

Agenda Item	10
Report No	RES/36/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Corporate Resources

Date: 27 August 2026

Report Title: Standby Policy

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Standby Working Group and seeks Committee approval to amend the Council's corporate Standby Scheme. The proposed amendments aim to ensure fairness and equality, align Highland Council arrangements with other Scottish Local Authorities, and improve service delivery and employee work-life balance.
- 1.2 Concerns were identified in relation to increasing challenges in maintaining effective rota coverage and potential impacts on staff wellbeing.

A review was held to consider these matters, alongside comparative benchmarking with other local authorities. As part of the review, feedback was gathered through a short life working group (the Standby Working Group) and consultation with service managers.

- 1.3 This paper recommends amendments to the current Standby Scheme to clarify and standardise arrangements. Under the revised policy, employees undertaking authorised standby duties will continue to receive a standby allowance in recognition of the requirement to remain available to support essential service delivery.

In addition, it is recommended that employees receive overtime payment in accordance with the Highland Council [Overtime Policy](#) for any time worked whilst on standby, including callouts and remote working. Overtime will be paid at the appropriate rate with payment applicable to complete half hour periods only.

The standby allowance will be payable irrespective of whether any callout occurs and reflects the requirement to remain available, rather than payment for time worked.

- 1.4 Based on the current scheme, employees must work more than 10% of their standby period before overtime becomes payable. Any time worked up to the 10% threshold is not paid as additional overtime. The proposal to remove the 10% deduction will have an initial outlay of approximately £31,000 per year. This is expected to be recouped over time by a decrease in higher-cost staffing alternatives, as the new policy will support standby rotas to become more resilient, ensuring that overall there is no material financial cost to the change in policy.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the findings of The Standby Working Group;
- ii. Approve the revised corporate Standby Policy in line with Option 3 as set out in this report; and
- iii. Note the Standby Guidance document developed to support consistent implementation of the revised policy.

3 Implications

3.1 Resource –

A failure to manage the Council workforce and change puts at risk the Council's capacity to make the most effective use of resources. The impact of failure to deliver emergency call out services will have a reputational impact, as well as financial implications from any relevant regulatory body.

There is a potential financial impact of up to £31,000 associated with the proposed change.

3.2 Legal - Care is required that large scale and complex workforce change be managed in line with current employment legislation and Highland Council policies.

3.3 Risk - Having a sustainable workforce is included as a risk in the Corporate Risk Register. There are also staffing resource challenges associated with budget constraints. The delivery of core and statutory functions will be impacted if the Service is inadequately resourced. This report mitigates the risk of insufficient current and future workforce arrangements.

A potential financial impact of up to £31,000 is associated with implementing the recommended change.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) – Staff wellbeing is a priority in the People Strategy and this is also reflected in the Corporate Workforce Plan.

3.5 Gaelic - There are no Gaelic implications because of this report.

4 Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

- 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 14 July 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.
- 4.3.2 The screening process has concluded that there are no identified adverse impacts on any protected characteristic groups at this stage. However, ongoing monitoring will be undertaken to ensure that the policy is applied equitably and does not disproportionately affect any group.

The proposed changes are intended to promote greater fairness and consistency in the application of standby arrangements across Services. The removal of the 10% deduction and introduction of a clear standby allowance and payment structure is expected to reduce disparities and improve transparency. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

5 Background

- 5.1 The Council currently relies on a range of standby and out-of-hours arrangements to deliver essential services including Category 1 responder services such as winter roads maintenance and emergency building maintenance callout service. However, concerns were identified in relation to increasing challenges in maintaining effective rota coverage and potential impacts on staff wellbeing. Managers advised that current arrangements present a risk to the ongoing sustainability of service delivery, including difficulties in consistently filling shifts, a growing reliance on overtime, and the associated risk of staff fatigue.
- 5.2 In addition, strengthened cross-service collaboration and more robust financial management and oversight enabled the Council to identify inconsistencies in the application of the policy which had not previously been evident.
- 5.3 To address this, a Standby Working Group was established to:
 - review existing arrangements
 - benchmark against other Scottish Local Authorities and
 - develop options for improvement.

