The Highland Council

Committee: **Corporate Resources**

Date: **5 June 2025**

Report Title: **Corporate Cluster Workforce Action Plan Update**

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

1.   Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1   In May 2024, the Depute Chief Executive Service, Resources & Finance Service and the Performance & Governance Service were merged in the newly formed Corporate Cluster. All three Services had their own Workforce Planning reports and action plans, which are now combined in this updated Cluster Workforce Plan to reflect the new structure.

1.2   In addition, information from the service workforce plans was incorporated in a [Corporate Workforce Action plan](#) which was presented at Corporate Resource Committee on 20 March 2025.

1.3   The Committee will receive annual progress reports on the Corporate action plan.

2.   Recommendations

2.1   Members are asked to:

     i.   **Note** the Corporate Cluster workforce planning report and updated 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 workforce is included as a risk in the Corporate Risk Register. There are also staffing resource challenges associated with budget constraints. This report mitigates the risk of an insufficient current and future workforce.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks 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:** No 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 a merge of previously approved reports and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Introduction

5.1 Workforce planning is the process that organisations use to ensure they have the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.

5.2 On 6 September 2023, 7 December 2023 and 7 March 2024, the Corporate Resources Committee noted the service workforce plans for Performance & Governance, Depute Chief Executive and Resources & Finance Services respectively.

5.3 There have been several changes in the Highland Council organisational structure since the Service workforce plans were presented, resulting in the alignment of eight services to three Clusters. The three Services above are now all part of the Corporate Cluster and this Workforce report reflects this new structure as requested by Audit Scotland in September 2024 and provides an update on the previous service plans.

6. Corporate Cluster

6.1 The Corporate Cluster consists of three previous Services and has a total of 750FTE and a headcount of 822 employees.

6.2 The age profile shows that 45% of staff are 50 years or older and the turnover in 2024 was 8.4%.

6.3 69% of staff are female, 31% male. 25% of the female staff work on a parttime contract against 2% of male staff working parttime.

6.4   All Chief Officers in the Cluster are now appointed and taken up post, including one external appointment. The Corporate Finance and the Business Solution sections have completed further restructures, and reviews are ongoing for the remaining parts of the Cluster.

6.5   The average number of sick days per employee covering the period Q1-Q4 2024/2025 is 9.24. For further workforce data, please refer to the current workforce profile in the attached action plan report.

7.   Workforce Planning Updates

7.1   Recruitment & Selection

7.1.1   Although recruitment and retention are not a problem on the same scale as other parts of Highland Council, there are areas where is it difficult to recruit, specifically in Finance and Legal. The Cluster applies different recruitment methods which have proven to be successful, including radio adverts and publishing vacancies in different media in addition to Myjobscotland. Other strategies involve internal staff development and promotion, and the development of career pathways.

7.1.2   It is evident that further and ongoing emphasis must be placed on future proofing the Cluster staffing as only 13.5% of staff are younger than 30, and 13% are over 60 years old. To mitigate this, the Cluster has recruited 11 Modern Apprentices in the last year. In addition, 36 members of existing staff used the MA framework to upskill.

7.1.3   The Talent Strategy 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.

7.2   Absence Management and Staff Wellbeing

7.2.1   The absence levels for the Corporate Cluster increased slightly in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24 with the average days increasing from 8.08 days to 9.24 days absence per employee. This is below the Highland Council average of 13.13 days in the same period. It should be noted the national average absence rate for councils (non-teaching) increased in 23/24increased in from 6.8 to 7.6 days.

7.2.2   Although the average days lost is below the Highland Council average of 9.2 days in Q1-Q3 2025, the focus should lie on reversing the upward trend, through a range of absence management interventions.

7.2.3   The mandatory absence management training for managers was refreshed and is completed by 92% of the managers in the Corporate Cluster. The Cluster works towards a 100% completion rate. The number of Attendance Support Officers is currently under review, in order to increase the available management support. Additionally, employees can access our Employee Assistance Programme, which provides independent advice to address wellbeing, financial and mental health concerns.

7.2.4   The Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing team provides a wide range of wellbeing support for staff and managers. The team is actively raising awareness of the available support by promoting their website, wellbeing and helpline and the existence of the mental health first aiders.

