

MORAY COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Corporate Committee

Tuesday, 25 April 2023

Council Chambers, Council Office, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX

PRESENT

Councillor Theresa Coull, Councillor John Cowe, Councillor John Divers, Councillor Amber Dunbar, Councillor Jérémie Fernandes, Councillor Sandy Keith, Councillor Graham Leadbitter, Councillor Marc Macrae, Councillor Paul McBain, Councillor Shona Morrison, Councillor Bridget Mustard, Councillor Kathleen Robertson, Councillor Derek Ross, Councillor John Stuart

IN ATTENDANCE

Also in attendance at the above meeting were the Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance), Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development), Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance, Chief Financial Officer, Head of HR, ICT and Organisational Development, Stuart Beveridge, Estates Surveyor, Andy Donegan, Customer Development Manager, and Lindsey Robinson, Committee Services Officer, as Clerk to the meeting.

1. Chair

Councillor Bridget Mustard, Chair of the Corporate Committee, chaired the meeting.

2. Declaration of Group Decisions and Members Interests *

In terms of Standing Order 21 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct, there were no declarations from Group Leaders or Spokespersons in regard to any prior decisions taken on how Members will vote on any item on the agenda or any declarations of Member's interests in respect of any item on the agenda.

3. Resolution

The meeting resolved that under Section 50A (4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, the public and media representatives be excluded from the meeting for Items 17, 18 and 19 of business on the grounds that they involves the likely disclosure of exempt information of the class described in relevant Paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

Paragraph Number of Minute	Paragraph Number of Schedule 7a and Reason
17	8 – Information of the amount of expenditure proposed to be incurred by the Authority.
18	1 – Information relating to staffing matters; and 11 – Information relating to ant consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations.
19	6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person(s)

4. Minute of Meeting of the Corporate Committee of 31 January 2023

The minute of the meeting of the Corporate Committee dated 31 January 2023 was submitted and approved.

5. Written Questions **

The Committee noted that no written questions had been submitted.

6. Ward Budgets

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) invited the Committee to agree expenditure of Ward budgets in 2023/24.

During consideration, Councillor Mustard, seconded by Councillor Ross, moved the recommendations as written in the report.

Councillor Morrison, seconded by Councillor Coull, moved an amendment to change the recommendations as follows:

- i. in order to empower communities, ward budgets should be allocated for spend using a system of Participatory Budgeting;
- ii. that the Community Support Unit is tasked with bringing forward a proposal on how this may be achieved; and
- iii. that further consideration is given, ahead of the next budget, to forming a recurring capital allocation for participatory budgets across all of the Council wards and leveraging in match funding from external and commercial entities wishing to support community activity.

Councillor Coull sought clarification on how people know to apply for it and what the criteria was.

In response, the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) advised that the use of criteria was raised at the Admin Group meeting and at the Political Group Leaders meeting and it was agreed that the process should be kept as simple as possible and would be determined through the collective view of local needs as understood by local members.

On a division there voted:-

For the Motion (9)	Councillors Mustard, Ross, Cowe, Divers, Dunbar, Keith, Macrae, McBain and Robertson
For the Amendment (5)	Councillors Morrison, Coull, Fernandes, Leadbitter and Stuart
Abstentions (0)	

Accordingly the motion became the finding of the meeting and the Committee agreed that:

- i. potential expenditure is identified by members based on their local knowledge and understanding of minor works/concerns in their ward;

- ii. authority is delegated to the Chief Financial Officer to authorise expenditure throughout the year until the budgets are exhausted if two thirds or more (3 in a 4 member ward) of local members are in agreement as to proposed expenditure; and
- iii. if the agreement of at least two thirds of local members cannot be reached then proposals will be brought to Corporate Committee for consideration.

7. Best Value Progress Report on Moray Council

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) informed the Committee of the latest progress on the Best Value Assurance Review Strategic Action Plan.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to note progress made on the Best Value Assurance Report Strategic Action Plan shown in Appendix 1.

8. Improvement and Modernisation Programme

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) informed the Committee of the progress made in developing the projects set out in the Council's Improvement and Modernisation Programme (IMP).

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to:

- i. note progress on the projects set out in the Council's IMP; and
- ii. recognise that the IMP is focussed on financial sustainability and to assist in managing risks associated with the ongoing budget position agrees to reduce the financial commitment to the poverty project and to take this work forward through a different use of resources.

