

## **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 5 December 2023 at 2pm.

### **Present:**

Mr C Aitken (remote)  
Mr M Baird  
Mr B Boyd (remote)  
Mr R Bremner  
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair  
Mr D Fraser (remote)

Mrs J Hendry  
Ms M Hutchison (remote)  
Mr R Jones  
Mr B Lobban  
Mrs T Robertson  
Ms M Smith

### **Non-Members present:**

Mr C Ballance (remote)  
Dr C Birt  
Mr J Bruce  
Ms S Fanet (remote)  
Mr J Finlayson  
Mr K Gowans (remote)  
Ms L Johnstone (remote)  
Mr D Loudon  
Mr R MacKintosh

Ms K MacLean  
Mr D Macpherson  
Mr J McGillivray (remote)  
Mr D Millar  
Mr P Oldham  
Mrs M Reid  
Mr K Rosie  
Ms M Ross  
Mr R Stewart (remote)

### **Trade Union reps present:**

Mr J Gibson, UNISON

### **Officials in attendance:**

Ms K Lackie, Interim Depute Chief Executive  
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure, Environment & Economy  
Mr A Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place  
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property  
Mr P Nevin, Interim Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance  
Mr J Shepherd, Head of ICT & Digital Transformation  
Mr D Scott, Service Lead, Corporate Improvement and Redesign  
Mr M Bailey, Programme Manager, City Deal  
Ms A Smith, Project Manager, Old Man of Storr  
Ms A Brown, Principal Project Manager, Strategic Improvement  
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

### **Mr B Lobban in the Chair**

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

##### **Leisgeulan**

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie (substituted by Mr M Baird), Mr C Munro, Mr G MacKenzie, Mr M Green, Ms B Jarvie, and Ms L Saggars.

## 2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were none.

## 3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Board **NOTED** the minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2023, which had been approved by the Council on 14 September 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/15/23 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- information was sought on expected progress with the Improved Road Condition and Strategic Roads and Asset Management Plan, and a summary was provided, including the focus on process improvement, the study of structural issues, and the efficient use of plant and machinery, with the next steps being operational changes and improved efficiencies. A Roads Redesign workshop was scheduled for 17 January 2024;
- in relation to the Trades Framework Redesign, changes since the withdrawal of the previous Trades Framework in March 2020 were queried. These included lessons learnt from what had not worked previously, as summarised in paragraph 6.2 of the report;
- it was queried, in relation to the Trades Framework Redesign, what guarantees would be put in place to ensure external employers were paying their employees an acceptable rate, and what guarantees would be put in place to ensure that work would only be put out to external suppliers, after first maximising the use of all trades within the Highland Council. Assurance was provided that these would form key points of the review and that Trade Union representatives would be involved in the review process; and
- the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property, confirmed that this report was an update of matters arising and progress from the previous Redesign Board of 30 August 2023. It was confirmed that a separate paper would be taken to Council on 14 December 2023 setting out, amongst other matters, the general condition of assets, estimated costs to remedy, and an expansion of the assets in scope for rationalisation.

The Board:-

- i. **NOTED** the Work Programme Update; and
- ii. **AGREED** the appointment of Member representatives to support the Trade Framework Redesign project and that Members interested in this should email the Convener or the Head of ICT & Digital Transformation.

## 5. Asset Management

## Stiùireadh So-mhaoin

There had been circulated Report No RDB/16/24 by the Executive Chief Officer, Property and Housing.

During discussion, the Convener queried whether the development potential of the Ardross Street sandstone building had been discussed with any developers and it was explained that this would be checked prior to the Council meeting on 14 December 2023. Discussions had been undertaken with architects and planners, and the estimated cost to develop residential units meant it was unsuitable for affordable housing, and unlikely to be attractive to developer given the Inverness housing market, at an estimated development cost of £400k for a 2-bedroom unit.

The Board:

- i. **AGREED** that the Ardross Street sandstone building at Headquarters in Inverness was retained for use as office accommodation to allow the potential demolition of other blocks that were in poorer condition and that would require significant capital and maintenance investment in the coming years, subject to the Executive Chief Officer, Housing and Property, confirming to the Convener, prior to the Council meeting on 14 December 2023, whether the development potential of the building had been discussed with any developers; and
- ii. **NOTED** the progress on the other workstreams outlined in this report.

