

Agenda Item	11
Report No	RES/09/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Corporate Resources

Date: 19 March 2026

Report Title: Secondment Policy and Guidance

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Highland Council is committed to supporting career development, broadening skills, and strengthening overall workforce capability. Secondments play an important role in delivering our Talent Strategy by meeting short-term service needs and project demands, while also promoting organisational agility and the development of transferable skills. This policy sets out our approach to managing secondments consistently and effectively across the Council.
- 1.2 Secondments provide a strategic opportunity for both employee development and organisational growth. Through temporary assignments within the Council or with external partner organisations, secondments help build a versatile and agile workforce equipped to meet evolving service demands.
- 1.3 This policy, together with its supporting guidance, provides a clear framework and practical steps covering:
- The principles and purpose of secondments
 - Eligibility criteria, advertising requirements and terms and conditions
 - Approval and refusal process
 - Key rules including how secondments may be concluded
- 1.4 This policy will supersede the existing Secondment Policy

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. **Approve** the updated Secondment Policy
 - ii. **Approve** the updated Secondment Guidance

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - There are no resource implications arising from this policy. There may be resource implications when an employee is seconded, as their substantive role may require short-term cover, which may come at a higher cost than the associated staffing budget. Substantive managers are expected to explore alternative and flexible approaches to maintaining service continuity.

- 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)** - Secondments must not result in any reduction to health and safety standards, and it is the substantive manager’s responsibility to ensure all obligations are maintained.
- 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 **Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary**
 - 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 03.02.2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.
 - 4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there is a positive impact in relation to the updated Secondment Policy. Secondments can foster staff development and support progression into higher paid roles, positively affecting poverty and socio-economic impact. There are no negative impacts arising from the revised Secondment Policy.

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

4.3.3 Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment
Equality	Children and Young People – <i>no impact</i> Children affected by disability – <i>no impact</i> Older adults – <i>no impact</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sex: No impact</i> • <i>Age: No impact</i> • <i>Disability: No Impact</i> • <i>Religion or belief: No impact</i> • <i>Race: No impact</i> • <i>Sexual orientation: No impact</i> • <i>Gender reassignment: No impact</i> • <i>Pregnancy and maternity: No impact</i> • <i>Marriage and civil partnership: No impact</i>

Socio-economic	<i>Positive</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 Secondments are an important way to support employee development and organisational agility. They contribute to succession planning and align with the Highland Council's Talent Strategy by enabling employees to gain new experiences, build capability and support service improvement.

The Council benefits from secondments through a more flexible, skilled and adaptable workforce. They strengthen collaboration across Services and with external partners, help address skills gaps and support staff retention. Secondments also offer valuable career development opportunities and form a key part of the Council's wider approach to talent management. All opportunities are designed to be inclusive and gender-sensitive to ensure equitable access. In some cases, occupational requirements or health-related considerations may apply to ensure suitability and safety.

5.2 Secondments may be used in a variety of contexts, including short-term assignments, project-based roles, specialist functions or to meet urgent operational requirements. Secondments are typically a fixed-term arrangement lasting between 3 and 24 months.

6 Types of Secondment

6.1 There are three types of secondment:

- Internal (In-House) - A Highland Council employee who is seconded to a different job role within The Highland Council
- Outbound - A Highland Council employee who is seconded to a partner organisation
- Inbound - A partner organisation employee who is seconded to Highland Council

The policy and guidance set out how each type should be approached.

7 Approvals and refusals

7.1 Given the advantages of secondments to the organisation and to individuals, the policy sets out that managers should approve requests wherever possible. Where managers do not feel able to grant requests, a Chief Officer must agree that a request can be refused. This aims to ensure that opportunities are only refused where there is fair justification.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The updated policy and guidance provide more detailed and consistent direction for managers and employees, in order to encourage the use of secondments to widen employee skills and experience and enable better cross-service working. Members are asked to consider the draft policy and guidance appended.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate

Date: 23 February 26

Author: Talent Manager, Koreen MacDougall

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Secondment Policy
Appendix 3 - Secondment Guidance

