

Agenda Item	4
Report No	RES/10/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Corporate Resources

Date: 5 June 2025

Report Title: People Strategy

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Best Value thematic review of workforce innovation reported in September 2024 recommended the People Strategy be updated to align with the new Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy, approved in December 2024 to reflect the new structure of the Council and the Financial Strategy. The People Strategy has been reviewed with the revised copy shown in **Appendix 1**. Activity achieved covering the eight pillars of the strategy is shown in **Appendix 2** of this report.
- 1.2 The new senior leadership structure has progressed at pace with recruitment to the remaining two Chief Officer posts progressing. The streamlined leadership structure comprises three Service clusters providing better collaboration across Services, and has delivered initial savings of £370k as part of the budget savings agreed in February 2024. Further savings work has also commenced on the future operating model as part of the Council's agreed Delivery Plan to achieve a leaner and more efficient management structure and support services with an agile workforce. The People Strategy continues to focus on workforce planning activity and on developing our people to fill essential roles across the organisation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. **Note** the work which is being undertaken.
 - ii. **Agree** the revised People Strategy as contained in **Appendix 1**.
 - iii. **Note** the activity achievements of the People Strategy as contained in **Appendix 2**.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** Resource implications have been presented to committee with actions plans where appropriate. Resources relating to work of the delivery plan has also been identified through the budget process and ongoing monitoring by means of the officer Budget Review Group, chaired by the Chief Executive.

- 3.2 **Legal:** Employment legislation, including equalities legislation and Health and Safety legislation are relevant to the application of the People Strategy. Legal requirements are assessed when developing strategy and implementing policy with our trade union colleagues.
- 3.3 **Risk:** Risks arising from the Strategy are logged in the appropriate risk register such as Service or Corporate Risk Register. Having a sustainable workforce is a risk on the Corporate Risk Register. There are also staffing resource challenges associated with budget constraints. The workforce planning report actions helps to mitigate the risk of an insufficient current and future workforce. Accessibility of living accommodation when recruiting to critical roles has been identified and covered in the Talent Management Strategy.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):** There are no implications arising.
- 3.5 **Gaelic:** The Council will highlight the desirability of Gaelic in Job and Person specifications as part of its commitment to the promotion of the Gaelic language, as set out in the Council's Gaelic Language Plan.

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 individual IIAs have been approved on strategies and policies which make up the People Strategy therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. People Strategy Update

- 5.1 This report presents a revised People Strategy 2022-27 which provides links to the three year budget strategy approved in March 2025 and the portfolio activity set out in the Council's Delivery Plan 2024-27.
- 5.2 The Council's new leadership structure is progressing with the remaining appointments to the Chief Officer posts to achieve £370k savings. Work is also progressing with realigning the management level posts HC10-HC14 to the future operating model, including the two area model.

5.3 The Key Pillars in the strategy are listed as

- staff engagement
- health, safety and wellbeing
- reward and conditions
- talent management
- people development
- people data and processes
- workforce planning
- equality, diversity and inclusion

6. Activity in the Strategy

6.1 Staff Engagement

6.1.1 'You said we did' during 2023/4 budget helped focus on areas to review, such as service structures, operating model of the council, development and career pathways to employment for key roles staff, automate processes and do more on-line. The staff road shows 2024/5 also provided feedback that:

- Communication between senior management and the wider Council has improved significantly
- Messages are clear
- Staff appreciate that senior management are out and about
- Staff believe that the Council is committed to change
- Staff understand that we are taking risks, being ambitious and changing what we recognise is not working
- There is a clear vision and plans going forward
- Staff feel that we all have a part to play in the future of the Council
- Staff feel excited about the opportunities ahead.

6.1.2 We are committed to Investors in People and currently this is being rolled out to the organisation, with it being deliver to the Corporate Cluster initially and then progressed to the two other Service Clusters.

6.2 Health, Safety and Wellbeing

6.2.1 The First Highland Trauma Summit took place in September 2024. Organised by the Trauma-Informed Practice Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery Group. Trauma Champions are brought together from across Highland and agencies within the Trauma-Informed Practice Steering Group under the Mental Health Delivery Group. Following this summit work has been undertaken in the People team to establish how a trauma- informed approach can be bedded into our policies and practice.

6.2.2 The organisation' s mental health and wellbeing helpline will be used as an exemplar in the Scottish Government publication Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures 'In Practice Guide'.

6.3 **Rewards and Conditions**

- 6.3.1 Pay modelling has taken place at the lower end of the Council's grading structure to address the full consolidation of the Real Living Wage. The construct of the pay award over the last 2-3 years has provided comparably higher levels of award to our lower paid staff. This has impacted favourably on our gender pay gap for 2023/24 at 3.2% compared to 4.5% in 2021/22 as indicated below.
- 6.3.2 Hybrid/mobile working forms part of the flexible working policy which forms part of the separate report to this committee.

6.4 **Talent Strategy**

- 6.4.1 The Talent Strategy and action plan was approved in March 2025, which contains commitments under in the following five areas:
 - Develop as Employer of choice
 - Talent Attraction
 - Talent Retention
 - Talent Development
 - Exit Strategy
- 6.4.2 A sustainable and adaptable workforce is recorded on the corporate risk register. The action plan has been designed to mitigate the risk that we will not have the staff required to meet demand for services and achieve organisational outcomes by focusing on improving attraction, retention and the development of staff.

6.5 **People Development**

- 6.5.1 We will develop training to support the customer experience strategy approved in October 24, to promote a person/customer centred culture.
- 6.5.2 We will develop and deliver a senior leadership training programme.
- 6.5.3 We will continue to deliver the management connections development programme for middle managers.
- 6.5.4 We will increase awareness of neurodiversity within our staff, councillors, and wider community, to develop knowledge, skills and understanding to better meet the needs of neurodivergent individuals.

6.6 **Data & Processes**

- 6.6.1 Regular reports are being presented to Corporate Resources Committee on the work being undertaken on the HR and Payroll project. One of the strands of the project is focusing on improved data and processes. This will assist with the equality and diversity data being gathered and reported to better understand our workforce profile which impacts on our ability to develop services to our communities.

