

Agenda Item	11
Report No	RES/41/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Corporate Resources

Date: 20 November 2025

Report Title: Leadership and Management Toolkit

Report By: Chief Executive

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with information about a leadership and management toolkit developed to support the development of existing executive level officers and leadership succession planning within the Council.
- 1.2 The approach has been informed by latest research into executive development and is a bespoke solution developed for Highland Council officers. It includes:
 - The Management Connections programme.
 - Coaching and mentoring programmes.
 - Online and in-person training.
 - A 360° review tool.
 - Workshops and team development.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. **Note** the development of the Leadership and Management Toolkit

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** There are no immediate resource implications arising from this policy.
- 3.2 **Legal:** There are no legal implications arising as a direct result of this report.
- 3.3 **Risk:** There are no risk implications arising as a direct result of this report.
- 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 this is reflected in the approach to Executive Review and Development.
- 3.5 **Gaelic:** The policy and guidance follow the Council's Gaelic language policy in relation to the use of Gaelic in Corporate documents.

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 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 8 October 2025. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

4.3.2 The decision following the screening is that the impacts are neutral and therefore a full impact assessment is not required.

4.3.3 Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.4	Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
	Equality	Sex: No impact Age: No impact Disability: No Impact Religion or belief: No impact Race: No impact Sexual orientation: No impact Gender reassignment: No impact Pregnancy and maternity: No impact Marriage and civil partnership: No impact
	Socio-economic	<i>No impact</i>
	Human Rights	<i>No impact</i>
	Children's Rights and Well-being	<i>No impact</i>
	Island and Mainland Rural	<i>No impact</i>
	Climate Change	<i>No impact</i>
	Data Rights	<i>No impact</i>

5. Introduction

5.1 Developing managers and leaders is an investment in the future of the organisation, fostering organisational alignment, leadership accountability, and professional growth. While toolkits and training are already in place for line managers, these focus primarily on policy and processes such as managing absence and performance, workforce planning, carrying out appraisals etc. A more in-depth approach to developing senior managers with the potential to become Chief Officers, and existing Chief Officers and Assistant Chief Executives, was required.

- 5.2 The toolkit makes a positive distinction between leadership and management attributes: leadership being about inspiring and motivating people toward a common vision; while management focuses on the day-to-day operations and execution of plans to achieve specific goals.
- 5.3 **Leadership**
- The ways in which the **Vision and Values** of the person affect their approach to their role in the organisation.
 - How the person demonstrates **Integrity** in their role and deploys their vision and values through their actions in specific circumstances with positive effects.
 - How the person shows **Composure** under pressure and deals with challenge in their role.
 - The ways in which the individual **Energises the Team** to ensure that performance improves and change is enacted.
 - The extent to which the person can demonstrate and document how their **Burning Focus on Outcomes** has enabled them to achieve.
- 5.4 **Management**
- The ways in which the individual takes steps to **Listen to Others** to build a picture of what is required.
 - How the person works to **Build Understanding** of issues in themselves and those around them.
 - How the person demonstrates effectiveness in **Making Key Decisions**.
 - The ways in which the person can show that they are **Taking Appropriate Action** to ensure decisions are carried out effectively.
 - In their role, how the person can show that they are **Communicating Effectively** with others.
- 5.5 In senior roles, there is an expectation that officers will be functioning effectively in many of these areas already. Therefore, the toolkit functions as validation of these strengths and a mechanism to identify how these can be developed further in future.
6. **Research and Best Practice**
- 6.1 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the professional body for HR and People Development, confirms that:
- New leadership challenges are emerging from the pandemic and advancements in technology.
 - Skills such as engaging with employees, communicating a vision, leading transformation and developing an agile organisation are becoming more important.
 - Experiential learning is increasingly relevant.
 - Employees with coaches or mentors are likely to report higher job satisfaction.
 - There is a solid body of research showing feedback is one of the most powerful influences on performance.
 - Structured feedback mechanisms contribute significantly to leadership effectiveness and organisational culture.
 - There is a renewed focus on 'collaborative/distributive' leadership, primarily through building effective senior leadership teams.
 - Strategic alignment across executive teams is of key importance.

A summary of publications on this subject is available at **Appendix 3**.