The working group was made up of service managers across the organisation, trade union representatives from GMB, UNITE and UNISON, and HR colleagues.

6 Benchmarking and Key Findings

- 6.1 Benchmarking responses were received from 9 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities, representing a 28% response rate. The findings demonstrate a range of approaches to standby arrangements, with most councils operating structured payment models that distinguish clearly between standby allowances, disturbance payments and overtime.
- 6.2 A number of councils (including Moray, Fife, Aberdeenshire, Dundee City, Dumfries and Galloway, North Ayrshire, Falkirk, and Argyll and Bute) operate weekly or sessional standby allowances with overtime rates payable where the duration of a disturbance exceeds a defined threshold, typically 30 minutes or one hour.

- 6.3 Orkney Islands Council operates a model where standby, disturbance, and overtime payments are all applied without deduction, provided the duration exceeds 30 minutes, with disturbance covered through an allowance. Orkney also noted that standby requirements are clearly defined within contractual job profiles.
- 6.4 Overall, the benchmarking indicates that the majority of responding SLAs do not apply deductions to hours worked during standby periods and instead operate transparent and clearly defined payment structures, often supported by contractual clarity.
- 6.5 Discussions with the working group, trade unions, and service managers highlighted that the 10% deduction during a standby shift is a significant concern for staff. It was noted that some employees feel demotivated to participate in standby rotas, while others believe they are not adequately compensated for the disruption to their personal lives when on standby.
- 6.6 There is inconsistency in the application of the standby policy, with some Services operating under local agreements that removed the 10% deduction. Awareness of these differing arrangements among employees has led to increased dissatisfaction and perceptions of inequity.
- 6.7 Based on the information gathered through benchmarking and engagement with Services, it is proposed that the standby policy be amended to remove the current 10% deduction applied during standby shifts. Instead, staff would receive a standby allowance, with all hours worked during the standby period paid in full.

Only complete half hour periods of work qualify for overtime payment, ensuring a fair consistent and transparent approach to compensation in accordance with the overtime policy.

- 6.8 Currently, employees receive the following standby sessional and weekly payments.
- Weekday standby sessions normally run from the end of the normal working day until the start of the next working day.
 - Weekend and public holiday standby sessions normally consist of 12-hour periods.

Current rates:

- £39.63 per standby session
- £356.67 per standby week (9 consecutive standby sessions)

These payments are reviewed annually. It is proposed that employees continue to receive these payments as standby allowance payments, without the 10% deduction. The financial implications associated with this option are set out in section 9 of this report.

The proposed revised standby policy is available in **Appendix 2**. Should the policy be approved, it will be formatted in the HR Policy format. Supporting guidance was also developed to support consistent implementation of the policy and this is available in **Appendix 3**.

7 Options Considered

7.1

	Option	Opportunities	Risks
1	Remain as is	- Limited resource implications from this review - Service delivery continues as is	- Impact on staff morale - Employee challenge - Inequalities - Continued inability to cover standby rotas in some areas - Continuation of current inconsistent application
2	Retain current policy as is but resolve inconsistent application	- Existing policy available - Resolve inconsistent application - No resource required to implement updated policy	- Out of date policy - Employee resistance to change application of standby - Continued inability to cover standby rotas in some areas - Increased sub-contractor costs
3	Corporate Standby Policy Review	- Updated and modernised policy that reflects current best practice and employment legislation - Make standby more attractive for employees - Reduce cost of using sub-contractors to carry out standby - Clarify employee standby contractual status	- Resource required to update policy - Cost to the organisation due to proposed removal of 10% payment deduction

8 Preferred Option

The Working Group recommends approving **Option 3 – Corporate Standby Policy Review**, with the following priorities.