6.7 **Equalities** – link with Highland Council Equality Outcomes

- 6.7.1 We will work towards achieving the Equally Safe at Work Bronze Award, having achieved the development status. Promoting a more diverse workforce that reflects our community continues to be a priority for the Council. As reported to the Communities and Place Committee in May, the Council currently holds data on 100%

of the workforce in relation to age and sex, 47% of the workforce in relation to disability and 43% in relation to race (ethnic group). The information recorded for the other protected characteristics has now vastly improved, however it is still limited in comparison. The data reported in the Mainstream Equalities Report show we currently hold 35% of the workforce data in relation to religion or belief and sexual orientation. 34% in relation to Transgender, 34% in relation to Caring Responsibilities and 32% in relation to Marriage or Civil Partnership.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate

Date: 16 May 2025

Author: Elaine Barrie, Head of People

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Revised People Strategy
Appendix 2 - Activity Achieved

Human Resources
Goireasan Daonna

People Strategy

2022 – 2027

Revised June 2025

The top of the page features a green background with purple geometric shapes. On the left, a photo of a forest path is framed by purple triangles. On the right, a photo of three people (two women and one man) working together is also framed by purple triangles.

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Document Control

A: Version History

Version	Date	Author	Change
1.2			
1.1	16.05.25	Elaine Barrie	Strategy reviewed
1.0	17.10.22	Elaine Barrie	Strategy created



1. Introduction

The People Strategy has been developed with the Council's Ambitious, Sustainable and Connected aims in mind, which are reflected throughout the document to support the [Council Programme 2022-27](#) 'Our Future Highlands'. An effective people strategy can help support the overall business goals by improving employee performance. Most importantly, it places employees at the forefront of the organisation's vision, which can have long-lasting positive effects.

There is a need to adapt our strategic thinking so we can design better services for the future based on clear fundamentals:

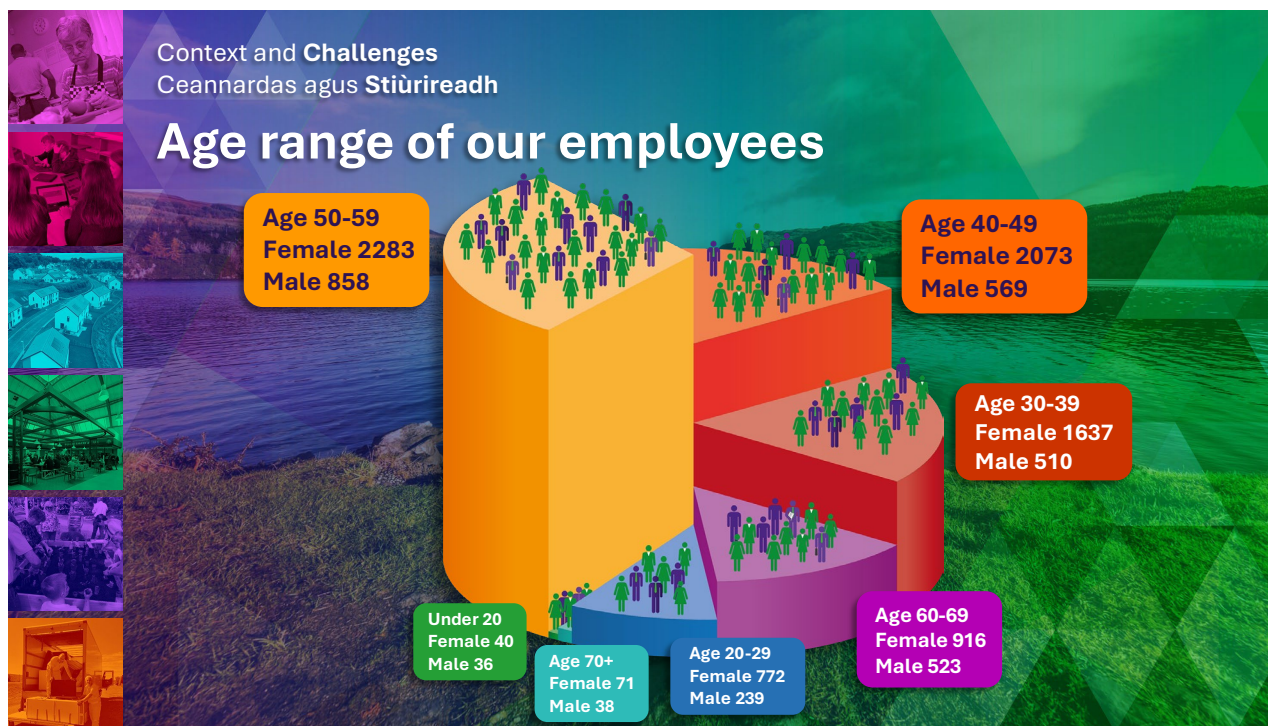
- Who it is we deliver services to and why?
- How will our people deliver services?
- How will we succeed and measure success?

Our strategy needs to focus on developing our people. We need to be ambitious for our staff. Treat them as individuals and show them that being fulfilled, safe and healthy in the workplace are not the outcomes from success, they are the ingredients for success. To successfully implement the strategy our leaders, need to instil confidence, and use their knowledge, skills and abilities to shape the future of the organisation. We need to give our people the skills to accept uncertainty and develop confidence to embrace the inevitable changes that lie ahead and operate in a safe and healthy way. The expectation is that our staff will take responsibility and be accountable for the work they are employed to do to support the implementation of the Delivery Plan aligned to our [three year budget strategy](#).

