

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	<b>8</b>
Report No	<b>RES/05/25</b>

**Committee:** Corporate Resources

**Date:** 20 March 2025

**Report Title:** Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy 2025-2027: Action Plan Update

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Corporate Resources Committee on 5 December 2024 approved the Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy. This report aligned workforce planning strategies with relevant strategic supporting documents and included a Corporate Workforce Planning Action plan 2025 – 2027, based on common themes from the Service Action Plans.
- 1.2 This report provides Members with an update on the Action Plan.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. **Note** the progress of the actions in the workforce action plan as contained in sections 6 -11 of the report
  - ii. **Agree** bi-annual updates will be brought to committee to monitor progress against the action plan

## 3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** A failure to manage workforce planning and change puts at risk the Council's capacity to make the most effective use of resources. The impact of failure of statutory service delivery will have a reputational impact, as well as financial implications from any relevant regulatory body. Limited budget will impact on what level of service is delivered, if it is not mandated, especially on the number of staff; training of the staff; plant and equipment available for staff to do their job effectively.
- 3.2 **Legal:** Care is required that large scale and complex workforce change be managed in line with current employment legislation and Highland Council policy. The delivery of core and statutory functions will be impacted if the Service is inadequately resourced, and staff do not have the necessary skills to deliver core functions.
- 3.3 **Risk:** Having a sustainable and adaptable workforce is included as a risk in the Corporate Risk Register – HCR3. There are also staffing resource challenges

associated with budget constraints. The update on the actions in this report continue to mitigate staff lacking required skills, inflexible organisational design which hampers recruitment or moving resource within all levels of the Council, pressure on resources that prevents recruitment either to new posts or to fill vacancies and the lack of skilled potential external candidates.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks are arising from changes to plant, equipment, process or people):** Staff wellbeing is a priority in the People Strategy and the Service action plans, and this is reflected in the Corporate Workforce Plan.

3.5 **Gaelic:** There are no Gaelic implications.

#### **4. Impacts**

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

#### **5. Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy 2025 – 2027 Update**

5.1 On 5 December 2024, Members approved the Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy and Action Plan 2025 – 2027 and requested an update on progress at the next Resource Committee. The Workforce Planning strategy is one of the strands of the People Strategy.

5.2 Progress updates will be provided for each category of Workforce Challenges and Priorities identified in the approved Workforce Action Plan 2025 -2027:

- Recruitment and Retention
- Staff Wellbeing
- Training and Development
- Council Structure

5.3 Strategic Workforce Planning is an ongoing process, and the majority of the milestones are set in 2026 and 2027. It is therefore proposed that Members will receive bi-annual update reports.

5.4 The workforce action plan shows links with several portfolios in the Delivery Plan including Asset reconfiguration, the Future Operating Model and specifically the 'Meeting the Council's future Workforce Needs' which is a workstream in the Workforce for the Future Portfolio (WFTF). The WFTF portfolio board receives 6 weekly updates on each priority below.

5.5 By 2034, there is projected to be a 9% fall in working age population in Highland - 30% fall Sutherland, 27% fall Caithness, 20% fall Ross and Cromarty and Wester Ross. There is also projected 70% increase in 75+ in next 22 years. There is a further

projected 15% reduction in the numbers of 0–15 year olds in the next 22 years. It should be noted 44% of our staff are aged 50+ and this means that developing and retaining a skilled workforce is critical.

## **6. Recruitment and Retention**

6.1 The Talent Strategy which is also being presented to this committee, recognises the Highland Council's need to plan, manage and improve people approaches, and supports the achievement of the [People Strategy](#) and implementation of the Council's [Delivery Plan](#). To create a robust organisation, we must embrace diversity and foster an inclusive workplace that encourages ambition and supports change. The Talent Strategy will provide the foundation to build the 'ambitious, sustainable and connected' culture, placing people at the very heart of the organisation.