- Implement the revised corporate Standby Policy and Guidance to ensure a fair and consistent approach that is based on best practice and employment legislation.
- Explore service delivery options that enhance employee work-life balance while maintaining service delivery and resilience.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 Amending the Standby Policy as proposed will result in increased costs based on the 10% deductions being removed. However, there is the potential to realise longer-term savings through:

- Improved workforce planning
- Reduced overtime and agency costs
- Reduced reliance on external sub-contractors to provide standby cover

- 9.2 Based on an analysis of standby payments claimed during the peak claim periods in January, February and March 2026, the estimated additional annual cost of the proposed standby arrangements to the Council is approximately £31,000.
- 9.3 The total cost of standby payments in 2025/26 was £1,057,673. The proposal would increase this by approximately 2.9%.
- 9.4 While the proposal represents an initial increase in direct costs, it is anticipated that these will be offset over time through improved operational efficiency and reduced reliance on higher-cost staffing solutions, supporting a more sustainable and resilient standby model. Overall, the proposal is therefore expected to be deliverable with no material increase in cost.

10 HR and Service Implications

- 10.1 The implementation of the revised Standby Policy will require a coordinated approach between HR and Services to ensure effective delivery and compliance.
- 10.2 HR will be responsible for finalising the policy, guidance and supporting documentation, including clear guidance on application, payment arrangements, and contractual considerations. HR will also lead on the communication of the approved policy to ensure a consistent understanding across the organisation.
- 10.3 Services will be responsible for the local implementation of the policy, including the consistent application of arrangements, integration into rota management, and ensuring that managers and employees are aware of their responsibilities.
- 10.4 A structured programme of communication and engagement, including continued partnership working with Trade Unions, will be essential to support implementation, promote consistency, and address any queries from employees or managers.

11 Next Steps

- 11.1 Subject to Committee approval, the revised Standby Policy will be finalised and implemented with supporting documentation, including guidance to ensure a consistent and effective approach to implementation across all Services.
- 11.2 A review of service requirements for standby and out-of-hours provision will be undertaken to ensure that arrangements remain appropriate, sustainable, and aligned with operational service delivery needs.
- 11.3 Appropriate engagement and consultation will be undertaken with affected employees and Trade Unions to support implementation and to inform any required changes to working arrangements or contractual provisions.

12 Conclusion

- 12.1 The proposed amendments to the Standby Policy provide an opportunity to address workforce capacity concerns and enhance staff wellbeing. By aligning arrangements with best practice and other local authorities, the revised policy strengthens the Council's position as a fair and equitable employer.

The changes are expected to improve employee engagement and participation in standby rotas, reduce reliance on higher-cost staffing solutions, and support more sustainable workforce planning. In turn, this will enhance service resilience and ensure the continued delivery of critical out-of-hours services.

While the proposal introduces an increase in direct costs, these are considered proportionate and are anticipated to be offset over time through improved efficiency and reduced operational risk. Overall, the revised Standby Policy represents a balanced and sustainable approach that supports both service delivery and employee wellbeing.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 5 August 2026

Author: Louise McGunnigle, HR Manager
Hannah Jones, HR Business Partner

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Revised Standby Policy July 2026
Appendix 3 – Standby Guidance July 2026

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

About proposal

What does this proposal relate to? Policy

Proposal name: Standby Policy Review

High level summary of the proposal: A review of the current Standby Policy was undertaken by a Working Group including HR colleagues, Trade Union reps and Service Managers. This report proposes amendments to the current policy.

Who may be affected by the proposal? Highland Council employees who undertake standby and service managers who deliver emergency out of hour services.