2. Context

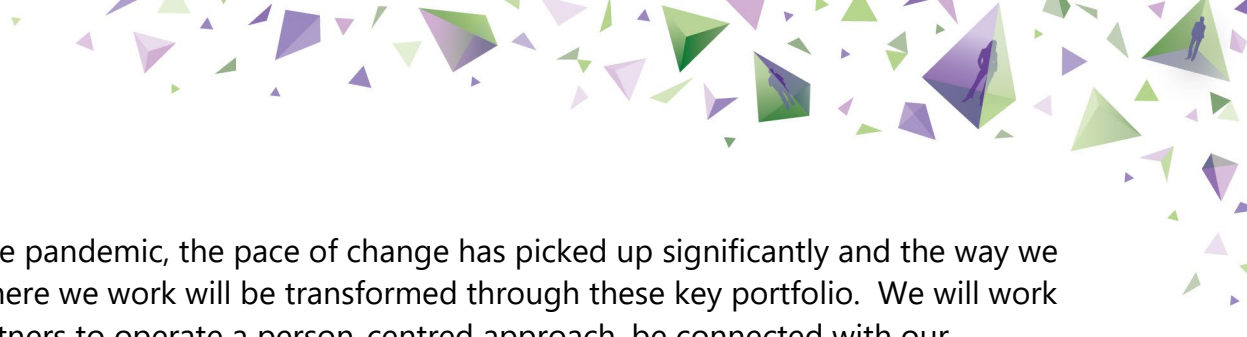
The [Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy](#) was revised in December 2024 which recognises that our most important resource is our people. We are one of the largest employers in the Highlands delivering services to a population of 238,060 (census 2021) by 10,565 staff (8,287.53 FTE). We have a predominantly female workforce – 74.1% and

25.9% males. We also have an ageing workforce with 44.4% of our staff aged 50 and above and 10.3% aged 30 or under. The overall revenue budget is £818m of which £457.4m relates to staffing costs.



Our staff deliver a range of services: sustaining our roads, footpaths, bridges and harbours; delivering education services, process welfare benefits, adult social care provision, support looked after children, offer advice and support local business, opportunities to work with partners to build new housing, provide waste/recycling services, council housing and support to prevent homelessness, public toilets, play parks. This strategy has been reviewed to connect with Our Future Highland corporate objectives. It links to the Council's [three-year budget strategy \(2024-2027\)](#) by delivering key portfolios within the Council's [Delivery Plan 2024-27](#). The key projects within the Delivery Plan which connect to the wider People Strategy are:

- **Workforce for the future portfolio** - Meeting our Council's Future Workforce Needs
- **Corporate solutions portfolio** – Future Operating Model, Hybrid Working and Data Foundations Project
- **Reconfiguring our Asset base portfolio** - Single Public Estate: New Area Community Hubs, incorporating schools, offices, depots and partners
- **Net Zero**



Following the pandemic, the pace of change has picked up significantly and the way we work and where we work will be transformed through these key portfolio. We will work with our partners to operate a person-centred approach, be connected with our communities and maximise opportunities as illustrated in the [Highland Outcome Improvement Plan](#). The pooling of resources and creativity, along with a more flexible and agile workforce will be central to our success going forward.

Fair Work

The Fair Work Convention was established in 2015 with a remit to drive forward fair work in Scotland. Fair work is defined as work that offers an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect. It balances the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers and it.

The Workforce for the Future portfolio supports the fair work vision that we will have a world-leading working life where fair work drives success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses, organisations and society. The Highland Council strives to be an employer of choice.

The [Council's Fair Work Statement](#) is published on the HR Micro site and our commitment to the fair work agenda is endorsed by our trade unions who in partnership with the council contribute to this work.

We continue to meet the commitments of a fair work employer, achieving Living Wage Employer status in 2019. We are a Disability Confident Leader and currently working towards re-accreditation. We were awarded the Armed Forces Covenant Gold level in 2021 and will seek revalidation towards the end of 2026. In addition, the Reasonable Adjustment Passport scheme was introduced in 2022.

We will build on our achievements which contribute to fair work practices. The themes outlined in this strategy contribute to developing a strong sense of corporate identity and culture our people not only recognise, but can identify with and are attracted to, as key for any successful organisation.

Many of the important dimensions of fair work can be seen in organisations where unions are recognised. Our longstanding Health and Safety and HR partnership agreements demonstrate the value we place on the contribution our trade union colleagues provide to strategic and operational issues. Working in partnership with our trade union colleagues will remain a key aspect of the People Strategy.

3. Key Elements of the Strategy

RECOVER

RESHAPE

REPRIORITISE

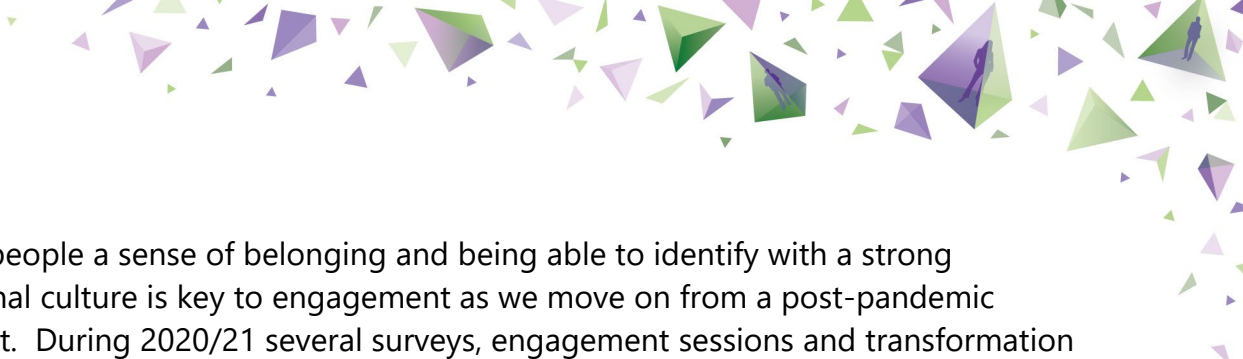
It is well documented that our staff stepped up during the pandemic to continue to deliver services, including the delivery of new services to our communities and the vulnerable. Many staff took on different roles, adapting and creating different service delivery models and connecting with our partners to continue to support our communities. As we move on from recovery and transition, we must start to reshape the organisation to align to new priorities. Our people will drive forward our corporate priorities with the People Strategy being a central and critical component closely aligned to the Delivery Plan and financial strategy. The following eight pillars of the strategy will support the organisation's transition and create a modern workforce to deliver the reprioritised services as driven by the Future Operating Model.

