The Highland Council

Committee:	**Education**
Date:	**4 June 2025**
Report Title:	**Service Performance Reporting for Quarter 4 2024/25**
Report By:	**Assistant Chief Executive - People**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The report details relevant performance data and contextual information as outlined in the Service Plan and Performance Plan.

1.2 This report also provides performance information on:
- Corporate Indicators
- Contribution to the Performance Plan
- Service Plan Progress
- Contribution to the Delivery Plan – Workforce for The Future Portfolio

1.3 The content and structure is intended to:
- assist Member scrutiny and performance management,
- inform decision-making to aid continuous improvement, and
- provide transparency and accessibility.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to scrutinise and approve:

    i. The Service's performance and risk information;
    ii. The update on the Workforce for the Future Portfolio at section 8; and
    iii. The actions taken following an internal audit of financial procedures in schools at section 9.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource
There are no implications arising as a direct result of this report other than those set out.

3.2 Legal
This report contributes to the Council's statutory duties to report performance and secure best value in terms of; Section 1(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 1992, and Section 1 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, respectively.

3.3   Risk
There are no risk implications arising as a direct result of this report. The Workforce for the Future Portfolio has its own risks and issued log for the projects and activities that it oversees.

3.4   Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)
There are no direct health and safety implications arising from this report.

3.5   Gaelic
There are no implications for Gaelic arising as a direct result of this report.

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 a monitoring and update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5.   Service Performance - Corporate Indicators

5.1   Service performance in relation to Absence, Complaints, Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and Invoice Payments are set out in the following sub-sections.

5.2   Service Attendance Management

Service Attendance Management is a nationally benchmarked indicator. Effective absence management supports staff, maintains productivity, and contributes to the Council's benchmarked performance. In Quarter 4 the Service lost an average of 4.55 days per non-teaching employee and 3.4 days per teacher, compared to an average of 3.95 for the Council as a whole. There has been an increase in both categories of staff and across the Council during Q4.

The Service is reviewing the most common types of sickness absence to consider what actions could be introduced to help support staff health and wellbeing. The Service is also working closely with Head Teachers to provide training, advice, and guidance on absence management. It is anticipated that revised line management and support arrangements will further assist Head Teachers to address persistent and regular staff absence and ensure that this remains a priority across the service.

Education and Learning

Average number working days per employee lost through sickness absence

Average Days Lost	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25
EDL Non-Teaching	2.42	2.08	4.21	4.82	3.88	2.67	4.00	4.55
EDL - Teachers	1.83	0.98	2.65	2.80	2.38	1.47	2.70	3.40
Highland Council	2.48	2.08	3.35	3.48	3.24	2.54	3.42	3.95

5.3   Service Complaints Response Times
Monitoring complaints provides important feedback which can facilitate decision making and service design. Services are responsible for responding to complaints which are issued on their behalf by the Customer and Resolution Improvement Team (CRIT). Performance for complaints during Quarter 4 against a corporate target of 80% is shown below.

For front line complaints Service performance is consistently higher than the Council average and well ahead of the 80% corporate target. For 2nd Stage complaints, performance is lower but still ahead of the Council average. 2nd Stage complaints tend to be highly complex and require thorough investigation, often involving meeting with the complainants and staff before finalising a response. This can make meeting the 20-day response deadline very challenging if the investigation is going to be appropriately thorough.

> **Complaints - Education and Learning**

Number of closed complaints and the % compliant with the legislative timescale

Frontline Resolution within 5 days

	Q1 23/24		Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
Education and Learning	8	100 %	9	67 %	14	93 %	22	95 %	52	96 %	14	93 %	12	92 %	12	92 %
Highland Council	159	92 %	132	78 %	150	80 %	189	76 %	219	84 %	196	78 %	155	88 %	183	87 %

Investigation Resolution within 20 days

	Q1 23/24		Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
Education and Learning	32	72 %	18	67 %	28	61 %	44	48 %	30	57 %	23	65 %	24	83 %	29	69 %
Highland Council	97	63 %	85	49 %	67	48 %	98	46 %	86	47 %	101	57 %	90	42 %	71	51 %