Start date of proposal: 01/03/2026

End date of proposal: 04/06/2026

Does this proposal result in a change or impact to one or more Council service? Yes

Which Council services will be impacted by this proposal? Corporate, People, Place

Does this relate to an existing proposal? No

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Sign off date: 2026-07-15

Equalities, poverty, and human rights

Protected characteristics

Select what impact the proposal will have on the following protected characteristics:

Sex: No impact

Age: No impact

Disability: No impact

Religion or belief: No impact

Race: No impact

Sexual orientation: No impact

Gender reassignment: No impact

Pregnancy and maternity: No impact

Marriage and civil partnership: No impact

Protected characteristics impact details: There are no identified adverse impacts on any protected characteristic groups at this stage. However, ongoing monitoring will be undertaken to ensure that the policy is applied equitably and does not disproportionately affect any group. The proposed changes are intended to promote greater fairness and consistency in the application of standby arrangements across Services.

Poverty and socio-economic

What impact is the proposal likely to have on the following?

Prospects and opportunities: No impact

Places: No impact

Financial: Positive

Poverty and socio-economic impact details: The proposals are not expected to have a significant impact in terms of socio-economic inequalities. However, the removal of the 10% deduction and payment of all hours worked is likely to have a positive impact for lower-paid employees who participate in standby arrangements, by improving overall earnings and financial stability.

Human rights

Which of the below human rights will be affected by this proposal?No human rights will be affected

What impact do you consider this proposal to have on the human rights of people?No impact

Human rights impact details: No negative human rights impacts have been identified. The policy

will be implemented in a proportionate manner with appropriate engagement with employees and Trade Unions to ensure that any changes to working arrangements remain reasonable and justified.

Equalities, poverty and human rights screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to equalities, poverty and human rights? No impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Children's rights and wellbeing

What likely impact will the proposal have on children and young people? Young people aged 16 to 18 may be required to undertake standby as part of their role and they will be supported by the policy and Council to ensure they receive adequate rest breaks and compensation.

Which of the below children's rights will be affected by the proposal? No children's rights will be affected

Explain how the children's rights selected above will be affected:

Children's rights and wellbeing screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to children's rights and wellbeing? No impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Data protection

Will your proposal involve processing personal data? Yes

Is any of this data already processed by the Highland Council? Yes

What is the purpose of the personal data being processed? To ensure accurate and timely payment to staff undertaking standby duties.

Is there an up-to-date privacy notice available on the Highland Council website? Yes

Data protection screening assessment

What change will there be to the way personal data is processed? No significant change to current processing

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Island and mainland rural communities

Does your proposal impact island and mainland rural communities? No

Island and mainland rural communities screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to island and mainland rural communities?No difference

Is a Full Impact Assessment required?No

Climate change

Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂e)? No

Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? No

Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing climate? Yes

Provide information regarding your selection above: The proposal is intended to support robust emergency response services.

Climate change screening assessment

Have you identified potential impact for any of the areas above or marked any as not known? No

Is a Full Impact Assessment required?No

Standby Policy

1. Document Control

Version History

Version 2.0 – July 2026 – Updated Policy content

Version 1.0 – September 2021 – Updated to new layout

Version 0.1 – 27 May 2015 – Standard Policy format

Document Approval

Louise McGunnigle – Interim Strategic Lead HR – Owner and final reviewer

Pay and Conditions Partnership Group – TU Representation – Reviewer

Hannah Jones – Author

2. Purpose

The Highland Council is committed to maintaining critical, statutory and essential services outside normal working hours where required.

This policy establishes the framework for standby arrangements and sets out the principles governing eligibility, payment, working time requirements and responsibilities associated with standby duties.

The Council will ensure that standby arrangements are operated fairly, consistently and in accordance with relevant legislation and terms and conditions of employment.

3. Scope

This policy applies to employees up to and including HC11 who are required to participate in authorised standby arrangements to support the delivery of Council services.

The policy applies to standby duties undertaken outside normal working hours, including evenings, weekends and public holidays.

4. Definition of Standby

Standby is a formally authorised arrangement whereby an employee is required to remain available outside normal working hours to respond to emergencies, service interruptions, statutory requirements or other operational incidents requiring an urgent response.

Standby arrangements are established to support service continuity, protect public safety and maintain operational resilience across Council services.

