

Corporate Services

Service Overview

- 1. Corporate Services.** A high level of attendance at work is essential to the effective functioning of the Council, to the maintenance of its strategic values, and particularly to the provision of quality services. To secure such attendance requires commitment from managers, employees and trades unions. The People and Performance team provide managers with data on attendance and advice on attendance management.

The “Sickness Days Lost per Employee (Corp6)” indicator highlights the average number of days lost per employee and is helpful in monitoring the policies and strategies that the Council put in place to manage attendance at work.

In our Equal Pay Statement the Highland Council is committed identifying and eliminating any unfair, unjust or unlawful practices that impact on pay. Along with pay gap data the number of female employees in the top 2% and 5% of earners helps to form a picture of how well the Council is promoting gender equality in employment. The percentage of women in the top 5% of non-teaching staff (Corp3b) has remained relatively static over recent years. There have been significant improvements in all other related indicators.

A number of ‘Women in Management’ initiatives have been developed which include an on-line learning resource for female employees interested in preparing for supervisory and management roles; a 2 day workshop for new and aspiring women managers and a mentoring scheme.

Factors which will affect future improvement include the reduction in management post as the Council manages a reduction in the workforce.

- 2. Democratic Services** administers and supports meetings of the Council and its Committees, Boards and Working Groups. This involves preparation of agendas, collation and distribution of reports and papers and the preparation of minutes. The Service also offers support to members in induction and on-going training. In addition to the Council’s own meetings the Service provides a Company Secretarial service to the Council’s Arm’s Length Companies such as High Life Highland (HLH) and administers the Children’s Hearings Area Support Team. All Council meetings are made available to view through our webcast facilities.

The Council also offers direct support to members through the provision of administrative support to the Convener, Leader and Opposition Group. All members receive a basic salary (which is set nationally) and a small number of members holding positions with additional responsibility such as Convener and Leader of the Council receive further entitlements. Members are supported in the discharge of their Council duties and responsibilities e.g. to attend Council meetings and other Council related duties through reimbursement of travel and expenses and provision of ICT such as PCs and mobile telephones.

- 3. Finance Services.** The Finance Service is responsible for the collection of Council Tax in the Highland Council area and for ensuring creditor invoices are paid. The Business Support section has responsibility for processing the majority of creditor invoices through the Council’s financial management system.

Council Performance

Sickness Days Lost per Employee (Corp6)

Since 2009/10 the Council has reduced the number of days lost per employee from 10.5 to 7.86. In 2013/14 the Council was ranked 2nd out of 32 Councils in 2013/14.

In 2013/14 the three most prevalent reasons for all absence across the Highland Council for were:

- Stress Related/Depression/Debility (20% of all days absence)
- Operation/Hospitalisation (14% of all days absence)
- Diarrhoea/Vomiting/Stomach Upset (12% of all days absence)

Of all absence from the Highland Council 72% of the days lost were due to long term absence (28 days or more as defined in policy).

Women managers in top 5% of earners (Corp3b)

The percentage of women in the top 2% and 5% of earners has also improved significantly in relation to all employees, although the percentage of female employees in the top 5% of earners of non-teaching earners has been relatively static since 2012/13. The decrease of 8.0% in the number of women in the top 5% of earners, between 2011/12 and 2012/13 reflects the major staffing changes associated with the transfer of staff to the National Health Service Highland (NHS) to support Integrated Care. Progress since 2011/12 has been as follows.

(* The 2014/15 figure is based on quarter 3 data i.e. October, November, December, all other are year-end.)

All Employees	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15*
% of female employees in the top 2% of earners (>£50,418)	51.3%	51.3%	48.2%	57.1%
% of female employees in the top 5% of earners (>£44,444)	54.6%	54.5%	53.9%	57.0%

Non - teaching Employees	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
% of female employees in the top 2% of earners (>£44,444)	33.3%	35.5%	35.8%	40.5%*
% of female employees in the top 5% of earners (>£38,275)	54.1%	46.0%	46.7%	46.4%*

Democratic Core Cost (Corp2)

The unique geography of the Highlands presents significant challenges to the Council in supporting members' particularly given the significant size of rural wards and the distances that may be involved in travelling to the Council's Headquarters in Inverness. The Council's performance in terms of cost of service/population reflects the challenges of supporting members across a large geographical area which is sparsely populated. Performance in terms of cost has increased by approximately 2% from £43,355.80 in 2012/13 to £44,176.86 in 2013/14 which reflects a fuller and more accurate capture of the costs of supporting members' ICT.