6.2 The Learning and Development Adviser focusing on career coaching was recently promoted and a new member of staff has been appointed to the role and started in January 2025. This role includes:

- working across all functions of the People Development team supporting managers with succession planning, identifying qualification needs
- skills gaps analysis to support the organisation to identify resources are required to develop our staff and managers
- support reporting methods for annual Employee Review and Development (ERD) meetings which will provide data to plan in advance the learning and development required by their staff
- Provide 1-2-1 career coaching and advice
- support with career events, building relationships with schools, colleges and prospective future employees to enhance our drive to be an employer of choice
- work collaboratively with colleagues in Education and Employability to identify new ways of working and reduce duplication
- contribute with design of marketing and promotional materials to improve the information, advice and guidance we provide
- deliver interview techniques as part of MA support and career progression
- deliver drop in sessions and webinars to provide managers with a better understanding of their role in developing our staff and apprentices

## **6.3 Highland Council MA Programme Update**

6.3.1 Further development of the MA programme is being driven by the Workforce for the Future Portfolio (WFTF) and People Development strategy. The People Development (L&D) manager is responsible for managing the MA Centre and SVQ Qualifications Centre and oversees the deliver on the MA contract and the qualifications outcomes. The People Development team are working closely with the WFTF Principal Project Manager and the Workstream Lead to develop opportunities.

## **6.4 Skills Development Scotland Training Provider Contract**

6.4.1 The training provider contracts are resourced through the MA Levy, which is set at 0.5% of an employer's annual wage bill, this equates to c£1.663m for 2024/25.

6.4.2 The contract covers a three-year period – 2024/25 2025/26 2026/27. We successfully increased our funded places to 109 places per year. Additional places can become

available during the contract year and SDS allocate these through a bid process. The Council was allocated a further 16 places in August 2024. A further bid for 16 places has been submitted and notification of the allocation is expected in March 2025. The Council is approved to deliver qualifications by our in-house SQA Centre in Management, Customer Service, Business & Administration, Care Services Leadership and Management Professional, Housing, Social Services & Healthcare, Social Services & Healthcare Technical, Social Services (CYP) and Social Services (CYP) Technical.

- 6.4.3 Where we are unable to deliver qualifications or have used our provider places, services are supported to secure funded or part funded places with an approved external training provider. The table below shows the providers and the frameworks we use when required:

Training Provider	Framework
Borders College	Healthcare Support; Healthcare Support (Non-clinical)
Elite Training	Information Security
Glasgow Caledonian University	Engineering: Design & Manufacture
Heriot Watt University	Civil Engineering GA
Highland Learning Academy	Business & Administration – SCQF 8
	Data Analytics, Digital Applications
	Facilities Services, Freight Logistics
	IT & Telecommunications
	Management SCQF 9
	Project Management Technical, Payroll
Moray Firth Training	Automotive
Napier University	Construction in the Built Environment
	Engineering: Design & Manufacture
Open University	Engineering: Design & Manufacture
	Cyber Security
Robert Gordon University	Construction in the Built Environment
	Data Science
	Engineering: Design & Manufacture
	IT for Business Management
Safety Training Solutions	Construction: Civil Engineering SCQF 5
	Construction: Management
	Construction: Technical
	Occupational Health & Safety
Scotia Law	Paralegal
SECTT / UHI Inverness	Electrical Installation
SECTT / UHI -North Highland	Electrical Installation
SNIPF/UHI Inverness	Plumbing & Heating
UHI – North Highland College	Construction: Building
	Professional Cookery
	Youth Worker
UHI Inverness	Business Management GA
	Civil Engineering GA
	Construction in the Built Environment
	Construction: Building
	Construction: Civil Engineering SCQF 6/7