IIA screening: Secondment Policy

The Secondment Policy has been reviewed and updated to ensure clarity and consistency. The supporting Secondment Guidance has also been updated and together they now provide a clear framework and practical steps for managing secondments fairly, effectively and consistently

Who may be affected by the proposal?: **All Highland Council staff**

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion Of Screening
Equalities, Poverty and Humans Rights	<p>No Impact upon any human rights as participation is voluntary, Ts and Cs remain protected, equality of opportunity is maintained and there is not impact on privacy or family life.</p> <p>Positive impact on poverty and equality offering development opportunities, enhanced skills, and organisational benefits without creating any negative effects. Secondments foster career progression and staff undertaking a secondment may benefit from learning in the seconded role thus broadening their skills base.</p> <p>Staff on secondment may be paid at a higher grade than their substantive role increasing their household income.</p>
Children's Right and Well-Being	No Impact
Data Rights	No Impact on data protection or information management, as secondments do not introduce new data processing requirements and all existing employee data continues to be handled under standard organisational policies and legal safeguards
Island and Mainland Rural	<p>Positive Impact on Island & Rural Communities by providing structured, accessible opportunities for temporary development and skills enhancement, the policy supports equal access to career progression, particularly for staff based in remote or rural areas who may have fewer local opportunities.</p> <p>This helps reduce geographic inequality and strengthens organisational capacity across locations.</p>
Climate Change	No Impact

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Secondment Policy

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Introduction

The Highland Council recognises secondments as a valuable opportunity for employee development and organisational growth. Secondments offer employees the opportunity to gain valuable experience, broaden their skillsets and contribute to Service delivery in new and meaningful ways.

By facilitating temporary placements within the Council or with external partner organisations, secondments support the development of a versatile and agile workforce. They also align with the Council's [Talent Strategy](#) by promoting career progression and enhancing workforce capability.

This policy outlines the framework for managing secondments in a fair, consistent and transparent manner, ensuring that both employee development and service needs are effectively supported.

Policy Purpose

This policy aims to provide employees with a fair, consistent and transparent framework for secondments, enabling the development of a flexible and skilled workforce. It supports the Council's strategic objectives by addressing short-term service needs and project requirements, while fostering agility and the acquisition of transferable skills across the organisation.

Who is this policy for?

This guidance applies to Scottish Joint Council (SJC) employees.

Teachers and Associated Professionals whose conditions of service are governed by the [Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers \(SNCT\)](#) and [Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers \(LNCT\)](#) agreements may be subject to different provisions.

Employees on Agenda for Change Terms and Conditions have separate arrangements in place, please see [NHS PIN policies](#).

Policy in Practice

Definitions

A fixed-term or temporary employee - is an individual engaged by the Highland Council for a fixed period to complete a defined task or project.

Permanent employee - is an individual employed by the Highland Council on an ongoing basis with no predetermined end date to their contract.

Secondee - is an individual who is undertaking a secondment in a different role, either within the Highland Council or with an external organisation.

Secondment - is a temporary transfer of an employee to a different role, either within the Highland Council or to an external organisation.

Secondment manager - is responsible for overseeing and supporting an employee who is temporarily assigned to a different role, department or organisation as part of a secondment arrangement.

Substantive role – is the employee's permanent contracted role within The Highland Council.

Substantive line manager - is the manager responsible for overseeing an employee in their permanent (substantive) post.

Internal (In-House) - is a permanent Highland Council employee temporarily moving to a different role within Highland Council services.

Outbound - is a permanent Highland Council employee undertaking a secondment with an external partner organisation such as the NHS, Scottish Government or other partner bodies.

Inbound - is an employee from an external partner organisation such as the NHS, Scottish Government or other partner bodies undertaking a secondment in one of The Highland Council services.

Policy Principles

Advertising Secondments

Where appropriate, fixed-term vacancies should be advertised as secondment opportunities in line with the Highland Council's [Recruitment and Selection Policy](#).

Permanent employees may request to apply for fixed-term vacancies on a secondment basis, even if the role is not advertised as such. Prior approval from their line manager is required. However not all roles are appropriate for secondment arrangements, for example some education posts.