Council Tax - Annual % received (Corp7)

The Council's performance is measured on the percentage of Council Tax due that has been collected by the end of that particular financial year. In relation to 2013/14 the percentage figure relates to the amount of Council Tax due for that year that had been collected as at 31 March 2014. It is often referred to as the "in-year" collection rate.

The Council had collected 95.5% of Council Tax due, which is a small decline in collection, compared to the prior year of 95.6%. The Council had collected slightly more than the Scottish average for 2013/14, which was 95.2%. This slight decrease in collection has resulted in a one place drop in the Council's ranking at 16th in 2013/14 compared to 15th for the prior year.

The economic position can result in reduced disposable incomes for customers, which in turn can present challenges in collecting Council Tax, despite Council Tax levels being frozen for seven consecutive years (2008-2015).

Council Tax - Collection Costs (Corp4)

The Council's performance is measured on the cost per property to administer and collect Council Tax. The cost of £14.22 per property is higher than the Scottish average of £12.13, with the Council being ranked 23rd.

Foregoing any possible inconsistencies in cost allocations across Scottish Councils, the Council recognises that the delivery of Council Tax administration and collections in Highland has scope for improved efficiency.

Invoices Payment within 30 days (Corp8)

The Council's performance is measured on the percentage of creditor invoices paid within 30 days. The Council's performance of 93.3% in 2013/14 reports an improvement from 90.7% compared to the previous year.

This increase has seen the Council's performance rise above the Scottish average for 2013/14 at 91.9%, compared to slightly under average for the previous year (90.8% in 2012/13).

The Council also measures speed of processing within 10 days. In 2013/14, performance was 73.4% compared to 65.5% for the previous year.

What the Council is doing to improve services

Sickness Days Lost per Employee (Corp6)

Detailed statistics are used to highlight repetitive absences and to manage long term and repetitive absences. Line managers, supported by Human Resources Services, meet with individual employees whose absences are giving cause for concern. These meetings are designed to be supportive to individual staff, and to ensure that any specific actions are identified, such as a referral to Occupational Health.

Occupational Health, Personnel and Employee Development continue to support Service line managers to implement the Council's Absence Management Policy in a number of ways, including:

- Training courses for employees and managers
- Assisting line managers with issues arising from return to work interviews
- Seeking medical reports
- Liaising with other specialists, internal and external, to the Council to enable employees to remain in employment

Although overall Highland Council absence rates compare favourably with performance across Scottish Local Authorities, performance by Services and Sections within the Council does vary. Corporate Development are currently supporting a number of initiatives, including a Scrutiny Working Group, to identify good practice in relation to attendance management and action this across all Council Services.

Women managers in top 5% of earners (Corp3b)

The Council has taken a number of actions to improve the number of female employees in the top 5% of earners. These include:

- Creating and supporting an on-line learning resource for female employees interested in preparing for supervisory and management roles.
- Improving the Women into Management programme

The on-line learning material sits within the Council's My Online Learning platform and provides 14 e-

learning modules across a range of topics that female staff have identified as of specific interest. These include networking and influencing skills; presenting yourself; career development and challenging yourself.

The Council's Women in Management Programme provides a two day workshop for new and aspiring women managers and includes confidence building, assertiveness, presentation, goal setting and career development. The programme also includes speakers who are successful women managers from the public and private sectors. To date 114 female staff has attended the programme.

The Highland Council Mentoring scheme, although open to all, is specifically targeted at women wishing to enter or progress a career in management. Advisers work with those who wish to join the scheme to understand their goals and requirements before matching them with an experience mentor who is a senior manager in the Council.

To support the Women in Management programme the Learning and Development team ran a 4 day Springboard programme in 2014 in partnership with Neish Training and Scottish Natural Heritage. This event was designed to support career development for women and there were 11 Highland Council attendees

Since the 2013 equal pay audit a number of supporting actions have been taken to address gender segregation and the availability of part time work in senior grades. For example:

- Female role models in male dominated job groups have been identified and achievements publicised in corporate communications.
- Where service delivery allows vacancies will be advertised as "suitable for flexible working hours up to 35 per week" to encourage applications from candidates who wish to work on a part time basis part time applications.
- Job Descriptions and Person Specifications have been reviewed to ensure that they contain no gender bias.
- Services have reviewed workplace facilities to ensure that both genders are adequately catered for.
- Significant areas of gender segregation have been reviewed to identify and address any barriers to employment.

Although significant improvement have been made it is important to maintain momentum. This will be particularly important in the coming years dominated by the difficult financial situation and the continued need for a reducing workforce.