7. Management Connections

- 7.1 Management Connections is a bespoke, in-house programme for aspiring senior managers. It provides insight into the work of a Chief Officer, including presenting at Committees and engaging with Elected Members; learning the topic of leadership theory and practice; and development aligned to the Council's direction and priorities.
- 7.2 Piloted in 2023/24, the programme has been expanded and developed in 2024/25, with a cohort of 59 taking part. Responding to feedback from the pilot, the programme uses experiential learning, and includes:
- Monthly learning groups.
 - Sessions on the Council's vision, values and plans for the future.
 - Group work on management and change case studies.
 - Committee-level report writing.
 - An in-person mock committee in the Council chambers, presenting to executives and taking questions.
 - An elevator pitch.
 - Opportunities to hear from senior executives about their own journey, challenges and advice.
 - Opportunities to hear from external speakers from partner organisations and business about leadership in different contexts and sectors.
- 7.3 Participants have commented favourably on having the chance to work across team and service boundaries on projects and topics; showing that, in addition in building individual confidence and skills, the programme is also contributing to better cross-service working and breaking down of silos by building relationships between cohort members. This is further supported by a dedicated Teams channel for participants to communicate and offer peer support.
- 7.4 The programme is complemented by other offerings within the Leadership and Management Toolkit, such as coaching and mentoring and careers advice, allowing participants to tailor support to their requirements and interests. Feedback has been positive about the opportunities presented, with participants feeling invested in and better equipped to take their careers to the next level.

8. Coaching and Mentoring

- 8.1 Coaching and mentoring are recognised as effective personal and professional development tools. Coaching is a more structured approach, in which an individual is led through questioning to develop their own solutions to challenges. It is usually applied to specific issues where an individual has experienced difficulty or areas which an individual would like to develop. Coaches are expected to have some formal training in coaching techniques.
- 8.2 Mentoring is typically a longer-term relationship in which a trusted advisor will provide career and personal development advice. This is a less structured and can be a more informal approach, with mentors drawing on and sharing their own experiences as senior executives.

- 8.3 What coaching and mentoring have in common is that they are confidential and depend on the participants developing a trusted relationship. Conversations with a coach or mentor are a safe space for individuals to explore challenges and solutions.
- 8.4 The Council offers a range of coaching and mentoring support within the Leadership and Management toolkit. The in-house offer matches individuals who would like to offer mentoring or coaching with those looking for a coach or mentor. It is recognised that acting as a coach or mentor can be as rewarding as receiving coaching or mentoring, and is a development opportunity in its own right.
- 8.5 The Council also participates in external programmes. These have the advantage of allowing individuals to be matched with coaches or mentors from other organisations, building relationships across the sector.
- 8.6 The Local Government Connect Network, established by the Improvement Service, offers a mix of online and in-person events as well as mentorships, encouraging participants to build personal connections. The Highland Council currently has five mentors and five mentees taking part in this programme, including one from High Life Highland.
- 8.7 Solace Scotland offers the Springboard programme, with Chief Executives asked to nominate one 'rising star' from their authority to take part. This programme includes 12-month membership of Solace including events and development opportunities; 1:1 mentoring by a Chief Executive or Director; and series of workshops including conversations with Chief Executives. The aim is to offer insight into the work of Chief Executives and senior executives. The Highland Council currently has one colleague taking part.
- 8.8 The Highland Council is also exploring an opportunity to work other authorities on the Local Government Leadership Success Profile (LSP) pilot. This programme builds on Leading to Change, a national programme developed NHS Education Scotland (NES) on collaboration with the Scottish Government. It supports leadership development across social work, social care, health and wider public services. The pilot offers a leadership self-assessment questionnaire and career conversation, as well as bringing together participating organisations to develop support for aspiring individuals.

9. Online and In-Person Training

- 9.1 In addition to the mandatory training and training on policies, processes and systems which is available, the Leadership and Management Toolkit has also begun to populate our training offer with a wider range of materials covering aspects of leadership including:
- Key note speeches and other materials from executive level leaders across local government and other sectors.
 - Presentations and materials from elected members across the UK.
 - Videos and information on cross-cutting and national issues, such as climate change, demographic change, public service reform and finance; and equality and accessibility.
 - Materials relevant to leadership and change management theory and practice.
 - Signposting to key organisations, including the Improvement Service, COSLA, NES and Solace.