The key fundamental elements of the strategy are:

- staff engagement
- health, safety and wellbeing
- reward and conditions (including job design)
- talent management
- people development
- people data and processes
- workforce planning
- equality, diversity and inclusion.

Change is not a project: it is constant. The pandemic has accelerated opportunities. As leaders we need to ensure our strategies align and support the change needed from staff in order to effect change in the organisation, such as design of service under the Future Operating Model.

4. Staff Engagement



Giving our people a sense of belonging and being able to identify with a strong organisational culture is key to engagement as we move on from a post-pandemic environment. During 2020/21 several surveys, engagement sessions and transformation workshops reaffirmed that our people are committed to our vision to be Ambitious, Sustainable and Connected and that there is a real appetite to support the organisation to achieve our priorities.

An [Engagement Strategy](#) was approved in September 24 which outlined the overall aim to motivate, engage and empower the Council's workforce to achieve a working environment based on our values to improve motivation, ways of working and individual capability at all levels. This engagement strategy will cultivate creativity and innovation and establish a place in which employees are proud to work; positively contribute to the sustainability of the organisation; and have a sense of connection to the organisation.

The views and suggestions of our staff are key to informing the future delivery of Council services. We want to develop an environment where we listen and seek to understand how, through connected communication we can improve motivation to deliver dynamic ways of working and increasing individual capability at all levels.


We are delivering Investors in People (IiP) and are committed to this process to help us be informed on staff's views and shape how we operate. We will:

- Optimise employee engagement levels across the Council
- Equip line managers and senior managers with the skills to successfully engage their workforce, particularly during times of change
- Set out a consistent framework for delivering employee engagement across the Council

5. Health, Safety & Wellbeing

We will advance our employee health and wellbeing by ensuring there is a safe and secure working environment for our staff and legal compliance in all staffing matters.

Ensuring we meet our statutory obligations in respect of the health, safety and welfare at work of our employees and all others affected by our activities must be bedded into everything we do. Compliance with health and safety legislation/regulations will be considered the minimum standard to be met. Our aim is to seek a culture of continuous improvement in health, safety and wellbeing which is supported by:

- 
- Developing policies, procedures and standards
 - Monitoring and inspecting workplaces and investigating accidents, incidents and occupational ill-health
 - Providing health and safety training
 - Promoting occupational health
 - Providing confidential employee support

The **Occupational Health Safety and Wellbeing (OHSW) Policy** is being updated to reflect the new senior leadership structure. It outlines the roles and responsibilities for health and safety in the organisation including the role of our trade union partners.

An [OHSW Strategy](#) is also being developed and an action plan for the wellbeing survey is being progressed.

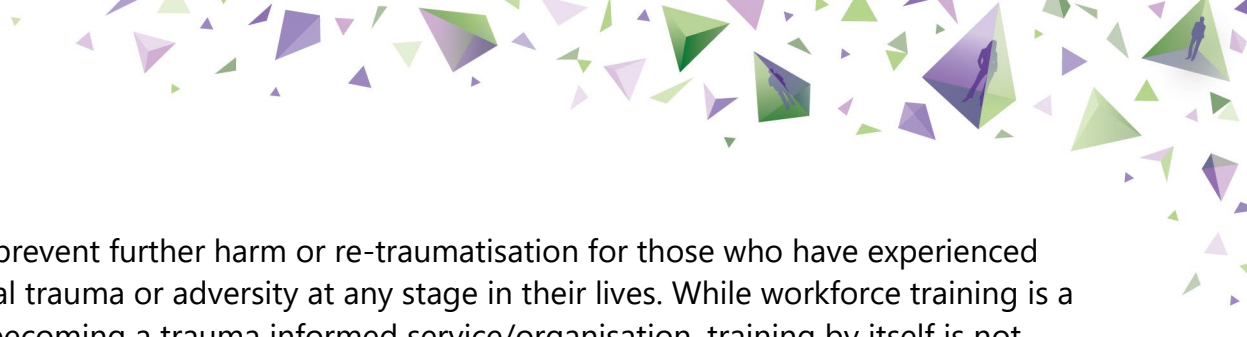
Mental Health

Supporting and promoting good mental health and wellbeing is one of the core outcomes and priorities of our Council. It is important to ensure people are supported and able to live healthy lives. As we come out of the worst of the COVID pandemic we recognise it has led to increased levels of social isolation and loneliness and some deterioration in mental health and wellbeing. Mental health is the most frequent reason for referral to our occupational health provider and contact with the employee assistance program. In Q4 2025 (Jan-March) the primary reason for contacting the employee assistance program was for mental health issues (52.8%), anxiety/worry incidents (19.2%) by complex mental health (15.4%).

As per Q4 2025 we have over 90 trained mental health and wellbeing representatives. We will continue to expand our network of mental health representatives to provide ongoing support to staff. In 2024 we also introduced the new mental health and wellbeing inbox - mhwreps@highland.gov.uk and [The mental health and wellbeing helpline](#) was launched for employees providing targeted support for staff through a range of routes. This has provided easier access to help and support for staff. The helpline has been identified nationally as a model of good practice.

Trauma-Informed Workforce

The Council has committed to rolling out a **trauma-informed practice** in all services and to promote specialist training for our staff. Trauma training is available on Traineasy. In developing a trauma-informed workforce, we aim to ensure we deliver services in



ways which prevent further harm or re-traumatisation for those who have experienced psychological trauma or adversity at any stage in their lives. While workforce training is a key part of becoming a trauma informed service/organisation, training by itself is not sufficient. Evidence indicates there are four key drivers that are required to embed trauma-informed practice and policy in a meaningful and sustained way:

- Leadership that commits to embodying trauma-informed principles and driving forward this culture change in a joined-up, collaborative way
- Workforce wellbeing is prioritised and there are structures in place for monitoring and maintaining staff wellbeing, including supervision
- People with lived experience of trauma are involved in continuous feedback and service improvement
- Data and information is collected to support routine evaluation of the impact of this work on meaningful outcomes.

