

Agenda Item	<b>14</b>
Report No	<b>RES/44/25</b>

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Corporate Resources

**Date:** 20 November 2025

**Report Title:** Corporate Systems Update – HR & Payroll Programme

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

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides financial, performance, risk and general information on the programme to replace and improve the Council's Core Corporate HR & Payroll (HRP) related systems.
- 1.2 The programme is working towards the vision to deliver an **ambitious**, user-focused HRP experience that empowers users and streamlines operations through **connected** technology and **sustainable** practices.
- 1.3 The HR Data and Process Enablement Project completed in September 2025. The outcomes from that work are now being taken forward in various workstreams including the TalentLink Recruitment System Project and the HR Solution Implementation Project.
- 1.4 Updates on these projects and associated preparatory work are provided in this report.
- 1.5 Updates are also provided on change management and stakeholder engagement activity that supports the technical delivery within the programme.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - i. **Note** the updates and progress of the HRP Programme.

## 3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** Earmarked reserve and budget pressure funding alongside the existing budgets for the current systems in use has provided project funding to support the project implementation. Resource requirements are being reviewed to ensure that they are adequate to meet the specified project deliverables, ongoing project work, and considering remaining project risks.

A further HRP Solution implementation and transformation project is now being scoped considering the HRP technology options appraisal undertaken as part of the HR Data and Process Enablement project. This will inform the further funding required to progress future transformation work.

## 2025/26

The Programme Financial position as at the end of Quarter 2 2025/26 is:

	Total Remaining Programme Budget at 1 April 2025	Commitments for FY 2025/26	Remaining Forecast Spend for FY 2025/26	25/26 Spend to Date	25/26 Forecast Outturn
Q2 25/26 position (£)	775,945	0	134,134	452,840	188,971

The forecast balance at the end of 2025-26 will be available to be used on programme work in 2026-27.

- 3.2 **Legal:** The Council has a statutory requirement to pay staff and suppliers and record payments for tax and other audit purposes. Systems and processes need to comply with these statutory duties.
- 3.3 **Risk:** The systems being replaced are critical corporate systems that support core aspects of service delivery (paying staff, paying suppliers, receiving income, etc). It is essential therefore that successful implementation is achieved, and risk is managed and mitigated given the critical impact risks could have on Council business.

The Programme Board continues to manage ongoing key risks and issues which include:

- Programme affordability.
- The level of Project Team resources.
- Competition between “business as usual” activity and remaining project delivery work.

There are no risk implications arising as a direct result of this report.

The project also directly contributes to the risk response to the Corporate Risk in respect of Financial Sustainability (CR1).

- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):** There will be process changes and as a result implications for staff using the new systems. Effective change management will be imperative and there is a dedicated Change Manager undertaking this role to mitigate any risks to the organisation.
- 3.5 **Gaelic:** There are no specific Gaelic implications arising from this report. All projects will ensure the Council’s bilingual policy is appropriately applied.

## 4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required for this report. However, for each project noted in this report an Integrated Impact Assessment is being conducted by the HR & Communications service.

## 5. HRP Projects

### 5.1 Overall Project RAG

Reason for Project RAG Rating and Corrective Action:

M7 25/26

Project 11: TalentLink Recruitment System Improvements, Single Sign On (SSO) functionality has been rolled out, all users migrated to SSO.  
 Project 10: HRP Solution Implementation Project, project initiation in progress, concluding discovery work and preparation for HRP solution.  
 The HRP programme remains on target.



