

Agenda Item	8
Report No	RES/20/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Corporate Resources

Date: 4 June 2026

Report Title: Investors In People Programme Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Officer – Corporate

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on progress with the roll out of Investors in People across the Council. The programme is on track, with three out of six tranches accredited to date.

1.2 The update includes the final, independent reports from Investors in People into the Corporate Cluster services. The report for Corporate 1 (Legal and Governance) is attached as **Appendix 1**. The report for Corporate 2 (Business Solutions, Corporate Finance, HR and Communications and Revenues and Commercialisation) is attached as **Appendix 2**.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. **Note** the progress in rolling out Investors in People across the Council;
- ii. **Note** the high-level actions at paragraph 8.3 of the report; and
- iii. **Note** the Corporate 1 and Corporate 2 assessment reports.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource – there are no immediate implications arising from this report. Any future proposals emerging from this work will be subject to appropriate financial appraisal.

3.2 Legal – there are no immediate implications arising from this report.

3.3 Risk – there are no immediate implications arising from this report.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) – there are no immediate implications arising from this report.

3.5 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, 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. Any future proposals emerging from this work will be subject to appropriate financial appraisal.

5. Introduction

- 5.1 In 2024, the Council agreed to use the internally-recognised Investors in People (IIP) accreditation framework (We Invest In people) as an 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. The benefits of IIP are laid out in the [March 2026 report](#) to Corporate Resources Committee.
- 5.2 The IIP framework operates on a three-yearly cyclical process designed to embed a culture of continuous improvement. It consists of a survey which captures employee sentiment across a consistent set of questions. The questions have been developed by IIP over many years to accurately reflect the topics which impact employee experience.
- 5.3 IIP is being rolled out Council-wide in six tranches: two for each Cluster.
- **Corporate 1:** Legal and Corporate Governance
 - **Corporate 2:** Business Solutions, Corporate Finance, HR and Communications, Revenues and Commercialisation
 - **Place 1:** Housing and Communities, Property and Assets
 - **People 1:** Health and Social Care, Integrated People Services
 - **People 2:** Primary and Early Years, Secondary Education
 - **Place 2:** Enterprise and Investment, Facilities and Fleet, Operations and Maintenance
- 5.4 The process for each tranche is:
- Survey of all staff (50% target completion rate)
 - Qualitative discussions between assessors and a representative group of staff
 - Accreditation level confirmed
 - Feedback sessions to staff
 - Action plan

6. Rollout progress

6.1

	Start date	Survey response rate	Accreditation	Current status
Corporate 1	April 2025	83%	Standard Award	Action plan being implemented
Corporate 2	Oct 2025	83%	Standard Award	Action plan being implemented
Place 1	Jan 2026	61%	Standard Award	Feedback sessions underway
People 1	March 2026	56%		Discussions underway
People 2	April 2026			Survey underway
Place 2	May 2026			Survey due to start

The rollout is on track to complete by September 2026.

7. Key themes

7.1

A number of common themes are emerging from the assessments that have been completed so far.

What to be proud of:

- staff feel trusted to make decisions
- managers are keen to support high performance
- strong peer-to-peer support, openness and collaboration within teams
- staff are aware of their own role and purpose and team responsibilities
- staff enjoy their work and recommend the Council as an employer

7.2

Areas for improvement:

- recognition – staff would prefer local, team-based recognition
- communication on change
- more time for discussion on future goals, service development and strategy
- better use of feedback and training to develop manager effectiveness
- induction and ERDs

7.3

Overall, there is evidence of positive change. In the 2022 staff survey:

- 17% had confidence in senior leaders
- 17% were confident action would be taken as a result of the survey
- 12% believed changes in the council are usually for the better
- 14% believed change is managed well

7.4

By contrast, the combined results of the Corporate 1 and Corporate 2 liP surveys showed:

- 63% trust leaders
- 65% say the Council has a plan for the future
- 59.5% agree the organisation embraces change

8. Action Plans

- 8.1 Investors in People is an improvement methodology. Action plans based on the information gathered at assessment and subsequent feedback sessions are key to ensuring employee experience is maintained and improved.
- 8.2 Corporate Cluster Chief Officers delivered 23 in-person and two online sessions to provide thanks for participation, feedback on the survey results, and congratulate staff on what we are proud of. 360 staff members attended in person and 67 online. Attendees are asked to provide their feedback on priorities and ideas for making improvements, and this was used to develop the action plan.
- 8.3 High level actions to be implemented include:
- recognition – service-level recognition and thanks
 - leadership visibility - service away days and a programme of visits and meetings with senior managers
 - communication on change – service Viva Engage communities
 - manager development – piloting change management training
 - inductions and ERDs – service-level inductions and improvements to the ERD forms and process
- 8.4 The Corporate Cluster action plan is a more detailed living document. It will be further developed and updated by the Champions Network. Key milestones from the plan will be used to track progress of implementation through the programme management system.

9. Next Steps

- 9.1 Roll out across all services will continue.
- 9.2 Pulse surveys and focus groups will be used to assess progress annually until the end of the three-year accreditation cycle. Progress will be reported to the Corporate Resources Committee.
- 9.3 The Corporate Cluster will deliver the Service and Cluster-level actions within the plan, and progress Council-wide actions in collaboration with colleagues from other Clusters.

10. Monitor and Report Progress

- 10.1 Options on how best to monitor and report progress are being explored by the IIP Project Board These include identifying:
- improvement activity at organisational, service and team levels within action plans with timeframes and resources

- reporting to CMT and strategic committees and at what intervals
- measures and milestones reported in PRMS

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

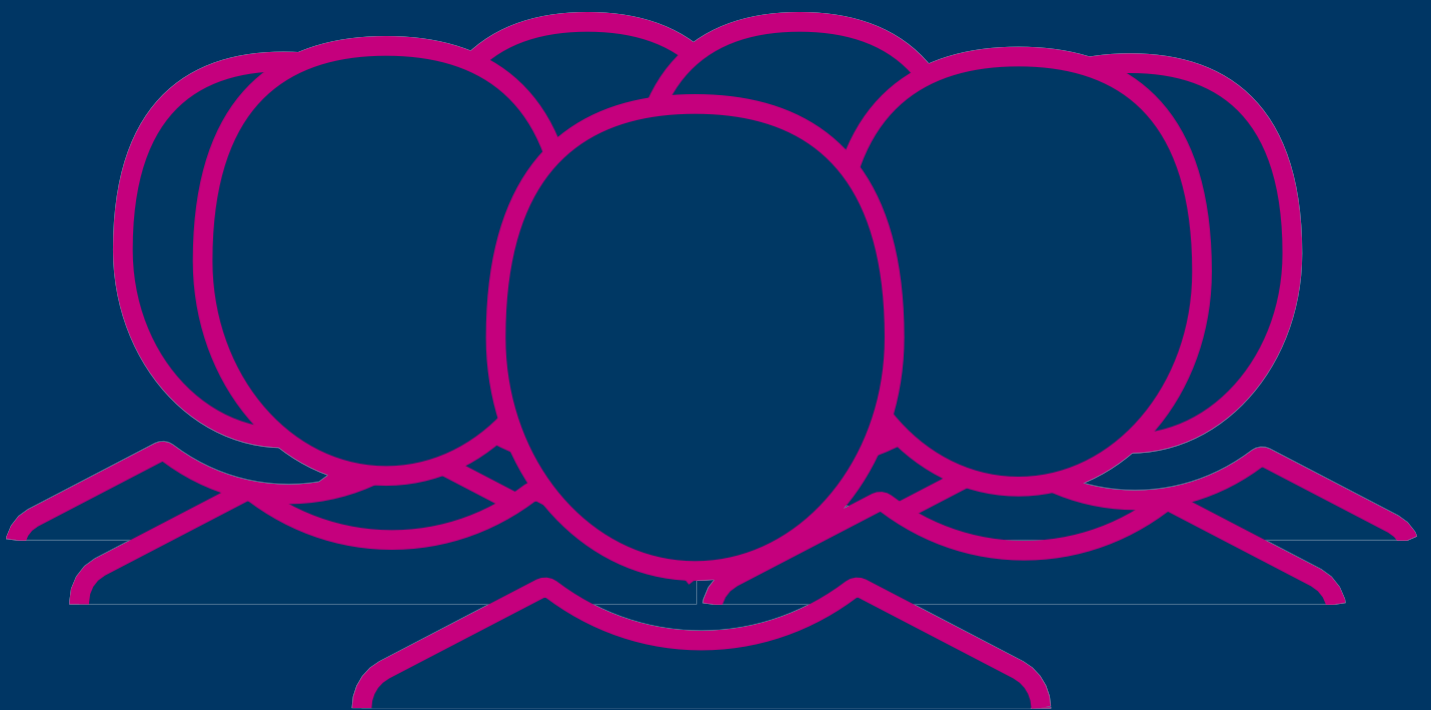
Date: 7 May 2026

Author: Nicky MacLennan, IIP Programme Manager

Appendices: Appendix 1 – IIP Report – Corporate Group 1
Appendix 2 – IIP Report – Corporate Group 2

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®

We invest in people



Feedback

**The Highland Council
(Legal and Corporate Governance)**

Project number: SCO-25-0013

Practitioner: Ruth Oulton

Date: July 2025

Investors in People

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INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®

We invest in people Standard

The Legal and Corporate Governance department is at the Standard level of our We invest in people accreditation.

Detailed feedback and recommendations inside...

- What to be proud of
- What to work on
- Our recommendations
- What's next

Key dates

Accreditation date	12-month meeting	24-month meeting	Accreditation expiry
June 2025	June 2026	June 2027	June 2028

At a glance

The Highland Council is the local authority for the Highland council area in Scotland, responsible for governing the region and providing services to its residents. Over 10,000 people are employed within three clusters:

1. Corporate: Business Solutions, Corporate Finance, HR and Communications, Legal & Corporate Governance, Revenues & Commercialisation.
2. Place: Facilities & Fleet, Planning & Economic Development, Property & Assets, Housing & Communities, Operations & Maintenance
3. People: Primary and Secondary Education, Health & Social Care and Integrated People Services.

You intend to use the Investors in People framework to benchmark, review and support the improvement of people management practices across the Highland Council region. The Legal and Corporate Governance (LCG) Team was the first department to be assessed against IIP as an initial pilot project. I am delighted to award Investors in People at Standard level.

This report contains comprehensive feedback in relation to the Investors in People framework for the LCG department. It is therefore not representative of the Council as a whole.

I have highlighted good practice across all Indicators. I have also identified several areas for attention to support progression towards higher levels of accreditation, particularly around the management of behaviours, support for managers, the use of organisational values and opportunities to enhance overall performance as change is implemented. It is important to recognise that many of these issues warrant an organisation-wide improvement strategy, although some progress can also be achieved in these areas through a locally focused approach within the LCG department.

As part of this review an IIP survey was implemented, and this resulted in an 83% response rate which is quite an achievement. Out of the LCG's headcount of 118 people, I was able to have in-depth confidential discussions with 24 people which represents just over 20% of the department's headcount. Whilst some meetings took place on MS Teams for logistical reasons, I aimed to meet with as many people in person as possible. I thank these people for their time and want to ensure that they know that their open and honest views were heard and have been factored into this feedback. Some anonymous quotes are in *italics* and have been used to highlight feedback given.

Thank you also to Nicky MacLennan and Penny Weaver for doing an amazing job at co-ordinating diaries and setting up this assessment.

What to be proud of

- People in LCG are passionate about their jobs and delivering services that meet the needs of the local community. Many people have several years if not decades of service and are mostly happy in their roles.
- People value the Council's approach to work life balance and cite flexible and remote working as key motivators. Many also perceive that it enables them to deliver their work in a manner that meets the needs of others and the community.
- Members of the LCG team fully understand their individual role and team purpose. They are acutely aware of what is expected of them in terms of measurable performance objectives.
- Managers are mostly seen as being supportive and approachable. Different individuals may have different views of the same manager based on their own take on management styles. Overall, though, your people feel trusted and this makes them feel valued.
- There is a great deal of autonomy given to people to carry out their roles effectively. This is another way in which people tell me they feel valued for their skills and expertise.
- Regular discussions happen in teams and one-to-ones about performance and these discussions are seen as supportive and helpful.
- Managers are keen to support high performance in their teams and encourage the development of skills / career progression, yet they don't all feel that they have the support to do this effectively.
- People are committed to continuous improvement and are keen to share their views.

What to work on

- Collecting and utilising feedback on management effectiveness, whether positive or otherwise, should be prioritised. This will support best practice and enhance ongoing development of management capability.
- It is commonly perceived that behaviour management is an area in which you have faced challenges. As with many other organisations, people may sometimes fear or avoid conversations around underperformance when diversity and wellbeing issues are at play, due to a complex set of concerns. This could happen because of a fear of being perceived as discriminatory, lack of confidence or training or not knowing the HR support. The consequences of not having effective discussions is that small issues can become big issues that are difficult to resolve.
- Your values are underutilised. There is much mileage to be gained in terms of using them consistently to enhance staff engagement, support the pursuit of high performance and recognising and rewarding efforts.
- Fostering greater collaboration in some areas would provide significant benefits in terms of efficiency.
- Workforce planning - in terms of succession planning for planned and unplanned absences and the development of your future talent pipeline.
- There are opportunities to review your non-financial reward and recognition strategies to support engagement and promote best practice.
- As plans for restructuring and reform take further shape, it's important to consult with people about the changes that impact on them to support engagement with new ways of working.
- There is room to improve your learning and development strategy to support the successful implementation of change agendas.
- Induction activities are patchy and inconsistent and need attention to ensure that people in new roles get off to the best possible start.
- A perception of "*being at the red line*" with regard to staffing may be forcing some teams to prioritise completing tasks over making improvements to how things work

efficiently and effectively.

