

## **Item: 6**

**Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 7 June 2023.**

### **Orkney College Business Review Short-Life Working Group: Operation and Outcomes**

**Report by Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

To provide an overview of the operation and outcomes of the Orkney College Business Review Short-Life Working Group.

## **2. Recommendations**

The Committee is invited to note:

### **2.1.**

That, on 10 March 2022, the Council established a short life Member Officer Working Group, with a remit to inform a business review and strategic five-year plan for Orkney College.

### **2.2.**

The outcomes from the Orkney College Business Review Short-Life Working Group, as detailed in sections 5 and 6 of this report, resulting in a suite of reports to be considered by the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee on the following matters:

- Governance.
- Staffing Matters.
- Branding.
- Academic Partnership Agreement.
- Strategic Plan.
- Operating Principles.

**It is recommended:**

### **2.3.**

That, as the working group has completed its remit, the Orkney College Business Review Short-life Working Group be disestablished.

### **3. Orkney College Business Review Short-Life Working Group**

#### **3.1.**

On 10 March 2022, the Council established a short life Member Officer Working Group, with a remit to inform a business review and strategic five-year plan for Orkney College. Full details are contained in Appendix 1 to this report.

#### **3.2.**

The Orkney College Business Review Short-Life Working Group was facilitated by Andrew Thomson, Consultant. Neil Simco, Deputy Principal Academic and Research of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) was co-opted onto the Working Group. As the Highlands and Islands Students' Association (HISA) do not currently have a representative at Orkney College, they were not represented.

#### **3.3.**

The working group held six meetings, as detailed in Appendix 2 to this report. Early meetings provided attendees with information on Orkney College's current operations and potential future directions, enabling consideration of a Strategic Plan. Exploration of governance and funding structures, and the College's relationship with the Council and UHI led to the desire to create a set of Operating Principles to guide both College Officers and the Council Officers who work with them. Consideration was also given to whether the College should sign up to the National Recognition and Procedures Agreement (NRPA) and of the potential benefits to Orkney College of using UHI branding.

### **4. Outcome**

#### **4.1.**

The working group has created a greater understanding among elected members and officers of the operations of the College, what it contributes to Orkney, and what it could contribute in the future, and how its unique dual position as part of the Council and an Academic Partner within UHI supports those operations but also provides some challenges with regard to management and governance.

#### **4.2.**

It has created a group of people within the Council and UHI who understand the College and want to support its future development, as well as enhancing the sense of partnership between Orkney College and UHI.

#### **4.3.**

It was the unanimous decision of the Orkney College Business Review Short-Life Working Group to bring a suite of reports to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee, with recommendations which they believe will put Orkney College in a strong position to move forward. These are set out in more detail in section 5 below.

#### **4.4.**

The working group recognised that the position reached came as a result of the journey travelled through six days of collaborative working. It was therefore agreed that Briefing Seminars be delivered to inform elected members, as well as members of the College Management Council Sub-committee, of the background to the reports and allow for discussion. These sessions were held on 27 April and 5 May 2023 for elected members and on 23 May 2023 for members of the College Management Council Sub-committee.

#### **4.5.**

As the working group has completed its remit, it is recommended that the group be disestablished. However, this would be conditional on the suite of reports detailed in section 5 below being approved by Council.

### **5. Reports**

#### **5.1. Governance of Orkney College**

##### **5.1.1.**

Orkney College is part of the Council: the Council employs College staff and owns the assets and liabilities of the college. Orkney College is a partner in UHI and UHI, through grant funding provided by the Scottish Funding Council, is the main funder of both the Further Education and Higher Education provision of the College. Within this context, it is essential to the operation of the College that all parties understand:

- What the various responsibilities are with regard to college governance, both in the context of the college forming part of the Council, and the requirements of UHI and the Scottish Funding Council.
- Who bears these responsibilities.
- How these responsibilities are discharged.
- The relationships between governance and the management role of the College Senior Leadership Team.

##### **5.1.2.**

This report clarifies these items and proposes replacing the College Management Council Sub-committee with a Stakeholder Group.

#### **5.2. Orkney College Staffing**

This report addresses the National Recognition and Procedures Agreement (NRPA) and makes specific recommendations to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee.

#### **5.3. Orkney College Branding**

This report recommends that Orkney College adopt UHI branding.