Escalated Resolution within 20 days

	Q1 23/24		Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
Education and Learning	2	50 %	3	0 %	2	50 %	0		3	33 %	2	50 %	2	50 %	2	50 %
Highland Council	32	50 %	32	41 %	28	57 %	34	35 %	47	32 %	28	50 %	26	46 %	34	44 %

5.4   Service Freedom of Information ('FOI') Response Times

FOI requests are co-ordinated by CRIT in collaboration with the Service teams which may hold information relevant to the request. The performance for FOI response times during Quarter 4 against a corporate target of 90% is below.

Performance fell back in Q4 and the reasons for this have been investigated. Many of the FOI requests received in the period were complex and requesting information for the first time (i.e. the Service had to compile from scratch) which means they take longer to complete. The time of year is also relevant as the majority of FOI requests in Q4 related to workforce and resourcing which falls to the same team that work with Head teachers on staffing arrangements for the new school session, which also needs to be undertaken in the same period. Staff absence in the Workforce Planning Team has added to this pressure on capacity.

It is also notable that the volume of FOIs has been on an upward trend with a far greater number coming through than in the same period last year. This will also impact on staff's capacity to respond within the time frame.

A review is being undertaken to identify options for improving the Service response times going forward.

Freedom of Information Requests - Education and Learning

% of FOIs closed compliant with the legislative timescale

% FOIs Compliant - Education and Learning	Q1 23/24		Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
	44	77 %	52	96 %	35	91 %	57	65 %	46	87 %	41	56 %	90	70 %	74	57 %

% FOIs Compliant - Highland Council	Q1 23/24		Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24		Q4 23/24		Q1 24/25		Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
	399	84 %	333	88 %	338	89 %	548	77 %	511	81 %	479	76 %	568	73 %	616	71 %

**Tables display the number of FOIs closed within the quarter and % of those that were compliant with the legislative timescale (20 working days) for the service and the Highland Council overall.
The Scottish Information Commissioner requires the Council to achieve a minimum compliance rate of 90%.**

5.5   Service Invoice Payment Times

Payment of invoices within 30 days of receipt is a Council Statutory Performance Indicator. The Council also monitors the number of invoices paid within 10 days of receipt. The performance for invoice payment times within 10- and 30-days during Quarter 4 against a target of 77% and 95%, respectively, was as shown below. Performance has improved since Quarter 3.

Education and Learning - Invoice Payments

Invoice Payment within 30 days	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25
Education and Learning	93.4 %	88.8 %	92.3 %	92.1 %	89.2 %	82.7 %	90.0 %	90.7 %
Highland Council	95.1 %	96.7 %	95.6 %	93.6 %	87.7 %	91.4 %	92.9 %	92.9 %

Invoice Payment less than 10 days	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25
Education and Learning	76.9 %	72.8 %	77.3 %	76.3 %	68.7 %	63.7 %	71.8 %	72.7 %
Highland Council	72.8 %	80.9 %	75.3 %	69.7 %	57.0 %	68.5 %	63.8 %	63.3 %

6. Service Contribution to the Performance Plan (previously Corporate Plan)

6.1 This is a high-level overview report for the Service's performance.

The performance information below is for the Academic Year 23/24. The attainment data has been reported previously to Committee.

Information for the current Academic Year is not available as we are still only part way through it. 2024/25 performance information will be available after the national Insights data is published.