Congratulations on achieving Standard level accreditation

You care about your people, and we know you're ambitious to do even more for them.

Our feedback focuses on what you need to do to keep improving.

What's next?

When you've had a chance to read this report, we'll explain your results in our **feedback meeting**.

WHO?

The meeting will include: Ruth Oulton, Nicky Maclennan, Allan Gunn, Stewart Fraser, Ruth Fry and Elaine Barrie.

WHEN?

The feedback meeting is scheduled for **29th July 2025**.

WHERE?

We'll meet at **TBC**

WHAT?

Together, we'll...

- **discuss your result** and our recommendations in detail.
- brainstorm how to turn our recommendations into **tangible activities**.
- develop an **action plan**, which we'll be able to review one and two years on.

To keep your accreditation, you need to:

- keep meeting (or exceed!) the **requirements** of your award.
- meet us **12 and 24 months** down the line. We won't be assessing you again, but it'll give us the chance to **chat through your progress** against your action plan.
- be **reassessed** no more than three years on from this assessment.

Assessment results

Your results by indicator



Survey highlights

The IIP survey was open 2nd - 16th May 2025 and everyone in the team was invited to participate.

The full survey feedback was presented to you on the 27th May 2025.

Your highest scores

- The LCG department scores higher / the same in the survey compared to the Public Administration and Defence sector for 7 Indicators.
- The highest performing area is how performance is managed and in particular, measuring and assessing performance.
- 91.9% people say they have discussed performance with their line manager in the last 6 months.
- 93.8% of people say that their role enables them to work well with others.
- 91.8% people say they are trusted to make decisions within their role.
- 87.7% people say that they have agreed objectives with their line manager in the past six months.
- 85.7% of people said that their manager motivates them to achieve their best.

...and your lowest

- The LCG department scores lower in the survey compared to the Public Administration and Defence sector against two Indicators - Living the organisation's values and behaviours and Creating sustainable success.
- Only 65.2% people say that the organisation's values guide the way that it works
- 67.4% people say that the organisation embraces change.

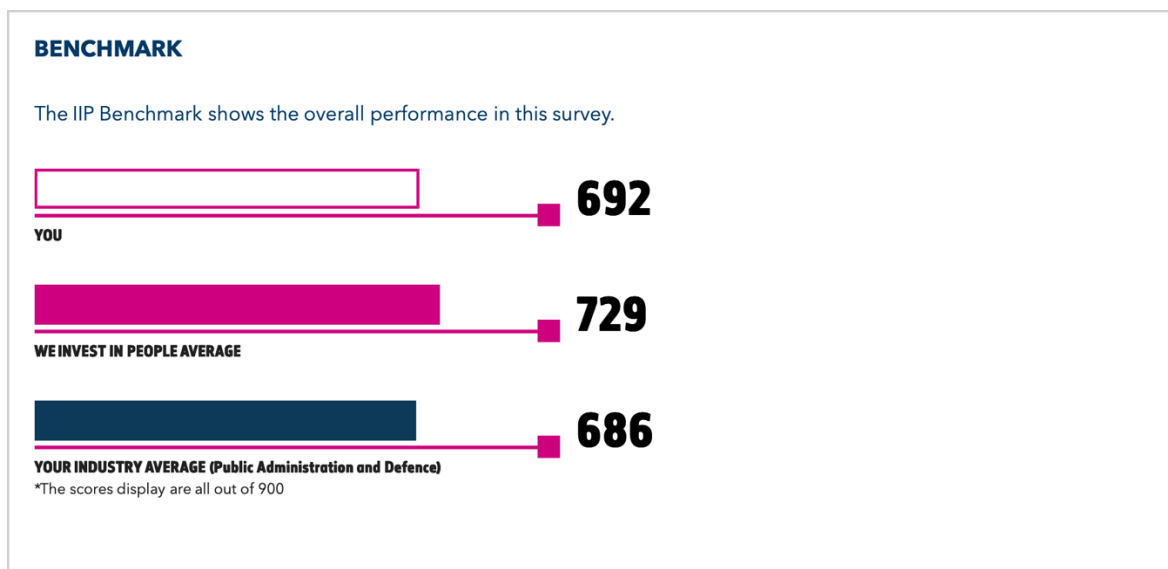
- 64.3% people say that they get appropriate recognition for the work that they do.
- 58.2% say that they are consistently recognised when they exceed expectations.
- 50% say that they organisation develops great leaders.
- 48% say that they are rewarded in ways that match their motivations.

Demographic summary

- There are similar trends with the feedback across all teams with LCG.
- Full time staff were generally more positive than part-time staff in their feedback.
- Managers were more positive than those without line management responsibilities.
- 48% say that they are rewarded in ways that match their motivations.

Your overall survey score

The LCG department with 118 people in scope scored slightly higher than other organisations in the 50-249 employee bracket in the Public Administration and Defence industry, but lower than the IIP average for all organisations.



The IIP Benchmark is a **single numerical value** (out of 900) which captures the sentiment of employees against the consistent base set of questions.

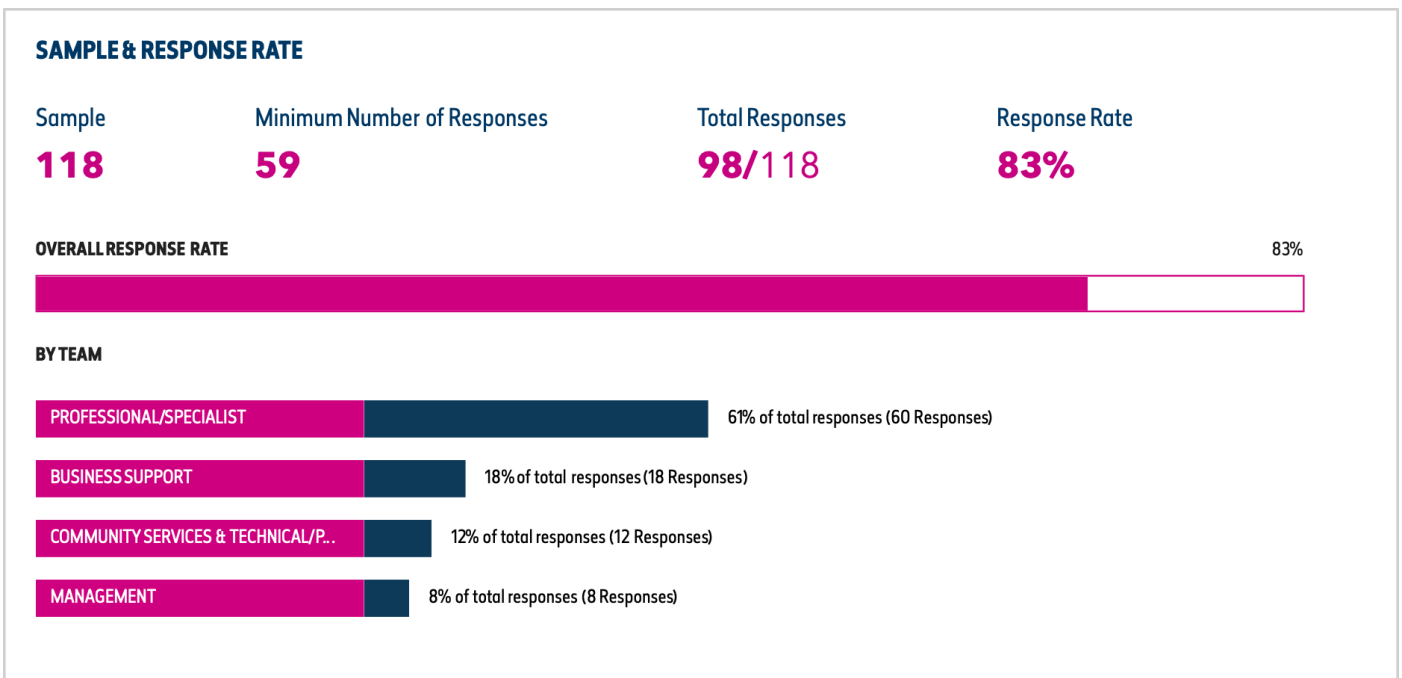
The IIP Benchmark is a **signal of overall performance** in the survey. It aids comparison, analysis and the interpretation of results and is used with the most impact in the Benchmark view.

The IIP Benchmark is calculated using all the responses received from an organisation's survey, considering each individual question, from the mandatory **"base set"** only, in the context of its relating indicator.

It is only calculated once a survey has a required **minimum of seven responses**. The IIP Benchmark is calculated using the formula below:

- 38 scores per base set question = using the Likert scale, each individual base set question is given an **average value** based on all employee responses
- 9 scores per Indicator = the base question values under each Indicator are then averages out to provide a score per Indicator (calculated as a percentage)
- Overall benchmark = all 9 Indicator scores are then added together to provide an overall IIP benchmark value out of 900.

Who took the survey?



Your survey results by indicator

Indicator summary

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AVERAGE SCORE	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEFENCE
Indicator 1 Leading and inspiring people	15.8%	37.2%	19.4%	17.9%	4.6%	3.6%	1.5%	5.3	+0.1
Indicator 2 Living the organisation's values and behaviours	9.2%	42.7%	17.6%	23.5%	3.7%	3.1%	0.4%	5.2	-0.4
Indicator 3 Empowering and involving people	24.2%	37.8%	22.2%	7.4%	5.4%	1.5%	1.5%	5.6	+0.2
Indicator 4 Managing performance	39.5%	38.3%	11%	5.1%	2.6%	2%	1.5%	5.9	+0.4
Indicator 5 Recognising and rewarding high performance	7.7%	35.2%	19.4%	21.4%	8.4%	4.3%	3.6%	4.8	+0.2
Indicator 6 Structuring work	17.6%	49%	21.2%	6.1%	4.6%	1%	0.5%	5.6	0.0
Indicator 7 Building capability	11.4%	42%	18.4%	17.3%	6.7%	3.1%	1%	5.2	0.0
Indicator 8 Delivering continuous improvement	15.3%	47.4%	19.4%	14.5%	1.8%	0.8%	0.8%	5.5	+0.2
Indicator 9 Creating sustainable success	13.5%	34.7%	26.5%	16.6%	5.4%	1.8%	1.5%	5.2	-0.2

Your survey results by theme

Themes (Highs and Lows)

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AVERAGE SCORE ↓	DIFFERENCE FROM IIP AVERAGE
Your highest themes									
Measuring and assessing performance INDICATOR 4: Managing performance	48%	38.8%	5.1%	5.1%	0%	1%	2%	6.2	+0.5
Enabling collaborative working INDICATOR 6: Structuring work	26.5%	51%	16.3%	4.1%	2%	0%	0%	6	-0.1
Making decisions INDICATOR 3: Empowering and involving people	31.6%	40.8%	19.4%	5.1%	2%	0%	1%	5.9	0.0
Setting objectives INDICATOR 4: Managing performance	39.8%	36.7%	11.2%	5.1%	3.1%	2%	2%	5.9	+0.2
Motivating people to deliver the organisations objectives INDICATOR 1: Leading and inspiring people	38.8%	40.8%	6.1%	5.1%	6.1%	1%	2%	5.9	+0.2
Your lowest themes									
Operating in line with the values INDICATOR 2: Living the organisation's values and behaviours	6.1%	41.8%	17.3%	21.4%	6.1%	6.1%	1%	5	-0.7
Embracing change INDICATOR 9: Creating sustainable success	7.1%	27.6%	32.7%	15.3%	12.2%	3.1%	2%	4.8	-0.7
Recognising and rewarding people INDICATOR 5: Recognising and rewarding high performance	7.1%	34.2%	19.9%	23%	7.7%	4.6%	3.6%	4.8	-0.3
Developing leadership capability INDICATOR 1: Leading and inspiring people	5.1%	16.3%	28.6%	32.7%	7.1%	8.2%	2%	4.5	-0.8
Designing an approach to recognition and reward INDICATOR 5: Recognising and rewarding high performance	4.1%	25.5%	18.4%	29.6%	12.2%	5.1%	5.1%	4.4	-0.5

What your people told us

Leading

LEADING AND INSPIRING PEOPLE

Indicator 1: Leading and inspiring people							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	15.8%	37.2%	19.4%	17.9%	4.6%	3.6%	1.5%
I trust the leaders of my organisation	11.2%	42.9%	22.4%	17.3%	3.1%	2%	1%
Management communicates the organisation's ambition	8.2%	49%	20.4%	16.3%	2%	3.1%	1%
My manager motivates me to achieve my best	38.8%	40.8%	6.1%	5.1%	6.1%	1%	2%
My organisation develops great leaders	5.1%	16.3%	28.6%	32.7%	7.1%	8.2%	2%

Note: It is important to note that people view 'leaders' in different ways e.g. employed senior leaders, immediate line managers and even Elected Members when considering the results above. Positively, there is a specific question about 'my manager' which scored extremely well.