## **5.4. Academic Partnership Agreement**

This report proposes that the Council sign the Academic Partnership Agreement between UHI and the Council.

## **5.5. Orkney College Strategic Plan**

This report presents a strategic plan for Orkney College, which incorporates elements of both the Council Plan 2023-28 and the UHI Strategic Pillars and Aims and proposes that delivery plans be developed in collaboration with the Stakeholder Group (dependent on that group being established). Once approved, it is further proposed that the delivery plans be monitored by the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.

## **5.6. Orkney College Operating Principles**

This report proposes a set of key principles relating to the operation of Orkney College, including its status as part of the Council and an Academic Partner within UHI which, if approved, will be shared with relevant Council Officers and partners.

# **6. Responding to the Rockborn Review**

## **6.1.**

The Alignment Review (2021) carried out by Rockborn Management Consultants was commissioned by seven rural/island partner colleges of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) to set out options for strategic collaboration structures to deliver sustained provision for the students, staff and communities which those colleges serve individually. The recommendations of the report are that:

- Shetland College completes its proposed merger.
- A merger offers the best benefit to cost and effort for Lews Castle College, Argyll College, NAFC Marine Centre, North Highland College and West Highland College.
- Orkney Islands Council uses the information in the report regarding the position of Shetland and the other partner colleges in the study to consider whether Orkney College has a greater ability to serve the islands' needs and opportunities as a stand-alone organisation – where it would be likely to be subject to the same vulnerabilities as Shetland without the subsidy - or become part of a bigger entity to realise more effectively the economies of scale.

## **6.2.**

Since the review was published, Shetland College has completed its local merger of Shetland College UHI, NAFC Marine Centre and Train Scotland; the new entity is named UHI Shetland. Lews Castle College (now UHI Outer Hebrides) North Highland College (now UHI North Highland) and West Highland College (now UHI West Highland) are in the process of merging, to become UHI North, West and Hebrides.

### **6.3.**

Issues raised by the Rockborn Review are addressed in the reports identified at section 5 above.

## **7. Responding to the Thomson Review**

### **7.1.**

The review commissioned by Orkney College and carried out by Andrew Thomson made the following proposals:

“A. Understand and accept the inherent value of the College to Orkney and make it a central partner for the future in social and economic developments, being clear about:

- The actual finances and financial performance of the College.
- The legal status of Orkney College UHI.
- How the College is funded and what this says about how it is managed.
- The complications of being funded through UHI but being accounted for as part of the Council.
- The exceptional return on investment achieved by the College for Orkney.

B. Appreciate and nurture the vital partnerships with the Council, the UHI and the economy and community.

C. Endorse and act on the proposals for FE, HE and College innovation.”

### **7.2.**

Proposals A and B have been defining strands throughout the work of the working group, which has created a greater understanding among elected members and officers of the operations of the college, what it contributes to Orkney, and could contribute in the future, and how its unique dual position as part of the Council and an Academic Partner within UHI supports those operations, but also provides some challenges management and governance.

### **7.3.**

The proposals for innovation in proposal C have been considered in creating the Orkney College Strategic Plan, referred to at section 5.5 above.

## **8. Links to Council Plan**

### **8.1.**

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan strategic priority theme of Strengthening our Communities.

## **8.2.**

The proposals in this report relate directly to Priority C3 'Development of learning provision and pathways' of the Council Delivery Plan.

## **9. Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan**

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priority of Sustainable Recovery.

## **10. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

## **11. Legal Aspects**

There are no legal aspects arising directly from this report.

## **12. Contact Officers**

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Peter Diamond, Head of Education, extension 2436, Email [peter.diamond@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:peter.diamond@orkney.gov.uk).

Jane Partridge, Service Manager (Secondary and Tertiary Education), extension 2419, Email [jane.partridge@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:jane.partridge@orkney.gov.uk).

Joanne Wallace, Interim Principal, Orkney College, 569000, Email [joanne.wallace@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:joanne.wallace@uhi.ac.uk).

## **13. Appendices**

Appendix 1: Previous Council Decisions.

Appendix 2: Outline of the Orkney College Business Review Short-Life Working Group Meetings.

## Appendix 1

# Orkney College Business Planning Review – Previous Council Decisions

## 1. Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 16 February 2022

The Committee noted:

**1.1.** That, on 20 January 2020, the College Management Council Sub-committee noted the proposal to undertake a strategic review of Orkney College.