- 9.2 To further develop in-person training and development for executive level colleagues, working is ongoing to increase membership and participation in Solace activities amongst the Chief Officer cohort in the Highland Council.

10. 360° Review Tool

- 10.1 The ERD process provides a structured framework for evaluating executive performance, supporting leadership development, and aligning individual contributions with strategic goals. It is designed to be developmental rather than punitive, encouraging reflection, feedback, and continuous improvement.
- 10.2 360° feedback is a comprehensive evaluation method that gathers input from multiple sources to provide a holistic view of an executive's performance. It plays a key role in the ERD process by enhancing self-awareness and promoting balanced development. The 360° review tool is based on the key components of leadership and management, detailed in Section 5 of this report. It requires individuals to rate themselves against each component for self-evaluation, and for their direct reports and peers to also submit ratings, which are used to identify themes, gaps, strengths and areas for development.
- 10.3 360° feedback uses a strengths-based approach to:
- help officers identify areas of strong leadership and management behaviours;
 - highlight opportunities for further development; and
 - enable personal and professional growth.

In executive roles, the feedback process has both:

- a private, individual aspect — supporting personal reflection and growth; and
- a public, team-oriented aspect — influencing team performance and stakeholder engagement.

Over time, data gathered from the 360° process will be used to:

- shape future leadership and management development training; and
- inform strategic workforce planning and succession initiatives.

A key feature of the tool is the feedback loop.

- Recipients of 360° feedback are encouraged to meet with officers who provided input.
- This promotes transparency, accountability, and mutual understanding.

It helps close the loop and reinforces a culture of continuous improvement.

Having already been trialled successfully with the Chief Executive, the tool will be rolled out to executive level officers (Assistant Chief Executives and Chief Officers) in the 2026-27 financial year. The framework can be viewed at **Appendix 2**.

11. Workshops and Team Development

- 11.1 Aligning executive teams is of key importance as they must address transformations which are increasingly complex, and help to engage the rest of the organisation in a shared purpose. Strengthening the leadership team is also shown to inspire leaders to strengthen their own management teams in turn.

- 11.2 It is recognised that the Chief Officer cohort at Highland Council is relatively newly formed, and work is being undertaken to support team building and joint learning across this group.
- 11.3 Two half-day 'away day' sessions have been held to strengthen relationships, share experiences and align priorities. These include plenary discussions and group work to ensure they are interactive and dynamic. Building psychological safety is one aim of this work, allowing individuals to express challenges so that they can be understood and addressed without judgement.
- 11.4 Further sessions are planned, using engagement with Chief Officers to shape the agenda, speakers, topics and activities to their development preferences.
- 11.5 Going forward, this work will be closely aligned with the 360° feedback tool, using this to support Chief Officers to understand how their personal strengths complement those of the team.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The Leadership and Management toolkit not only enhances self-awareness but also fosters a culture of openness, accountability, and continuous development.

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 3 November 2025

Author: Derek Brown, Chief Executive
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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment Screening
Appendix 2 – 360° report template
Appendix 3 – Research and best practice on Leadership Development

Appendix 1

Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening was undertaken on 27 October 2025. The conclusions were subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

The screening process concluded no impacts for equalities, poverty and human rights; children's rights; island and mainland communities; or climate change. The proposal will generate additional personal data for staff undertaking 360 degree review. This will be gathered for training and development purposes only and managed under the existing HR data privacy policies of the Council.