9. Employment Policy Framework Review 2022-23

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) invited the Committee to approve the update on the employment policy framework for 2022-23.

During consideration, Councillor Dunbar sought clarification on the safe driving policy as it states that a voicemail should be left for staff when they are driving. Concern was raised that this would still involve phoning the member of staff who may think to answer if the call was from management.

In response the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) advised that if management know someone is driving they are not to contact them but to stop any confusion it would be taken out of the policy.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to approve the update on the employment policy framework for 2022-23 as follows:

- i. Menopause Policy – this is a new policy which outlines the Council's position with regards to our approach in recognising the impact of this transition on the workforce and our response to this.

- ii. Safe Driving Policy – the policy has been updated following amendments to the Highway Code and streamlined to concisely set out the Council’s requirements for the workforce.

10. 2021-2023 Workforce Planning

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) informed the Committee of the progress made against the interim workforce strategy and plan for the period 2020-2022 and to consider the proposed workforce and organisational development (OD) strategy for the period 2023-2026.

During consideration, Councillor Robertson sought clarification on what measurable outcomes were achieved by the Culture Working Group.

In response, the Chief Executive advised that he would provide that information for the Committee.

Councillor Divers sought clarification on the Culture Working Group meeting without elected members. He was of the opinion that the report says that everything is OK but he has been approached by the Trade Unions with issues.

In response, the Depute Chief Executive advised that the Culture Working Group had completed the work instructed and has now been mainstreamed. The Head of HR, ICT and Organisational Development added that it had been sub-groups that had been meeting not the full working group.

After lengthy discussion, the Chief Executive agreed to speak to all groups to look at the options available around the Culture Working Group and existing framework for raising issues. He further agreed that this would be completed within one month.

Thereafter the Committee agreed:

- i. to note the progress made against the 2020-2022 Interim Workforce Plan;
- ii. to approve the proposed Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy for 2023-26 as set out in Appendix A and Workforce and OD Plan for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix B;
- iii. that the culture work is progressing as a core part of business as usual; and
- iv. to defer the closure of the Culture Working Group until after the findings of the consultation by the Chief Executive.

Councillor Macrae left the meeting during the discussion of this item.

11. Health and Safety Annual Report 2022

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities, Organisational Development) asked the Committee to consider the annual Health and Safety report and approve the progress noted and proposed future actions.

During consideration, Councillor Robertson asked for a breakdown of the violence and aggression incidents by gender.

The Head of HR, ICT and Organisational Development agreed to provide this.

Councillor Leadbitter asked if the same could be provided for the perpetrators of the violence and aggression incidents.

The Head of HR, ICT and Organisational Development advised that this information may not be easily obtained, but that if it was not too time consuming for officers it would be fed back to the Committee.

Councillor McBain asked if there could be consistency across the graphs and figures and if they could show the figure and the percentage.

This was agreed by the Head of HR, ICT and Organisational Development.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to:

- i. note the content of the annual health and safety report, as set out in Appendix 1, and the progress towards the outcomes established in the last report; and
- ii. approve the proposed future actions for 2023.

12. Public Performance Report 2021-22

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) asked the Committee to consider the Public Performance Report 2021-22 in its reporting of actions and performances of Council services against Corporate Plan priorities.

During consideration Councillor Coull sought clarification on the last page of Appendix 1 where it states that £2.6 million was spent on the replacement bridge in Lossiemouth. She stated that this was Scottish Government funding.

In response, the Head of HR, ICT and Organisational Development advised that if the report was inaccurate it would be corrected.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to approve the Public Performance Report 2021-22 in its reporting of Council performance and progress against Corporate Plan Priorities.

13. Customer Charter Update

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) invited the Committee to consider and approve the updated Customer Charter in Appendix 1.

During consideration Councillor Coull sought clarification on the wording around a safe, confidential space being available.

In response the Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance agreed to include wording that a private space would be available to members of the public if they required it.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to approve the updated Customer Charter.

14. Freephone Numbers for Service Users

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) provided the Committee on the cost and impact of implementing free telephone access to Council services.

During consideration Councillor Fernandes asked if there was the possibility of having one free telephone line for those in crisis, suffering mental health challenges, struggling with the cost of living, or dealing with domestic violence.

In response, the Customer Development Manager advised that he would be happy to bring a report back to Committee on this.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed to note the background and cost of customer telephone contact with the Council and agreed that:

- i. existing local rate calls are retained for customers who contact the Council by telephone;
- ii. the availability of call back continues to be promoted for those who are unable to phone for financial reasons;
- iii. free telephone access is retained at the Elgin HQ reception and Information Hubs; and
- iv. officers will investigate the costs of having one free telephone line for people in crisis and report back to a future committee.