**1.2.** That the strategic review of Orkney College, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, was commissioned in 2020, with the independent consultant, Andrew Thomson, presenting his findings to the College Management Council Sub-committee at an informal briefing on 27 September 2021.

**1.3.** That, in 2021, seven rural and island partner colleges of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) commissioned an appraisal to explore opportunities for more strategic collaboration, with the consultants, Rockborn Management Consultants, presenting its findings, attached as Appendix 2 to the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, to the College Management Council Sub-committee at informal briefings on 7 June and 27 September 2021.

**1.4.** That, also of significance to the business planning of Orkney College, UHI had developed and would shortly be launching a refreshed branding and visual identity design as part of its Branding and Positioning Project.

**1.5.** That, on 7 December 2021, the Council resolved that the recommendations of the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee relating to the UHI Branding and Positioning Project should be referred back to that Committee, to enable the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing to further explore the ramifications of the Project, with particular regard to comments made in the consultant's documentation, as presented, and to consider the viability of 'sub-branding'.

**1.6.** The proposal to establish a short life working group, that would conclude by the end of 2022, with a remit to consider the Strategic Review, the Options Appraisal and the UHI Branding and Positioning project, referred to at paragraphs 15.2, 15.3 and 15.4 above respectively, together with any other relevant pertaining issues, with a view to informing a draft detailed business review and business plan for Orkney College.

**1.7.** That, on 7 February 2022, the College Management Council Sub-committee considered the proposed membership of the short life working group and suggested that membership be expanded to include further representation, including stakeholder input, as appropriate.

The Committee **resolved to recommend:**

**1.8.** That a short life working group, to conclude by the end of 2022, with a remit to inform a draft detailed business review and business plan for Orkney College, be established.

**1.9.** That core membership of the short life working group should comprise the following:

- Chair, Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.
- Vice Chair, Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.
- Chair, College Management Council Sub-committee.
- Vice Chair, College Management Council Sub-committee.
- Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing/Head of Education.
- Service Manager (Secondary and Tertiary Education).
- Senior Human Resources Advisor.
- Representatives from Finance, Legal and Committee Services.
- Senior Management Team of Orkney College.
- 2 Community/Business Representatives, College Management Council Sub-committee.
- 1 HISA Representative, College Management Council Sub-committee.
- 1 Staff Representative, College Management Council Sub-committee.

**1.10.** That stakeholders, as detailed in Appendix 4 to this Minute, should be invited to participate in the work of the short life working group, as and when required.

**1.11.** That the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing should submit a report, to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee in early 2023, advising of the outcome of the detailed business review for Orkney College and presenting a business plan.



## **Appendix 2: Outline of the Orkney College Business Review Short-Life Working Group Meetings**

### **Day 1 28 October 2022 – Establishment and purpose of the MOWG**

- OIC forward plan.
- Introduction to Orkney College operations and funding structure.
- Orkney College contribution to school curriculum.
- UHI statutory funding role and forward plan (UHI2024).
- Orkney College staffing structure, student number trends and current drivers.
- Curriculum Area Presentations\*:
  1. Care.
  2. Maritime.

\*Curriculum Leaders presented their department's current activities, staffing, challenges and opportunities

### **Day 2 11 November 2022 – Curriculum Area Presentations contd.:**

3. Institute of Northern Studies.
4. Agronomy Institute.
5. Hospitality and Agriculture.
6. Archaeology Institute.
7. Business and Management.
8. Computing and Inclusive Practice.
9. Training and Commercial Work.

### **Day 3 28 November 2022 – Finance, Partnership and Governance**

- Orkney College Finance and Funding.
- UHI Partnership Agreement.
- Governance Role of the College Management Council Sub-Committee.

### **Day 4 9 December 2022 – Staffing, Strategy and Governance**

- Staffing: The National Recognition and Procedures Agreement.
- Developing a Strategy.
- Models for College Governance.

### **Day 5 10 February 2023 – Operating principles and Future Plan**

- Operating Principles for Orkney College.
- Strategic direction and overall plan.
- Governance Role of the College Management Council Sub-Committee.
- Development Planning Process.

### **Day 6 24 February 2023 – Finalising and preparing for reports**

- Operating Principles.

- Governance.
- Strategic Plan.
- Branding.
- Staffing.
- Action Plan for next steps after MOWG.