Education and Learning - PIs and Actions that contribute to Performance Plan

PIs/Actions in the Performance Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Period	Data
SCQF Level 5 attainment by all children || CP1.01 || CHN04	AY 21/22	65.0 %	AY 22/23	64.0 %	AY 23/24	63.5 %
SCQF Level 6 attainment by all children || CP1.01 || CHN05	AY 21/22	33.0 %	AY 22/23	31.0 %	AY 23/24	32.0 %
% P1/4/7 Pupils Achieving in Literacy || CP1.01 || CHN13a	AY 21/22	59.3 %	AY 22/23	64.8 %	AY 23/24	68.7 %
% P1/4/7 Pupils Achieving in Numeracy || CP1.01 || CHN13b	AY 21/22	68.8 %	AY 22/23	72.2 %	AY 23/24	74.4 %
School attendance rates % Bi-ennial || CP1.01 || CHN19a	AY 2017 - 2019	92.75 %	AY 2019 - 2021	91.50 %	AY 2021 - 2023	90.00 %
School attendance rates (Care Experienced) % Bi-ennial || CP1.01 || CHN19b	AY 2017 - 2019	85.67 %	AY 2019 - 2021	86.92 %	AY 2021 - 2023	83.30 %
School Leavers - Highest attaining 20% - Complementary Tariff Score || CP1.01	AY 21/22	1,257	AY 22/23	1,251	AY 23/24	1,238
School Leavers - Lowest attaining 20% - Complementary Tariff Score || CP1.01	AY 21/22	134	AY 22/23	121	AY 23/24	110
School Leavers - Middle attaining 60% - Complementary Tariff Score || CP1.01	AY 21/22	618	AY 22/23	575	AY 23/24	565
SCQF Level 5 attainment by children from deprived backgrounds || CP1.02 || CHN06	AY 21/22	42.0 %	AY 22/23	42.0 %	AY 23/24	39.8 %
SCQF Level 6 attainment by children from deprived backgrounds || CP1.02 || CHN07	AY 21/22	16.0 %	AY 22/23	13.0 %	AY 23/24	11.7 %
Pupils entering positive destinations || CP1.03 || CHN11	AY 21/22	94.45 %	AY 22/23	95.27 %	AY 23/24	96.50 %
% Highland popn with HLH Card || CP1.05	FY 22/23	29.0 %	FY 23/24	29.0 %	FY 24/25	29.0 %
Develop & implement new SLA with Eden Court Highlands || CP1.10 (Completed Q4 23/24)	Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
HLH contract review completed || CP1.10 (Completed Q2 24/25)	Q2 24/25	Completed	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	
ERDs being completed - EDL || CP5.01	Q2 24/25	Some Slippage	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	Completed
% Gaelic Learner Secondary Pupils || CP1.11	AY 21/22	15.69 %	AY 22/23	14.60 %	AY 23/24	15.18 %
% GM Nursery Pupils || CP1.11	AY 21/22	7.50 %	AY 22/23	8.59 %	AY 23/24	9.25 %
% GM Primary Pupils || CP1.11	AY 21/22	6.44 %	AY 22/23	6.64 %	AY 23/24	6.71 %
% Gaidhlig Secondary Pupils || CP1.11	AY 21/22	3.12 %	AY 22/23	3.14 %	AY 23/24	3.17 %
New measures and indicators for Gaelic developed as part of the new GLP || CP1.11 (Completed Q1 23/24)	Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25	

7. Service Plan Progress

7.1 The intent within this report is to provide high level dashboard information across a range of performance measures for the whole Service. Through these quarterly reports, officers will highlight key matters for Members to consider, significant variations, or key developments in the quarter.

Separate reports are provided to Committee on a regular basis to provide more in-depth consideration of key priorities and performance. This includes, for example, Attainment, School Improvement and High Life Highland.

7.2 The Service performance indicators illustrated in 8.4 include the whole Service dashboard. This is provided for completeness which means it includes indicators which may not have moved during the quarter, those with only an annual update, and those indicators which have no exceptions to highlight, as well as those that are relevant to the quarter being reported against. The format of presentation aims to balance the need to provide Members with visibility of the complete performance dashboard, while ensuring that there is clarity on which subset of those indicators are more relevant, or with points to note, for the current quarter.

