

Statement on Commitment to Fair Work



Why Fair Work is important

Work is an important part of adult life and is critical to our wellbeing and shaping how we live. The [Fair Work Convention's Framework](#) defines Fair Work as work that offers [effective voice](#), [fulfilment](#), [opportunity](#), [respect](#) and [security](#). These dimensions of Fair Work will manifest in different ways in different workplaces, aiming to balance the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers. They should be visible in the attitudes, behaviours, culture, policies and practices within an organisation – demonstrating the value placed on fair work and equal opportunity in work. The Fair Work First criteria align with the dimensions of Fair Work, and are focused on:

- providing a decent standard of living and income
- offering security of contract, including hours and earnings; other entitlements including sick pay and pension
- fostering an environment where workers' views are actively sought, listened to and can make a difference, including through a stronger role for trade unions
- giving opportunities for all to learn, develop and progress
- creating a healthy and safe environment, where individuals' wellbeing is actively supported
- enabling people to have a good work-life balance
- supporting people to feel valued and respected and that they have a sense of purpose in work and wider society
- creating fair, diverse and inclusive workforces; and
- promoting innovation and productivity.

These elements can reinforce each other, creating a virtuous circle of positive practices, behaviours, attitudes and outcomes that can help organisations to remain competitive and to grow and prosper, and creating a culture which ensures workers are treated fairly.

Fair Work is key to supporting people and business to flourish and is critical to achieving a modern, high value, inclusive economy – today and in the future. Enabling a more inclusive, people-centred culture of work which supports workers and employers to shape their organisations together, and to develop the skills needed for a successful future, is key. Talented people are at the heart of every successful operation. By creating the conditions for workers to develop and utilise their skills, Fair Work can enable workers to play a full and active role - underpinning high productivity, performance and innovation and contributing to healthier, wealthier and more inclusive societies.

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The Highland Council has made the following commitments to Fair Work:

Employee Voice (Effective Voice) - The Highland Council supports the system of collective bargaining and believes in the principle of solving industrial problems by discussion and agreement. For practical purposes, this can only be conducted by representatives of the employers and of the employees. Our employees' statement of particulars encourages membership of a recognised trade union to enable effective representation. This is strengthened by the partnership arrangement which operates in the Council referred to in the [People Strategy](#) and outlined in Services hold meetings with trade unions on a regular basis and the unions have an opportunity to liaise directly with senior elected members at Staff Partnership meetings which are held on a quarterly basis. The [Staff Partnership Framework](#) provide a basis for issues are worked on jointly to reach a shared solution. Health and Safety issues are also discussed at service H&S and area H&S meetings with corporate issues raised at the Central Safety Committee which elected members also attend. Regular communication sessions take place with staff and the Council's staff intranet site has recently been revamped to provide an improved communication platform for staff to express views and hear about corporate or staffing issues. Staff surveys are undertaken to seek feedback from our staff on a variety of issues

Investment in workforce Development (Fulfilment) – Our commitment to workforce development is outlined in the People Development Section of the [People Strategy](#). This covers all staff in the organisation with particular focus currently on 'grow our own' with Modern Apprenticeship provision, secondments, internal opportunities, leadership & management development and digital learning to ensure staff at all levels in the organisation has the right skills and to achieve a more agile, adaptable and flexible workforce now and in the future. We support the Young Person's Guarantee Scheme with the aim of developing a partnership approach to retaining young talent within Highland.

Use of zero hours contracts (Security) – We do not support the use of zero hours contract. Where staff are required to be engage on a causal basis there is no requirement to accept work when offered therefore it does not tie the individual to poor employment practices. The Council does not have a practice of 'firing and rehiring'. Temporary contracts are regularly reviewed including use of agency workers and where appropriate staff are offered temporary or permanent posts. Further guidance is being developed for managers and staff on use of Fixed term contract working to re-enforce clarity.

Gender Pay Gap & Employing a Diverse Workforce (Opportunity and Respect) -

Equality, diversity and inclusion form a key element of our [People Strategy](#). Our focus is to promote equality, diversity and inclusion throughout our recruitment and employment policies and practices; to encourage a workplace culture of dignity, respect and engagement; and to equip our staff with the skills and confidence needed to deliver on equality, diversity and inclusion as an employer and service provider. We have reviewed our pay model with our TU reps which was applied

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from April 2021 and ensures pay differentials are reinstated due to the consolidation of the Scottish Local Government Living Wage rate at the bottom of our pay scale. The pay model was developed involving the three trade unions representing staff affected and it has a positive impact on our gender pay gap bring this down from 5% to around 4.5% which is considered to be within acceptable levels – see [gender pay gap statement](#). Ongoing work to continue to reduce the gender pay gap and commitments to [equalities](#) are regularly reported to committee for member approval. A revised [statement on Equal Pay](#) was approved in September 2023 and we are working towards achieving Equally Safe at Work (ESAW) accreditation. We hold the Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award for outstanding support towards the Armed Forces community and signatory to Armed Forces Covenant. We are a Disability Confident Leader, the highest accreditation in recognition of our commitment to recruiting and retaining staff with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

Flexible and Family Friendly Working Practices (Opportunities)

Our employment policies are designed to support flexibility for staff with a range of working arrangements see [flexible working and flexible retirement](#). Flexible working can be requested as a day one provision. We also offer up to 5 days paid time off to support staff who have carer responsibilities and meet criteria in the [care positive policy](#).

Real Living Wage (Security) – We are an accredited Living Wage employer, gaining status in 2019 and pay our staff a minimum hourly rate at least equivalent to the SLW including all our apprentices. Pay Bargaining is done at a national level through relevant bargaining groups.

Creating a Healthy and Safe Environment and Supporting Wellbeing (Respect and Fulfilment) - Health and Safety issues are also discussed at service H&S and area H&S meetings with corporate issues raised at the Central Safety Committee which elected members also attend as part of the [Staff Partnership Framework](#) under 'Highland Council Health Safety and Wellbeing Partnership'. The Council also provides a range of [mental health and wellbeing support](#) including a network of Mental Health Representatives, an EAP 24/7 and 365 days of the year.

Staff employed on specific [SNCT/LNCT](#) and [Agenda for Change](#) (NHS) conditions of employment may have specific provisions to that outlined above (see SNCT and Agenda for Change information) however this does not affect the commitment to the principles in this document.

Future developments on issues supporting the Fair Work will be discussed with the unions as part of the Council's partnership working arrangements through HR Sub Group and reported to Council committee where necessary for approval and implementation with staff affected.

This document has been agreed by Elaine Barrie, Head of People, Highland Council and Trade Unions on 12 March 2025.