5. Policy Principles

The Council will:

- Maintain standby arrangements only where there is a clear operational requirement.
- Apply standby arrangements fairly, consistently and proportionately.
- Ensure employees undertaking authorised standby duties receive appropriate remuneration.
- Comply with relevant employment legislation and the Working Time Regulations.
- Support employee health, safety and wellbeing when managing standby arrangements.

- Ensure standby arrangements are subject to appropriate management oversight and review.

6. Standby Payments

Employees undertaking authorised standby duties will receive a standby allowance in accordance with agreed terms and conditions.

Payment of a standby allowance recognises the requirement to remain available for work outside normal working hours and is payable whether or not the employee is called upon to undertake work during the standby period.

Weekday standby sessions normally run from the end of the normal working day until the start of the next working day.

Weekend and public holiday standby sessions normally consist of 12-hour periods.

The current rates are:

- **£39.63 per standby session**
- **£356.67 per standby week** (9 consecutive standby sessions)

(Rates correct as of April 2026)

7. Additional Time Worked

Where work is undertaken during a standby period, the time worked will be paid in accordance with the Highland Council Overtime Policy and any applicable terms and conditions.

Employees must accurately record all authorised additional time worked in accordance with local procedures.

8. Working Time and Rest Requirements

The Council is committed to ensuring compliance with the Working Time Regulations (1998) and recognises the importance of adequate rest for employee health, safety and wellbeing.

Employees undertaking standby duties will be entitled to statutory rest periods and where appropriate, compensatory rest in accordance with legal requirements.

Managers and employees must work together to ensure standby arrangements are managed in a manner that supports compliance with working time requirements and minimises the risk of fatigue.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

Managers

Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring standby arrangements are operationally justified.
- Authorising participation in standby arrangements.
- Ensuring standby duties are organised fairly and consistently.
- Monitoring compliance with this policy and relevant legislation.
- Authorising standby and associated overtime payments.
- Giving due regard to employee wellbeing and working time requirements.

Employees

Employees are responsible for:

- Participating in authorised standby arrangements as required.
- Remaining available to respond during agreed standby periods.
- Following relevant operational procedures.

- Accurately recording any additional time worked.
- Raising any concerns regarding fatigue, wellbeing or compliance with working time requirements with their manager.

10. Equality and Wellbeing

The Council is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in the application of this policy.

Standby arrangements will be operated in a manner that supports employee wellbeing and takes account of individual circumstances where appropriate, whilst balancing operational requirements.

11. Monitoring and Review

The operation of this policy will be monitored by Human Resources in partnership with Services and recognised Trade Unions.

The policy will be reviewed regularly or sooner where legislative, organisational or operational changes require amendment.

12. Quick Links

Standby Guidance and Procedures

[Overtime Policy](#)

[Working Time Regulations](#)

[Working Hours and Enhanced Hourly Rates](#)

Fleet Policy on Drivers' Hours

Standby Guidance

1. Purpose

This guidance provides managers and employees with practical information on the implementation of standby arrangements under The Highland Council Standby Policy.

It explains the operational requirements for standby duties, payment arrangements, working time considerations and the processes that should be followed to ensure standby arrangements are managed consistently, fairly and safely.

This document should be read alongside the Standby Policy and other related employment policies.

2. What is Standby?

Standby is an arrangement where an employee is rostered to be available outside their normal working hours to respond to emergencies, service failures, urgent operational issues or statutory requirements.

Standby arrangements are used where a delay in response could:

- Present a risk to public safety
- Impact essential service delivery
- Cause significant disruption to Council operations
- Result in legal or statutory non-compliance
- Lead to damage to Council property or assets

3. Roles Required to Participate in Standby

Standby arrangements will only be established where there is a clear business need.

Examples of services that may operate standby arrangements include:

- Roads and winter maintenance
- Fleet and vehicle recovery
- Building maintenance
- Environmental health
- Emergency planning
- Housing and property services
- Other services requiring emergency response provision

The requirement for standby should be clearly identified by the service manager.