Eligibility and Application

Employees on temporary or fixed-term contracts are not eligible to apply for secondment opportunities.

Employees are not eligible to apply for internal or outbound secondments that are more than one grade (or equivalent) below their current substantive role.

Employees wishing to apply for a secondment must seek approval from their Line Manager before doing so.

All requests to apply for a secondment should be approved unless there are clear, demonstrable business reasons why it is not practicable.

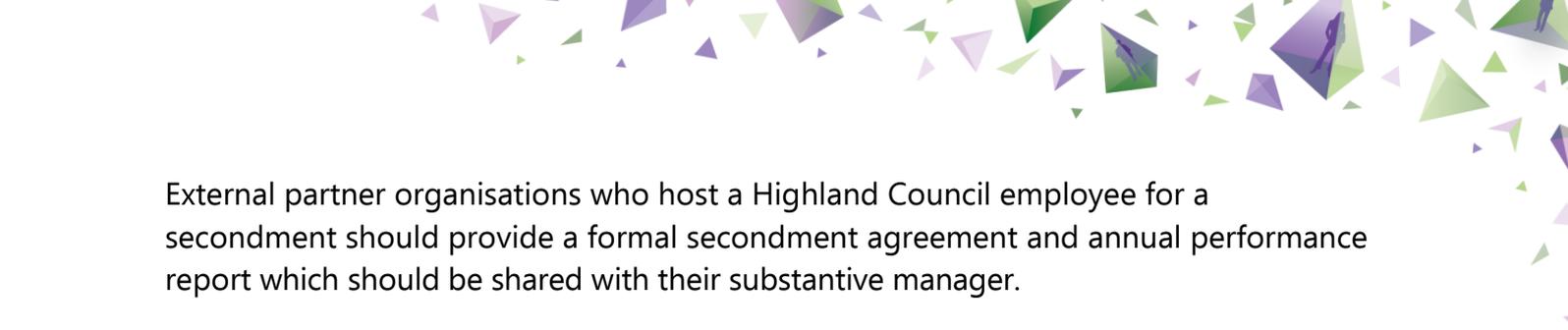
The Chief Officer and HR must be consulted prior to a secondment request being refused. The reasons for refusal must be communicated to the employee in writing.

Internal applicants who meet the essential criteria for a post are guaranteed an interview.

Terms and Conditions

Secondments follow the terms and conditions of the seconded post, including working hours, location and grade. However, if the seconded role is at a lower grade, the employee will continue to receive their substantive grade pay.

Permanent employees do not break their continuous service during outbound secondments and all secondees will retain their substantive employment status.



External partner organisations who host a Highland Council employee for a secondment should provide a formal secondment agreement and annual performance report which should be shared with their substantive manager.

During Secondment

The secondment manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the secondee including performance, annual leave and attendance management.

The employee and substantive manager must retain contact during the secondment. The substantive manager must ensure the secondee is aware if there are any potential changes to their substantive post.

[Employee Review and Development](#) (ERD) arrangements must be clarified, agreed and formalised between the secondee, their substantive manager and their secondment manager.

Extension

A secondment may be extended provided that there are operational reasons for doing so, however any extension requires all parties to consult and approve the extension. The employee must receive confirmation of the extension in writing.

A seconded employee does not have an automatic entitlement to the role they are seconded to if it becomes permanent. However, if the role was previously advertised and the employee was appointed through a formal recruitment and selection process including a competitive interview, they may be considered for permanent appointment without the need to re-advertise the post.

Termination of Secondment

When undertaking a secondment, permanent employees will normally retain the right to return to their substantive post at the conclusion of the secondment period.

A secondment may be terminated early however this should be managed carefully to minimise disruption and ensure fairness.

Early Termination may be requested by the:

- secondee
- secondment manager

- substantive manager.

The substantive manager is responsible for supporting the employee's reintegration into their original team and substantive role following the secondment.

For further information please see the [Secondment Guidance](#).