7.2.5   A staff wellbeing survey was conducted in January 2024 with a summary of key findings reported to Committee in March 2024. Work continues on findings from the survey to influence policy and to direct resources to wellbeing initiatives to address issues where required.

7.3   **Succession Planning**

7.3.1   A new succession planning toolkit was developed in 2024. The toolkit and guidance support managers with identifying key positions, timelines and development needs of internal employees (successors) with the potential to fill these posts, to ensure future service needs are met.

7.3.2   Implementation of the toolkit has started but it will take time to do a robust analysis of all key positions and development needs, and to draft development plans.

7.4   **Hybrid Working**

7.4.1   The vast majority of roles in the Corporate Cluster are office based, and hybrid working is well established in the Cluster.

7.4.2   It is recognised that hybrid working affords a better work/life balance for many staff, which supports their wellbeing and helps recruitment and retention of staff.

7.4.3   However, clear parameters are required around hybrid working in order to manage staff expectations, equity and balance the need of the individuals with service delivery requirement.

7.5   **People Development**

7.5.1   People Development was previously a challenge due to the limited availability of internal resources. However, much improvement has been achieved over the last 24 months due to increased focused resource within the People Development Team including a recently appointed Career Coach, management development training at various levels and a variety of online training on Traineasy.

7.5.2   The Employee Review and Development (ERD) process is a crucial instrument in supporting staff development. It helps to identify the skills required for staff to effectively fulfil their role and provides an opportunity to discuss any other issues relating to the job role including future plans. ERDs assists with succession planning. ERDs also clarify the employee's workload and any health, safety and wellbeing issues. Due to the importance of ERDs the Cluster strives to achieve a 90% ERD completion rate, acknowledging the fact that 100% is not realistic, taking in consideration situations such as long term absence, maternity and staff turnover.

7.5.3   As part of the [Talent Strategy](#) that was approved by Corporate Resources Committee on 20 March 2025, the organisation will work towards Investors in People (IiP) Accreditation. IiP is an internationally recognised accreditation for people management and employee wellbeing, and it aims to increase productivity across organisations by improving workplaces and supporting employee engagement. The

focus of IiP accreditation is to invest in people, wellbeing and apprentices which aligns with our workforce planning ambitions. This corporate process will start in May 2025 with Legal and Corporate Governance, followed by the remaining part of the Corporate Cluster. The Place and People Clusters will follow in 2026.

7.6 Structures

7.6.1 Due to the recent organisational restructure, the service is undergoing significant change and managers are working closely with their staff, HR and Trade Unions to review structures and ensure they are sufficient to enable successful service delivery and staff development. The service values the positive partnering relationship it has with Trade Unions, and they continue to be consulted regarding proposed changes.

8. Action Plan

8.1 The Corporate Workforce Planning report and Action plan is included as **Appendix 1**. This is based on the previous Service Workforce Plans as developed by the Management Teams supported by the HR Business Partner.

8.2 It is important to note that it is not possible to provide exact end dates for some actions as workforce planning is an ongoing process.

9. Priorities

9.1 The workforce planning priorities identified for the Corporate Cluster for the next 12 months are:

- Succession planning and staff development to mitigate the aging workforce
- Staff wellbeing and absence management
- Continued implementation of a sustainable staffing structure
- Recruitment and retention

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Date:	7 May 2025
Author:	Jannet Sikkema, Senior HR Business Partner
Background Papers:	Performance and Governance Workforce Plan, September 2023 Depute Chief Executive Workforce Plan, December 2023 Resources & Finance Workforce Plan, March 2024 Corporate Workforce Strategy, People Strategy
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Corporate Cluster Workforce Report and Action Plan 2025 - 2026

Corporate Cluster Workforce Report and Action Plan 2025 - 2026

In September 2024, Audit Scotland requested that Service Workforce Action Plans were merged to reflect the new Cluster Structure. This also provided the opportunity to update the workforce data and action plans.