4. Planning and Managing Standby Rota's

Managers should establish rotas that provide appropriate operational cover while ensuring standby commitments are distributed fairly among eligible employees. Wherever possible, rotas should be published in advance and developed with consideration for annual leave, training commitments and operational demands. Rotas should also be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain effective, sustainable, and compliant with relevant requirements.

Employees should be given reasonable notice of planned standby commitments except in exceptional circumstances.

5. Employee Expectations During Standby

When undertaking standby duties employees are expected to:

- Remain fit and able to undertake work if required
- Be contactable throughout the standby period using agreed communication methods
- Respond to contact within a reasonable timescale

- Be capable of attending the workplace or commencing remote work within the response times required by their service
- Follow local emergency response procedures
- Maintain any equipment issued for standby purposes

Employees who become unavailable during a standby period must notify their manager immediately to allow alternative cover arrangements to be made.

6. Response Times

Each service may establish local response standards depending on operational requirements.

Managers should ensure employees are aware of:

- Expected response times
- Escalation arrangements
- Contact methods
- Circumstances requiring attendance versus remote resolution

Local response requirements should be proportionate and compatible with Working Time Regulations.

7. Standby Sessions

Standby arrangements will normally operate as follows:

Weekdays

- A standby session normally runs from the end of an employee's working day until the beginning of their next scheduled working day.

Weekends and Public Holidays

- Standby is normally organised in 12-hour periods unless an alternative arrangement has been approved by the service.

8. Standby Allowance

Employees undertaking authorised standby duties are entitled to a standby allowance.

The standby allowance:

- Recognises the requirement to remain available for work
- Is payable regardless of whether a callout occurs
- Is separate from overtime payments
- Will be paid at the rates approved by the Council and amended following relevant pay awards

9. Additional Time Worked and Overtime

Where an employee is required to undertake work during a standby period, payment will be made in accordance with the Overtime Policy.

Examples include:

- Attending a work location
- Undertaking emergency repairs
- Providing remote technical support
- Responding to incidents requiring active intervention

Employees must:

- Record actual time worked
- Submit claims in accordance with policy and procedures
- Ensure claims are authorised by their manager

Managers are responsible for verifying claims before approval.

10. Working Time and Rest Requirements

The Council is committed to ensuring employees receive appropriate rest and that standby arrangements are managed safely.

Daily Rest

Employees should normally receive a minimum uninterrupted rest period of 11 consecutive hours within each 24-hour period.

Compensatory Rest

Where emergency callouts interrupt statutory rest periods, managers should make arrangements for compensatory rest to be taken as soon as reasonably practicable.

Managers should consider the frequency and length of callouts, the number of consecutive standby periods, and the impact of standby duties on employees' normal working hours. Where there are concerns about fatigue, managers should review working arrangements and consider implementing alternative cover arrangements to ensure the health, safety, and wellbeing of employees.

11. Public Holidays

Where standby duties fall on a fixed public holiday, managers should ensure employees receive any entitlement to compensatory leave or payments in accordance with relevant Highland Council terms and conditions.

12. Manager Checklist

Before introducing or reviewing standby arrangements, managers should consider the following:

- ✓ Is there a clear operational requirement?
- ✓ Are standby arrangements the most appropriate solution?

- ✓ Have employees and Trade Union representatives been consulted where appropriate?
- ✓ Are rotas fair and proportionate?
- ✓ Are working time and rest requirements being met?
- ✓ Are standby payments and overtime claims being monitored?
- ✓ Are appropriate records being maintained?
- ✓ Have employee wellbeing and fatigue risks been considered?

13. Quick Links

[Standby Policy](#)

[Overtime Policy](#)

[Working Time Regulations Guidance](#)

[Working Hours and Enhanced Hourly Rates](#)

[Fleet Policy on Drivers' Hours](#)