7.3 As the main focus of work is currently establishing the programmes and projects within the Council's Operational Delivery Plan and the development of meaningful measures of success and milestones, work on a Service Plan for 2024/25 is on hold, as it is across all Services. This report therefore contains progress on Actions within the 2023/24 Service Plan which are ongoing.

7.4

Entitlement, Excellence & Equity - Improved Outcomes Q4 24/25						
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	**Period**	**Data**	**Period**	**Data**	**Target Value**	**Completion/ Update Date**
3 Year ASL implementation plan delivered	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target		Due to complete Q2 26/27
Activity to achieve stretch aims agreed with Education Scotland	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q4 23/24
All performance data analysed to set targets and determine next steps - PRIMARY	AY 22/23		AY 23/24	100 %	80 %	Update due following September
All performance data analysed to set targets and determine next steps - SECONDARY	AY 22/23		AY 23/24	100 %	80 %	Update due following September
Annual monitoring of quality and standards in schools - PRIMARY	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target		Ongoing until Q2 25/26
Annual monitoring of quality and standards in schools - SECONDARY	Q3 24/25	Completed	Q4 24/25			Ongoing until Q2 25/26
Collaborative Improvement Framework embedded consistently across the Authority - PRIMARY	AY 22/23		AY 23/24	100 %	80 %	Update due September
Collaborative Improvement Framework embedded consistently across the Authority - SECONDARY	AY 22/23		AY 23/24	100 %	80 %	Update due September
Continue to review underpinning of approach to ASL	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25
Effectiveness and impact of leadership of Learning Training	Q3 24/25	Completed	Q4 24/25			Completed Q3 24/25
Establish local collaborative networks	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 23/24
Establish the Performance and Achievement tracking system in Primary	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q3 23/24
Improved Head Teacher and Officer collaboration	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q1 24/25
Improvements in admissions procedures for special schools	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q4 23/24
Increase in children reporting wellbeing needs are being met	AY 2019 - 2021	73.1 %	AY 2021 - 2023	72.8 %	76.8 %	Survey results every 2 years
LAC considered for a Coordinated Support Plan	FY 23/24		FY 24/25		80 %	Update due Dec 24
Leadership of Learning training completed	AY 22/23		AY 23/24	100 %	80 %	Training completed
Progress and Achievement model used in Primary schools	AY 22/23		AY 23/24	100 %	80 %	Update due following September

Entitlement, Excellence & Equity - Improved Outcomes Q4 24/25

Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
% School leavers with 1+ Lvl5 SQA Grade A-C	AY 22/23	85.1 %	AY 23/24	87.5 %		annual update February
% School leavers with 1+ Lvl6 SQA Grade A-C	AY 22/23	55.7 %	AY 23/24	61.3 %		annual update February
% Participation rate for 16-19 year olds (per 100) || CHN21	FY 23/24	93.8 %	FY 24/25		92.7 %	annual update December
SCQF Level 5 attainment by all children || CP1.01 || CHN04	AY 22/23	64.0 %	AY 23/24	63.5 %		annual update February
SCQF Level 6 attainment by all children || CP1.01 || CHN05	AY 22/23	31.0 %	AY 23/24	32.0 %		annual update February
% P1/4/7 Pupils Achieving in Literacy || CP1.01 || CHN13a	AY 22/23	64.8 %	AY 23/24	68.7 %	67.0 %	annual update December
% P1/4/7 Pupils Achieving in Numeracy || CP1.01 || CHN13b	AY 22/23	72.2 %	AY 23/24	74.4 %	75.0 %	annual update December
School attendance rates (Care Experienced) % Bi-ennial || CP1.01 || CHN19b	AY 2019 - 2021	86.92 %	AY 2021 - 2023	83.30 %	84.40 %	update July every 2 yrs
School attendance rates % Bi-ennial || CP1.01 || CHN19a	AY 2019 - 2021	91.50 %	AY 2021 - 2023	90.00 %	90.20 %	update December every 2 yrs
School Leavers - Highest attaining 20% - Complementary Tariff Score || CP1.01	AY 22/23	1,251	AY 23/24	1,238	1,239	annual update February
School Leavers - Lowest attaining 20% - Complementary Tariff Score || CP1.01	AY 22/23	121	AY 23/24	110	113	annual update February
School Leavers - Middle attaining 60% - Complementary Tariff Score || CP1.01	AY 22/23	575	AY 23/24	565	577	annual update February
SCQF Level 5 attainment by children from deprived backgrounds || CP1.02 || CHN06	AY 22/23	42.0 %	AY 23/24	39.8 %	42.0 %	annual update February
SCQF Level 6 attainment by children from deprived backgrounds || CP1.02 || CHN07	AY 22/23	13.0 %	AY 23/24	11.7 %	13.0 %	annual update February
Pupils entering positive destinations || CP1.03 || CHN11	AY 22/23	95.27 %	AY 23/24	96.50 %	95.71 %	annual update April