### 5.2 Key Milestones & Requests for Change (as of 27<sup>th</sup> October 2025)

MILESTONES		CURRENT STATUS
<i>Starts Apr 24 / Completes Apr 24</i>	Altair Pensions Payroll: HC pensions self-serve go live	M4 24/25 Completed
<i>Starts Apr24 / Completes Aug24</i>	Altair Pensions Payroll: Pensions self-serve concludes	M6 24/25 Completed
<i>Starts Apr24 / Completes Mar25</i>	Altair Pensions Payroll: Pensions payments migrated to Altair	M12 24/25 Completed
<i>Starts Aug24 / Completes Nov24</i>	HR & Payroll: Socitm Advisory Review Complete	M8 24/25 Completed
<i>Starts Oct24 / Completes Feb25</i>	Altair Pensions Payroll: Pensioners payroll Go-live	M12 24/25 Completed
<i>Completes Jun 25</i>	Altair Pensions Payroll: Project Closure	M3 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts / Completes Feb25</i>	HR & Payroll: Data and Process Enablement: Initiation	M11 24/25 Completed
<i>Starts Mar25 / Completes Apr25</i>	HR & Payroll: Data and Process Enablement: Discover phase	M2 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts Apr25 / Completes May25</i>	HR & Payroll: Data and Process Enablement: Define phase	M3 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts May25 / Completes Jun25</i>	HR & Payroll: Data and Process Enablement: Prepare phase	M3 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts / Completes Jun25</i>	HR & Payroll: Data and Process Enablement: Deliver phase	M6 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts May 25/ Completes June 25</i>	HR & Payroll: Data and Process Enablement: Options appraisal	M3 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts May 25/ Completes June 25</i>	HR & Payroll: Rapid Improvements - Talentlink (recruitment system)	M6 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts May 25/ Completes June 25</i>	HR & Payroll: Rapid Improvements - Resourcelink (HR and Payroll system)	M3 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts / Completes Aug25</i>	HR & Payroll: Data and Process Enablement: Project closure	M6 25/26 Completed
<i>Starts Aug25 / Completes Sep25</i>	HRP&P: Option selection	M6 25/26 Completed

All original milestones for the programme, within the council Delivery Plan, are now complete. New milestones are currently being developed for HRP work that will be reported on in future reports pending approval by the Corporate Solutions

Portfolio Board. Programme staff continue to work on initiatives such as the Talentlink Recruitment project and pre-requisite work for future HRP system improvements, as detailed in paragraphs 5.7 and 5.8.

### 5.3 Financial Summary

- i) Savings  
Savings of £300k in 2026/27 were brought through in the council's 2025 budget and will be enabled by implementing HRP process efficiencies.
- ii) Income  
No direct income directly attributed to this project have been identified.
- iii) Investment  
See section paragraph 3.1.
- iv) Mitigations  
Identify all known Programme costs and source appropriate funding for duration of Programme.

### 5.4 Key Risks

As all project outputs have been delivered the key risks associated with the project are now closed in relation to the HR Data and Process Enablement Project.

However, these or similar risks will be re-assessed as the programme moves into the next stages and will continue to be managed by the Programme Board.

Key Risks	Mitigation
<p><b>Competing tensions between “business as usual” (BAU) availability of resources to support project work and deliver change:</b></p> <p>Due to competing workload - project dependencies between programme projects, other projects, BAU, council wide priorities.</p>	<p>Undertook Socitm Advisory Strategic Review to ensure scope and resourcing is clearly understood as part of future Programme Roadmap.</p> <p>Resources required to deliver the HR Data and Process Enablement project have been agreed for 2025/26.</p> <p>The resourcing model, including both internal and external resource requirements, for future HRP transformation is being developed and is being informed by the outputs from the HR Data and Process Enablement Project and supplier engagement.</p>
<p><b>Competing tensions between “business as usual” and availability of technical/SME resources and the technical expertise to deliver the project outcomes</b></p>	<p>The resourcing model, including both internal and external resource requirements, for future HRP transformation is being developed and is being informed by the outputs from the HR Data and Process Enablement Project and supplier engagement.</p>