This Workforce Plan is a result of merging the Performance & Governance, Depute Chief Executive Service (excl. Climate Change) and Resource & Finance Service Workforce Plans as approved in September 2023, December 2023 and March 2024. This is an interim merge, a full Workforce Planning exercise will be undertaken following a refresh of the existing Workforce Planning toolkit, including the newly developed Succession Planning toolkit.

The PESTLE, SWOT and Workforce Analysis in this report remain as per information gathered at the Service Workforce Workshops in 2023 and 2024.

However, current Corporate Cluster workforce profile data has been added to provide up to date information.

Jannet Sikkema
Senior HR Business Partner.

PESTLE (Politic, Economy, Social, Technology, Legal and Environment

Drivers for Change. **(Which external factors are impacting on the level and type of resources that are needed within the service?)**

Political	Economical	Social
- New structure – review of number of area committees? - Elected member decisions - Elections - Community /3rd sector - Scottish Government Service expectations - Greater partnership working expected from local & national government - Supporting local communities - Tax policy: environmental regulations, trade restrictions and reform: tariffs - Benchmarking with other LAs - Govt strategies e.g. focus on wellbeing	- Economic growth/decline; interest, exchange, inflation and wage rates; credit availability; contract costs; cost of living. - NI increase - Contract costs are not sustainable – need to resource reducing contract costs - Buying from frameworks – could this be done Nationally? - Attracting skills – wages not always competitive. - Silo working due to limited resources - Changing costs e.g. subscriptions - Hardware costs increasing - Resource to scope projects which can be taken forward as and when funding becomes available - Increasing equality agenda with reduced budgets - Diverse, ringfenced (sometimes temporary) funding streams - Reactive working - Ability to collect & recover (Revs) - Budget settlement – public sector financial challenge - Green Free Port - Align budget to expectations	- Skills of staff needed are in demand - Hybrid model – flexibility in terms of where people are based vs commitment to the Highlands/supporting the local economy - Changing labour market – mobility of people – live anywhere, work anywhere - Aging population and geographical nature of organization - Lifestyle choice – living in Highland - Staff resources and skills - Under-resourced to meet needs in the region. In terms of offering support in relation to poverty and being able to progress projects/scale up to meet needs - Changing expectations of internal/external customers - Urban v rural – growth v decline - Demographics – aging workforce - Cost of living and child care - Housing challenges to support recruitment

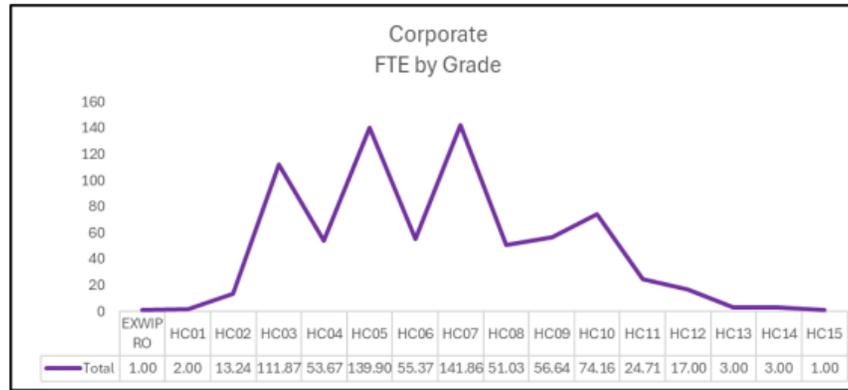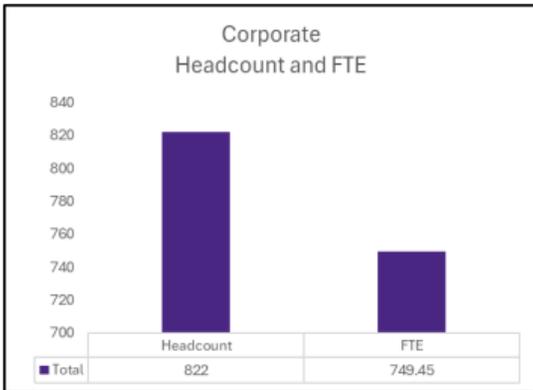| Technology	Legal	Environment
- Digital Strategy - New technologies i.e., robotics and artificial intelligence: rate of change, do HC staff have the right skills? - New Finance system and HRP project - Telephony - ICT opportunities and challenges: - Lack of client group/customer digital access - Digital v face to face contact - Digital strategy - Cost and availability of new tech - to buy/change and get benefits - Invest in resource to get benefit from technology - Cyber Security risks - Asset Rationalisation – needs to be data driven – link ICT, climate change, Planning regs	- Legislation/guidance changes, for example Data Protection, Electoral rules, employment law. - HR legislation and guidance - Expectation/requirement for council to support/achieve statutory targets in relation to condition of domestic properties and energy perf (EPC rating)	- Climate change targets and deadlines fast approaching - Increasing regulations to force change and subsequently behaviour – emissions, transport - Complexity of climate crisis – climate anxiety (esp. young people) - Certain approaches to climate change are better done nationally - Climate Change evidence based targets – understand full cost implications for Council. - Environmental regulations (Climate Change; Carbon Clever; Net Zero target) means increased need to switch to sustainable resources; ethical sourcing (both locally and nationally); - Hybrid working: less property, less travel results in reduced carbon footprint - Working more digital has reduced the need to print.