Entitlement, Excellence & Equity - Improve the Consistency and Quality of Provision Q4 24/25

Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Develop a Learning and Teaching Policy	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25
Improve quality of ELC provision	Q3 24/25	Some Slippage	Q4 24/25	Some Slippage		Due to complete Q2 24/25
Improved Leadership of Learning and Teaching	AY 22/23		AY 23/24			Reporting will begin Sept25 (AY24/25)

Entitlement, Excellence & Equity - Net Zero Carbon Targets Q4 24/25

Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Develop promotional plan to support Learning for Sustainability - due to start Q2 23/24	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25
Research funding resource to recruit a development officer - due to start Q2 23/24	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q3 23/24

Opportunities - Implement Service-wide MIS Q4 24/25

Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Cross service asset rationalisation board meets quarterly - due to start Q2 23/24	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q1 24/25
Ensure mothballed schools are kept under regular review	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q1 24/25
GME School catchment areas established and any consultations complete	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target		Due to complete Q2 25/26
SEEMIS EYMIS - live and operational by target dates	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25
SEEMIS EYMIS - project benefits realised	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25
SEEMIS EYMIS - user training and support delivered	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25

Opportunities - Stakeholder Engagement Q4 24/25

Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
% Highland popn with HLH Card || CP1.05	FY 23/24	29.0 %	FY 24/25	29.0 %	29.0 %	annual update August
Develop & implement new SLA with Eden Court Highlands || CP1.10	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q4 23/24
HLH contract review completed || CP1.10	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25
Contribute to the Active Highland Strategy - due to start Q2 23/24	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q1 24/25
New Parental Engagement Strategy and Action Plan created	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q4 23/24
Parental Engagement Strategy & Action Plan - Reference Group established	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q1 24/25
Review existing SLAs/implement recommendations [exc. HLH & Eden Court]	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	Some Slippage		Due to complete Q4 24/25