Transparency and trust

"People want to do their own job and want to do it well"

"People understand what is expected of them, they get what they need to do their job"

"The information is all there if you have the time to read it"

There is no doubt that people understand the overall aims and purpose of the Highland Council and the context within which it operates. There have been some changes since the new Chief Executive joined and more are ongoing, so it is perhaps no surprise that only

77.6% of people agreed that management communicated the organisation's ambition and one in five people are sitting on the fence about this. I am aware that you make great efforts with top-down communication e.g. emails, meetings, online resources and more recently roadshows. Interestingly, some people commented that because there was so much information, communication could be improved by “streamlining” or prioritising it to avoid important messaging getting lost. There is opportunity to assess your communication plans to ensure alignment with evolving strategic objectives.

People are aware and understand the Performance and Governance Plan, specifically the targets that affect individual teams. Most people have regular team meetings / catch ups which is supporting a sense of belonging and providing an opportunity for people to discuss priorities, share their views and any concerns with managers. As such, everyone within the LCG structure was clear about their role and the function of their team.

Motivating people to deliver

85.7% of people in the survey agreed that ‘my manager motivates me to achieve my best’ and this was reflected in discussions. There are some excellent examples of managers hosting informative and supportive team meetings, supporting people's wellbeing and encouraging ownership for decision making. Many people have significant longevity of service and are highly experienced in their roles and as such, feedback indicates that managers trust their expertise, time management and decision-making. Being trusted to do a good job and “not micromanaged” is valued. Most people considered their managers to be supportive and were highly positive about support for their work life balance.

Developing leadership capability

“I have never had any management training. I go to X if I have any queries. If I needed any training my manager would be quite supportive I think”

“There are some good people managers, but they have different skill sets”

“Managers are seen as nice people so I don't want to challenge them. Where would you go anyway if it wasn't a big formal process”

“Employees can't provide feedback on their manager to someone else”

Managers absolutely understand what is expected of them to deliver priorities and targets. They understand the need to manage performance and motivate and support their teams to be able to deliver, though in practice some managers are seeking more support. Although there are management competencies in place, no-one referred to these during my discussions. Managers' understanding of ‘what makes a good manager’ typically comes from

their own personal experiences, rather than an understanding of what the Highland Council requires.

There were many examples of how managers’ supported people’s development ‘on-the-job’, but less so about how all managers encouraged people to develop outside of this or how they encouraged career development.

Collecting and utilising feedback on management effectiveness, whether positive or otherwise, should be prioritised. Currently, there is a perception that such feedback can only be given through formal HR processes. Establishing effective feedback mechanisms will help identify examples of best practice and enhance ongoing development of management capability, particularly in addressing any management styles that may negatively affect individuals.

LIVING THE ORGANISATION’S VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

Indicator 2: Living the organisation’s values and behaviours							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	9.2%	42.7%	17.6%	23.5%	3.7%	3.1%	0.4%
The values at my organisation guide the way we work	6.1%	41.8%	17.3%	21.4%	6.1%	6.1%	1%
I share my organisation’s values	7.1%	48%	16.3%	26.5%	0%	2%	0%
My organisation has clear values	10.2%	44.9%	20.4%	14.3%	8.2%	1%	1%
My behaviour reflects the organisation’s values	17.3%	46.9%	14.3%	21.4%	0%	0%	0%
I challenge behaviours which don’t match the organisation’s values	5.1%	31.6%	19.4%	33.7%	4.1%	6.1%	0%

This is the lowest scoring area in your survey and is also scores significantly lower when benchmarked against other public administration organisations.

Communicating and using your values

Ambitious - Sustainable - Connected

“I’ve always got the core values in mind when looking at how we do things”

“The values were spoken about when I started, but they haven’t been mentioned since”

“I struggle to see where they are used, they are part of the last Chief Executive regime”

“I’ve heard of them, but they don’t mean much to me in my day-to-day job”

“They are irrelevant”

“I’m sure there are values, pretty sure they do have them”

Your people are aware that there are core values and generally understood the spirit of what these were. Indeed, there was a common understanding of the need to work cohesively, be forward thinking and adaptable in meeting the needs of communities. People told me that the values were incorporated into the annual ERD with the intention they were discussed annually. Newer members of the team said that the values were discussed during induction activities. Outside of this, there is uncertainty if or how they were used. Some people suggested that the values were a legacy from the past.

The values are displayed on the HR intranet pages, yet the values on the external Highland Council website are not the same as the ones on the EDR perhaps contributing to a lack of clarity on what they are.

Managing behaviour in line with your values

In the survey, ‘challenging behaviours which don’t match your values’ comes out as an area for attention. I explored this further during the discussions with people who told me that this topic was related to the behaviours of:

- Members of the public
- A few Elected Members from time to time
- Some staff members where there was a perception that under performance and conduct went unaddressed and this was impacting on the outputs of teams, engagement and morale.

Most people recognised that dealing with the behaviours of members of the public was part

of the job and that Elected Members had codes of conduct to adhere to and there was oversight of this.

Focussing on your people though, a key recommendation from this review is that you revisit your corporate values and how they are used in practice. There is much mileage to be gained in terms of using them consistently to:

- Enhance staff engagement
- Support high performance
- Managing underperformance
- Recognising and rewarding high performance
- Being at the heart of how you operate at every level
- Decision making
- Learning and development

EMPOWERING AND INVOLVING PEOPLE

Indicator 3: Empowering and involving people							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	24.2%	37.8%	22.2%	7.4%	5.4%	1.5%	1.5%
I am encouraged to use initiative in my role	31.6%	41.8%	19.4%	5.1%	1%	0%	1%
I have all the information I need to do my job well	19.4%	38.8%	22.4%	6.1%	8.2%	3.1%	2%
I have a say in decisions that affect my role	14.3%	29.6%	27.6%	13.3%	10.2%	3.1%	2%
I am trusted to make decisions in my role	31.6%	40.8%	19.4%	5.1%	2%	0%	1%

Access to knowledge and information

“There are no team meetings, but we do all work together anyway”

“We meet weekly and monthly”

80.6% of people agreed that they had the information they needed to do their job well and this was confirmed during discussions. Managers are good at sharing information with their teams through one-to-one discussions and team meetings.

“Interdepartmental communication can be quite difficult”

“The departments work largely in isolation from each other. It’s an inefficient way of doing things”

“Sometimes we don’t receive all the information we need from other teams”

“There is a general lack of co-ordination between departments impacting on budget issues”

Frustrations can arise from challenges in information flow between departments as well as external partners and agencies. Teams are frequently occupied with their own responsibilities and may not always have full visibility into the pressures or deadlines faced by others. Enhancing understanding and fostering greater collaboration in some areas would provide significant benefits in terms of efficiency.

Involving and empowering people

“We get asked for views in meetings. We set something up to work better together”

“Managers could consult more about the changes”

“We meet every week to discuss what we need to do; we are talking about how to get things done all the time”

People said consultation took place within teams about day-to-day workloads and priorities on a regular basis. Each team works differently in this respect, but the conversations are happening.

Some teams have taken the initiative in improving how they go about their jobs (more of this in Indicator 6). There is certainly an appetite to improve efficiency, although heavy workloads may limit opportunities to discuss how this can be accomplished.

There have been many restructures over the years and your people are accustomed to

change. Opinions vary on how much consultation occurs regarding changes beyond their immediate team. Some hold the perception that it's often simply the team and job names that change names rather than the way that work is delivered.

Making decisions

91.8% of people in the survey agreed that they were trusted to make decisions and similarly 92.8% of people said they were encouraged to use initiative within their role. I was told that there was a great level of trust placed in people and autonomy to carry out their jobs in the best possible way. This trust and ownership supports empowerment and makes people feel valued.

In the survey, only 47.9% of people said that they had a say in decisions that affected their role but when explored further, this view typically related to the legislative and governance nature of people's roles in the department.

Supporting

MANAGING PERFORMANCE

Indicator 4: Managing performance							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	39.5%	38.3%	11%	5.1%	2.6%	2%	1.5%
I have agreed my objectives with my line manager within the last 12 months	39.8%	36.7%	11.2%	5.1%	3.1%	2%	2%
I feel encouraged to perform to the best of my abilities	33.7%	41.8%	12.2%	6.1%	3.1%	2%	1%
My manager helps me improve my performance	36.7%	35.7%	15.3%	4.1%	4.1%	3.1%	1%
I have discussed my performance with my manager in the last 6 months	48%	38.8%	5.1%	5.1%	0%	1%	2%

Setting objectives

“We go through a questionnaire; it’s a catch up and a chat”

“The ERD process is a bit torturous”

“We do the ERD annually, it’s a good opportunity for people to speak to their managers”

Team and individual objective setting is an area of strength. 87.7% of people say they have agreed objectives with their manager in the last 12 months. Whilst the ERD process is the main forum for setting and reviewing this, targets and timescales are evident in all teams and people are supported to achieve these through open dialogue.

Measuring and assessing performance

Managers are keen to support high performance within their teams. Of note, 91.9% of people say that they had discussed their performance with their manager in the last 6 months. Whilst most

participate in the annual ERD process, they indicated that frequent one-to-one meetings and team discussions may be more effective for ongoing management of team and individual performance. Employees also consider regular discussions with managers about performance to be more supportive and useful.

Feedback on the current ERD process is mixed, some value this opportunity to meet with managers in a structured way and see it as helpful, others perceive it to be a “*paperwork exercise*”. I am aware that you are piloting a new approach to this.

Although the ERD does include a section on values most people are not clear about its merit, which links into my earlier feedback on values.

Managing underperformance

“We are not firm enough with those falling below the grade”

“There used to be a lot of grievances and appeals but they tackle that”

“I don’t feel that I can call things out because of fear of diversity or discrimination”

“There is an impact on others when performance goes unaddressed”

“Underperformance is discussed with constructive conversations. We are told every mistake is fixable, it’s not life or death”

“Managers are not terribly well supported at all”

“Managers need to be supported to manage”

“Staff management is all about adhering to policy”

It is commonly perceived that behaviour management is an area in which you have faced challenges. As with many other organisations, people may sometimes fear or avoid conversations around underperformance when diversity and wellbeing issues are at play, due to a complex set of concerns. This could happen because of a fear of being perceived as discriminatory, lack of confidence or training or not knowing the HR support. The consequences of not having effective discussions can impact on the morale around fairness, missed development opportunities, the continuation of underperformance as well as increased caseloads for the HR team.

RECOGNISING AND REWARDING HIGH PERFORMANCE

Indicator 5: Recognising and rewarding high performance							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	7.7%	35.2%	19.4%	21.4%	8.4%	4.3%	3.6%
I am rewarded in ways that match my motivations	4.1%	25.5%	18.4%	29.6%	12.2%	5.1%	5.1%
I feel appreciated for the work I do	12.2%	46.9%	19.4%	10.2%	6.1%	3.1%	2%
I am consistently recognised when I exceed expectations	6.1%	28.6%	23.5%	25.5%	9.2%	3.1%	4.1%
I get appropriate recognition for the work I do	8.2%	39.8%	16.3%	20.4%	6.1%	6.1%	3.1%

Your approach to reward and recognition

“Flexible working is the best way we get rewarded”

“The benefits are crucial to me; flexitime policy and the pensions are a really good incentive”

“They are very accommodating to personal lives”

Although this is the lowest performing Indicator in the survey for the LCG department, that is not uncommon for most of the organisations that we work with. That said, LCG score slightly higher in this Indicator than your sector average.

When discussing with people what it was that the Council did to reward and recognise them, people focussed the conversations on pay and pensions. Yet when probed further they mentioned many other benefits including support for work life balance, flexible working, trust and autonomy.

Career opportunities (and therefore the opportunity to progress to the next salary band) play an important part in the recognition of efforts with the Council.

As a public sector organisation, employment contracts include a wide range of competitive financial and non-financial rewards that are a key advantage for attracting and retaining employees. Publishing an annual rewards statement (financial and non-financial benefits) could

highlight these benefits to existing and future employees.

Recognising high performance

“You do get thanked from X for your efforts. There is nothing else that they can do”

“We are not appreciated as much as we used to be”

“We hear we are doing a good job. We get thank you emails from the public. We appreciate that more”

“You get thanked if you do a special task”

“I’m doing a good job; I know I am”

“I just recently had a chat with X and he could see the work I am doing”

78.5% of people said in the survey that they felt appreciated for the work that they did. Here it is important to comment on the fact that your people gain their feelings of appreciation from a wide audience. Whilst much of this recognition comes from immediate line managers and peers, some teams also have the opportunity to feel valued because of feedback from other agencies and bodies and Elected Members. The public also feature, however, in this regard, perceptions of unfair criticism can impact negatively on morale.

The survey and the feedback from discussions highlights that when people go ‘the extra mile’ there is not much to acknowledge it outside of the immediate team. Highlighting individuals' contributions can have meaningful effects on morale and engagement. However, missed opportunities for recognition, or inconsistencies in how efforts are acknowledged, may lead to perceptions of unfairness and disengagement. Some individuals may feel overlooked or believe that gratitude is not appropriately directed if they do not receive recognition, they consider appropriate from their peers. This is one area in which your values could be utilised at no cost.

Further, it’s important to recognise that not all of the people in LCG are seeking constant praise from managers - many of your people ‘know’ that they are doing a good job because roles are being fulfilled and priorities achieved.