STRENGTHS ANALYSIS

	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
	STRENGTHS	**WEAKNESSES**
CURRENT Consider current resource, capability, and performance strengths and issues. What is done well and what areas require improvement?	• Experienced and dedicated staff • Professional services • Good reputation (locally & nationally • Efficient & Effective • Good morale although not as strong as pre Covid • Use of technology Staff attuned to efficiency/money saving • Internal vacancies – focus on develop/promoting existing staff • Robust policies • Formulated direction of travel • Professional networks	• Staffing/difficult to recruit posts • Resourcing work/priorities • Lack of Progression routes – pathways to success • Stretched staff – caught up in BAU • Failure to invest in existing systems – develop and staff up to date • Still lots of manual processing (Revs) • Service identity – do others understand what we do/key deliverables • Single points of failure, no succession planning. • Incomplete implementation of hybrid working – parameters still not clear • Getting the right data and accuracy of data - we know we have it but hidden • Lack of clear documented processes
	OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
FUTURE Identify potential opportunities and potential threats. What future developments could attract required workforce? Are there potential skills shortages, workforce competition, recruitment or retention issues, or distribution.	• Staff development opportunities (MA/GA) • Flexible working, attractive pension scheme, family friendly policies – sell the package • Remove barriers to allow better collaboration and knowledge sharing • New funding opportunities • Generic job descriptions/career paths • Better use of data • Delivery plan outcomes • Process efficiencies • More benchmarking • Increased use of technology • Freeport	• Cyber attacks • Data breaches • Funding – Govt grants & Council Tax • (Regional) climate impact • Additional duties coming from new legislation without the funding to support • Aging workforce • Reduction training budgets • Insufficient risk and change management

Corporate — Headcount and FTE

	Headcount	FTE
Total	822	749.45

Corporate — FTE by Grade

	EXWIP RO	HC01	HC02	HC03	HC04	HC05	HC06	HC07	HC08	HC09	HC10	HC11	HC12	HC13	HC14	HC15
Total	1.00	2.00	13.24	111.87	53.67	139.90	55.37	141.86	51.03	56.64	74.16	24.71	17.00	3.00	3.00	1.00

Annual Turnover - Period Jan - Dec 2024 (Corporate)

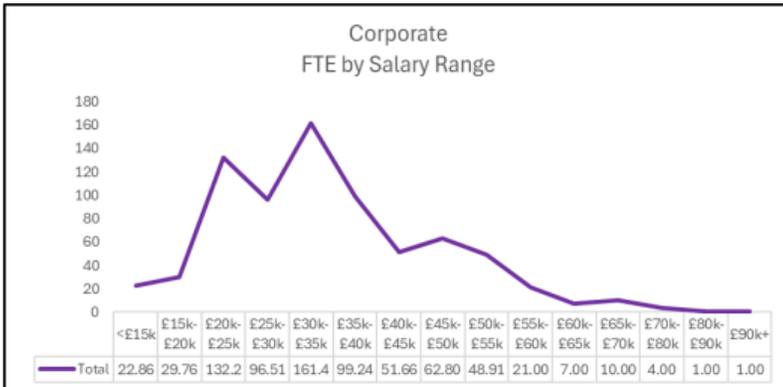|	
Headcount	822
Leavers	69
Turnover	8.4%