Cost of Living Pressures

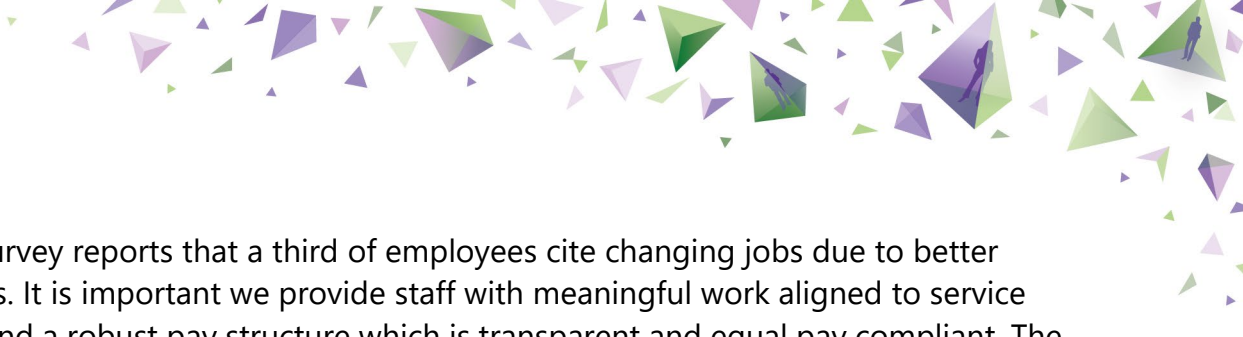
It is well documented that the impact of cost of living pressures on staff wellbeing is likely to be significant. Support with Financial Wellbeing can be accessed through the Council's Welfare team and the Employee Assistance Programme. Information on financial wellbeing can also be accessed on the [staff intranet](#) site.

Attendance Support

Supporting staff who are off sick or have a long-term condition will also form a strand of the wellbeing approach to promote high staff attendances. It is well reported absence can also adversely impact on colleagues and team performance. The effectiveness of attendance support will be monitored through data provided regularly to service management teams. We are also relaunching on-line training support for managers hosted on Traineasy to deal with short-term persistent staff absence and long-term absences. This will be in the form of short refresher training and videos. Guidance on ill health retirement is being reviewed and managers will be upskilled on the ill health retirement process.

6. Reward and Conditions (incl Job Design)

Working practices that benefit employees through good reward schemes and terms and conditions is highlighted in the Taylor Review as one of the components of good work. The [Working Lives Scotland 2022 report](#), which presents the findings from a CIPD



employer survey reports that a third of employees cite changing jobs due to better pay/benefits. It is important we provide staff with meaningful work aligned to service objectives and a robust pay structure which is transparent and equal pay compliant. The Staff Satisfaction Survey will be used to assess the effectiveness of our staff pay and benefits provision. We are an accredited Living Wage Employer and have fully consolidated the Scottish Living Wage rate and reviewed our grading structure.

Job profiles will be designed based on core skills and competences to enable our staff to move easily within teams and across services to best meet Service delivery demands, supported by the [Workforce for the Future portfolio](#). Job roles will offer meaningful work, evaluated through the Council's Job Evaluation Scheme. Jobs roles will be adapted for employees with a disability to ensure full compliance with legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010 and the Council's Reasonable Adjustment Passport Scheme introduced in 2022. Job design or redesign of roles must reflect the changing needs of the business and offer greater flexibility for sustainability of the organisation going forward.

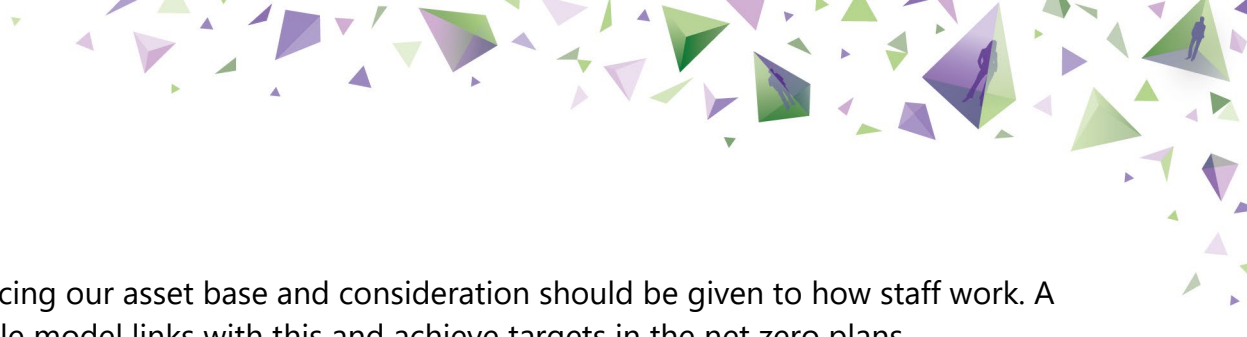
Hybrid/Mobile Working

The Council recognises the benefits of a more flexible approach to work with hybrid/mobile working being widely considered for office-based staff across the Council. The premise of hybrid/mobile working is based on business needs and services delivery requirements to ensure organisational performance is not compromised and aligns to the [Corporate Solutions portfolio](#).

The hybrid/mobile model allows staff to share valuable in-person time, to collaborate, learn and work together in an office environment, whilst also retaining the flexibility to undertake work from home or remotely as work outputs dictate.

Our workforce vision is to have a motivated and committed workforce that is agile, focused on outcomes and dedicated to continuous improvement. By modernising our working practices, we will be able to:

- Provide an environment for staff that improves productivity, work-life balance and job satisfaction and retention
- Improve service delivery for our customers
- Realise financial savings on buildings and maximise space utilisation
- Lower our carbon footprint
- Increase the diversity and inclusivity of our workplace, thereby enhancing our prospective talent pool by promoting and advertising hybrid/mobile working.



We are reducing our asset base and consideration should be given to how staff work. A hybrid/mobile model links with this and achieve targets in the net zero plans. We are also embarking on Smarter Working which involves more widely modernising approaches to work, and includes the improved use of technology; making buildings fit for purpose; increasing cross-service working; reviewing job roles and the structures of teams; and seeking new and innovative ways to engage with the Highland community.