STRUCTURING WORK

Indicator 6: Structuring work							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	17.6%	49%	21.2%	6.1%	4.6%	1%	0.5%
My work is interesting	21.4%	46.9%	22.4%	6.1%	2%	1%	0%
I am able to develop the skills I need to progress	11.2%	38.8%	26.5%	10.2%	9.2%	3.1%	1%
I have the right level of responsibility to do my job effectively	11.2%	59.2%	19.4%	4.1%	5.1%	0%	1%
My role enables me to work well with others	26.5%	51%	16.3%	4.1%	2%	0%	0%

Role design and autonomy

This is one of your high performing areas in the survey. Roles are highly structured with clearly defined skills and capabilities for each position. The structure supports professional development and career progression, and people feel that they can progress should opportunities arise. There are some good examples whereby people have been encouraged to pursue professional qualifications and gain experience in other teams / outside the Council to support a move up to the next level.

Flexible working is seen as a major benefit and one that enables individuals to deliver their work in a manner that meets the needs of others as well as the community (as well as their own personal commitments).

“They are good with internal movement; you can grow within the role if you want to”

“There’s a new structure brought about by the new Chief Executive. The role is now more challenging”

“There’s lot of transformation work going on but it’s just restructuring”

“There’s a rigorous recruitment process for roles. It’s fair”

As plans for restructuring and reform take further shape, it's important to consult with people about the changes that impact on them as a few people suggested that this wasn't always the case which may affect engagement.

Autonomy

"I stay because I have autonomy and choice over how I work"

"We are the subject matter experts"

"I give them autonomy to do what they need to do"

"The team work out their own arrangements and it works"

89.8% of people say that they have the right level of responsibility to do their job effectively. Discussions reflected that policies and practices help individuals make suitable decisions for their roles. I've mentioned earlier on in the report that most people feel trusted to get on and do a good job and value this ethos.

90.7% of people said that their work was interesting, and this was backed up by the discussions I had. People clearly enjoy their work.

Collaboration

93.8% people say their role enables them to work well with others. When exploring collaborative working many people's roles in LCG require them to work with other agencies and partners, other Councils and Elected Members. That said, and mentioned earlier in the report, there are opportunities to build on this collaboration to achieve measurable improvements in efficiencies.

There are some great examples to highlight how teams have taken the lead with collaborative working. Examples include the Licensing Team who hosted a meeting with other external agencies around changes in the STL process and the Legal Team meeting with the Estates department to look at how each team could work better together.

Improving

BUILDING CAPABILITY

Indicator 7: Building capability

BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	11.4%	42%	18.4%	17.3%	6.7%	3.1%	1%
I make use of my organisation's learning and development opportunities	11.2%	41.8%	17.3%	21.4%	5.1%	3.1%	0%
I have opportunities to learn at work	11.2%	52%	14.3%	12.2%	7.1%	3.1%	0%
I know how my organisation invests in learning and development	7.1%	29.6%	17.3%	25.5%	12.2%	7.1%	1%
My manager thinks it is important that I develop my skills	17.3%	51%	17.3%	11.2%	2%	0%	1%
People are selected for roles based on their skills and abilities	10.2%	35.7%	25.5%	16.3%	7.1%	2%	3.1%

Development opportunities

“We are very committed to learning”

“All of the people are trained differently, because of the circumstances at the time”

“We do 6 weekly staff training from each other”

“Lots of on-the-job training. If you don't know how to do it, you just ask”

Corporate online learning and development opportunities are plentiful, underpinned by competency frameworks. Only 54% of people said that they knew how the Council invested in learning in and development which was a surprise given that many people referred to the Traineasy e-learning system and on-the job learning.

71.3% people said that they made use of your learning and development opportunities whereas 77.5% of people said that they had opportunities to learn at work. The vast majority of successful learning seems to take place on the job, as people learn new ways of working and take on more advanced tasks. Colleagues are keen to support the development of others when approached. 85.6% of people said that they felt that managers thought it was important that people developed their skills.

It will be no surprise that in-person rather than e-learning is preferred particularly for subjects involving people rather than systems. Whilst e-learning offers advantages in terms of accessibility and affordability evidence suggests that in-person and vocational training leads to more successful learning outcomes because of opportunities for discussion and interaction.

Whilst the ERD process is the formal channel for discussing development opportunities, informal discussions also take place. Current provisions appear to meet people's immediate development needs but there is room to improve your learning and development strategy to support the successful implementation of change agendas.

Induction

“There’s no real induction”

“They need to modernise the induction system with the HR system, I imagine they have a big churn in the first couple of months”

“Managers do the induction on the job. There is an induction checklist. There’s no corporate induction, just emails, a welcome starter pack”

Induction activities are patchy and inconsistent and need attention to ensure that people in new roles get off to the best possible start. Inductions are taking place within teams and colleagues are generally happy to help people settle into their roles. From discussions it wasn't clear that there was any sort of corporate induction delivered, other than people being referred by HR to read materials online. There is certainly scope here for improvement in promoting values and culture.

Succession planning

Some teams are already practising succession planning, such as by hiring trainees. However, a more structured approach across all teams should be considered for retirements, planned and unplanned absences.

Leadership development

“We’ve had a look at succession planning, it’s not completely developed”

“People get promoted because they are good at their job, not because they are good at managing people”

“There is a lot of management training there if people choose to access it. Everyone is different to manage”

“We are supposed to be doing workforce planning to prepare people for promotion, but there is no budget for it”

“Succession planning is scant”

“There is no way to know if managers are effective. The Council is not good at tackling poor performance”

There is some awareness that there are management development programmes available as a result of email communications; though there is a perception that these are not accessed regularly because they are optional. A couple of people mentioned Management Connections as a useful leadership development programme.

There are many effective leadership development practices already in place and a great deal of praise for managers. Some discussions revealed instances where managers, possibly unaware of the impact of their actions, had negatively affected morale and engagement.

Successfully moving forward with implementing change will require refining your approach to management development activities. I was told that other than the ERD people do not have the opportunity to provide constructive feedback on their line manager, nor do managers have a forum to outline the challenges they face managing people. This feedback would be invaluable in designing future management development provision.

There is an opportunity to address the development of leadership skills to prepare people for possible future management roles. Introducing an induction programme for new or prospective managers could assist in helping them quickly understand their impact on performance and settle into their roles more easily.

DELIVERING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Indicator 8: Delivering continuous improvement							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	15.3%	47.4%	19.4%	14.5%	1.8%	0.8%	0.8%
I look for improvement ideas from my colleagues	17.3%	48%	22.4%	11.2%	0%	1%	0%
I am encouraged to improve the way I do things	12.2%	59.2%	18.4%	8.2%	1%	0%	1%
I am responsible for improving the way we do things	13.3%	36.7%	20.4%	23.5%	3.1%	2%	1%
I am trusted to try new approaches in the way I work	18.4%	45.9%	16.3%	15.3%	3.1%	0%	1%

Creating a culture of continuous improvement

You overall survey benchmark score for this Indicator is slightly higher than other organisations in your sector. There is no doubt that improvements have been made to the way that people are managed and supported, though not everyone would recognise this. There is a willingness to improve in all teams and a belief that there is commitment from the top, but I received several comments that *“plans weren’t always followed through”*.

Some people have a vague recollection of the staff survey in 2022, but no one knew what happened to their feedback.

Examples of improvements that have been made included various restructures, the introduction of Trainees, improvements to IT infrastructure, recruitment of MA’s / trainees, the development of new services e.g. STL team. I am aware that there are many more planned improvements at a Council level e.g. changing the ERD process, reviewing the use of values, improving induction processes and rolling out the roadshows.

The Performance and Governance Service’s vision is *“to support a high performing Council committed to deliver the Council Programme to empower the people of the Highlands, create vibrant and sustainable places, and drive economic growth and prosperity”*. Going forward,

managers and leaders and leaders must make time to guide discussions and engage others in striving for high performance. Ultimately, this responsibility is shared by all.

Encouraging innovation

“We’ve got lots of ideas for service improvements to the system”

“Everyone will have ideas on how things can work better”

90.1% of people agree that they are encouraged to improve the way that they do things which mirrors with Indicator 3 where 92.8% people agreed that they were encouraged to use initiative in their role. Similarly, 87.7% of people look for improvement ideas from their colleagues which maps with Indicator 6 where 93.8% of people say their role helps them work well with others.

Team meetings and one-to-one meetings are the main ways in which people are encouraged by managers to come up with new ideas and approaches. In newer teams e.g. CRIT and the STL, approaches to work have been continually evolving and there were some really positive examples of how people had been involved in improving things. Indeed, 80.6% of people say that they are trusted to try new approaches.

A perception of *“being at the red line”* with regard to staffing may be forcing some teams to prioritise completing tasks over making improvements to how things work efficiently and effectively.

CREATING SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Indicator 9: Creating sustainable success

BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	13.5%	34.7%	26.5%	16.6%	5.4%	1.8%	1.5%
My organisation has a plan for the future	16.3%	37.8%	17.3%	22.4%	4.1%	1%	1%
My organisation is a great place to work	14.3%	39.8%	30.6%	10.2%	3.1%	1%	1%
My organisation embraces change	7.1%	27.6%	32.7%	15.3%	12.2%	3.1%	2%
My organisation has a positive impact on society	16.3%	33.7%	25.5%	18.4%	2%	2%	2%

Focussing on the future

The Performance and Governance Service Plan (updated 2023) clearly sets out all of the future service priorities. People are aware of this plan and in particular the measures of success that they contribute towards. The budget constraints within which the Council operates is understood at all levels. There is good evidence of short-term planning in particular taking place in each team. Less so about longer-term planning which may reflect 43.8% being ambivalent about the ‘plan for the future’ in the IIP survey.

Overall, the people that I met with enjoy their jobs and working for the Council and the LCG department. 84.7% of people in the survey agree that it’s a great place to work. In particular they value the flexibility they have to work remotely which supports personal work life balance, the employment T&C’s and the trust placed in them to deliver.

Embracing change

Communication in LCG is perceived to be generally good about changes that are happening. Given that there are ongoing changes being brought about to teams and structure by the appointment of the new Chief Executive it’s fair to say that some people are not entirely certain about the future direction of travel. The survey backs up my onsite discussions with many people being less positive about how the Council embraces change.

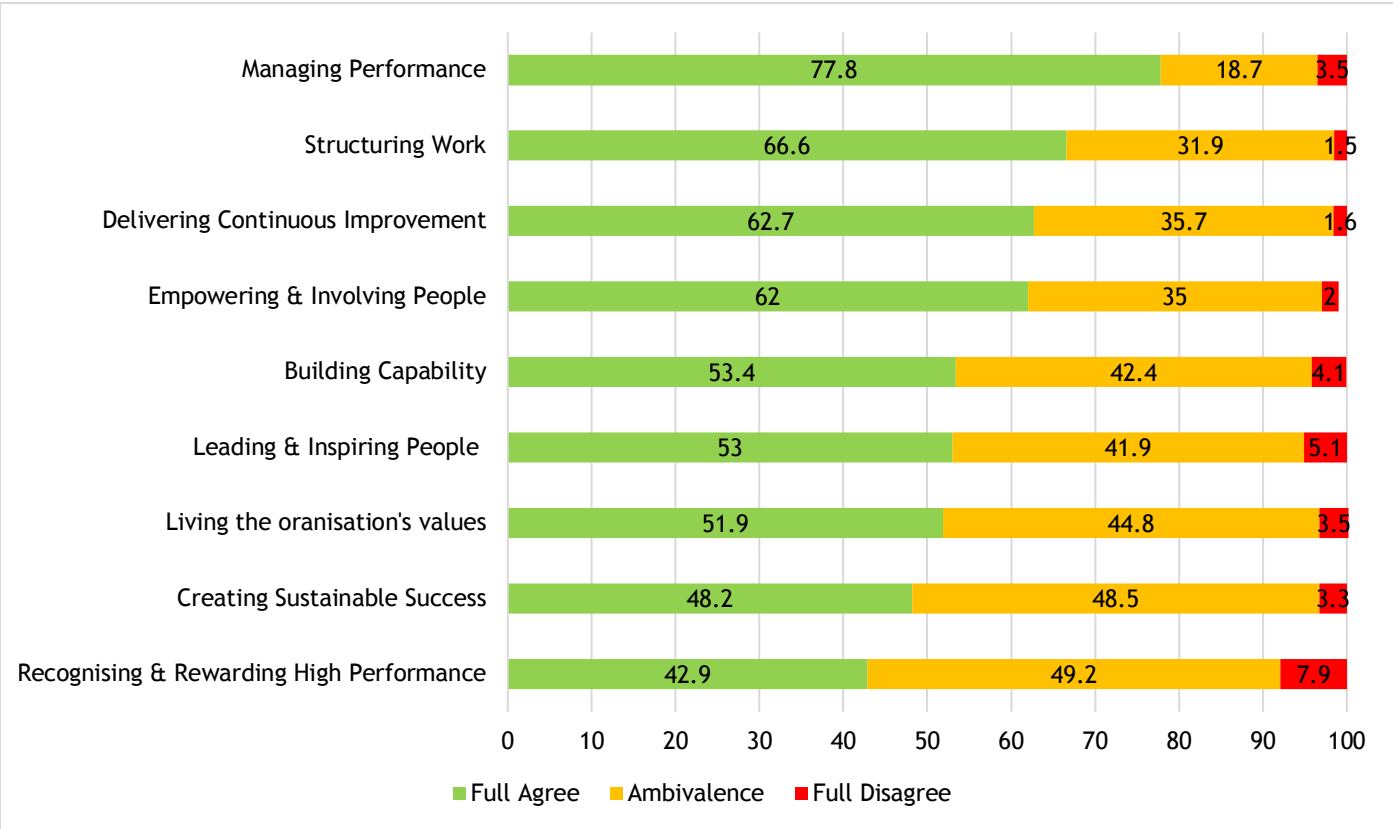
The wider community

By the very nature of the role that the Highland Council provides it will be no surprise that people at all levels are acutely aware of who your stakeholders are and who the communities that you serve are.