	Construction: Technical
	Professional Cookery

- 6.4.4 As part of the shared service agreement with NHS Highland the Council's SVQ team deliver qualifications to 75 NHS staff working in Adult Social Care services. 24 adult social care places are allocated each year to our third sector partners Keltic Care, Gateway and Eldon.
- 6.4.5 There are opportunities for staff to follow higher level training, leading to a degree level qualification, through the Graduate Apprenticeship programme. The cost of the qualification is funded through Scottish Awards Agency for Scotland as part of the MA Levy funding. The programmes are delivered by approved colleges and universities. The Council currently have staff following GA routes in Business Management, Civil Engineering, Construction in the Built Environment, Data Science and Engineering: Design and Manufacture.
- 6.5 MA Communications Plan**
- 6.5.1 An activity plan has been developed by the MA and Qualifications team outlining how information and opportunities are shared with stakeholder groups. A communications channel is also being created using Viva Engage to enable active communication, benchmarking, briefing sessions and attending careers events.
- 6.5.2 The communication guidance, which includes roles and responsibilities of those involved in delivering qualifications is currently being reviewed.
- 6.6 Managers' Survey – MA Options and Recruitment**
- 6.6.1 A survey was distributed to all managers in January 2025 seeking manager input on modern and graduate apprenticeship routes, shared apprenticeships (internal and/or external), corporate MA programmes and recruitment challenges. An analysis of the responses is currently being undertaken and will help inform workforce planning.
- 6.7 Shared Apprenticeships – New Option**
- 6.7.1 We are scoping the option for a shared apprentice model with other employers. This could be a particularly useful model in areas where there are part-time or part year opportunities with micro businesses. But a shared model across the Highland Council Clusters is also part of the scope.
- 6.8 Pathways through Apprenticeships – New Options**
- 6.8.1 We are exploring how we could develop a Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) programme and proposals including resource implications will be brought back to committee for consideration. FAs are currently offered through colleges directly with schools. Research is being undertaken to gather data on which FA is being delivered in which schools and in what numbers.
- 6.9 Internal Mentoring Programme**
- 6.9.1 The Highland Council runs an annual mentoring programme, with 12 places available. The application process (mentees and mentors) for the 2024/25

programme is currently taking place and mentees will be matched with a suitable mentor. New mentors will receive training.

## **6.10 Recruitment Data**

- 6.10.1 A Data Analyst has been appointed for 12 months working on the Workforce for the Future portfolio. Part of the role is to analyse recruitment data available from the Council's recruitment system Talent link. Examples of data available are number of adverts (internal/external), number of re-adverts, part-time/full-time post and number of applicants. This will be used to inform best ways to recruit and other improvements in recruitment.

## **6.11 Succession Planning**

- 6.11.1 A new toolkit has been developed and presented in the Cluster SMTs with the purpose of supporting managers to identify key post, future skills gaps and how to mitigate this. There have also been sessions with managers, HR Business Partners, supported by the Talent Manager on the use of the toolkit.

## **6.12 Recruitment Strategies**

- 6.12.1 In the last 4 months, the Highland Council has been more successful in appointing to difficult to recruit posts by using different media such as videos, radio and newspaper advertisements. A recent example of this has been the recruitment campaign for finance staff which has proven to be very successful. This approach will be implemented further across the services.

# **7. Staff Wellbeing**

- 7.1 Reducing sickness absence is a Highland Council priority. Absence management starts with correct recording of absences and additional communication and training has been rolled out to managers. This also resulted in a higher uptake of the mandatory absence management training and with 88% of all managers have now completed this module. The occupational health provider (PAM) and their physiotherapist are engaging in more proactive and preventative support for managers and employees.
- 7.2 Mental Health is in the top three reasons for staff sickness absence. A Highland Council Staff Wellbeing Survey was conducted between December 2023 and January 2024. The results were presented in the Resource Committee on 7 March 2024. Actions identified from the survey are ongoing and actively includes the implementation of a wellbeing helpline, mental health and suicide prevention training, widening the role of the physiotherapist to support on matters such as menopause and session to prevent problems with posture. There is now a Viva Engage page dedicated to Mental Health and Wellbeing.
- 7.3 A focused action plan resulting from the survey will be presented to the Central Safety Committee in March.

# **8. Training and Development**

- 8.1 In 2025, will focus on reporting methods for annual Employee Review and Development (ERD) meetings which will provide data to plan in advance the learning and development required by their staff.

8.2 The implementation of the Succession Planning Toolkit will continue to be rolled out to managers.

8.3 The mandatory training programme for managers has been reviewed for 2025 to reflect the Highland Council's priorities this year.

## **9. Council Structure**

9.1 Review of current approaches to service delivery and team structures and working patterns is part of the Future Operating Model and members will receive an update on this significant piece of work in due course.

9.2 Work on a more flexible workforce including generic post within job families based on competencies will start in 2025.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

Date: 5 March 2025

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Background Papers:

Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy and Action Plan 2025 – 2027 (Corporate Resources, 5 December 2025)