Equality and Diversity

This policy endorses the Equality & Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) principles which apply to all employees of The Highland Council, regardless of any of the protected characteristics (Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex or Sexual Orientation).

Guidance

Guidance, information and tools relating to the management of this policy have been developed and will be maintained in accordance with the Highland Council Partnership Framework. Guidance, procedures and associated documentation can be found on the HR Microsite – see [Quick Links](#) below.

Legislation

The development and application of this policy is guided by:

- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Equalities Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018 & UK GDPR
- The Fixed-Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002

Monitoring

The application of this policy will be monitored through the Highland Council Partnership Framework and the Corporate Resources Committee.

Quick Links

The Hyperlinks listed here will redirect you to the related guidance, letters, information, and relevant organisations mentioned in this policy.

[HR Microsite](#)

[Secondment Guidance](#)

[Secondment Agreement](#)

[Talent Strategy](#)

[Recruitment and Selection Page](#)

[Employee Review and Development](#)

[NHS PIN policies](#)

[Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers \(LNCT\)](#)

[Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers \(SNCT\)](#)



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Secondment Guidance

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Introduction

Secondments are a key mechanism for supporting employee development and organisational agility. They contribute to succession planning and are closely aligned with the Highland Council's [Talent Strategy](#) by enabling employees to gain new experiences, build capability and support service improvement.

The Highland Council benefits from secondments by developing a more flexible, skilled and capable workforce. They help strengthen collaboration across Services and with external partners, address identified skills gaps and support staff retention. Secondments also create valuable career development opportunities and contribute to the Council's broader approach to talent management. All secondment opportunities are designed to be inclusive and gender sensitive, ensuring equitable access. In certain circumstances occupational requirements or health-related considerations may apply to ensure suitability and safety.

Secondments enhance the employee experience by providing:

- opportunities for meaningful growth through exposure to new challenges
- a chance to contribute to strategic priorities and service improvement
- a broader understanding of different services and functions
- a pathway to develop and strengthen their skills and explore potential career progression opportunities
- increased confidence through a variety of work experiences
- the opportunity to develop professional networks across the Highland Council and with external partners
- greater adaptability and resilience in response to changing work environments.

This guidance sets out the procedures for implementing and managing secondments in line with Highland Council policies.

Guidance

Secondments

For definitions of the terms used in this guidance, please see the [Secondment Policy](#).

Secondments may be used in a variety of contexts, including short-term assignments, project-based roles, specialist functions or to meet urgent operational requirements. Secondments are typically a fixed-term arrangement lasting between 3 and 24 months.

There are 3 distinctive types of secondment – Internal, Outbound and Inbound all of which have different criteria, as outlined in the table below:

Description	Grade, Hours and Location	Terms and Conditions	Additional Information
Internal (In-House) – Employee moving within Highland Council			
A Highland Council employee who is seconded to a different job role within The Highland Council	Working hours, location and grade align to the seconded post unless the grade is lower, in which case the substantive grade remains	Employment status and continuous service preserved	
Outbound – Employee going to Partner Organisation			
A Highland Council employee who is seconded to a partner organisation	Working hours, location and grades align to the seconded post	Employee remains on Highland Council terms and conditions, preserving continuity of service	Host organisation must provide a secondment agreement and annual performance report
Inbound – Employee from a Partner Organisation			
A partner organisation employee who is seconded to Highland Council	Working hours, location and grades align to the seconded post	Employee remains on their organisation's terms and conditions	Highland Council must provide a clearly defined secondment agreement

Advertising Secondment Opportunities

Arrangements for advertising secondment opportunities with partner organisations may differ depending on their individual recruitment practices. Both employees and managers should ensure they understand the relevant procedures before moving forward.

Permanent employees may express interest in applying for fixed-term vacancies on a secondment basis, even if the position is not specifically advertised as such. Before submitting an application, employees must obtain approval from their substantive line

manager and inform the recruiting manager that they are applying on a secondment basis.

Eligibility

While fixed-term employees should be considered for opportunities in the same way as permanent employees, employees on fixed-term or temporary contracts are **not eligible** for secondments. However, they may apply for the advertised vacancy on a fixed-term basis rather than a secondment basis.