The extent to which your workforce demographics is reflective the communities that you serve is on your radar. People are recruited from and located in all regions within the area. The longevity of service and dynamics of the labour market may pose certain challenges in ensuring that the LCG workforce is completely representative of the community. Efforts are being made to attract and develop a younger talent pipeline.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning here that I found that many people are personally motivated to support local charities and also volunteer to support the efficient running of elections.

Annex 1



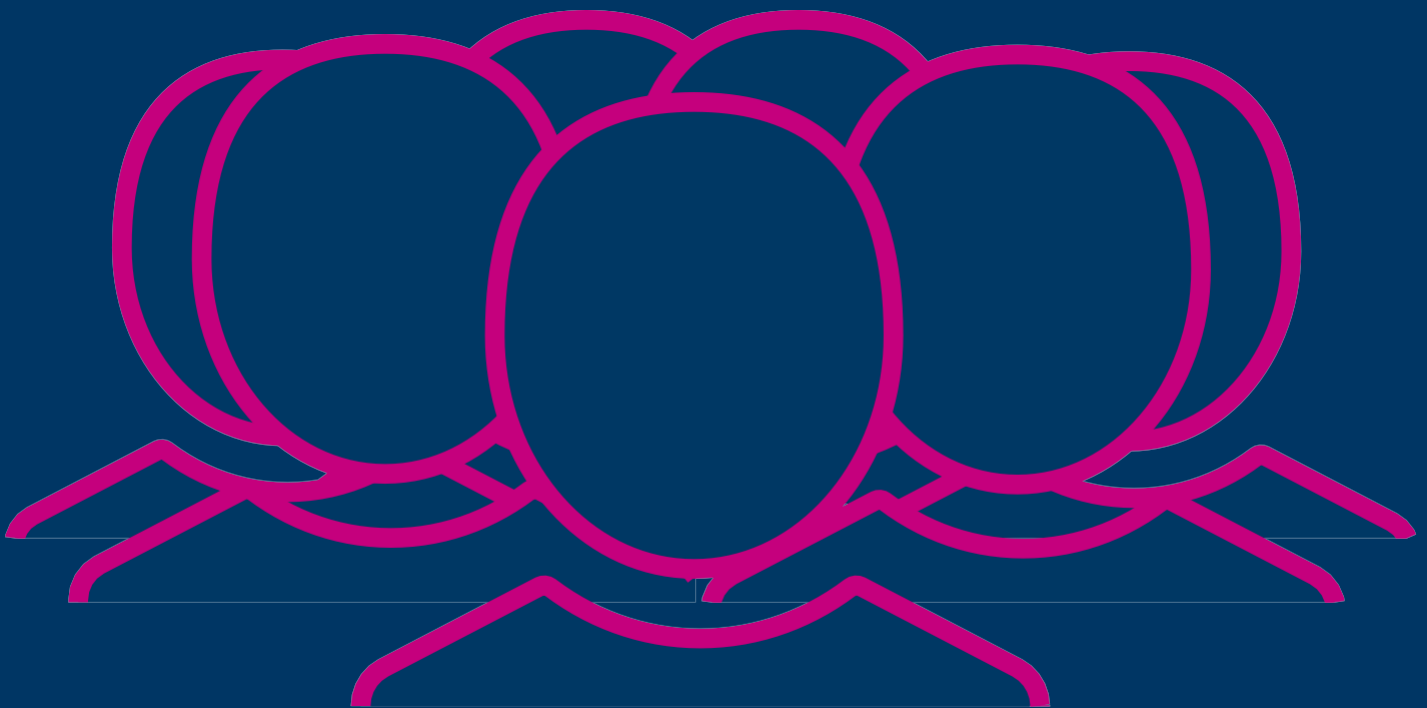
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Feedback

The Highland Council Corporate Cluster

Business Solutions
HR & Communications
Corporate Finance
Revenues & Commercialisation

Project number: CRM-25-00244
Practitioners: Ruth Oulton & Maria Baxter
Date: March 2026

Investors in People

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INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®

We invest in people Standard

The Corporate Services Cluster of The Highland Council is at the Standard level of our We invest in people accreditation.

Detailed feedback and recommendations inside...

- What to be proud of
- What to work on
- Our recommendations
- What's next

Key dates

Accreditation date	12-month meeting	24-month meeting	Accreditation expiry
November 2025	November 2026	November 2027	November 2028

At a glance

The Highland Council is the local authority for the Highland region in Scotland, responsible for governing the region and providing services to its residents. Over 10,000 people are employed within three clusters:

1. Corporate: Business Solutions, Corporate Finance, HR and Communications, Legal & Corporate Governance, Revenues & Commercialisation.
2. Place: Facilities & Fleet, Planning & Economic Development, Property & Assets, Housing & Communities, Operations & Maintenance
3. People: Early Years, Primary and Secondary Education, Health & Social Care and Integrated People Services.

You are using the Investors in People framework to benchmark, review and support the improvement of people management practices across the Highland Council region. The Legal and Corporate Governance (LCG) team was the first service within the Corporate Cluster to be assessed against IIP as an initial pilot project. This assessment covers the remaining services in the Corporate Cluster; Business Solutions, HR & Communications, Revenues and Commercialisation and Corporate Finance.

This report contains comprehensive feedback in relation to the Investors in People framework for Corporate Cluster. It is not intended to be representative of the Council as a whole. Separate appendix reports have been provided for each of the four services highlighting key areas of strength and areas for improvement.

We have highlighted good practice across all Indicators. We have also identified several areas for attention that will help make work better for your people. These areas are particularly related to managerial effectiveness, performance management, recognition of efforts and the management of change. There are obvious overlaps between the findings highlighted in the feedback to Legal & Corporate Governance report. It is important to recognise that many areas for improvement are consistent across the Cluster and warrant an organisation-wide improvement strategy, although some progress can also be achieved in these areas through a locally focused approach within the Corporate Cluster.

As part of this review an IIP survey was implemented, and this resulted in an 83% response rate which is a great achievement and highlights that people are keen to have their views heard. Out of the four service's headcount of 700 people, we were able to have in-depth confidential discussions with 109 people which represents 15.6% of the workforce. This is above the

minimum sample guidance set by IIP of 4%. Whilst some meetings took place on MS Teams for logistical reasons, we aimed to meet with as many people as possible in person. We thank these people for their time and want to ensure that they know that their open and honest views were heard and have been factored into this feedback. Some anonymous quotes are in *italics* and have been used to highlight feedback given.

Thank you also to Nicky MacLennan, Eve Carson and Olga Lockhart for doing an amazing job at co-ordinating busy diaries and setting up this assessment.

What to be proud of

- Staff understand the Council's aims, roles, and priorities, which helps team cohesion. There is a shared understanding among staff of the Council's ethos, with an appreciation for the importance of working cohesively, being forward-thinking, and adapting to meet community needs.
- There is confidence in senior leaders and most managers who are recognised for supporting wellbeing, work-life balance, and managing complex priorities.
- Employees are dedicated to service improvement, innovation, and value opportunities to contribute their expertise.
- Most staff have agreed objectives, understand targets, and value meaningful discussions around these outside of the ERD process.
- Staff feel trusted to make decisions, act independently, and manage their responsibilities.
- Managers are keen to support high performance in their teams and encourage the development of skills / career progression, yet they don't all feel that they have the time or support to do this effectively.
- Strong peer-to-peer support, openness, and high levels of collaboration within teams.
- Competitive pay, pensions, flexible/hybrid working, and high job security help attract and retain staff.
- Staff are highly motivated to serve and positively impact local communities.

- Your people are largely happy in their roles and would recommend the Council as a great place to work and indeed do so.

What to work on

- Staff would welcome improved two-way communication about changes and their impact on them, particularly for those not close to senior management. Uncertainty about the Council's future direction and FOM is causing anxiety for some.
- Team meetings are often operationally focused, leaving little time for discussion of future goals or organisational / service development. There is a desire for greater involvement in continuous improvement that recognises staff expertise. Fostering greater collaboration and communication in some areas would provide significant benefits in terms of efficiency and adapting to new ways of working.
- As plans for restructuring and reform take further shape, it's important to consult with people about the changes that impact on them to support engagement with new ways of working. Change management strategies require careful consideration.
- Collecting and utilising feedback on management effectiveness, whether positive or otherwise, should be prioritised. This will assist in supporting best practice and enhance ongoing development of management capability.
- There is a shortage of 'transformational' HR resource to support managers in people development capabilities. A preference for in-person learning is unmet as e-learning dominates. Budgets and processes for external learning remain unclear.
- There is inconsistency in performance discussions, with the ERD process often viewed as a formality rather than a useful development tool. Not all managers are adept at having open and honest performance conversations.
- There is room to improve your learning and development strategy to support the successful implementation of change agendas. Opportunities for advancement and skills development are inconsistently supported. Many staff find it difficult to prioritise their own learning and development because of workloads.

- Workforce planning requires attention in terms of succession planning for planned and unplanned absences and the development of your future talent pipeline.
- There are significant benefits to be had by using values to consistently enhance staff engagement, support the pursuit of high performance and recognising and rewarding efforts.
- Recognition should be an area of focus, with many staff feeling undervalued and only a minority consistently acknowledged for exceeding expectations. Staff would prefer local, team-based recognition over organisation-wide awards to support engagement and promote best practice.
- The induction experience for new starters is variable, with some left to navigate on their own. There is a need for a more structured and consistent approach to team and corporate induction.

Lastly, we mention car parking at HQ as this as it was without exception raised as an issue that is causing significant levels of frustration amongst staff. People told us that they wasted Council time looking for spaces, incurred personal expense because of fines and in some cases chose not to attend the office because of these challenges.

Congratulations on achieving Standard level accreditation

What's next?

When you've had a chance to read this report, we'll explain your results in a series of **feedback meetings**.

WHO?

The main report feedback meeting will include:

Ruth Oulton and Maria Baxter of Investors in People
Allan Gunn, Brian Porter, Ruth Fry, Jon Shepherd, Sheila McKandie, Elaine Barrie and Nicky Maclennan

This is scheduled for the 27th November 2025.

Service specific separate feedback meetings for each of the CO's will take place on the 26th November 2025.

WHERE?

We'll meet at Highland Council HQ.

WHAT?

Together, we'll...

- **discuss your result** and our recommendations in detail.
- brainstorm how to turn our recommendations into **tangible activities**.
- develop an **action plan**, which we'll be able to review one and two years on.

To keep your accreditation, you need to:

- keep meeting (or exceed!) the **requirements** of your award.
- meet us **12 and 24 months** down the line. We won't be assessing you again, but it'll give us the chance to **chat through your progress** against your action plan.
- be **reassessed** no more than three years on from this assessment

Assessment results

Your results by indicator



Survey highlights

The IIP survey was open 8th September to 3rd October 2025 and everyone in the team was invited to participate.

The full survey feedback was presented to you on the 9th October 2025.

Your highest scores

- 87.2% people agree that their role enables them to work well with others
- 81.8% people agree that they are trusted to make decisions in their role
- 80.4% of people agree that they look for improvement ideas from their colleagues
- 71% of people agree that their manager helps them improve their performance
- 77.4% of people say that they feel encouraged to perform to the best of their abilities
- 74.3% of people agree that their manager motivates them to achieve their best

...and your lowest

- 54.5% of people say that people are selected for roles based on their skills and abilities
- 59.4% of people say that they have a say in decisions that affect their role
- 54.7% of people say that they get appropriate recognition for the work they do
- 48.4% say that they are consistently recognised when they exceed expectations
- 42.3% say they are rewarded in ways that match their motivations
- 46% agree that the organisation develops great leaders

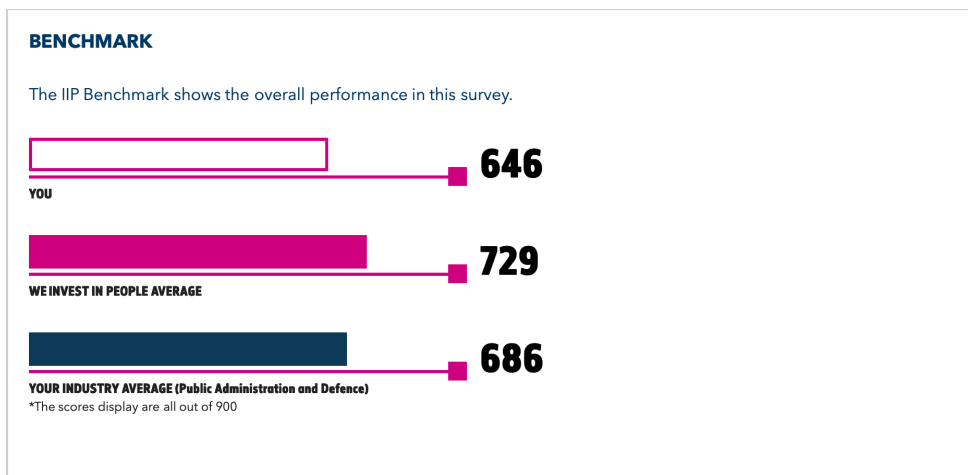
Demographic summary

The detailed survey data suggested that across all services:

- Fixed term / contract staff were typically more positive than others in how they rated the statements
- Full time staff were typically more positive than part-time staff
- Senior Managers are most positive in their responses, followed by Managers. Those without line management responsibilities being least positive.