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
Equality	Sex: No impact Age: No impact Disability: No impact Religion or belief: No impact Race: No impact Sexual orientation: No impact Gender reassignment: No impact Pregnancy and maternity: No impact Marriage and civil partnership: No impact
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Human Rights	<i>No impact</i>
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Climate Change	<i>No impact</i>
Data Rights	<i>No impact</i>

Appendix 2 – 360 Report Template

Report Data: Self Evaluation versus Data from Respondents

Theme / Aspect	Self Eval	Respondent Eval	Difference	Note / Theme
Leadership Skills and Abilities				
Vision and Values				
Clarifying Vision				
Strategic Direction				
Enabling Innovation				
Adapting to Circumstances				
Taking Ownership				
Overall				
Demonstrating Integrity				
Values in Action				
Ethical Decision Making				
Fairness				
Consistency and Coherence				
Transparency				
Staying Curious and Open-Minded				
Respect for Team Culture				
Overall				
Showing Composure				
Courage				
Emotional Regulation				
Self-awareness				
Empathy and Active Listening				
Problem-solving Focus				
Clear Communication				
Overall				
Energising the Team				
Motivating Others				
Confidence and Authenticity				
Delegation and Building Trust				
Lead by Example				
Creating Conditions for Success				
Promoting Collaboration (L)				
Demonstrating Empathy				
Provide Opportunities for Growth				
Overall				
Focus on Outcomes				
Clear Vision for Success				
Prioritisation of Efforts				
Data-Driven Decision Making				
Ownership and Accountability				
Maintaining Resilience				
Overall				
Leadership Overall				

Management Skills and Abilities				
Listening				
Listening Actively				
Hearing Difference Voices				
Using Technology to Gather Insights				
Being Evidence and Data Informed				
Embedding Listening				
Training and Empowering Others				
Overall				
Building Understanding				
Communicating Purpose				
Mapping Interconnections				
Facilitating Dialogue				
Making Decisions Transparently				
Visualising Priorities				
Training and Development				
Promoting Collaboration (M)				
Overall				
Making Key Decisions				
Grounding Decisions in Values and Vision				
Staying Forward-Focused				
Demonstrating Empathy and Being Inclusive				
Balancing Risk and Reward				
Committing to Continuous Learning				
Communicating Clearly and Effectively				
Overall				
Taking Appropriate Action				
Adapting Leadership Style				
Acting on Feedback				
Establishing Clear Objectives and Priorities				
Building Accountability				
Providing Resources and Support				
Recognising and Reinforcing Positive Behaviours				
Leading by Example				
Courage to Act				
Overall				
Communicating Effectively				
Continuous Communication				
Encourage Two-Way Communication				
Set the Tone for Open Communication				
Ensure Clarity and Consistency				
Tailor Communication to the Audience				
Foster Two-Way Communication				
Provide Regular Updates				
Address Conflict Constructively				
Overall				
Management Overall				

Appendix 3

Research and best practice on Leadership Development

- **John Bratton**
Source: Bratton, J. (2023). *Organizational Leadership* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
Annotation: A comprehensive UK-authored textbook that examines leadership theories and practices in organizational contexts, including ethics, sustainability, and team leadership.
- **Iain Snelling et al.**
Source: Snelling, I., Brown, H., Hardy, L., et al. (2023). UK trainees' perceptions of leadership and leadership development. *BMJ Leader*, 8(3), 215–221.
Annotation: Research into leadership development within UK healthcare, offering practical implications for experiential learning and mentoring.
- **CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development)**
Source: Barends, E., Rousseau, D., Janssen, B., Capezzio, A., & Velghe, C. (2023). *Leadership Development: An Evidence Review*. London: CIPD.
Annotation: A UK-based evidence review providing best practice guidance for leadership development programmes, widely cited in HR and L&D circles.
- **Hira Ali**
Source: Ali, H. (2021). *Her Way to the Top: A Guide to Smashing the Glass Ceiling*. London: Advancing Your Potential.
Annotation: A UK leadership coach and author focusing on inclusive leadership and gender equity, offering practical strategies for diverse leadership development.
- **Des Dearlove & Stuart Crainer (Thinkers50)**
Source: Dearlove, D., & Crainer, S. (2025). *Thinkers50 Radar Report*.
Annotation: UK-based founders of Thinkers50, a global ranking of management thinkers, providing cutting-edge insights into leadership trends and innovation.

Professional Practice & Frameworks

Carter, L., Giber, D., Goldsmith, M., et al. (2001). *Best Practices in Organization Development and Change*. Pfeiffer.

Annotation: A collection of case studies and best practices for organizational change and leadership development.

Block, P. (2011). *Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used*. Pfeiffer.

Annotation: While focused on consulting, this book provides valuable insights into influencing and leading change within organizations.