

Agenda Item	<b>14</b>
Report No	<b>RES/12/26</b>

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Corporate Resources Committee

**Date:** 19 March 2026

**Report Title:** Investors in People Programme Update

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

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with a progress update on the roll-out of the Investors in People (IIP) programme, which was approved in March 2024.
- 1.2 The Highland Council is using the IIP framework to benchmark, review, and enhance staff experience and engagement across the organisation. The programme approach has been shaped by the IIP framework and by guidance provided by the assigned IIP practitioners overseeing delivery.
- 1.3 Due to the size and complexity of the Council, it was agreed that the most effective method of implementation would be to deliver six cohorts over an 18-month period.
- 1.4 The survey and accreditation activity forms Phase One of the programme, with all cohorts scheduled for completion by July 2026.
- 1.5 Phase Two is the implementation of the action plan activities which will make improvements to our workplace practices and culture as recommended by IIP.
- 1.6 The programme will be concluded at the end of the three-year accreditation period in July 2029, at which point IIP will move to 'business as usual', with three-yearly cycles of re-accreditation and improvement.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - i. **note** the progress of the IIP programme.

## 3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** There is a recurring budget in place to fund one full-time member of staff to support delivery of the programme across the Council, with administrative support provided by Business Support. In addition, earmarked reserves have been allocated to meet the costs associated with evaluation and accreditation by IIP.

- 3.2 Legal: There are no legal implications arising as a direct result of this report.
- 3.4 Risk: Implementing IIP mitigates the risk of staff dis-engagement and poor employer reputation, which could impact recruitment and retention.

There is a risk that, without buy-in across all services, implementation of action plans will be delayed or incomplete. This is being mitigated via engagement with Chief Officers.

- 3.5 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people): Staff wellbeing is a priority in the People Strategy and is reflected in the IIP framework and recommendations for improvement.
- 3.6 Gaelic: The programme will follow the Councils Gaelic language policy in relation to the use of Gaelic language in corporate documents.

#### **4. Impacts**

- 4.1 In Highland Council, 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. Integrated impact assessments will be carried out when developing service team actions plans.

#### **5. Introduction**

- 5.1 The Council are one of the largest employers in the Highlands delivering services to a population of 235,430 by 10,500 staff (March 2025). Our people are key to delivering services efficiently.

Effective staff engagement and positive staff experience can help support overall business goals by improving recruitment, retention, and employee performance. Most importantly, it places employees at the forefront of the organisation's vision, which can have long-lasting positive effects.

In 2024 an outline business case was prepared outlining options that could be an effective alternative to the biennial staff survey. IIP was selected as the most appropriate model to support improvement in how we lead, support, and develop our people and organisational culture.

- 5.2 IIP: Make Work Better framework was established in 1991 and is a globally recognised accreditation framework that benchmarks an organisation's performance in workplace practices. The framework operates on a three-year cyclical process designed to embed a culture of continuous improvement.

The benefits of implementing the IIP framework will enable us to build a resilient and sustainable Council, realising financial and transformational change through:

- receiving an unbiased and independent assessment of the Council’s People Strategy and workplace practices;
- enabling staff to have a meaningful voice, contributing to increased motivation, performance, and morale;
- achieving an accreditation level that can be strengthened in each three-year cycle through the implementation of recommended improvements;
- benchmarking performance against comparable organisations, providing a robust baseline for future development;
- enhancing productivity and organisational effectiveness;
- improving the Council’s ability to attract high-quality talent;
- strengthening staff engagement, retention, and overall workforce motivation;
- access to free leadership development events; and
- increased networking opportunities and automatic entry into IIP awards.

## 6. Progress

6.1 The IIP programme will be implemented into the Council in project phases between April 2025 and July 2026. Officer Governance is provided through the Corporate Solutions Board, one of the six Portfolios in the Council’s Operational Delivery Plan. The cohorts are structured as follows:

- Corporate Group 1: Corporate Cluster - Legal & Corporate Governance.
- Corporate Group 2: Corporate Cluster - Business Solutions; Corporate Finance; HR & Communications; Revenues & Commercialisation.
- Place Group 1: Place Cluster - Housing & Communities; Property & Assets.
- Place Group 2: Place Cluster - Facilities & Fleet; Operations & Maintenance; Enterprise & Investment.
- People Group 1: People Cluster - Health & Social Care; Integrated People Service (excluding Education).
- People Group 2: People Cluster - Primary and Early Years; Secondary Education; Education Support Team.

Phase One of the project is to complete the IIP assessment process and prepare draft action plans for each Chief Officer service. Table 1 below summarises progress.