15. Strathisla Community Council

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) informed the Committee of membership issues in relation to the Strathisla Community Council and recommended the dissolution of the community council as a result of these.

During consideration, Councillor Coull, seconded by Councillor Morrison, moved that the recommendation should be to extend the supported status of the Community Council for a further 3 months and to look into a merger with Keith Community Council.

In response, the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) advised that to do a merger would involve a review of the Community Councils and there would be resource and capacity issues in doing this.

Councillor Ross stated he had reservations on an amalgamation between the two Community Councils.

Following further consideration, the Committee agreed to continue the supported status of the Community Council for a further 3 month period to allow the membership issues to be resolved and a further report to be brought to Committee if necessary.

16. Question Time ***

Under reference to paragraph 6 of the minute of the meeting of this Committee dated 31 January 2023, Councillor Could sought an update on the Fife Keith pavilion.

In response the Chief Financial Officer advised that there are a couple of groups looking at it and these were being assessed by officers and report will come back to Committee.

Under reference to paragraph 8 of the minute of the meeting of this Committee dated 31 January 2023, Councillor Robertson sought an update as to when a report on the consultation on car park charges could be expected.

In response the Chief Financial Officer advised a report would be due after recess.

Under reference to paragraph 9 of the minute of the meeting of this Committee dated 31 January 2023, Councillor Robertson sought an update on the Volunteer Policy Refresh.

In response the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) advised that consultation with the Community Councils had taken place and report would be brought to the June meeting.

Under reference to paragraph 8 of the minute of the meeting of this Committee dated 31 January 2023, Councillor Keith sought an update from the Chair with regard to writing to COSLA and if there had been a response.

In response, Councillor Mustard advised that the letter was being drafted and a response will be circulated once received.

Councillor Fernandes sought clarification on non-domestic rates as he was not aware that the relief had been cancelled and people were having to re-apply.

In response, the Chief Financial Officer advised that information went out with the recent bills signposting people to the Council website for more information on the changes being made.

Councillor Keith queried if this was a change at Scottish Government Level.

In response, the Chief Financial Officer advised that there are two things that impact NDR, firstly there are periodic re-valuations and the latest one was 1 April 2023 which meant that rates could go up and down. Secondly the Scottish Government changed the thresholds and how the relief is administered. Moray Council administers these on behalf of the Scottish Government and it is a complex process which is why reliefs have been cancelled and people encouraged to re-apply to ensure they are getting the relief in which they are entitled.

17. Forres Flood Alleviation Scheme - Compensation Claim [Para 8]

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) asked the Committee to approve payment of compensation arising from the Forres Flood Alleviation Scheme.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to:

- i. approve the compensation payment as detailed in Section 5 of the report; and
- ii. remit the Legal Services Manager to document the transaction accordingly.

18. Trade Union Facility Time [Para 1 & 11]

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) asked the Committee to determine the Council's position in relation to trade union facility time from April 2023 onwards from the options set out in the report and if required, to recommend to the Council the allocation of budget to cover backfill costs.

During consideration Councillor Ross, seconded by Councillor Keith, moved that there should be a permanent extension of the current arrangements.

Councillor Robertson, seconded by Councillor Dunbar, moved an amendment that there should be a 12 month extension of the current arrangements.

On a division there voted:-

For the Motion (9)

Councillors Ross, Keith, Cowe, Coull, Divers, Fernandes, Leadbitter, Morrison and Stuart

For the Amendment (4)

Councillors Robertson, Dunbar, McBain and Mustard

Abstentions (0)

Accordingly the motion became the finding of the meeting and the Committee agreed:

- i. a permanent extension to the current arrangements; and
- ii. the creation of a budget pressure for future years for backfill costs arising from this.

19. Corporate Scanning Printing and Copying Contract [Para 6]

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) sought authority from the Committee for the award of the corporate scanning, printing and copying contract.

Councillor Macrae rejoined the meeting at this juncture.

During consideration Councillor Robertson asked if the connectivity issues could be looked into and if ways to help those with medical issues could be investigated to save printing off committee papers

In response, the Chief Executive advised that this would be investigated.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to give authority to the Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance to award the tender to the bid which represents the best overall price and quality and to sign the contract on behalf of the Council.