Relationships - Ensure Service Delivery Meets Need Q4 24/25

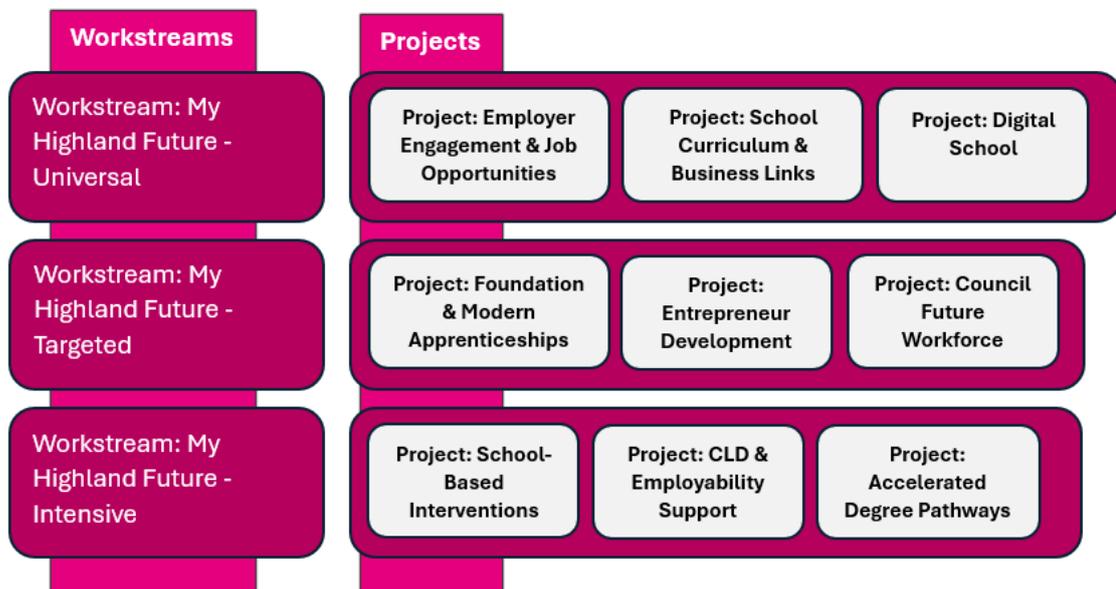| Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Support schools undertaking Rights Respecting Schools award - due to start Q2 23/24	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	On Target		Ongoing
Use of Implementation Science to implement local approach to support	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q3 23/24

Relationships - Progress Community Initiatives Q4 24/25

Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
Evaluate and review the impact of existing CLD plan - due to start Q2 23/24	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25
Strategic delivery of CLD Plan 2021-24	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q2 24/25

Values-based Leadership - Improved Quality of Leadership Q4 24/25						
Actions PIs being Monitored in Service Plan	Period	Data	Period	Data	Target Value	Completion/ Update Date
ERDs being completed - EDL | | CP5.01	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	Completed		Due to complete Q4 24/25
Design and deliver a Head Teacher induction programme	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	Completed		Due to complete Q1 25/26
Highland Professional Learning & Leadership Academy Established	Q3 24/25	On Target	Q4 24/25	Completed		Due to complete Q4 24/25
New Headteacher feedback from staff survey indicates supported in role	AY 22/23		AY 23/24	4.7	4.5	annual update August
Present options for development of a Highland Professional Learning and Leadership Academy	Q3 24/25		Q4 24/25			Completed Q1 24/25

8. Contribution to the Delivery Plan – Workforce for The Future Portfolio

8.1 The Workforce for The Future Portfolio is presently delivered through 2 workstreams – Employer Engagement & Job Opportunities and Career/Employment Pathways & Employability Support – containing 5 programmes/projects.

8.2 As reported at Council in May 2025, the structure and approach to delivering the Portfolio outcomes has developed as the projects have progressed and there has been further engagement across key partners such as SDS and UHI and with industry sector representatives. Consequently, subject to Council approval in May, the portfolio will be realigned to a vision for delivering our future Highland workforce under the brand 'My Highland Future.' This revised plan will allow closer working between Highland Council and partners to promote a core lifelong learning offer focused on emerging job opportunities and career pathways.

8.3 The portfolio will be aligned into three distinct programmes: a universal programme which everyone can experience; a targeted programme which will provide additional support for individuals and groups; and an intensive programme for those who are either most at risk of not joining the labour market or who are on elite pathways. The revised portfolio plan is mapped out below. Further details of these programmes will be updated at a future meeting of the Education Committee.

Workstreams	Projects		
Workstream: My Highland Future - Universal	Project: Employer Engagement & Job Opportunities	Project: School Curriculum & Business Links	Project: Digital School
Workstream: My Highland Future - Targeted	Project: Foundation & Modern Apprenticeships	Project: Entrepreneur Development	Project: Council Future Workforce
Workstream: My Highland Future - Intensive	Project: School-Based Interventions	Project: CLD & Employability Support	Project: Accelerated Degree Pathways

8.4 The existing workstreams 'Employer Engagement' and 'Job Opportunities' will become part of the Universal programme, as will the 'Digital School' offering. The targeted programme will involve the expansion of Foundation Apprenticeships and Modern Apprenticeships across the partnership. The current projects on the 'Employability Toolkit' and 'Tailored Employment Support' will form part of the intensive programme. The intensive programme will also look at how accelerated degree pathways could be supported.