### 6.2 Milestones: Assessment and Action plan

Group	Start date	Action Plan	Current status
Corporate 1	April 2025	Drafted	Complete
Corporate 2	October 2025	Underway	On target
Place 1	January 2026		On target
Place 2	May 2026		
People 1	March 2026		On target
People 2	April 2026		

### 6.3 Survey response rate and accreditation

Accreditation level is determined by both the survey responses and feedback from confidential discussions. These cover nine indicators:

- Leading and inspiring people
- Living the organisations values and behaviours
- Empowering and involving people
- Managing performance
- Recognising and rewarding high performance
- Structuring work
- Building capability
- Delivering continuous improvement
- Creating sustainable success

To achieve standard accreditation, organisations must reach 'developed' level for all nine indicators.

Group	Survey response rate	Standard accreditation
Corporate 1	83%	Achieved
Corporate 2	83%	Achieved
Place 1	61%	tbc

### 6.4 Survey

All staff are invited and encouraged to participate in the IIP survey, which is entirely anonymous and confidential. A higher response rate increases the robustness of the findings and strengthens confidence in identifying the improvement actions required. As the 2022 staff survey achieved an overall response rate of 47%, and it was agreed that a minimum response rate of 50% should be set for the IIP survey. This target exceeds both typical staff survey response rates (approximately 30%) and the minimum response rate required by IIP (24%).

Ownership and a clear call to action from the Chief Officer has been shown to improve survey completion results. As roll out into services without desk-based colleagues continues, successful approaches such as visiting depots with laptops and someone on hand to offer support have been trialled. We will continue to listen to teams and trade union representatives to make the survey as accessible as possible, as we work towards increasing participation in future IIP surveys to further enhance the reliability of the results.

### 6.5 Discussions

A representative sample of staff is selected by the IIP practitioners to participate in one-to-one interviews and small focus group discussions. These discussions are fully confidential between the practitioner and the participating staff members, providing valuable qualitative evidence as part of the accreditation process. Staff have been proactive and positively engaged throughout, contributing openly and constructively to the discussions.

### 6.6 Benchmarking

The IIP Benchmark is a single numerical score that captures overall employee sentiment against a consistent set of survey questions. It provides a clear indicator of organisational performance, enabling meaningful comparison, analysis, and interpretation of results against similar organisations.

The IIP Benchmark is calculated using all survey responses, assessing each question within the context of its associated framework indicator. Corporate and Place clusters are being benchmarked against the Public Administration and Defence sector, while alternative sector benchmarks are being explored for the People cluster to ensure the most appropriate comparison.

IIP has highlighted several areas of strong performance across the Council, as well as recommendations for improvement. These insights will now inform the development of action plans for each Chief Officer service and for the organisation as a whole.

#### 6.7 **Accreditation**

This provides the structure, insight, and external recognition required to support the Council in creating a more effective and resilient working environment. The IIP framework offers four levels of accreditation - Standard, Silver, Gold, and Platinum - each reflecting increasing maturity in people management practices. Through the implementation of the agreed improvement actions, the Council will be well positioned to progress towards achieving higher levels of accreditation in future assessment cycles.

6.8 Engaging staff effectively is fundamental to driving cultural change, as it enables shared understanding, increases participation in improvement activity, and supports the successful embedding of new behaviours and practices. The feedback from staff is being used to prepare the draft action plans.

#### 6.9 **Action Plans**

Action plans are informed by IIP recommendations and prioritised through feedback from staff engagement sessions. Staff sessions are being held in appropriate locations throughout the Highland area. Chief Officers are delivering in-person and Teams sessions to provide thanks for participation, feedback on the survey results, and congratulating staff on what we are proud of. It is also the first stage of action planning as attendees are asked to provide their feedback on priorities and ideas for making improvements. This will result in improved staff engagement; resources being directed where they are needed and actions achieved in each CO service area. Progress against action plans will be reported to Cluster SLTs and at Cluster Trade Union meetings.

6.10 Themes emerging from staff include:

- Staff are proud of team working, strong peer support and collaboration; appreciate flexible working opportunities and work/life balance; feel trusted to make decisions; and would recommend the Council as a good place to work.
- Inconsistency with induction and ERD process
- Reward and recognition needs to be explored further.
- Lack of time to prioritise learning because of workloads.
- Improve training opportunities, not just e-learning/Traineeasy.
- Improve communication regarding change and involve people affected.
- HQ car park – no space for staff or visitors.

#### 6.11 **IIP Champions**

A network of volunteer champions is being recruited in each CO service and across the organisation to develop and implement improvements. From these networks a staff forum will be established, with representatives from each service who will inform organisational development.

## 7 **Future resourcing**

A paid summer placement working on IIP has been advertised in schools as part of the Council's programme for building our future workforce. This will support the administration of the programme as more cohorts get underway. Using existing IT hardware from Learning and Development has enabled teams based in depots and other locations without ready access to IT to take part, though this does still require officer support. Other options for ensuring momentum is maintained are being explored as the programme progresses and the scale and complexity of the activity required is quantified.

Designation:	Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate
Date:	20 February 2026
Author:	Nicky Maclennan, Programme Manager IIP
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	None