Your overall survey score

The Corporate Cluster (excluding LCG) with 696 people in scope scored lower than other organisations in the Public Administration and Defence industry and lower than the IIP average for all organisations. Your benchmark score for the four services assessed is 646 which compares to the Legal and Corporate Governance benchmark score in May 2025 of 692.



‘Public Administration and Defence’ section covers activities of a governmental nature, normally carried out by the public administration. This includes the enactment and judicial interpretation of laws and their pursuant regulation, as well as the administration of programmes based on them, legislative activities, taxation, national defence, public order and safety, immigration services, foreign affairs and the administration of government programmes. This section also includes compulsory social security activities.

The IIP Benchmark is a **single numerical value** (out of 900) which captures the sentiment of employees against the consistent base set of questions.

The IIP Benchmark is a **signal of overall performance** in the survey. It aids comparison, analysis and the interpretation of results and is used with the most impact in the Benchmark view.

The IIP Benchmark is calculated using all the responses received from an organisation's survey, considering each individual question, from the mandatory "**base set**" only, in the context of its relating indicator.

It is only calculated once a survey has a required **minimum of seven responses**. The IIP Benchmark is calculated using the formula below:

- 38 scores per base set question = using the Likert scale, each individual base set question is given an **average value** based on all employee responses
- 9 scores per Indicator = the base question values under each Indicator are then averaged out to provide a score per Indicator (calculated as a percentage)
- Overall benchmark = all 9 Indicator scores are then added together to provide an overall IIP benchmark value out of 900.

Who took the survey?

SAMPLE & RESPONSE RATE

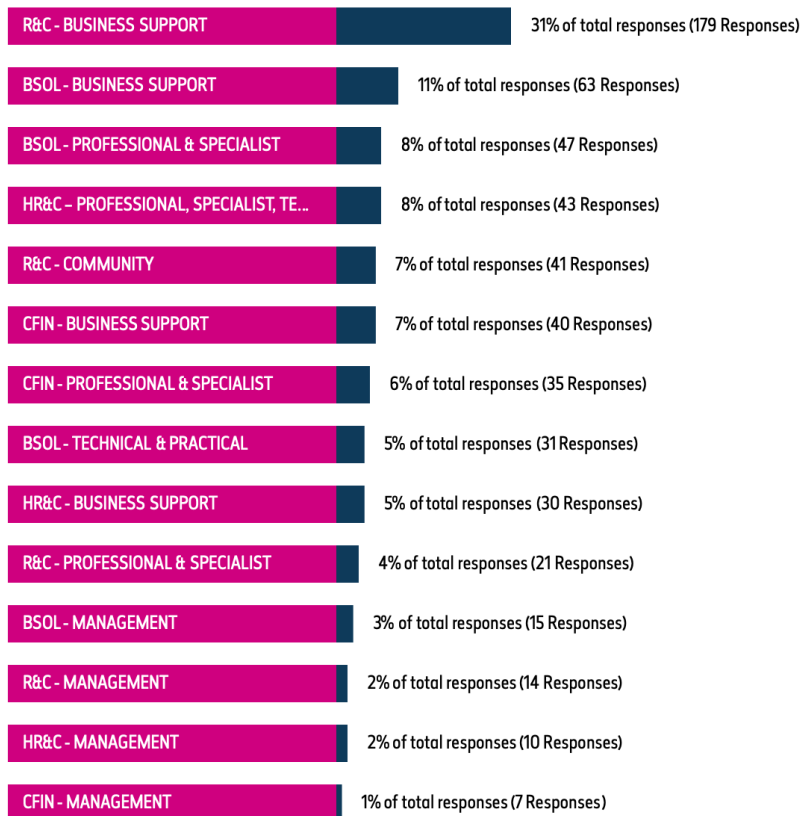
Sample	Minimum Number of Responses	Total Responses	Response Rate
696	167	576/696	83%

OVERALL RESPONSE RATE

83%



BY TEAM



Your survey results by indicator

Indicator summary

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AVERAGE SCORE	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEFENCE
Indicator 1 Leading and inspiring people	12.5%	30.8%	19.7%	19.4%	9.1%	5.8%	2.8%	4.9	-0.2
Indicator 2 Living the organisation's values and behaviours	10.3%	33.8%	22%	24.9%	3.9%	4.1%	1.2%	5	-0.6
Indicator 3 Empowering and involving people	17.1%	36.5%	21%	9.8%	7.1%	5.1%	3.4%	5.2	-0.2
Indicator 4 Managing performance	21.1%	38.2%	13.4%	14.9%	4%	5.6%	2.6%	5.3	-0.2
Indicator 5 Recognising and rewarding high performance	9.5%	25.7%	17.2%	21.9%	9.2%	9.3%	7.3%	4.5	-0.2
Indicator 6 Structuring work	15.4%	41.3%	21.2%	11.9%	5.6%	3%	1.7%	5.3	-0.3
Indicator 7 Building capability	12.5%	32.5%	18.9%	19.8%	7.5%	5%	3.7%	4.9	-0.3
Indicator 8 Delivering continuous improvement	13.8%	34%	22.6%	20%	3.9%	3.3%	2.3%	5.1	-0.2
Indicator 9 Creating sustainable success	11.7%	28.5%	24%	23%	6.4%	4.1%	2.4%	4.9	-0.5

Your survey results by theme

Themes (Highs and Lows)

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AVERAGE SCORE ↓	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEFENCE
Your highest themes									
Enabling collaborative working INDICATOR 6: Structuring work	20.5%	49%	17.7%	8.7%	2.4%	0.9%	0.9%	5.7	-0.1
Making decisions INDICATOR 3: Empowering and involving people	19.1%	43.6%	19.1%	10.6%	4.2%	2.1%	1.4%	5.5	-0.1
Improving through internal and external sources INDICATOR 8: Delivering continuous improvement	17.5%	40.5%	22.4%	16%	1.7%	1%	0.9%	5.5	-0.2
Encouraging high performance INDICATOR 4: Managing performance	22%	36.5%	15.6%	15.8%	4.7%	3.2%	2.1%	5.4	-0.1
Motivating people to deliver the organisations objectives INDICATOR 1: Leading and inspiring people	24.3%	34.7%	15.3%	12.7%	5.4%	4.9%	2.8%	5.3	0.0
Your lowest themes									
Deploying the right people at the right time INDICATOR 7: Building capability	9.2%	29%	16.3%	20.7%	10.4%	8.2%	6.3%	4.6	-0.2
Participating and collaborating INDICATOR 3: Empowering and involving people	11.5%	23.8%	24.1%	13.4%	10.1%	10.1%	7.1%	4.5	-0.5
Recognising and rewarding people INDICATOR 5: Recognising and rewarding high performance	8.9%	24.8%	17.8%	23.8%	8.5%	9.1%	7%	4.5	-0.2
Developing leadership capability INDICATOR 1: Leading and inspiring people	5.9%	19.3%	20.8%	28.1%	13.2%	7.5%	5.2%	4.3	-0.3
Designing an approach to recognition and reward INDICATOR 5: Recognising and rewarding high performance	6.6%	21.5%	14.2%	27.1%	9.9%	12.5%	8.2%	4.2	-0.2

What your people told us

Leading

LEADING AND INSPIRING PEOPLE

Indicator 1: Leading and inspiring people							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	12.5%	30.8%	19.7%	19.4%	9.1%	5.8%	2.8%
I trust the leaders of my organisation	8.5%	35.1%	18.9%	20%	9.9%	5.9%	1.7%
Management communicates the organisation's ambition	11.3%	34%	23.6%	16.7%	8%	4.9%	1.6%
My manager motivates me to achieve my best	24.3%	34.7%	15.3%	12.7%	5.4%	4.9%	2.8%
My organisation develops great leaders	5.9%	19.3%	20.8%	28.1%	13.2%	7.5%	5.2%

Future Operating Model

There is no doubt that people understand the overall aims and purpose of the Highland Council and the context within which it operates. People are very clear about the purpose of their current role and the function of their team. Targets and priorities are well communicated and understood - they know exactly what's expected.

There are changes with restructuring across the Corporate Cluster which is likely to be ongoing for some time. People are largely uncertain about the how the changes will evolve and particularly how it will affect them. They are aware that discussions are happening “*at higher levels*” and are making assumptions that these are based on attempts at improving efficiencies and saving money.

We acknowledge that there is considerable top-down information regarding vision and

objectives should people choose to access this. The roll out of the Roadshows has also gone some way in communicating the 'big picture' messages and some people are paying more attention to these than others - 16.7% of people are sitting on the fence in the survey in relation to 'Management communicates the organisation's ambition'. Many people however are consumed with the demands of their daily work responsibilities rather than the future. Most people participate in regular team meetings / catch ups but tell us that these meetings tend to focus on operational delivery, and this supports a sense of belonging and team working to their team.

People are looking for more opportunities to discuss change and specifically how it will impact them. Two-way communication to discuss change and service improvements is certainly an area of focus. There is a clear commitment to enhancing service operations, and staff are eager to collaborate with senior management. They emphasised to us that their 'grassroots' knowledge and expertise can inform decision-making processes aimed at improving Council performance and its effects on both communities and employees. For some, pending changes and uncertainty are causing anxiety particularly where people are temporarily 'acting up'. The lower down in the hierarchy, the more disconnected people are feeling from larger service aims and objectives.

Leadership

There is a good level of confidence in the CO's and ACE and an appreciation of the challenges they face, juggling many priorities and accountabilities. There is also an appreciation that change doesn't happen quickly in the Council and many factors are at play in progressing change agendas and new ways of working.

Motivating people to deliver

74.3% of people in the survey agreed that 'My manager motivates me to achieve my best' and this was largely reflected in discussions. We received reports of managers being highly supportive in team meetings and on a one-to-one basis. This was particularly evident around wellbeing issues and support for worklife balance. Most people feel trusted to deliver, yet there are pockets where some people feel "*micromanaged*", and this is having a negative effect on morale. We picked up that people are really keen to do their jobs to the best of their abilities and front line staff are especially passionate about helping members of the public.

Developing management capability

Managers have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to achieve priorities and targets. They recognise the importance of managing performance as well as motivating and supporting

their teams to ensure delivery. Indeed, there were many examples of how managers' practically supported people's development with operational tasks. However, feedback from staff across all services indicates that enhancing management competency in softer skills such as career development conversations, managing performance and uncertainty through change should be a priority area of focus.

Managers' perceptions of effective management tend to be shaped by their own experiences, rather than a broader understanding of requirements set by the Council. While people management competencies do exist, there was no clear indication that managers were aware of them or how they were measured or performed against them.

Consistent with our feedback to the LCG service, it is essential to prioritise the collection and utilisation of feedback on management effectiveness, encompassing both positive and constructive input. At present, there is an impression that such feedback is limited to formal HR channels and must be raised as a complaint. Implementing effective and supportive feedback mechanisms will help identify management best practices and areas where performance can be improved. This will ultimately support the continuous development of management capabilities to impact positively on engagement, morale and buy in to change agendas.

LIVING THE ORGANISATION'S VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

Indicator 2: Living the organisation's values and behaviours							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	10.3%	33.8%	22%	24.9%	3.9%	4.1%	1.2%
The values at my organisation guide the way we work	6.8%	28%	25.3%	25.7%	7.1%	5.2%	1.9%
I share my organisation's values	11.3%	39.2%	22.7%	22%	2.1%	2.3%	0.3%
My organisation has clear values	9.5%	33.9%	26.2%	19.1%	5%	4.5%	1.7%
My behaviour reflects the organisation's values	17%	43.4%	15.6%	20.5%	1.4%	1.7%	0.3%
I challenge behaviours which don't match the organisation's values	6.8%	24.3%	20%	37%	3.6%	6.8%	1.6%

This is one of the lowest scoring areas in your survey and it also scores significantly lower when benchmarked against other public administration organisations. The feedback remains consistent with the LCG service.

Communicating and using your values Ambitious - Sustainable - Connected

Your people are aware that the Council does have stated core values and generally understood the ethos of these. There is certainly a shared understanding of the need to work cohesively, be forward thinking and adaptable in meeting the needs of communities. People believe that this is important and does guide the work the Council does. In the survey, 58.1% are ambivalent (somewhat agree / neither agree nor disagree / somewhat disagree) about how your values guide the way they work. We found this to be because there really isn't a consistent understanding of what they are or how they should be applied.

Some people told us that the values were incorporated into the annual ERD with the

intention they were discussed annually. That said, those people that had taken part in an ERD were not sure of how values had supported the process. Many people we met with, particularly outside of Revenues & Commercialisation told us that they didn't recall taking part in the ERD process in recent years. We were however informed by you that *"72% of staff across whole cluster have had their ERD"* which suggests a disparity between staff experience and recorded data.

Newer members of staff were more familiar with the values either because they had researched them as part of interview process or they were covered during induction activities. Outside of this, they had uncertainty if or how they were used. Longer serving members of staff told us that the values were a legacy from the past and were more about the outward facing role of the Council rather than about internal behaviours.

Managing behaviour in line with your values

37% of people neither agree nor disagree that they 'challenge behaviours which don't match the organisational values'. This theme is consistent with LCG (who were 33.7% neither agreeing or disagreeing) and comes out as an area for attention. We explored this further during the discussions with people who told us that this theme was related to odd instances where conduct or operational issues went unaddressed, and this impacted on the performance of other teams. Typical examples we were presented with related to different teams / services not communicating / collaborating effectively with each other. There is a view from some that *"nothing changes"* and there aren't the channels or the time to understand the impact of change on others.