## 6. The Storr – Progress Update 23/24 An Stòr – Cunntas air Adhartas 23/24

There had been circulated Report No RDB/17/25 by the Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

A presentation was provided covering current facilities, the approach to the project, a high-level financial summary, the aims of and progress with the project, achievements, future actions and community development opportunities, and how to measure success post April 2024, when the Storr Centre was expected to complete.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- officers and members of the local community were thanked for their work, and for the engagement and partnership working that had taken place;
- assurance was sought and provided that income from the project, nett of costs, would be shared equally;
- concerns were expressed in relation to the parking, with the car park often being full from 10am during summer months. Mitigation included potential for a small amount of car park expansion, and the availability of staff to act as parking stewards when required. Overall, parking was likely to remain a challenge given the popularity of the location, and it was hoped that publicity for other attractions in the Highland could help to spread the footfall at attractions more evenly;
- the importance of seeking other similar income generating projects across the Highlands was emphasised, especially those with year-round opportunities; and

- it was vital that Electric Vehicle charging points were in good working order, and promptly repaired when necessary.

The Board **NOTED**:

- i. the ongoing local Member involvement and established governance through an Officer-led cross-Service Project Board;
- ii. the ongoing Partnership working including with Skye Iconic Sites Project, NatureScot, SkyeConnect, and local community;
- iii. the significant achievements delivered by the Project and the continued progress being made;
- iv. the future growth opportunities for the site for both Council and local economy; and
- v. the commitment to measuring performance including regular reports to the Skye & Raasay Area Committee

## **7. Income Generation Togail Teachd-a-steach**

There had been circulated Report No. RDB/18/23 by the Executive Chief Officers for Communities & Place, and for Infrastructure, Environment & Economy.

A presentation was provided on the review of existing fees & charges and proposals for generating new sources of income from tourism, including The Storr, future projects, and campervans. Information was provided on the feedback received at the time of writing from the recent budget simulator consultation, and the approximate levels of income generation potential of various levels of fee & charges increases at and in excess of inflation (Consumer Prices Index).

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- a breakdown of income from the high-level list of fees & charges detailed in Appendix 1 was sought and would be provided in the budget reports to Council on 29 Feb 2024;
- with reference to paragraph 6.3 in the report, Members queried whether income from the Storr project would be used to equal out other projects, and it was pointed out that such decisions were largely political, and for Members to consider as part of the budget setting process;
- it was noted that feedback from the budget simulator indicated more than half of respondents favoured of a 15% increase in fees & charges;
- there was merit in establishing a voluntary payment scheme for campervans, but consideration was required to ensure fairness and distinguish between different types of campervan users;
- if the Council made wider use of direct debits, for example for garden waste, or parking permit payments, there could be benefits in terms of income generation and cost reduction;
- it was queried whether garden waste could be used to generate income via composting; and
- it would be beneficial if the Council could provide more low charge, short-term campervan stances, especially on Skye where campsites were generally full from early in the day during summer months.

The Board:

- i. **NOTED** the work done to consider mechanisms to generate income as part of wider budget considerations;
- ii. **AGREED** that these propositions will be considered by and recommended to Council in relation to the upcoming three year budget setting process;
- iii. **REFLECTED** on any other areas of income generation they would like officers to consider within our available powers; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the Income Generation Board described in the paper be established and recommended to Council.

## **8. My Council Programme - Customer Charter Prògram na Comhairle Agam – Cairt Luchd-cleachdaidh**

There had been circulated Report No RDB/19/26 by the Interim Depute Chief Executive.

During discussion, the positive, inclusive language used in the Charter was welcomed. It was important to ensure people without internet access, particularly elderly people, were not neglected in relation to their ability to contact the Council, and it was explained that improving online access for those who preferred it would free up resources and reduce queues for those wishing to use more traditional methods of contact, such as telephone or face to face.

The Convener suggested that Members email the Interim Depute Chief Executive with any further suggestions.

The Board **NOTED** the draft Customer Charter.

The meeting ended at 3.15pm