

**The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum –
Elected Members/Staff Side Group**

Minutes of Meeting of The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum held in Council Headquarters, Inverness on **Thursday 20 February 2025 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

Employer’s Representatives:

Mr R Bremner	Mr B Lobban
Mr J Finlayson (remote)	Mr D Louden
Mr K Gowans	Mr G Mackenzie (remote)

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr J Gibson, UNISON	Mr R Boyle (UNITE)
Mrs C A Stewart (GMB)	

In attendance:

Mrs K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Mr A Gunn (**AG**), Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate
Mr M MacLeod, Assistant Chief Executive – Place (remote)
Mr B Porter, Chief Officer Corporate Finance
Ms E Barrie (**EB**), Head of People, Corporate
Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers’ Side
Mr A MacInnes, Senior Committee Officer, Corporate

Mr B Lobban in the Chair

SUBJECT/DECISION

ACTION

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Christie from the Employer’s Side and Ms L A MacAskill (GMB), Ms L MacKay (Unison), Ms M Macrae (RCN) from the Staff Side.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement

Transparency Statement – Mr K Gowans declared a transparency statement with the items on the agenda as a member of the EIS trade union, however, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the items, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

3. Staff Side items

i New Ways of Working Framework

The Staff Side requested that if employees work patterns are to be changed, trade unions be consulted on this. It was advised that any changes to the New Ways of Working Framework would be done in consultation with trade unions. While there would be no material changes to the Framework, it was proposed that current guidance on

flexible and hybrid working be consolidated and trade unions would be consulted on this. It was important that there was continual dialogue between Managers and employees on any issues regarding working patterns, whilst ensuring the business needs of the Council are met.

ii Concerns about disciplinary and grievance appeal investigations; Length of time for investigations to conclude; Investigating officer's opinions on allegations

The Staff Side were concerned that the disciplinary/grievance process was taking too long and that staff and trade unions were not being kept informed of progress on cases. In response, there was a process where there should be regular communication with employees on their case. In noting the Staff Side concerns, an undertaking was given for Officers to meet with trade unions to discuss this issue further as it was important that disciplinary/grievance policies were followed.

AG/EB

4. Budget Briefing

The Chief Officer Corporate Finance provided a briefing on the budget to be presented to full Council on 6 March. The outlook for the budget was much improved and there was a relatively modest residual budget gap still to be closed. Budget assumptions took account of savings previously agreed by Council, an increase in Government grant settlement; income from the waste extended producer responsibility levy; budget reserves; Council tax planning assumptions and budget pressures, such as increase in Employers national insurance contributions.

Further options would require to be considered to close the budget gap in order to provide a balanced budget. The benefit of a multi year budget planning approach was highlighted and meant the Council had time to consider options for producing a balanced budget in future years.

The Forum **Noted** the budget briefing.

5. Investors in People update

The Forum were updated on progress relating to Investors in People (IIP). Investors in People was a recognition that an organisation looks to improve performance and realise objectives through the management and development of its people.

It was intended to introduce this initiative as a pilot project in the Corporate Cluster. An IIP survey would be carried out to check where the organisation was currently at compared to the various elements of the IIP. The survey would be independently assessed.

Focus groups would be set up comprising managers and staff with the aim of developing an action plan based on what areas the organisation was doing well and what areas needed improvement. A working group comprising managers, staff and young people would support this process.

An overview of the principles, indicators, themes and approach to IIP was provided. There was funding for a dedicated post to drive IIP in the Council. IIP would be rolled out to Place and People Clusters in due course and updates on progress would continue to be provided to trade unions.

The Forum **Noted** the update on Investors in People.

6. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated the minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on 7 November 2024, the terms of which were **Approved**.

7. Matters Arising from Minutes

The following updates on actions from the last meeting were provided:-

i Action - It would be checked if Staff Side representatives were required to make declarations of interest/transparency statements.

Update – Staff Side representatives may make a declaration of interest and leave the meeting for that item. A transparency statement would not apply to staff side representatives.

ii Action - A further meeting with trade union representatives to explain how staff access Myview would be arranged.

Update - Completed.

iii Action - all staff who were not office based, were to have a Council e-mail address so that they could access Corporate systems. An update on progress with this project and timeline for completion would be provided at the next meeting.

Update circulated on progress with this project. Further updates would be provided to the Staff Side.

iv Action - high level statistics on the number of grievances and how long they took to complete would be submitted to future meetings of the Forum.

Update - The following data was provided at the meeting for the last 12 month period:- Disciplinary cases concluded – 17; average length of time from start of disciplinary process to completion – 14 weeks; current grievance/disciplinary open cases – 30.

Cases are monitored to ensure these were carried out as quickly as possible and any delays in the process are addressed wherever practicable. The provision of more data, including presented in tabular format is work in progress and will continue to be provided at these meetings.

EB

v Action - it would be checked if members of the Pension scheme had electronic access to their pension information on the new Altair Pensions system.

Update - Completed.

8. Service Trade Union Liaison Meetings

There were circulated the following Service Trade Union Liaison Minutes of Meetings, the terms of which were **Noted**:-

- i. Place – 13 November 2024;
- ii. Education – 27 November 2024;
- iii. Corporate – 19 December 2024;
- iv. Health & Social Care – 24 January 2025

The meeting concluded at 11.20 a.m.