<p><b>Significant cultural change is required to transform from current operations, in order to systemise HR and payroll and achieve project outcomes:</b></p> <p>Due to systemising this will bring significant change to the whole organisation, processes and new ways of working. Paper based processes will be replaced with system modules, change will impact all employees.</p>	<p>HRP&amp;P project team includes a Change Manager and Learning &amp; Development Adviser. Project team is actively reviewing opportunities for improvements, rolling out training and guidance to support managers.</p> <p>Change management work has been assisted by change experts from Civiteq during the HR Data &amp; Process Enablement Project.</p>
<p><b>Project funding may be insufficient to achieve some/all project objectives:</b></p> <p>Due to potential resources required from within organization – SME’s and technical expertise to support project delivery.</p>	<p>Risk being monitored by Project &amp; Programme Boards and through Programme Financial Statement.</p> <p>Based on current forecast costs in 2025/26 the programme is currently affordable.</p> <p>The resourcing model, including both internal and external resource requirements and systems investment, for future HRP transformation is being developed and is being informed by the outputs from the HR Data and Process Enablement Project, including the Technical Options Appraisal.</p>

## 5.5 Progress Update & Forward Plan

### 5.6 HR Data & Process Enablement Project

5.6.1 The HR Data & Process Enablement Project, undertaken with Civiteq, was formally closed in September 2025 following the delivery of the final products and playback of findings to senior stakeholders. The project was delivered within budget.

5.6.2 Key deliverables resulting from the project include:

- “As Is” Process Maps for over 100 HRP processes.
- HR Workforce Analysis Report.
- End User Personas.
- “Could Be” Process Maps for some HRP processes.
- A Technical Options Appraisal.
- Draft Technical Specification for the council’s HRP Solution.
- Data Landscape.
- HR Project Data Report.
- Information Asset Register.

### 5.7 HRP Solution Implementation Project

5.7.1 Following on from the completion of HR Data and Process Enablement Project work the Programme Board have approved a Project Brief for a project to transform the council’s HRP Solution using a “best of breed” system.

5.7.2 As part of the initiation of this project a procurement exercise is currently underway to secure a suitable “best of breed” solution and associated implementation services to achieve true transformation of the HRP processes and data. The outcome of this procurement exercise will inform the budget and resourcing requirements for the programme beyond 2025/26 and beyond.

5.7.3 The programme team are currently undertaking preparatory work in advance of the large-scale HRP transformation including:

- Completion of more “As Is” Process Mapping for all HRP processes.
- Pre-requisite data and information gathering and analysis.
- Project scoping & resource planning.

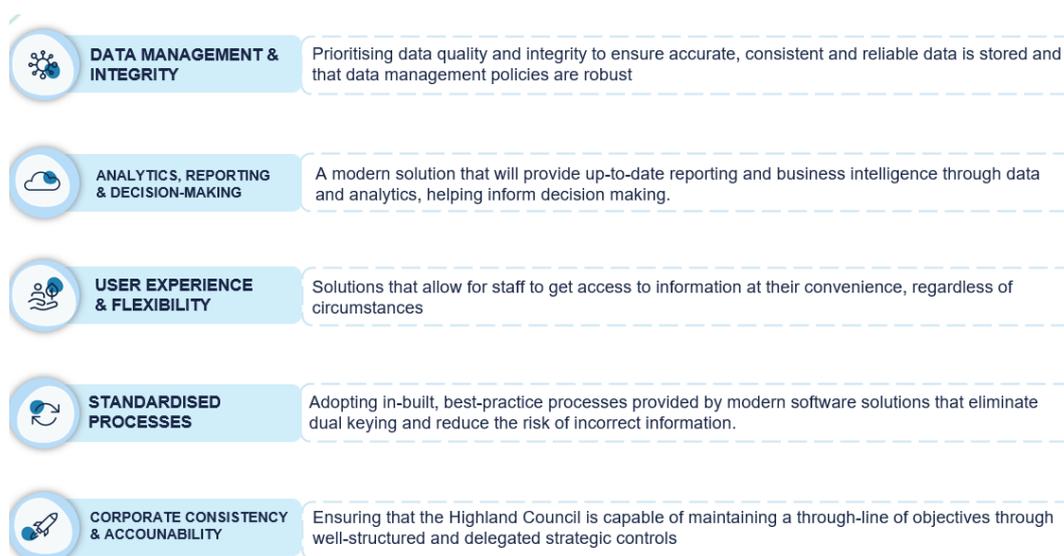
5.7.4 The Programme team are also engaging closely with the Data Foundations Project, another project within the Corporate Solutions Portfolio of the Delivery Plan, to undertake further detailed analysis of HRP data.