No of Starters and Leavers - Period Oct - Dec 2024 (Corporate)

Starters	22
Leavers	12
Turnover for the Period	1.5%

Posts with Projected End Dates up to 31.12.2025

72

Corporate — FTE by Salary Range

	<£15k	£15k-£20k	£20k-£25k	£25k-£30k	£30k-£35k	£35k-£40k	£40k-£45k	£45k-£50k	£50k-£55k	£55k-£60k	£60k-£65k	£65k-£70k	£70k-£80k	£80k-£90k	£90k+
Total	22.86	29.76	132.2	96.51	161.4	99.24	51.66	62.80	48.91	21.00	7.00	10.00	4.00	1.00	1.00

Corporate — FTE by Age Range

Age Range	FTE
70+	3.06
60-70	97.91
50-60	236.47
40-50	167.85
30-40	140.77
20-30	100.38
16-20	3.00

Corporate — Gender Split

- Female 69%
- Male 31%

Corporate — Contract Type

	Full-time	Part-time
Total	642.00	107.45

Corporate — Contract Type by Gender

	Full-time	Part-time
Female	417.00	102.30
Male	225.00	5.15

Sickness Absence Q1 – Q4 2024-2025 compared to 2023-2024:

Sickness Absence Corporate Cluster Q1-Q4 2024-2025			
Average days lost per employee	9.24	Highland Council average days lost	13.13
Sickness Absence Corporate Cluster Q1-Q4 2023-2024			
Average days lost per employee	8.08	Highland Council average days lost	11.46

The data above shows an increase in 2024-2025 compared to the previous year. This is a trend we see Highland Council wide, and data shows that this trend is comparable with other Scottish Local Authorities. The average absence in the Corporate Cluster is below the Highland Council average.

Top 3 reasons for Absence Corporate Cluster*	Top 3 reasons for absence Highland Council*
1. Viral (Covid/Flu/Cold)	1. Viral (Covid/Flu/Cold)
2. Diarrhoea/Vomiting	2. Diarrhoea/Vomiting
3. Headache/Migraine	3. Stress/Anxiety.

* Based on FTE days lost

Workforce ANALYSIS

WORKFORCE Current	Description	PRIORITY	MEASURES TO TAKE TO ADDRESS
Age profile	45% of all staff in the Corporate Cluster is older than 50, which is in line with the Highland Council and national data. This group includes those in (management) roles that require a high degree of specialist knowledge and skills. Retirements and resignations result in loss of experience and knowledge, and possible difficult to recruit posts.	1	Succession planning Identify 'single points of failure' and mitigate Use of MA and trainee programmes Implement measures to support aging workforce to support continuous employment
Demographics	69% of staff in the Corporate Cluster is female against 31% male, The Cluster is slightly more balanced than the Council average: 73.8% of all Council staff i area female. This is a national trend in Local Authorities and not specifically a Highland issue. However, we should ensure that gender distribution is reflected in management roles. Female employees are more likely to work parttime contracts, which is confirmed by the Cluster data: of the 107,45 FTE parttime contracts, only 5.15FTE are worked by male employees.	3	Flexibility in contracts and place of work/hybrid working can help with the retention of (female) employees.
EMPLOYMENT TYPES	72 employees in the Corporate Cluster have a fixed term contract, due to either ringfenced temporary funding for projects, or Modern Apprenticeships. It should be noted that this number also includes permanent staff who have taken up acting up or secondment opportunities. Parts of the Cluster would consider termtime contracts in support of talent attraction. The cluster has a low level of agency staff.	3	Fixed term contracts provide necessary flexibility and secondment & acting up contracts for permanent staff provide development opportunities. Managers will have to ensure that fixed term contracts are used correctly and should be aware of the employment rights for fixed term staff. No immediate actions required on this matter.
Recruitment and Retention	69 employees in the Cluster left Highland Council employment in 2024. This equates to a turnover rate of 8.4%, which is well below the Council's turnover rate of 13.9%. It has to be noted that other parts of the Council have many more fixed term contracts, specifically in schools, which impacts on the Council's turnover rate.	2	Retirements and fixed term contracts due to end are reasons for people leaving employment. Retirements can often result in loss of valuable experience and knowledge. Robust succession planning is key to mitigate this loss.