One principal recommendation arising from this review is to re-evaluate your corporate values and their practical application. Consistent utilisation of your values can yield significant benefits, including:

- Supporting collaboration / communication between teams for improved decision making
- Enhancing staff engagement
- Supporting high performance
- Managing underperformance
- Recognising and rewarding high performance
- Being at the heart of how you operate at every level
- Decision making
- Learning and development
- Progression, promotion and succession planning

EMPOWERING AND INVOLVING PEOPLE

Indicator 3: Empowering and involving people							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	17.1%	36.5%	21%	9.8%	7.1%	5.1%	3.4%
I am encouraged to use initiative in my role	26%	41%	16.3%	7.3%	4.7%	2.6%	2.1%
I have all the information I need to do my job well	11.8%	37.7%	24.3%	8%	9.5%	5.7%	3%
I have a say in decisions that affect my role	11.5%	23.8%	24.1%	13.4%	10.1%	10.1%	7.1%
I am trusted to make decisions in my role	19.1%	43.6%	19.1%	10.6%	4.2%	2.1%	1.4%

Access to knowledge and information

73.8% of people agreed that they had the information they needed to do their job well. We found that people are generally good at sharing operational and day-to-day information with their teams through one-to-one discussions and team meetings. Peer to peer sharing of knowledge and information is strong. People referred to plentiful guidance and notes on processes and systems albeit that some caveated this with a need to refresh some of the guidance as it had been surpassed by new rules or ways of working.

Our discussions indicated that where people believe that things fall short however is:

- Workloads dictating that people can only focus on their individual tasks leaving little time for sharing information and knowledge between services and teams. Examples include issue of letters and communications without warning to internal teams and colleagues dealing with 0800 calls and enquiries. Recipient calls to the 0800 number highlight the action. Better cross team effective communications is essential e.g. regarding processing of Winter Fuel Payment; Free School Meal; Clothing Grants etc.
- Communication about planned changes (people accept there are 'unknowns' but want to get involved with discussions with managers about potential impacts on

them)

- Frustrations with not getting updates that affect other departments e.g. network problems

Involving and empowering people

Conversations regarding day-to-day workloads and priorities are happening within teams. Approaches however vary with some staff suggesting they happen frequently and others less often. Where regular discussions are happening, people feel more able to openly discuss challenges around workloads, a greater sense of team cohesion and wellbeing.

Your people are accustomed to change within the Council which is seen as ongoing. They are keen to get involved in improving the way that services are delivered but tell us that this is typically limited to happening within their teams rather than at a more strategic functional / cross-team level which is where they see the potential for the greatest improvements.

Decision making and trust

81.8% of people in the survey agreed that they were 'trusted to make decisions' and similarly 83.3% of people said they were 'encouraged to use initiative within their role'. The majority of people told us that there was a great level of trust placed in people and autonomy to carry out their jobs in the best possible way. This trust and ownership supports empowerment and makes people feel valued. There are obvious frustrations with the speed of decision making in the Council yet people understand the complex political factors and process around this.

Some feel that their experience and expertise is overlooked meaning that the decisions made are not as progressive as they could have been - we frequently heard the phrase "*if only they had asked us or involved us*". Increasing understanding and promoting collaboration across different teams would support improved communication and lead to the greater efficiencies and continuous improvements you are seeking.

The extent to which people believe they 'have a say in decisions that affect their role' was one of the least positive areas in the survey. In addition to points made above about collaboration and involvement in decision-making, we know that many people are working to legislative requirements and parameters which dictate how and when work is required to be delivered which goes some way in explaining the data.

Supporting

MANAGING PERFORMANCE

BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator 4: Managing performance							
Indicator Average	21.1%	38.2%	13.4%	14.9%	4%	5.6%	2.6%
I have agreed my objectives with my line manager within the last 12 months	18.4%	43.6%	12%	12.8%	4.2%	5.9%	3.1%
I feel encouraged to perform to the best of my abilities	22.9%	38.5%	16%	13.2%	4.5%	2.8%	2.1%
My manager helps me improve my performance	21.2%	34.5%	15.3%	18.4%	4.9%	3.6%	2.1%
I have discussed my performance with my manager in the last 6 months	21.9%	36.3%	10.4%	15.3%	2.6%	10.2%	3.3%

Setting objectives

In line with the LCG service, team and individual objective setting is evident. 74 % of people say they ‘have agreed objectives with their manager in the last 12 months’ and we concluded that the gap here is likely to be the use of the ERD process. Whilst this is the main strategy for setting and reviewing objectives, not everyone is participating. Yet, we found that targets and timescales are evident across all teams and general conversations take place. Your people know what is expected of them and how this fits into overall service objectives. This is the joint highest scoring Indicator in the survey.

Measuring and assessing performance

Only 68.6% of people say that they had ‘discussed their performance with their manager in the last 6 months’. This was backed up with our discussions where many people told us that they had not taken part in an ERD or a meaningful discussion on how they were doing with their line

manager. The exception to this is Revenues & Commercialisation where most people told us that they had taken part in the ERD process over the past year.

Feedback on the usefulness of the current ERD process from those people who have participated is highly variable. Some people clearly value this opportunity to meet with a manager in a structured way and see it as helpful in supporting their careers, keeping them on track and as a chance to discuss concerns. Others perceive the ERD to be just a “*paperwork exercise*” and of little value for them or their team. Some people with experience of working outside the Council believe that the exercise is “*pointless*” because it is not linked to any form of financial or non-financial reward or career progression. This suggests a potential for some managers to have more meaningful conversations around individual performance and to use this as an opportunity for praise and recognition. Many people perceive that regular discussions with managers about performance would be more supportive and useful in managing team and individual performance yet qualify this with an understanding that managers are busy and workloads are already high.

The ERD contains a section on values, though its significance is not at all clear to individuals; this also relates to our previous comments regarding values. We are aware that you are piloting a new approach for ERD’s and recognise the need for CO’s to be given more oversight on ERD completion in their services.

Open and honest conversations

There is no doubt that managers are keen to encourage and support high performance within their teams. That said, our feedback suggests that some managers are more comfortable and more skilled in having open, honest and supportive performance conversations with individuals.

In line with feedback presented to the LCG service there is certainly scope to enhance managerial competency and importantly, confidence in managing performance discussions. We are aware that e-learning training is available on topics such as courageous conversations, should managers choose to access this. Yet this isn’t meeting the needs for everyone. We heard of great support from HR services when accessed, yet they are over-stretched to the point of only being able to support managers with managing performance when escalated. What is required is the allocated resource for a more pro-active, hands-on HR business partnering approach. This recommendation will become increasingly significant as efforts to engage people with change initiatives progress.

RECOGNISING AND REWARDING HIGH PERFORMANCE

Indicator 5: Recognising and rewarding high performance							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	9.5%	25.7%	17.2%	21.9%	9.2%	9.3%	7.3%
I am rewarded in ways that match my motivations	6.6%	21.5%	14.2%	27.1%	9.9%	12.5%	8.2%
I feel appreciated for the work I do	13.4%	31.4%	19.1%	12.8%	9.7%	6.6%	6.9%
I am consistently recognised when I exceed expectations	8.9%	22%	17.5%	26%	8.5%	9.4%	7.6%
I get appropriate recognition for the work I do	9%	27.6%	18.1%	21.5%	8.5%	8.9%	6.4%

Your approach to reward and recognition

Although this is the lowest performing Indicator in the survey across all Corporate services, this is typical for the vast majority of the organisations that we work with.

When individuals were asked about how they were rewarded and recognised by the Council, many people referred to pay and pensions. As conversations progressed, people spoke about flexible and hybrid working and support from managers for worklife balance including sickness absence. Trust and autonomy within roles (within legislative parameters) also fared highly. We said in the LCG feedback that as a public sector organisation, employment contracts include a wide range of competitive financial and non-financial rewards that are a key advantage for attracting and retaining employees. Publishing an annual rewards statement (financial and non-financial benefits) could highlight these benefits to existing and future employees. This suggestion was included in the LCG feedback.

A few people had a vague recollection of past organisational employee recognition strategies yet when asked about whether this should be revisited there wasn't much appetite for it. We know this is an area you are keen to explore. Our feedback is that people are concerned about another process and the fairness of some sort of organisational awards process given the diversity of roles. People expressed views that it could be divisive. Only 63.9% of people said in the survey that they felt 'appreciated for the work that they do'. What people are looking for

here is a recognition strategy that encompasses local and team efforts and recognition of efforts from senior leaders, rather than a broader organisational wide approach.

Recognising high performance

When considering how high performance is recognised, it will be no surprise that people mentioned career progression, 'acting up' and therefore the opportunity to progress to a higher salary band if these opportunities are available.

Some managers are clearly focussed on recognising high performance more than others. They recognise that this contributes to job satisfaction and engagement. However, less than half (48.4%) of the people in the survey said that they were 'consistently recognised when they exceed expectations' and one in four weren't sure. This should be a key area for focus to support change. Acknowledging individuals' contributions can positively influence morale and engagement with change. Conversely, failing to recognise efforts when people go the extra mile can result in apathy and decreased motivation.

Leveraging organisational values in this area presents an opportunity to enhance recognition approaches without incurring additional cost. This should be about recognising people for their behaviours and not just the achievement of targets. It will be helpful to note that not all people are seeking constant praise from managers, indeed many do not want to be in the limelight, so care should be given to understand what approach would reward and motivate each individual.

Front line staff in Corporate Services take great pride in being able to help people in the community, particularly those who are vulnerable or facing hardship. Being able to help a member of the public brings provides reward in itself for many staff. There is great empathy and support from colleagues in teams for difficult conversations or interactions with members of the public, but people don't recognise that their efforts are valued outside of the immediate team. This likely contributes to explaining why only 54.7% of people feel they get 'appropriate recognition for the work they do' and one in five people are sitting on the fence.

STRUCTURING WORK

Indicator 6: Structuring work							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	15.4%	41.3%	21.2%	11.9%	5.6%	3%	1.7%
My work is interesting	14.9%	40.1%	25.2%	11.3%	4.7%	2.4%	1.4%
I am able to develop the skills I need to progress	12.8%	33.5%	20.5%	15.5%	9.7%	5.6%	2.4%
I have the right level of responsibility to do my job effectively	13.2%	42.5%	21.4%	12.3%	5.4%	3%	2.3%
My role enables me to work well with others	20.5%	49%	17.7%	8.7%	2.4%	0.9%	0.9%
OPTIONAL QUESTIONS							
My role enables me to work collaboratively with other teams	16.7%	42.7%	20.1%	12.7%	4%	2.4%	1.4%

Role design and autonomy

This is one of joint second highest performing Indicators in the survey. There is no doubt that roles in Corporate Services are highly structured with clearly defined objectives. People largely enjoy their work and find it interesting and 80.2% people in the survey back this up. It was a pleasure to hear about the many varied and fascinating jobs people have in Corporate Services, it has certainly given us deep insight into the operations of the Council and the pressures people are under.

Flexible and hybrid working arrangements are regarded as significant advantages of working in the Corporate Cluster. We heard how these strategies enable individuals to consider how they fulfil their responsibilities in ways that accommodate the needs of colleagues, the broader community and work life balance. Given the societal shift in working arrangements for many people in office-based roles since Covid there is potential opportunity to provide managers with greater support in managing remote working to ensure 'business needs' are fully met.

Your structure fosters professional development and supports career progression. People feel that they would be supported to progress should opportunities arise. That said some are experiencing uncertainty about the Future Operating Model which has led to anxiety about how they will work in the future. Additionally, several people are ‘acting up’ in roles with unclear durations and uncertainty about maintaining salary levels. In certain teams there is a perception that advancement opportunities are limited because of the long tenure of those in more specialist or senior roles. In the survey only 66.8% of people said ‘they are able to develop the skills they need to progress’. Findings indicate gaps exist, partly because some individuals believe that they must prioritise delivery before developmental activities. Where people have progressed, they told us that they had been supported within their new roles by peers and managers who has signposted them to learning resources.

77.1% of people say that they have the ‘right level of responsibility to do their job effectively’. People generally feel trusted to get on and do a good job and appreciate this autonomy. There are however some people who were less positive in this area and spoke of “*micromanagement*”. Further, some people spoke about their being so many changes e.g. with legislation that it was a challenge to keep up to date with people highlighting that email updates weren’t always sufficient for consistent team learning.

Collaboration

87.2% people said that their ‘role enables them to work well with others’ and 79.5% said their role ‘enables them to work collaboratively with other teams’. In this context we know that many people are required to engage with other teams and external partners to fulfil role responsibilities and are encouraged to do so. Online working has no doubt had a significant impact on the extent to which people can meet with others across and outside the region. People told us they were involved in a great many forums and meetings. We have however noted some frustrations earlier on the report in Indicator 3 about opportunities to collaborate on service improvements rather than service delivery. There are clearly opportunities to build collaborative activities to support measurable improvements in efficiencies, but we also heard about:

- Implementation of systems and apps, drawing on expertise and cross team working to maximise potential benefits to end user
- Exchange of knowledge and sharing of good practice, to support efficiencies and cost savings often informally, across teams such as finance and ICT where “*we pick brains and transfer knowledge, which we are doing more now than ever*”

Improving

BUILDING CAPABILITY

Indicator 7: Building capability							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	12.5%	32.5%	18.9%	19.8%	7.5%	5%	3.7%
I make use of my organisation's learning and development opportunities	10.9%	33.2%	21.9%	20.3%	6.4%	5.2%	2.1%
I have opportunities to learn at work	13.9%	34.9%	18.9%	16.5%	8.2%	3.8%	3.8%
I know how my organisation invests in learning and development	9.9%	31.6%	22.2%	18.6%	7.3%	6.6%	3.8%
My manager thinks it is important that I develop my skills	18.6%	34%	15.1%	23.1%	5.2%	1.4%	2.6%
People are selected for roles based on their skills and abilities	9.2%	29%	16.3%	20.7%	10.4%	8.2%	6.3%

Discussions on learning and development

Conversations focussed on learning and development are happening in Corporate Services yet the extent to which people find these useful is variable. This is backed up by the survey results where only 67.7% of people agreed with the statement 'my manager thinks it is important that I develop my skills'. Those people who had participated in the ERD process were more positive overall about managers' commitment to learning and development.