This will inform critical data cleansing priorities and some strategic decisions required and ensure data work undertaken meets the minimum requirements of that parallel project.

## 5.8 TalentLink Recruitment System Project

5.8.1 In September 2025 the HRP Programme board approved the commencement of a project to implement improvements to the council’s Recruitment System, TalentLink.

5.8.2 The project aims to enhance the recruitment experience: improving efficiency, user experience, and alignment with Council policies and the Strategic Drivers identified and assessed as part of the Socitm Advisory (now Civiteq) Strategic Review undertaken in 2024.



5.8.3 Specific project objectives are based on the recommendations from the TalentLink health check carried out by COSLA, in April 2023. Prior to development of the project plan, the project team engaged with COSLA’s subject matter experts to ensure these recommendations were still valid.

5.8.4 The objectives of the work are as follows:

No.	Description	Strategic Driver	Benefits
1	Build and implement dashboards for Manager and Recruiting Team	• User experience and flexibility	• Reduce queries, email traffic and forms, with double handling of tasks to back-office teams by rolling out recruiting manager self-service.
2	Implement automated system notifications to better inform recruiting manager at stages in the recruitment process.	• User experience and flexibility	
3	Migrating recruiting officers' access from username and password to Single Sign On (SSO).	• User experience and flexibility	• Increasing system security, aligning with corporate ICT strategy. • Reducing the requests for password resets.
4	Review and redesign Candidate Management process	• User experience and flexibility	• Systemising steps and reducing manual handling • Reduction in off system working, increasing consistency in recruitment approach.
5	Review and redesign Offer Management process	• Standardised Processes • Data Management & Integrity	

5.8.5 This particular project is being delivered by Council officers and CoSLA who lead on this national system.

5.8.6 Progress so far has included:

- The successful rollout of the SSO functionality for the system.
- Development of a Recruiter Dashboard that is now in live use.
- Development of a Manager's Dashboard that is currently being tested and piloted with a group of managers from across services.
- Setup and testing of new automated system notifications.
- Setup, testing and process development to enable managers to manage interview arrangements directly within the system.

5.8.7 A notification of current and forthcoming TalentLink improvements has been communicated to all Council managers via email, Viva Engage and the Improvement Hub. To date feedback on these developments has been positive overall from recruiting managers.

5.8.8 The project will develop a system support and development model for the TalentLink System and associated processes. This is with the intention of ensuring that beyond the completion of the project, forecast to be March 2026, the council is well placed to continue to improve and take timely advantage of system enhancements offered by COSLA.

## 5.9 Programme Vision

A Vision has been agreed by the Programme Board and adopted by the Programme: *To deliver an **ambitious**, user-focused HRP experience that empowers users and streamlines operations through **connected** technology and **sustainable** practices.*

This newly developed Vision Statement places greater emphasis on delivering an improved user experience and is explicitly aligned with the Council's high-level organisational values. Stakeholder engagement materials and graphics will be updated to reflect the Programme Vision.

## 5.10 Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

Stakeholder engagement and communications plans have been updated in line with the revised scope and vision. Stakeholders have been classified according to their user persona in the programme and communication methods are appropriate to these different personas.

These user personas were created in conjunction with Civiteq and describe the different types of users of the HRP system, with details of their requirements, expectations and interactions. Their use makes it easier to describe the current and future experience of using the HRP functions to help identify where there will be improvements.

## 6. Programme Governance

- 6.1 There have been no changes to programme governance arrangements since the last update provided to the committee.
- 6.2 Project delivery and working groups will be formed below the Programme Board to take forward the work in the next stages of HRP transformation. Civiteq have provided recommendations with regards to the composition and remit of such groups in large HRP transformation projects which will inform the future structure. These groups will have appropriate levels of project delegated decision authority to enable the future work to progress at the suitable pace.
- 6.3 The Programme Board will remain responsible for ensuring appropriate linkages are made and dependencies managed between the projects within the new structure and controlling programme budgets.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate

Date: 3 November 2025

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