	Trainee programmes are created in Corporate Finance, Legal and Audit teams. The Cluster also makes use of the available Modern Apprenticeship frameworks and will continue to do so. Work is underway to analyse the recruitment data available on talentlink, with the purpose to report on: - Number of vacancies - Areas of recruitment - Number of re-ads - Number of applicants - Number of withdraws - Number of successful appointments This analysis will help target recruitment strategies.		Exit questionnaires give insight in reasons for leaving and where possible, action is being taken to address avoidable resignations. The new developed talent strategy will support better ways to attract staff and relevant channels for recruitment are utilised. Improved links and increased events in schools and UHI to explore options for attracting and encouraging young people and graduates is part of the Workforce for the Future Portfolio in the Delivery Plan. This will not only help with recruitment challenges: offering employment within our communities is another desired outcome of the Workforce for the Future Portfolio, in alignment with the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan. Promoting the staff benefits – not just salary – on working for the Council, continuing developing staff and enable routes for career progression will help attract and retain skilled staff. The Workforce for the Future portfolio includes a number of projects to support the Council as an Employer of choice. A robust onboarding/induction process makes new staff feel welcome, supported and connected, and there is evidence that this has a positive impact on retention. Difficult to recruit vacancies could be reviewed to determine if/where required and if/how work can be delivered differently.
Staff development	For 2025/2026, the Cluster has a total budget in 2025/26 of £136,777 available for development and learning. This would equate to around £180 per employee, though in reality some funding is ringfenced for specific purposes so it is not evenly split. Specific ongoing changes relating to HR, Finance, Legal, Revenues and Benefits regulations will require staff to undertake specialist training.	1	91% of respondents of the staff survey in 2022 agreed that they had the skills to do their job (see below). However, the workforce planning workshops identified the need to further equip staff with digital skills to explore how technology can enable modernisation of processes and increase efficiency. Strategic workforce planning and succession planning identifies current and future skills gaps and allows managers to plan mitigation. A succession planning

	The Cluster is well represented at the management connections programme for middle managers. The staff survey in 2022 showed that staff are not positive about career progression with Highland Council and Exit interview questionnaires highlight that lack of development is one of the reasons for staff to leave their employment with Highland Council. Some permanent staff have experienced the MA route, and this continues to work well. There is an appetite for increased staff training in particular to equip staff with digital skills.		toolkit has been developed and presented at SMTs, there has been a delay in Council wide implementation due to resources. Modern Apprenticeships for existing staff, mentoring, shadowing, grow your own, acting up and secondments are all measures that can be put in place to support staff development. Leading, thinking and Being Digital are the three key themes of the Council's digital strategy, which in turn forms part of the Council's wider agenda for the organisational development, growing the workforce for the future and ensuring no one is left behind. .
Staff wellbeing and performance	In the first three quarters of 2024-2025, 5,496 days were lost due to sickness absence in the Cluster. This equates to just over 15FTE. A staff wellbeing survey was conducted during December 2023-January 2024 and 43% of staff in the Corporate Cluster responded. Main findings: 1. 61% of Corporate staff felt in control of their workload, allowing them to take appropriate breaks – which is higher than the 48% Council average 2. The survey confirmed that the majority of staff feel confident that they can to do their job well most of the time and that their input was valued.	1	Absence management enables staff to return to work at the earliest opportunity, which is not only good practice, but also cost effective and avoids further absence from team members who absorb the additional workload. Additional Attendance Support Officers are currently being considered. An action plan following the analysis of the responses to the wellbeing survey is being developed. The Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing team provides a wide range of wellbeing support resources for staff and managers. Ongoing awareness of available support is required. In 2025, the Council will start working towards an IiP accreditation.
Structure and roles	Since the Service Workforce Planning reports were drafted, the Resource & Finance, Depute Chief Exec and Performance & Governance Services were merged in the new Corporate Cluster (30th April 2024) and the Assistant Chief Assistant and Chief Officers were recruited.	1	Restructures in Corporate Finance and Business Solutions have taken place in 2024 and early 2025. A review of other sections in the Cluster is in process with the purpose to ensure robust service delivery in the most efficient way.