7. Talent Management


The [Talent Management Strategy](#) and action plan provides the foundation to build an 'ambitious, sustainable and connected' culture within the organisation and supports the Workforce for the Future portfolio.

It recognises that our people are our most valuable asset both in terms of physical and financial resource. Maintaining a strong focus on attraction and retention whilst also identifying opportunities for our employees to grow and develop the necessary skills to meet both present and future needs is key.

Evolving business demands has set a new precedent for management and we must invest in the employee experience, for the entire employee life cycle. Investing in our people will demonstrate our commitment to developing a high-performing, diverse and agile workforce. We are looking for staff with a learning attitude who embrace change and will develop and grow their ability and ambition while feeling valued for their contribution.

The three key enablers embedded in our strategy are:

- **An ambitious culture** - taking forward a flexible workforce planning approach, making better use of our assets while embracing our 'One Council' approach. We will identify skills and behaviours required to achieve service, cluster and corporate priorities, fostering innovation and empowerment at all levels of the organisation.
- **Growing our workforce** – creating an environment that supports employee development, encourages flexibility, and fosters a growth mindset, ensuring we become a resilient and sustainable council.
- **Attract Talent** – establish the Council as the 'employer of choice' in Scotland, with a recruitment and selection process that is a positive experience for all candidates. Nurturing our employees by prioritising their wellbeing and offering a progressive, fair work environment that supports a healthy work-life



balance. As an inclusive employer, the Council values diversity and actively promotes recruitment practices that ensure equality, diversity, and inclusion at all levels of the organisation.

Provision of key housing for critical staff roles in areas where housing has been identified as a barrier to recruitment continues to be a priority. Other key enablers involve strengthening our cross-service working and building upon collaborative opportunities with partner organisations. Furthermore, improving and increasing our engagement with local communities and education establishments will be key to engaging younger talent and we must enhance the marketing of our job and career opportunities, raising the profile of the Council with the ambition of being considered an employer of choice in the Highlands.

We have demonstrated our ability to implement alternative service delivery models, and we must continue to strive for excellence with a defined corporate Council approach to talent management to meet both organisational and Service needs. We will harness our progress and multi-skill our employees to future-proof our organisation as we move forward. Our workplace aim is to be high performing and foster positive staff attitudes and behaviour through career opportunities and genuine commitment to employee wellbeing that will in turn increase staff loyalty and motivation.

8. People Development

People Development Plan

The renaming of Learning & Development to People Development (PD) is to highlight the required move from delivery of training by an organisation to the future role of facilitating development of our people, based on the needs of the organisation. To achieve the Council's vision, and to meet the needs of busy staff we will provide a blended approach to learning with a move towards more learning being delivered through digital solutions, while continuing with face-to-face provision where it will be most effective (diagram 1 below).

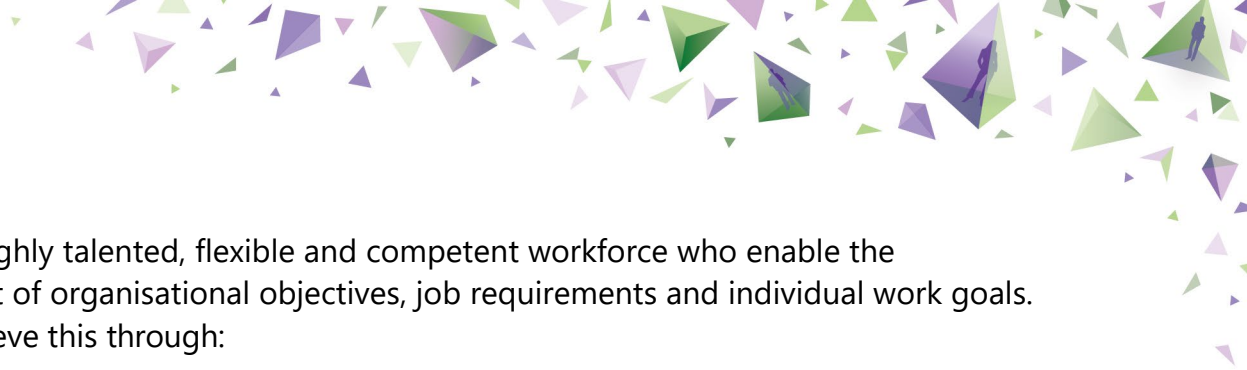


Diagram 1

This change meets the needs of busy staff by providing learning opportunities at the best time and place, and following the principles of the [70:20:10](#) learning model. This maximises the impact of learning through practical experience, people, and formal training methods, enabling us to create and support high-performing workforces in a cost sustainable manner, meeting the objectives of the [Delivery Plan 2024/27](#). All levels of staff will be encouraged to cascade and share knowledge and skills with others across their teams.

The Learning & Development Strategy will create a framework that details vision, objectives, primary learning needs, employee groups, core delivery methods, measurement, and governance to ensure that the PD function has a clearly articulated purpose and roadmap. We will continue to deliver and increase our range of Scottish Vocational Qualifications and other awards for our staff and as part of our agreement for NHS staff. As a Skills Development Scotland training provider, and to meet the objectives of the Workforce for the Future portfolio, we will increase the number and range of Modern Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships and offer places to appropriate external partners.

We will follow best practice [Chartered Institute of Personnel Development](#), [Chartered Management Institute](#) and [Institute of Leadership and Management](#) and involve key stakeholders to inform a comprehensive needs analysis so we understand the type of support that would be most valuable across all staff groups and teams, including providing opportunities for continuous professional development. We will adopt an evidence-based approach to designing interventions that identify gaps and upskill employees. Our priority is to work across the Council aligning with the Digital Strategy,



to build a highly talented, flexible and competent workforce who enable the achievement of organisational objectives, job requirements and individual work goals. We will achieve this through:

Elected Members, Leadership and Management Development

We will work with Elected members to identify development opportunities and signpost to specialist interventions to support them in their roles.

A Senior Leadership programme and opportunities will be designed and delivered to develop the effectiveness of our leaders.

Blended Management Development and mentoring programmes will develop skills, identify best practice, and advise on what is expected from our managers.