The rationale for excluding fixed-term employees from secondment opportunities is:

- Secondments require the employee to have a permanent substantive post to return to. Fixed-term employees do not have a substantive post beyond their fixed-term contract; therefore a secondment could create contractual uncertainty and operational risk.
- At the end of a secondment, a permanent employee's substantive post should be available to return to. For fixed-term employees, this is not the case as their fixed-term post may need to be re-advertised to maintain service delivery.
- Fixed-term employees can still apply for other fixed-term or permanent vacancies, which ensures fair access to career development opportunities for all.

Employees are **not eligible** to apply for internal or outbound secondments that are more than one grade (or equivalent) below their current substantive role. Eligibility for secondments is based on the employee's substantive grade, not any acting-up arrangements or temporary promotions.

Application

Employees interested in applying for a secondment must first seek approval from their substantive manager. To support informed decision-making, employees should provide key details at all stages, including the role description, duration of the secondment and the application closing date.

Substantive managers are expected to approve secondment applications unless there are clear and demonstrable business reasons that make the arrangement impracticable.

Internal applicants who meet the essential criteria for the post will be guaranteed an interview.

Approval

Substantive managers are responsible for assessing secondment requests fairly and in line with the [Secondment Policy](#). Managers must respond promptly to avoid unnecessary delays in the recruitment process.

Each request must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, considering factors such as duration, backfill requirements, operational impact, service needs and financial implications.

The substantive manager should ensure the employee understands and agrees to any changes to their terms and conditions, including any potential impact on existing arrangements such as pension contributions, allowances or working hours.

Managers should maintain clear records of the decision-making process to support transparency and for future reference.

Refusal

A secondment should only be declined where there are clear, demonstrable business reasons that would make the arrangement impracticable.

Before refusing a request, the substantive manager must consult with the relevant Chief Officer and HR.

If a refusal is agreed, the substantive manager must:

- clearly outline the reasons in a written document
- communicate the decision to the employee in writing
- ensure the decision is fair, transparent and aligned to the [Secondment Policy](#).

Managers should also retain documentation of the decision-making process for audit and reference purposes.

Responsibilities During Secondment

Before the Secondment Begins

All parties must be clear on their roles, responsibilities and expectations before the secondment commences as outlined in this guidance.

Once approved, a mutually agreed start date should be confirmed.

Unless otherwise agreed, Highland Council employees must return any equipment issued by their substantive manager such as IT devices or office materials prior to the secondment.

The secondment manager is responsible for providing the necessary equipment for the duration of the secondment. Any exceptions to this arrangement should be agreed in advance and documented as part of the secondment agreement.

To support a smooth transition, the substantive manager and employee should prepare a clear handover covering key responsibilities, ongoing work and any critical information for continuity.

During a Secondment

Employees are expected to adhere to the secondment agreement and carry out the duties of the seconded role.

The secondment manager should provide an induction, including orientation to their new workplace, reporting arrangements and objectives for the duration of the secondment. The secondment manager is also responsible for the secondee's welfare, including regular check-ins, feedback and addressing any issues (e.g. attendance, conduct, performance) in collaboration with the substantive manager.