People described to us an environment whereby their immediate and task related skills needs were discussed and met by on-the-job training with colleagues and from managers / team leaders to take on more advanced tasks. Colleagues were considered to be helpful in supporting people's learning. Team learning and development needs are often discussed during meetings and appear to be largely focussed on changes e.g. process, technology and legislative updates.

Many of your people take ownership for updating their own skills in this respect seeking out external online sources of information.

Overall, we heard conversations linked to career progression, or the development of softer skills were limited. We believe that there is merit in improving the conversations around learning and development so that people are guided to learning opportunities that will help them in their current roles and prepare them for future responsibilities. We expect that the importance of this will increase as changes and the FOM is rolled out.

Availability of learning and development opportunities

In addition to on-the-job training, corporate online learning and development opportunities are plentiful. People referred to the Traineasy platform, Management Connections, regional workshops and various SVQ / ILM qualifications. 66% of people say that they 'make use of the organisation's learning and development opportunities' and this was backed up during discussions. The emails that people receive about courses, workshops and e-learning resources help to ensure that people are kept informed of what is available though the extent to which these are read is variable.

We also heard from people who had attended conferences and sector specific webinars and gained understanding about different job-related topics as a result. There is uncertainty about what budgets are available for learning provided outside the Council.

People told us that in-person learning is generally preferred over e-learning for people-focused subjects. Although we accept that e-learning is more accessible and affordable, this learning style does not suit all people, and it often misses valuable opportunities for interaction and discussion.

Induction

We continued to hear that induction activities are patchy and inconsistent and need attention to ensure that people in new roles get off to the best possible start. Inductions are taking place within teams and colleagues are generally happy to help people settle into their roles. Some teams are great at this, using checklists and having guidance to hand, yet others new starts are left to largely work things out for themselves. One strength is IT set up and we heard that people had access to equipment and log in details at the outset. From discussions it wasn't clear that there was any sort of corporate induction delivered, other than people being referred by HR to read materials online.

Succession planning

Feedback indicates that succession planning across teams is currently ad-hoc, although there is general awareness of workforce demographics and the need to introduce early talent into the organisation. Discussions about future working methods are ongoing, which affects the ability of teams to plan for succession. However, implementing a consistent and structured approach across all teams could support service continuity, reduce single points of failure, and enhance preparedness for both planned and unplanned absences.

On the topic of early talent, we know you are keen for some additional feedback on their experiences to assist you with the onboarding and integration of others:

- Many were encouraged to apply for roles as result of ‘word of mouth’
- Most see immense opportunities at the Council
- They are supported by managers and more experienced colleagues
- They are seeking more connection with other younger employees in the Council and would welcome social / networking spaces to support a sense of belonging

Leadership development activities

There is a general awareness of available management development programmes and courses communicated via email. However, we heard that these initiatives are perceived as underutilised, largely due to:

- Their optional nature
- Managers being busy
- A lack of awareness of any skills gaps

We have already provided feedback on inconsistencies in management styles and approaches. We have no doubt that there are some highly respected managers in the Clusters and these managers were praised by their direct reports. Nevertheless, discussions indicated isolated instances where managerial actions, we believe unintentionally, negatively affected team morale and engagement.

To ensure successful implementation of future changes, it will be necessary to refine your approaches to management development activities. Feedback suggests that staff lack opportunities to provide constructive input regarding their line managers, and managers similarly do not have a dedicated forum to discuss challenges in people management. Such insights would be highly valuable for informing the design of forthcoming management development programmes and support. In Indicator 4 we referred to a need for greater HR

resourcing to increase the support available to managers to assist them with people related skills and capabilities and in managing performance. Addressing this gap is absolutely necessary to support any change agenda that requires engaging people with different ways of working.

Additionally, there is scope to enhance the development of leadership skills among individuals who may transition into management roles. Introducing an induction programme for new or aspiring managers could enable them to quickly appreciate the impact of their actions on performance and facilitate a smoother integration into their positions.

DELIVERING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Indicator 8: Delivering continuous improvement							
BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	13.8%	34%	22.6%	20%	3.9%	3.3%	2.3%
I look for improvement ideas from my colleagues	17.5%	40.5%	22.4%	16%	1.7%	1%	0.9%
I am encouraged to improve the way I do things	13%	34.7%	23.1%	21.2%	2.6%	3.1%	2.3%
I am responsible for improving the way we do things	12.8%	26%	23.8%	22.4%	5.9%	5.9%	3.1%
I am trusted to try new approaches in the way I work	11.6%	34.7%	21.2%	20.5%	5.6%	3.3%	3.1%

Creating a culture of continuous improvement

This is one Indicator in the survey where around one in every five people neither agree nor disagree with the statements potentially highlighting uncertainty around continuous improvement.

There is an appetite for improvement in the Cluster and Council as a whole, as evidenced by the ongoing consultations around improving the delivery of services. Your people believe that there is a commitment from the top to modernise and improve efficiency.

There is no doubt that improvements have been made to the way that people are managed and supported, though not everyone recognised that this was the case. We did however hear about various restructures, improvements to Traineasy, the introduction of Management Connections and the introduction of roadshows.

There is significant opportunity to make more of your workforce data to improve the way that you invest in your people. The planned introduction of the new HR system has the potential to provide you with a platform for this. The use of more robust data about workforce trends and

characteristics would support management development, workforce planning and performance improvements.

People told us about many planned improvements at a Council level e.g. changes to the ERD process, reviewing the use of values, improving induction processes and rolling out the roadshows.

Encouraging innovation

We were told that team meetings and one-to-one meetings are the main ways in which people are encouraged by managers to come up with new ideas and approaches. The extent to which people believe these forums are useful in encouraging innovation is however inconsistent. It is also fair to say that some people perceive that their roles are dictated by protocol which leaves little room for creativity.

Several improvements have happened that some of your people have been involved in e.g. changes to IT infrastructure, the introduction of a new finance system, recruitment of MA's / trainees and the development of new services.

There is a willingness to get involved in further continuous improvement initiatives and all people could give examples of how their functions could be improved, many of which had also been shared within teams. Yet, people told us that workloads and time to follow through on these was a barrier. Opportunity for facilitated discussions and the active involvement of all teams in the pursuit of high performance should be prioritised.

CREATING SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Indicator 9: Creating sustainable success

BASE QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Indicator Average	11.7%	28.5%	24%	23%	6.4%	4.1%	2.4%
My organisation has a plan for the future	14.6%	29.5%	21.2%	26.6%	3.6%	2.4%	2.1%
My organisation is a great place to work	12.8%	30.4%	26.6%	15.6%	6.6%	5.2%	2.8%
My organisation embraces change	8.5%	24.8%	26.2%	23.8%	8.2%	5.2%	3.3%
My organisation has a positive impact on society	10.8%	29.2%	22%	25.9%	7.1%	3.5%	1.6%
OPTIONAL QUESTIONS							
I feel positive about the future of my organisation	8.5%	26.2%	22.7%	26.2%	8.3%	5%	3%
I'm not afraid of making mistakes	5.2%	27.1%	25%	19.1%	14.6%	5.7%	3.3%
At my organisation, we learn from our mistakes	7.6%	25.9%	24.3%	21.5%	10.9%	5.6%	4.2%
At my organisation change is welcomed	6.8%	24.3%	23.6%	26.2%	10.9%	4.3%	3.8%
My organisation has a positive impact on the community	11.5%	28.1%	23.8%	28%	4.2%	3%	1.6%

Focussing on the future and change

The survey included several additional questions and we explored these areas during our meetings with staff. We found that there is general uncertainty around the future and this is down to new plans emerging about how services will be structured.

The Council's budget limits are clear to everyone, and teams demonstrates effective short-term planning. Feedback was less positive about longer-term planning which may reflect

51.4% being ambivalent about the 'plan for the future' in the IIP survey. It's fair to say that some people are not entirely certain about the future direction of travel and are therefore not entirely positive about it. As mentioned earlier feedback suggests that whilst roadshows are helpful in sharing the corporate view, more discussions about the impact on teams and individuals would be welcomed.

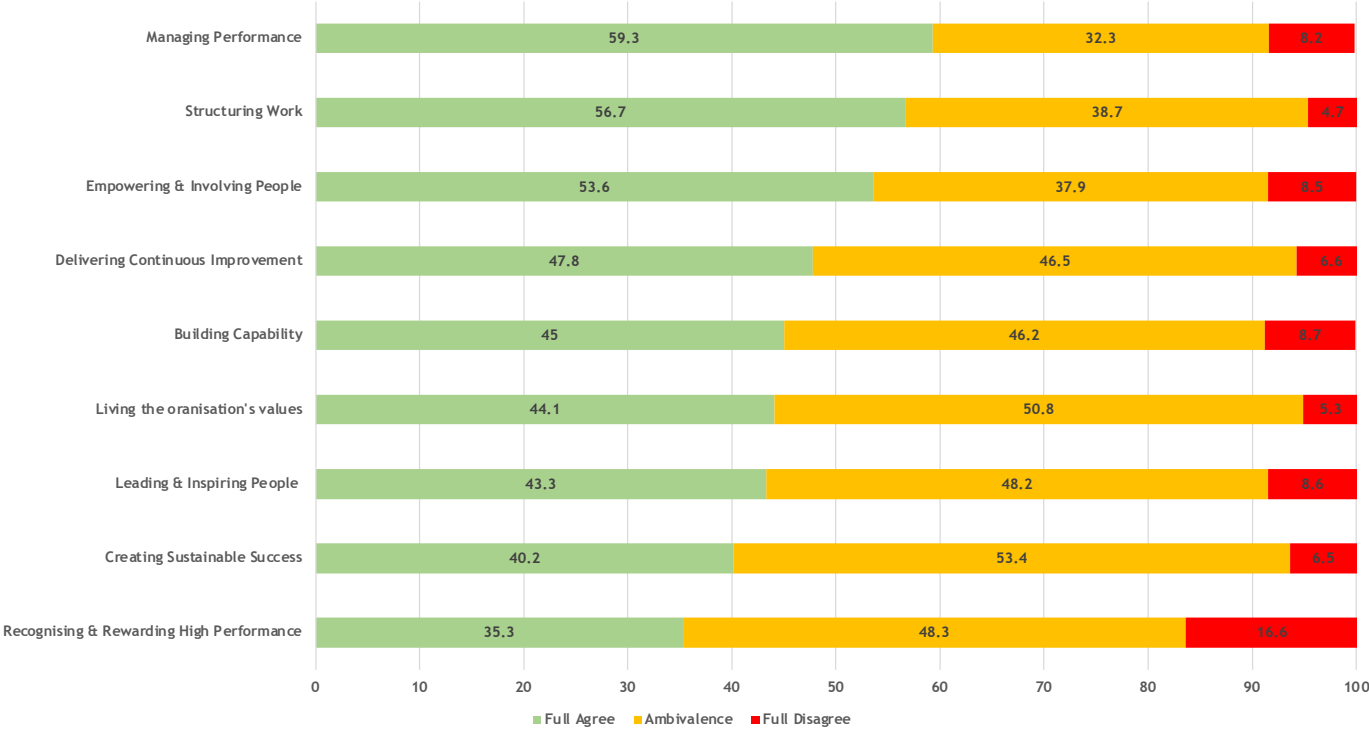
69.8% agreed that the Council 'was a great place to work'. Feedback from staff suggested that the vast majority of people do enjoy their work and find it interesting. People in Corporate Services value the flexibility they have to work remotely which supports personal work life balance, the employment T&C's and the trust placed in them to deliver. Job security is considered to be high. Indeed, the people we met with said that they would recommend working in the organisation to others. Yet, perceptions of workloads and the ongoing management of change are impacting on positivity here. Throughout the report we have referred to the extent to which people believe that change is embraced (58.2% of people are currently ambivalent about this) and there are obvious frustrations with the pace of change.

The wider community

By the very nature of the role that the Council provides it will be no surprise that people at all levels are acutely aware of who your stakeholders are and who the communities that you serve are. People have a personal interest and commitment in having a positive impact on the communities you serve. As we've alluded to in the rest of the report, they can however see opportunities where impact can be increased, yet a complex set of factors present barriers and this is a source of frustration.

The extent to which your workforce demographics is reflective in the communities that you serve is on your radar. People are recruited from and located in all regions within the area and the recent Developing a Future Operating Model for The Highland Council committee report highlighted that 97% of employees live within the region. The longevity of service and dynamics of the labour market poses certain challenges in ensuring that the workforce is completely representative of the community. Efforts are being made to attract and develop a younger talent pipeline.

Annex 1



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Want to get in touch?

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