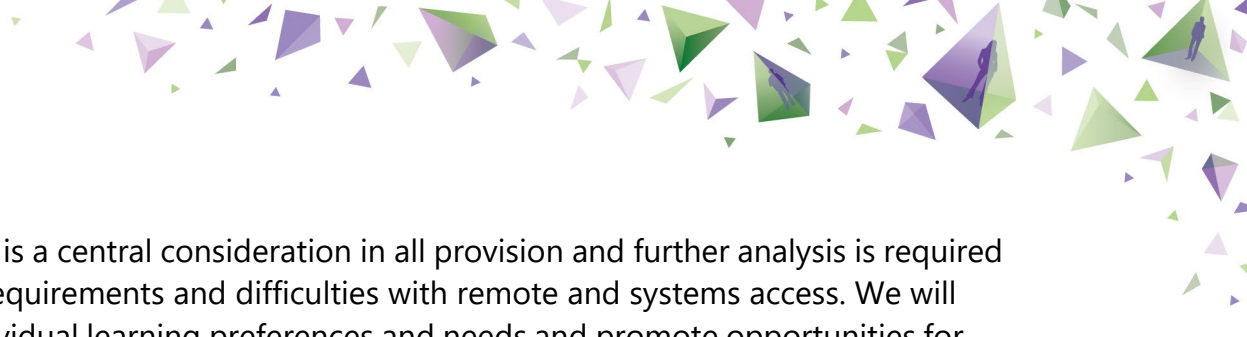
The development of coaching skills will be actively promoted amongst all managers as a way of effectively supporting team members and developing a more effective work force for the future.

Management and Staff Induction

A clear induction process with supporting documentation which outlines organisational objectives, team and job outcomes, and includes mandatory learning will be designed. This will provide a positive introduction for new employees and those moving jobs within the organisation and safeguards employees and the organisation from harm, including breach of data and H&S legislation and best practice.

Digital Learning

As we move to more learning being available digitally, our key priority is to make efficient use of Traineasy, our e-learning platform. This will include increasing the number of courses available, provide signposts to learning that are linked to Employee Review and Development (ERD), making use of reporting functionality appropriately. We will work in collaboration with the platform provider, Payroll/HR System and ICT specialists to implement required technical changes. We will build on existing networks with specialists where required to inform content, which will result in tangible outcomes aligned to the organisational values, competencies and behaviours detailed in the [Delivery Plan](#), and [Highland Outcome Improvement Plan](#)



Accessibility is a central consideration in all provision and further analysis is required to identify requirements and difficulties with remote and systems access. We will address individual learning preferences and needs and promote opportunities for pre-recorded and real time options such as Question & Answer sessions and screen sharing sessions.

There is a clear focus on improving and developing digital skills for our staff to meet future requirements of the organisation aligned to efficiency and performance agenda.

9. People Data & Processes

The effective support, management, and wellbeing of the people we employ relies on effective decision making, understanding the attributes and characteristics of those people and evidenced-based plans for their future deployment. This in turn requires a systematic approach to the management of extremely large quantities of data.

The current systems need to be significantly strengthened as currently users of the systems:

- Feel frustrated and fatigued
- Lack faith that the data produced is right and think it is slow to arrive
- Believe the system creates inefficiencies instead of adding value
- Believe systems are of less value for strategic planning than they should be
- Do not support standard operating procedures or adoption of business rules
- Are not joined up, have elements that are unpredictable and poorly controlled.

The new financial system is now operational and work is continuing on developing improved processes and the provision of timeous corporate staffing data. The HR Payroll system aims to “create a step change in system capability for the service and the council as a whole”. This will mean:

- A rationalisation and simplifications of standards

- Creating “one version of the truth” through effectively managing the data
- Ensuring clear support roles and teams aligned to the needs of the business

Priorities in HR and Payroll project are:

- A data cleanse, restructure, and maintenance project
- People and Role Team design
- A systems approach to data support to the employee life cycle

Throughout the project we will ensure stakeholders and initiatives are connected so that what is delivered is fit for purpose, sustainable and resilient.

10. Workforce Planning

The [Corporate Workforce Planning Strategy](#) has been approved with actions and desired outcomes focusing on four themes:

- Recruitment and staff retention
- Staff wellbeing
- Training and development
- Council structures

Investing in our current workforce and ‘grow your own’ continues to feature as way of addressing skill shortages and our ageing workforce. We will continue to promote Modern Apprentice, Graduate Apprentice and Youth Trainee opportunities and use external funding for this. Modern and graduate apprenticeships are not exclusively targeted at our younger workforce. These training routes are open to staff of all ages and will be used to upskill the existing workforce.

The Council has signed up to the **Young Person Guarantee** scheme was launched in November 2020. It aims to give all young people aged 16-24 the opportunity of a job, apprenticeship, further or higher education, training or volunteering as described by the Workforce for the future portfolio. Signing up to the Young Person’s Guarantee can bring the following benefits:

- Building a skilled workforce now and in the future
- Gaining new ideas and insight from a generationally diverse team

- Helping with recruitment, retention and succession planning
- Developing and motivating exiting staff
- Raising awareness of the council and job roles

The [Workforce Planning Strategy](#) will take into account the [Digital Strategy](#) approved by Corporate Resources Committee on 8 September 2022. The use of technology to modernise and transform the way services are delivered cannot be done without our people. Digital must be an integral part of the corporate approach to service delivery. Upskilling and developing our staff with digital skills a key component of workforce planning.

11. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion


The promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion across our workforce is central to our People Strategy. All our staff should feel included and valued irrespective of their age, disability status, ethnicity, faith, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation or socio-economic background.

There are legal aspects to this and as a public body we have duties to give regard to how we tackle discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality; and foster good relations. At the same time, we also recognise and value the wider benefits that a diverse workforce, reflecting the different experiences and backgrounds of our communities, can bring to our organisation.

Equality, diversity and inclusion form a key element of our People Strategy. Our focus will be to promote equality, diversity and inclusion throughout our recruitment and employment policies and practices; to encourage a workplace culture of dignity, respect and engagement; and to equip our staff with the skills and confidence needed to deliver on equality, diversity and inclusion as an employer and service provider.