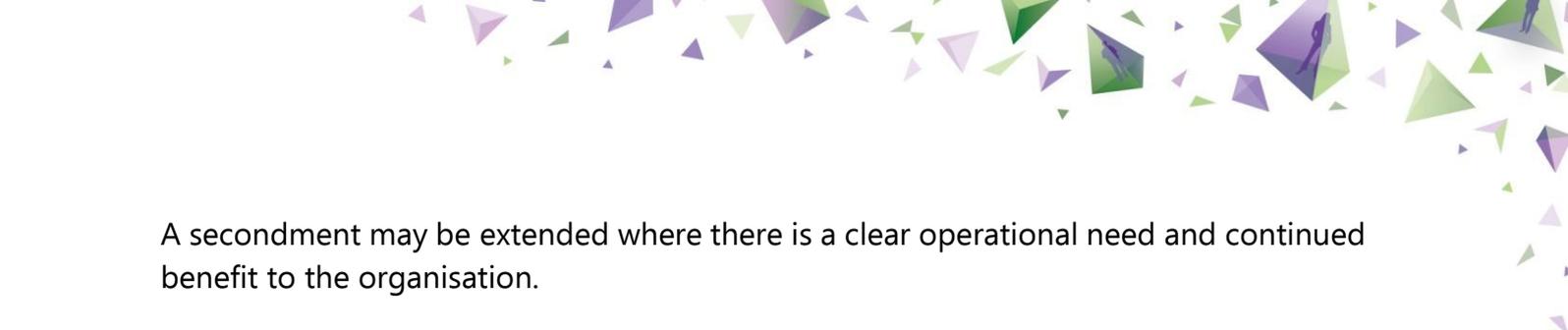
All parties should maintain regular communication throughout the secondment and agree ERD ([Employee Review and Development](#)) arrangements to ensure continuity in performance management.

Changes During the Secondment

The secondment manager should engage with the secondee and substantive manager to discuss any proposed changes to the secondment agreement, including any requests for extension or early termination. Any changes must be agreed in advance and documented.

Where there are proposed changes to the secondee's substantive role, the substantive manager must inform the secondee of these changes. For any significant changes, a meeting should be arranged to discuss the potential impact on the employee.

Extending a Secondment



A secondment may be extended where there is a clear operational need and continued benefit to the organisation.

Before approving an extension, the secondment manager should:

- consult with the secondee to confirm their willingness to continue in the role
- seek approval from the relevant Chief Officer and their manager as workforce planning or budget may be affected
- ensure the substantive manager is informed and agrees to the extension
- confirm the revised arrangements in writing, including the new end date and any changes to responsibilities or reporting lines (See [Secondment Agreement](#))
- provide a copy of the new Secondment Agreement confirming the extension to the secondee and substantive manager.

Where a Seconded Post Becomes Permanent

A secondee does not have an automatic right to be appointed permanently to the Highland Council post they are seconded into if it becomes a permanent position.

In certain circumstances, the secondee may be considered for permanent appointment without further advertising, provided that the post was previously advertised and filled through a formal competitive recruitment process. This may be appropriate where it supports continuity and efficiency. Any decision to appoint without further advertising must uphold the principles of equity, fairness and equal opportunity, ensuring no individual or group is disadvantaged. Each case should be assessed individually, taking into account the specific circumstances and in accordance with the Highland Council's [Recruitment and Selection Policy](#). Where a seconded post becomes permanent, secondment managers should follow the [HR Forms – Guidance for Managers](#).

A secondment does not guarantee progression to a permanent post. All secondments are time-limited and subject to review.

Termination of Secondment

An employee should be supported in their transition back to their substantive role. All managers play a key role in ensuring effective reintegration, helping the employee return to their team and resume their substantive role with confidence.

The substantive manager should arrange a reintegration meeting shortly before or upon the employee's return to:

- share updates on any team, structural or organisational changes
- discuss any training or development needs that may have arisen during the secondment
- agree on key work priorities and expectations moving forward.

Early Termination of a Secondment

If a secondee chooses to end the secondment early and their substantive post has been backfilled, there is no guarantee of an immediate return to their substantive role. In such cases, the employee may be assigned alternative duties that are reasonable and aligned with their grade and skill set for the remainder of the secondment period.

The secondment manager may also terminate the secondment early provided that appropriate notice is given to the employee. Where feasible, the employee will return to their substantive post immediately. If this is not feasible, suitable alternative duties may be arranged in consultation with [HR](#).

In exceptional circumstances, the substantive manager may request early termination of the secondment. This must be discussed with [HR](#) before any action is taken to ensure the decision is justified and managed appropriately.

Quick Links

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[Secondment Agreement](#)

[Talent Strategy](#)

[Recruitment and Selection Page](#)

[Employee Review and Development](#)

[HR Forms Guidance for Managers](#)

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COVENANT EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME GOLD AWARD

We are a Living Wage Employer

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