

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Redesign Board of the Highland Council** held in Committee Rooms 1 & 2, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on 2 October 2024 at 11am.

Members present:

Mr M Baird
Mr B Boyd
Mr R Bremner
Mr A Christie
Mr M Green
Mrs J Hendry
Ms B Jarvie
Mr R Jones

Mr G MacKenzie
Mr A MacKintosh
Mr D Macpherson
Mr C Munro
Mrs T Robertson
Ms L Saggars
Ms C A Stewart, GMB

Non-Members present:

Ms A Atkin
Mrs M Cockburn
Ms T Collier
Mr R Gale
Mr J Grafton
Ms M Hutchison
Mr S Kennedy
Ms E Knox
Mr R MacKintosh

Ms K MacLean
Ms J McEwan
Mr J McGillivray
Mr P Oldham
Mrs M Paterson
Mrs M Reid
Ms M Ross
Ms K Willis

Participating Officials:

Mr A Gunn, Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Ms A Clark, Chief Officer, Housing and Communities
Mr J Shepherd, Chief Officer, Business Solutions
Ms H Airey, Project Manager (Strategic Improvement)
Ms J Ross, Customer Service Delivery Manager
Mr B Gray, Catering Operations Manager
Ms S Nield, Catering Services Manager
Ms F MacBain, Senior Committee Officer

Mr R Bremner in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Leisgeulan

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mr B Lobban, Mr J Gibson (Unison), Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr D Fraser, Mr P Logue.

2. Declarations of Interest

Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were none.

3. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Board **NOTED** the minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2024, which had been approved by the Council on 27 June 2024.


4. Customer Experience Strategy Ro-innleachd Eòlas Luchd-cleachdaidh

There had been circulated Report No RDB/07/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the strategy was welcomed, but it was suggested that more flexibility is needed in our approach to customer contact, with reference to periods of change, for example the introduction of a new service, when customer contact was likely to increase. There was a tendency for customers to contact local Members if they were unable to receive prompt attention from officers, and it was queried whether staff could be sourced from other departments during such times, as part of the One Council ideology;
- the need to implement the strategy as soon as possible was emphasised;
- it was suggested that Members should not be grouped with staff in the strategy, noting the role of a Member to scrutinise and hold officers to account. Other Members responded that they did not object to being included in the strategy in the manner detailed, given their role as part of an escalation process. The Chief Officer, Housing and Communities, explained the position of Members in the strategy was as internal customers of the Council and the importance of ensuring they received information in a timely manner. It was clarified that no criticism of staff was implied by the comment; and
- a summary was sought and provided of the monitoring and reporting process for the strategy.

The Board:

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- i. **NOTED** the work undertaken to develop the Strategy; and
 - ii. **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to the Council that the Strategy be adopted.

5. Food in Schools Biadh ann an Sgoiltean

There had been circulated Report No RDB/08/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- concern was expressed at the levels of nitrates in food, and the importance of sourcing suppliers that avoided nitrates and focused on high quality, organic or local food. Aside from the health implications, which were briefly summarised, high levels of nitrates in food could negatively impact the take-up rates of school meals. Reference was also made to the possible health concerns around microwaves;

- if children and young people were not offered food they wanted to eat, the take-up rates of school meals, including free school meals, would drop, and the budgetary implications of this were summarised;
- some Members felt the aims of the strategy were not sufficiently clear, and referred to the conflict between the various aims, such as to save money, to increase uptake, and to promote healthier eating habits. Other Members suggested the situation was more complex and nuanced, and it was hoped the Working Group would take this forward;
- engagement with children and young people on this was vital and school cooks were suggested as likely to know which meals were the popular with children;
- other issues raised included waste reduction, local procurement, and environmentally friendly processes, such as reducing the use of plastic wrapping;
- the value to children of the ‘farm to fork’ and similar approaches was emphasised, with some Members suggesting schools could do more in this area, including the involvement of children in meal preparation, while others felt that schools already operated on full timetables;
- attention was drawn to the fundamental aim of ensuring children were fed, and that some families relied on their children receiving a hot meal at school. It was suggested there was little point in providing more costly ‘healthy’ food if the children were unlikely to eat it;
- other issues raised included the need to provide sufficient time and space for children to eat and socialise at school, to ensure they had independence and choice, to re-consider the merits of the dinner trays used in schools, and to involve children in growing food and in masterchef-type competitions;
- once a policy had been agreed, the project should be piloted in a small number of schools prior to a full roll-out;
- the catering operations manager offer to look into an anecdote about a tray of food being wasted at a school;
- it was suggested that AI, for example ChatGPT, might be useful to help analyse data; and
- Mr Christie asked that the Board agree to invite senior secondary school pupils to join the Working Group, and Mr Bremner advised that this would be considered by the Working Group.

The Board:

- i. **NOTED** the contents of the report including the outputs from the Redesign Board Workshop held on 4 September 24;
- ii. **AGREED** the next steps for “Food in Schools” as outlined at section 5.1; and
- iii. **AGREED** Members interested in appointment to the Working Group should email the Convenor in the first instance.

The meeting ended at 11.55am.