	Managers within the Corporate Cluster have varying spans of control and number of direct reports, ranging from 1 to 24.		We need to ensure that structures are aligned appropriately and are sufficient to meet anticipated changes to service delivery and ways of working.
Staff satisfaction survey 2022, 66% response rate.	The 66% response to the Staff survey in 2022 was high. Staff in the Corporate Cluster were most in agreement with: 1. I am interested in the work that I do: 94% 2. I have the skills to do my work: 91% 3. I am trusted to carry out my job: 88.5% Staff were most in disagreement with: 1. I feel I am able to challenge the way things are done in Highland Council: 44.5% 2. I have regular ERDs: 41% 3. I believe senior leaders will take actions following this survey: 37%	2	The outcomes of the Survey were discussed in SMTs and teams. Three years have passed since the last staff satisfaction survey, however, a staff wellbeing survey was conducted between December 2023 and January 2024, and the key outcomes presented at Resources Committee in March 2024. Although another survey will be needed to measure improvements, staff now log their ERDs on Traineasy and we know that 70% of staff in the corporate cluster have had an ERD in the last 12 months, which is a significant improvement. This is due to the refreshed ERD process. Now the ERDs are logged on Traineasy, we are able to monitor and will report to SMTs.
Hybrid Working	In the Staff Wellbeing Survey 2024, a fast majority of the respondents in the Cluster said they can work from home, which is not surprising as most roles in the Cluster are office based. Most staff prefer a hybrid way of working, a mix between working from home and in an office environment. The highest scoring benefits for staff working from home or hybrid were work/life balance and wellbeing, however it is equally important to acknowledge the benefits of staff coming together in terms of team building and collaborative working. Overall, the hybrid working model works well, however it does present some challenges in terms of managing staff expectations and balancing the needs of individuals and service delivery requirements. It is noted that more staff come into the office for at least 3 days a week, compared to not at all or maximum 1 day a week just after the pandemic. It was	1	Albeit hybrid working affords staff greater flexibility and a better work/life balance – all measures to attract and retain staff – it was acknowledged that clear parameters are required around Hybrid Working and the requirements of staff being available during core hours, and team agreements should be updated regularly. A hybrid and flexible working policy is in development.

| | also recognised that hybrid working should align with asset rationalisation in order to meet efficiency targets. | | |

WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN 2025-2026

WORKFORCE CHALLENGES PRIORITIES	ACTIONS REQUIRED	DESIRED OUTCOMES	WHO	WHEN
Age profile				
45% of all staff is older than 50	- Implement succession planning toolkit including age profile - MA and trainee programme - Identify 'single points of failure' and mitigate - Implement measures for aging workforce to support continuing employment	- Sufficient staff numbers and no skills shortages/gaps in the future. - A better balanced age profile where possible - Reduced number of 'single points of failure'.	Senior management, HR BP, MA centre, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing team	The succession planning toolkit is available and target date for full implementation is June 2026.
Recruitment and Retention				
Recrutiment challenges and difficult to recruit posts. Cluster turnover is 8.4% (2024) Some resignations are avoidable.	- Analyse data to further identify difficult to recruit post and apply different recruitment strategies to mitigate - Analyse exit questionnaires to resolve avoidable reasons for resignation. - Build on existing trainee programmes, MA and 'grow our own. - Refresh job descriptions and job titles to attract suitable candidates. - Review induction programme - Implement talent attraction strategy. - Recruitment and selection (R&S) guidance to be refreshed. - Explore mentoring role for those looking at phased retirement - Analyse exit questionnaires to identify reasons for leaving and put improvement is in place were possible. Anonymised, quarterly reports are provided. - Increase school events/job fairs.	- Highland Council is employer of choice, resulting in less difficult to recruit posts. - Right people at the right time with the right skillset now and the in the future. - Grow our own reduces the need to advertise externally. - Reduce turnover to avoid skills gaps - New recruits feel welcome and connected.	Senior management, HR BP, Talent Manager.MA team	The analysis of the recruitment data will be completed in May 2025. The talent strategy was approved by committee in March 2025 and applied going forward. Relating projects from the WFTF portfolio ongoing. The R&S guidance to be refreshed Q4 2024.