8.5 Portfolio Progress Highlights

Workstream: Industry/Partnership Engagement
Following engagement with key stakeholders, including with the Green Freeport, a draft 'Employer Charter' is currently being piloted with early adopters. Following lessons learned from this pilot the Highland Employer Charter will be opened to all local employers.

Workstream: Employability Toolkit
In partnership with Highland Employability Partnership, council staff contributed the development and launch of the Work.Life.Highland website and brand during the Scottish Careers Week in 2024. This launch was also linked with two successful virtual careers fairs taking place across Highland. This area of work is now embedded as 'business as usual,' with the website and brand being subject to continuous development and improvement to meet future service needs

Workstream: Digital School
Digital Learning has been developed during the past year to support equity of curriculum opportunities for pupils across the Highlands. It enables young people of secondary school age to access areas of the curriculum regardless of their geographic location or difficulties engaging with learning in school. Learning & teaching in the Digital School is delivered by real teachers in real time through online learning with active and collaborative experiences. We currently have 191 senior phase learners studying courses delivered digitally with 31 courses on offer.

8.6 Portfolio Financial Summary

The investment for this portfolio is cross-portfolio to support staff capacity to deliver the projects, and the savings relate to a holistic redesign of the Council's collective employability service delivery for 'all ages all stages' in life; as well as dedicated funding to provide for the expansion of our Digital offering.

Portfolio: Workforce for the Future Investment M12 24/25		
Investment Forecast Total	Investment Actual To Date Total	Investment Amount Total
£ 76,729	£ 76,729	£ 660,000

i)   **Savings**

The £500,000 savings aligned to projects being reported to this committee are for the redesign of the Council's Employability services – bringing together Council functions to develop an 'all ages all stages' approach. This saving was delivered in financial year 2024-2025.

ii)   **Investment**

£330,000 investment is to provide staff capacity for portfolio delivery over 3 years:
- **Principal Project Manager** – Portfolio-wide, in post since September 2024
- **Project Manager** – Workstream: Employer Engagement and Job Opportunities – post appointed and commenced mid-April 2025.
- **Data Analyst** – Portfolio-wide, had been appointed and started with the team in February, but received a job offer and left in March – recruitment resumed to fill this post.
- **Project Officer** – Portfolio-wide, post advertised and interviews taking place.

A further £330,000 is to provide for the delivery of the Digital School over 3 years. This funding is being drawn down to recruit staff to 'back-fill' teaching staff who have volunteered to be seconded into the Digital School to deliver online learning opportunities. Currently this amounts to £41,353. Investment spend may slip due to current national level union negotiations impacting teaching staff linked to online delivery. This will be considered within on-going risk assessment of this project's delivery.

9.   Review of Financial Procedures in Schools

9.1   Following an internal audit that looked at a sample of secondary schools, a number of improvement actions have been identified. The audit findings were shared and discussed with Head Teachers and the repot was subsequently emailed to them to ensure everyone was clear about the actions that needed to be undertaken. Reminders will also be issued to schools on a regular basis. The full report will be considered at the Audit Committee on 28 May 2025.

9.2   The Finance Service have been successful in recruiting staff, following a number of retirements to support Head Teachers with managing all aspects of their Devolved School Management budget and School Fund. Regular monitoring meetings are taking place to provide advice and guidance, and training is being provided to new and acting Head Teachers. There has also been some work undertaken to develop dashboards within the CIA financial system which will simplify the presentation of budget management information.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 10 May 2025

Authors: Brian Scobie, Portfolio Manager, Business Solutions;
                      Fiona Grant, Chief Officer Secondary and WftF Portfolio Lead;
                      Anne MacPherson, Strategic Lead, Resources.