Our priorities are to:

- Improve our understanding of how our workforce profile reflects the wider community and use the data to inform future activity
- Review our recruitment and selection processes and guidance with a view to attracting and retaining a diverse workforce through our approach to talent management
- Review our equality, diversity and inclusion learning and development opportunities to help develop the skills and confidence of all staff to deliver

- 
- on the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion
 - Take forward work to achieve Disability Confident Leader status following the introduction of our Reasonable Adjustment Passport scheme in 2022
 - Achieve the Equally Safe at Work Bronze accreditation to progress work on women's labour market equality, and to address gender inequality in the workplace and tackle violence against women. This includes delivering development opportunities such as workplace shadowing and mentoring schemes

12. Monitoring

Action plans have been created for each of the key elements of the strategy below, with the exception of reward and conditions as the need for the plan is dependant on conditions which would be negotiated.

- staff engagement
- health, safety and wellbeing
- reward and conditions (including job design)
- talent management
- people development
- people data and processes
- workforce planning
- equality, diversity and inclusion

An owner for each plan will be assigned from within the HR Management Team. The plans will focus on key deliverables for the year ahead and the team as a whole will assess progress on a regular basis. The assessment of the progress will be reported to committee and through service plan updates as way of governance. Reporting will show links between deliverables from the plan and performance indicators measured as part of the operational delivery plan. In addition, progress against the strategy will be communicated to the following groups:

- Employee partnership forums eg Staff Partnership Forum, HR Sub Group, Conditions of Service
- Central Safety Committee
- Corporate Resources Committee
- Corporate Leadership Team
- Extended Leadership Team (where appropriate)
- Operational Management Team (where appropriate)



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People Strategy 2022-2027 – Actions Achieved

Appendix 2

Key strands of the strategy	Activity Achieved	Evidence	Date Achieved
Staff Engagement			
Engagement Strategy developed containing a framework to deliver consistent messaging to staff	✓	Engagement Strategy approved - Corporate Resources Committee	Dec 24
Corporate Survey Action Plan	✓	<p>Action Plan approved by Council – 3 main areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement – valuing staff, recognition at committee, introduction of viva engage to provide channel for staff coms/interactions introduction of liP Senior Leadership visibility – Senior leadership appointed (tiers 1 and 2) involved in staff road shows across Highland area Management change – Training on Change Management and Service design incorporated into Future Operating Model 	<p>Dec 23</p> <p>2024 onwards</p> <p>May 2025</p> <p>Nov 24 onwards</p>
Optimise employee engagement levels across organisation	✓	Service TU meeting and H&S meetings – reconfigured to Cluster Service meetings	June 2024
Budget consultation including views of staff Dec 2023/Jan 2024	✓	‘You said we did’ during 2023/4 budget consultation contained in council budget report	Dec 23-Jan 24
Staff Road Shows	✓	ACEs and Cos engaging with staff at road shows across the Highland area, presenting on Delivery Plan and how medium term budget strategy supports the Delivery Plan.	Nov 24 onwards

Health, Safety and Wellbeing			
Employee Wellbeing Survey undertaken	✓	Reported high level findings to Corporate Resources Committee, Action Plan will be discussed at the CSC	March 2024 March 2025
Occupational Health Safety and Wellbeing	✓	Annual report to Central Safety Committee	
Carer Positive Scheme	✓	Policy approved and reviewed in June 2024 – provision for 5 days paid leave	June 2023
Disability Confident Leader Status	✓	Awarded Leader status	October 2023
Reward and Conditions (including Job Evaluation)			
Fair Work First	✓	Fair Work First statement endorsed by TUs	March 2025
Full consolidation of Scottish Living Wage	✓	This was achieved in 2023 and has a positive impact on lower graded roles predominantly held by female staff	May 2023
Talent Management			
Talent Strategy	✓	Agreed by Corporate Resources Committee	March 2025
Career Coach	✓	Appointed	Aug 2023
Succession planning Toolkit	✓	Supports Talent Strategy, services implementing as part of workforce planning	Dec 2024
People Development			
Continue to promote MA, graduate and youth trainees opportunities (internal and external)	✓	Grow our Own through MA Centre – 109 training places per year (2024-27), allocated a further 16 places, total 125 places for 2025 -2027.	2024/2025
Training for middle managers	✓	Roll out of the Management Connections Programme	2023/24 & 2024/25
Digital Learning	✓	Development of training material on e-learning platform Traineasy and providing data on training undertaken	March 2023

Data & Processes			
HR Payroll and Pensions	✓	Improved quarterly workforce data on absence, turnover, headcount, age, maternity, vacancies advertised etc Improved absence data commenced Absence dashboards commenced Workforce data dashboards commenced	Q1 2022/23 Q1 2024/25 Q1 2024/25
Workforce Planning			
Workforce Planning reviewed	✓	Approved by Corporate Resources Committee	Dec 2024
Review of Services workforce plans to produce Cluster Plans	✓	Service Cluster plans developed and approved at committee	March – May 2025
Young Person Guarantee	✓	Accepted for Scheme	February 2023
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion			
Progress Equally Safe at Work initiative	✓	Awarded development status – all policies, procedures and support for employees experiencing violence including a separate policy covering Gender Based Violence.	October 2023
Separate Harassment Policy developed as part of Equally Safe at Work accreditation	✓	Sexual Harassment Policy Approved by Corporate Resources Committee	October 2023
Published Equal Pay Statement, Equality in Employment Monitoring and Gender Pay Gap 2023	✓	Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 duty to publish information on gender pay gap shows +4.5% gap for all employee groups 2021/22 (acceptable banding + or - 5%). Equal Pay Statement 2023 - People and Transformation ; Equalities in Employment Monitoring Report 2023 - People and Transformation ; Gender Pay Gap 2023 - People and Transformation	September 2023
2 yearly publication of gender pay gap and Equal Pay Statement	✓	Publish May 2025 for pay gap 2023/24, gap has reduced to 3.2%	April 2025
Armed Forces Covenant Gold	✓	Currently hold gold status Armed Forces Covenant which is valid for 3 years and due to renew our status in 2026	2023