Democratic Core Cost (Corp2)

The Council is taking action to improve the service and to seek to reduce the costs incurred in supporting the democratic core. At its highest level the Council has agreed a reduction in the regular Committee cycle from 6 to 5\4 per year. This has been achieved through an efficient management and restructuring of the business of committees and will deliver a reduction in the costs involved in supporting meetings.

Separately in May 2014 the Council agreed to move forward an initiative to have 'carbon clever' or paper free meetings by 2017. This will involve electronic preparation and distribution of the agendas saving in paper, printing and postage costs. Further work is being undertaken in 2015 to improve the Council's videoconferencing facilities with a view to achieving reductions in travel expenditure. Work will be undertaken both to replace the existing microphone system within the Council Chamber which will improve the quality of the webcasts and to support the future move to carbon clever committees. This will be an important part of the new members' ICT service which is to be established.

Council Tax - Annual % received (Corp7)

The Council is reviewing business processes and the implementation of resultant changes will enable improvement in the processing performance of correspondence, such as Council Tax Reduction (CTR) claims. The time taken to process CTR claims has improved from 22 days (from Apr-June 2014) down to 19 days (from Oct-Dec 2014).

Improving Direct Debit take-up will also provide real opportunities for the Council to improve collection rates. Improved processing, supported by marketing campaigns, has seen the number of Direct Debit payers increase to nearly 78,000. This is an increase of 2,000 comparing December 2014 to December 2013.

During 2015/16 the Council's intention is to offer more on-line services, as part of its "Digital First" project. The increased on-line services will include the ability for customers to claim on-line (such as discounts), and access their own Council Tax account (and, if applicable, Non-Domestic Rates account) on-line.

Council Tax - Collection Costs (Corp4)

As part of the Council's restructuring, led by the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance has restructured the Finance Service Management Team. This has included the merger of the Exchequer and Revenues with Business Support sections under the one Head of Service.

During 2014/15, various improvements, including process design/redesign and resource management, have already seen a reduction in costs being incurred, supported by a strategy of vacancy management. Processing indicators, such as new claims processing, also show improvements demonstrating both financial and non-financial benefits from the merger.

As part of the Council's budget setting process for 2015/16–2018/19, further savings of £2.4M were approved in December 2014. This further saving is in addition to the £2.2M already delivered by the new Business Support service since it came into being in April 2011.

Invoices Payment within 30 days (Corp8)

The Council continues to process payments as quickly as possible, whilst maintaining appropriate governance, controls and risk-management as part of the "purchase through to payment" process.

During 2015/16, the Council will implement a new financial management system which offers various benefits, including the opportunity to fully implement e-Invoicing. E-Invoicing offers efficiency for the Council, customers and suppliers, as well as continuing to build on the improvements delivered on processing times since April 2011, where performance was less than 90% within 30 days, and less than 60% within 10 days.

How the public can get involved

The public can watch webcasts (<http://www.highland.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>) of all Council meetings both as they happen and for up to one year thereafter. Members engage with the public through surgeries, regular ward for a meetings, email/ telephone and increasingly through the use of social media.

Through Council performance surveys, the Council already gathers views on Council Tax payment methods. The views expressed are regularly satisfied/very satisfied.

It would be useful to gather customer views across a wider range of Council Tax and Revenue matters, such as customer service levels and suggestions as to how the Council can further improve service delivery. Consideration is being given as to how this could be done.

In terms of Business Support, as most of the services delivered are as a “client” role for Services, the involvement of the public will be led by the respective Services.

Theme	Indicator Code	SPI - Benchmark	FY 12/13	12/13 Rank	FY 13/14	13/14 Rank
Corporate Services	Corp1	Central Support Services as a proportion of running costs - Corp1	7%	31	7%	27
	Corp2	Democratic core cost per 1,000 population - Corp2	43355.80	22	44176.86	24
	Corp3b	Women managers in top 5% of earners - Corp3b	46.0%	22	46.7%	22
	Corp4	Council Tax - Collection Costs - Corp4	£15.52	23	£14.22	24
	Corp5b2	Domestic Noise Complaints - requiring attendance on site the average time (hours)- Corp5b2	19.0	20	119.0	28
	Corp6	Sickness Days Lost per Employee Corp6	8.7	1	7.9	2
	Corp7	Council Tax - Annual % received - Corp7	95.6%	15	95.5%	16
	Corp8	Invoices Payment within 30 days Corp8	90.7%	14	93.3%	12

For more information about our service plan and performance or further information on getting involved in helping to improve our services, please contact us on:

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Or contact us by email: www.highland.gov.uk