Staff development	Actions required	Desired outcomes	Who	When
Skills gap analysis need to be improved, which is also an action from the Audit Scotland Workforce Planning audit report.

Detailed skills gap analysis allows management to put measures in place to mitigate.

Lack of staff development or career progression are given as reasons for leaving Highland Council employment. | Implementing the succession planning toolkit to assists with the skills gap analysis.

Allocate existing learning and development budget and complete a Cluster L&D plan, informed by staff ERDs.

ERDs help managers and staff to identify development needs/wishes and the newly appointed career coach can support with identifying development opportunities, matched with areas where we experience skills gaps. Ensure that all staff have up-to-date ERD that is logged on Traineasy.

Continue to expand the internal face to face and online learning modules.

Equip staff with digital skills. Leading, thinking and Being Digital are the three key themes of the Council's digital strategy.

Monitor staff completion of mandatory training.

Review current establishment and determine if present structure and roles offer routes for career development.

Create more generic job descriptions to allow greater flexibility and movement between different areas. | - Staff have the skills and competencies required for their current role and future service delivery and feel confident to undertake their role.

- Staff remain in Council employment because they experience development opportunity and career progression

- L&D budgets are used strategically | Management, HRPB, People Development, Career Coach, Digital Transformation | Skills gap analysis using succession planning toolkit and ERDs and further WFP workshops, completed June 2026.

Strategic Cluster Learning and Development plan drafted in line with available budgets: June 2026.

Establishment review: December 2026 |

Structures and roles	Actions Required	Desired Outcomes	Who	When
The three Depute Chief Executive (exl climate change), Performance & Governance and Resources & Finance Services are combined in the newly formed Corporate Cluster. All new Chief Officer posts have been appointed to in the last 12 months. The Chief Officers span of control/direct reports vary significantly and needs further review. A review of the next management layer is underway.	Restructures have taken place in Corporate Finance and Digital Solutions. Review of other parts of the Cluster to take place, including a review of the management layers below the Chief Officers. Opportunities to improve service delivery have been identified and should be implemented following business cases. Review if current job descriptions are aligned to strategic objectives.	Establish a sustainable, cost effective structure that is fit for purpose and ensures valued service delivery.	Senior management, HR BP.	December 2025
Staff Wellbeing and Performance				
Sickness absence has increased in the last three quarters of 2024/25.	Ensure that all managers complete the mandatory Attendance management e-module. Managers to review absence stats on a regular basis to identify causes and trends, and continue to work closely with the Attendance Support Officer and Occupational Health to identify trends and active pro-active to reduce absence Ensure that all staff have an up-to-date ERD which includes staff wellbeing. Continue to make staff and managers aware of support available, for example promoting the Employee Assistance Programme, the Mental Health Representatives, and other tools and advice provided on the Health and Safety website.	100% compliance with the mandatory training for managers 90% staff have had an ERD in the last 12 months. Substantive and timely support for staff will reduce staff absence, performance issues and improve overall staff wellbeing, ultimately resulting in reduction of cost and turnover.	(senior) management, HR Officers, Attendance Support Officer, OHS&W team, People Development team	100% compliance mandatory training and 90% compliance ERDs by December 2025

Hybrid Working	Actions	Desired Outcomes	Who	When
The pandemic caused an immediate shift from working in an office to working from home. Hybrid working is the norm for many office based staff. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' going forward but need for clear guidelines/policies to ensure this is managed consistently.	Complete clear guidance on flexible and Hybrid working Review available office space and make fit for purpose to accommodate collaborative working. Work with teams to complete the team agreement documents about ways of working and review regularly	Effective match between work requirements and staff preference to enhance service delivery and staff wellbeing.	(Senior) management, HR, Reconfiguring our asset base PortFolio	Guidance complete June 2025.