waste Collection
Togail Sgudail NC500**

There had been circulated Report No RES/15/23 by the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercialism.

In discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- It was queried if any modelling had been undertaken on increased costs to the Council for clearing up fly tipping due to a lack of provision of waste bins. It was advised that the financial assessment related to the additional direct costs of service delivery for waste collection and it did not reflect any costs relating to clearing up fly tipping.
- It was queried what additional costs there had been to deal with fly tipping and overflowing bins and the financial implications to the Council for the reputational damage of overflowing bins. It was advised that this had not been financially assessed as part of the financial assessment of the notice of motion.
- A point was made that Standing Orders should be changed in order that financial assessments of notice of motions did not have to be referred to the Corporate Resources Committee, but could instead be considered at full Council along with the wider implications of notice of motions.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the financial assessment of the Notice of Motion relating to NC500 Waste Collection;
- ii. the financial implications of the Notice of Motion which were assessed as £110,000 for 2023 and a reduced 17 week period, or £150,000 on a recurring basis for an annual 22 week period;
- iii. the financial risks and implications as set out in the report, and that a clear and agreed funding solution would need identified for the Notice of Motion to progress; and
- iv. that the Notice of Motion and the financial assessment will be considered by Council on 29 June.

**8. Changes to SFRS response to Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS)
Seirbheis Smàlaidh & Teasairginn na h-Alba – atharrachadh ann a bhith a’ freagairt ghlagan/ghairmean fèin-obrachail**

There had been circulated Report No RES/16/23 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, there was concern regarding the change to Scottish Fire and Rescue (SFRS) responses to workplace automatic fire detection signals. For example, there

were schools in remote areas and the Responsible Premises Officers could live some distance from these sites and by the time they reached the site schools could already have been destroyed by fire. The number of false alarms in Highland was not excessive and it seemed this was a financially driven policy to stop responding to automatic fire detection signals which was inappropriate for a large area like Highland. This change could lead to substantial financial implications to the Council and ultimately cost lives. It was requested that the Committee respond to the SFRS that it felt the policy was inappropriate for Highland.

It was advised that there would not be any financial implications from the Council's insurers as a result of this change in policy. Also, there was a review of the Responsible Premises Officer function and refreshing RPOs for all buildings. Therefore, there was a package of measures on how to deal with this issue.

Given the strength of feeling by Members against the SFRS change in policy, it was Members' view that a letter be sent on their behalf to the SFRS expressing the concerns of the Committee, the impact the change in policy would have and to ask that dialogue on this matter be kept open. It was also decided to remove the recommendation to take Fire Alarm auto diallers offline during normal working hours.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i **NOTED** the change to SFRS responses to workplace automatic fire detection signals;
- ii **NOTED** the changes to be made to the programming of automatic fire detection systems, i.e. Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) to be notified when single heat detector, two smoke detectors or sprinkler system activated;
- iii **NOTED** the various implications set out in the report in section 3, in particular the Resource implications regarding options for a suitable Highland-wide out of hours callout process, including potential to contract a security company to provide a 24hr keyholder response service;
- iv **AGREED** to remove the recommendation to take Fire Alarm auto diallers 'offline' during normal working hours;
- v **AGREED** the actions coming out of the Next Steps section at section 6 of the report; and
- vi **AGREED** that a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to the SFRS expressing the concerns the Committee has to the changes to the SFRS response to Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals, the impact this would have and to ask that dialogue is kept open on this matter particularly on the impact it would have in rural areas.

9. **Non Domestic Rates Appeals Committee** **Comataidh Ath-thagraidhean nan Reataichean Neo-dhachaigheil**

There had been circulated Report No RES/17/23 by the Head of Legal and Governance.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the creation of a second, stand-alone Non Domestic Rates Appeal Committee to consider and determine a current appeal; and
- ii. the appointment of Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair; Mr P Oldham; Mr B Lobban, Mr M Green, Mr R Gale to serve on the stand-alone Non Domestic Rates Appeals Committee.

**MINUTES OF MEETINGS
GEÀRR-CHUNNTAS CHOINNEAMHAN**

**10. Minutes of Meetings
Geàrr-chunntasan Choinneamhan**

The following Minutes of Meetings had been circulated and:

- i. **APPROVED** - Central Safety Committee – 17 March 2023;
- ii. **APPROVED** - Staff Partnership Forum – 25 May 2023;
- iii. **NOTED** - Appeals & Disputes Committee – – 19 May 2023;
- iv. **NOTED** - Non Domestic Rates Appeals Committee – 23 May, 2023; and
- v. **NOTED** - Employment Release Sub Committee – 29 March 2023

The meeting was closed at 11:50 am.