

# The Highland Council Partners'



## Engagement and Partnership Framework

Version 1.0  
26 November 2014

## **Introduction**

We recognise that effective employee engagement and partnership working are important to the success of the Highland Council. We recognise the strong link between employee engagement and organisational success, and we recognise that fostering positive attitudes and values will support us in providing excellent public services to the Highlands.

We recognise that some of the traditional approaches to communication, consultation and negotiation can hinder employee engagement and can hinder achievement of the various parties' legitimate interests. Partnership working is a more productive relationship based on the satisfaction of mutual, as well as separate interests, with respect given by both parties to those separate interests. Employee engagement describes the positive values, attitudes and behaviours of someone at work.

Through meaningful consultation we aim to reach the best possible business decision and all partners will have the opportunity to influence this decision. The framework supports joint problem solving but does not support joint decision making. Decisions relating to Council business will be made by Elected Members of the Council and, where delegated, managers and officers of the Council.

## **Objective**

**Provision of Excellent Public Services which improves peoples' lives in Highland.**

The objective of the framework is to facilitate the success of the Council in our democratic role and in delivering high quality public services. By adopting the engagement and partnership model we aim to deliver a number of key benefits to the mutual interest of the Council, our employees and their representatives.

## **Our Shared Vision**

**Celebrate excellence in public service through effective employee engagement and the development of true partnership working.**

We will work together to achieve a future where:

- Leaders create and communicate a clear vision of how we want to progress as an organisation. At Council, Service, Section and Team level we will tell a consistent story about where we are going and what we need to do to get there. We will make this story relevant to all our employees explaining where they fit in and how they contribute to our success as a Council
- The Highland Council will empower rather than control all our staff. We will develop employees to succeed and devolve decision making to the lowest level, increasing flexibility and enabling them to use their initiative.

- We actively encourage employees to express their views and concerns and encourage them to be involved in the decision making process. We apply this approach to all areas of our business from workplace to Council levels.
- We act with integrity, ensuring that how we act is in accordance with **our** vision and the values.
- Employees show a strong commitment to the goals of the Council and are flexible in their approach to achieving these goals.
- The Highland Council will consider the employee voice and the trade unions consider the Council's position before important business decisions are made.

## **Benefits**

By embedding staff engagement within Council processes we aim to deliver key benefits of mutual interest, namely:

- Improved knowledge and understanding of the Council's business by all partners
- Better, quicker decision making based on greater influence of employees and their representatives
- Facilitate public sector reform
- Change implemented with assistance rather than resistance
- Improved productivity, engagement and commitment from managers, employees and their representatives
- Preventing employee relations problems by dealing with issues early
- Increasing levels of retention and the ability to recruit high quality staff
- Increasing levels of attendance at work
- Reducing numbers of tribunal cases
- Developing the partnership skills of managers and representatives
- Safer and healthier workplaces

## **Our Commitments and Principles**

All partners are committed to:

- the success of the Council,
- respect for other partners and their interests, and
- building trust through greater involvement.

Through working in partnership we will exhibit behaviours that support the Council's values:

- |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| ✓ Listening  | ✓ Open       |
| ✓ Supporting | ✓ Improving  |
| ✓ Valuing    | ✓ Delivering |
| ✓ Partnering |              |

The Council recognises our employees' desire for security of employment and trade union partners recognise our requirement to maximise flexibility to support improving service delivery. All partners are committed to working together to support these interests.

Our staff will be well informed and involved in decision making. Consultation will be entered into with a view to reaching agreement and carried out with the aim of addressing Council or staff objectives in good time and certainly before a decision is made.

Employee engagement and partnership work require managers and trade union representatives to develop an appropriate skill set. Time also has to be invested in ensuring that our framework delivers the desired benefits. All partners are committed to providing the resources required to realise the benefits of the approach.

All partners will treat each other fairly, consistently, and with dignity and respect.

All business will be discussed in partnership with the aim of producing the best decision for the Council while taking into account the views and concerns of our employees and their representatives.

We appreciate that meaningful consultation will require the sharing of sensitive data and information. All partners agree not to share data or information provided as part of the consultation without the express agreement of the sharing partner.

All parties appreciate the need for quick clear communication with those affected by decision making. This is particularly important when employees may have concerns as to how they will be affected. The Council and the trade unions recognise the need to collaborate on joint communications which clearly state the decision outcome and their respective positions.

The success of the Engagement and Partnership Framework is more important than any one single issue. Disagreements are part of partnership working but disagreement over one issue should not cloud our ability to progress other business.

## **Consultation and Decision Making**

We recognise that options based consultation is the most effective method of facilitating the best business decisions while considering the interests of employees and their representatives. Options based consultation should be the preferred approach applied to all consultation exercises from workplace to Council level.

As soon as is practical after a service objective has been identified consultation with partners should be invited. Managers should gather and report on the data and information relevant to the objective and prepare a number of options to meet the objective. This report should include details on the possible impact on employees.

During consultation each partner will apply the principles of the framework with the aim of arriving at the best business decision. A joint problem solving approach will be facilitated, considering the various options and their affect on the various partners. Trade unions partners will work to propose further options, or modifications to options, that support the interests of the Council and their members.

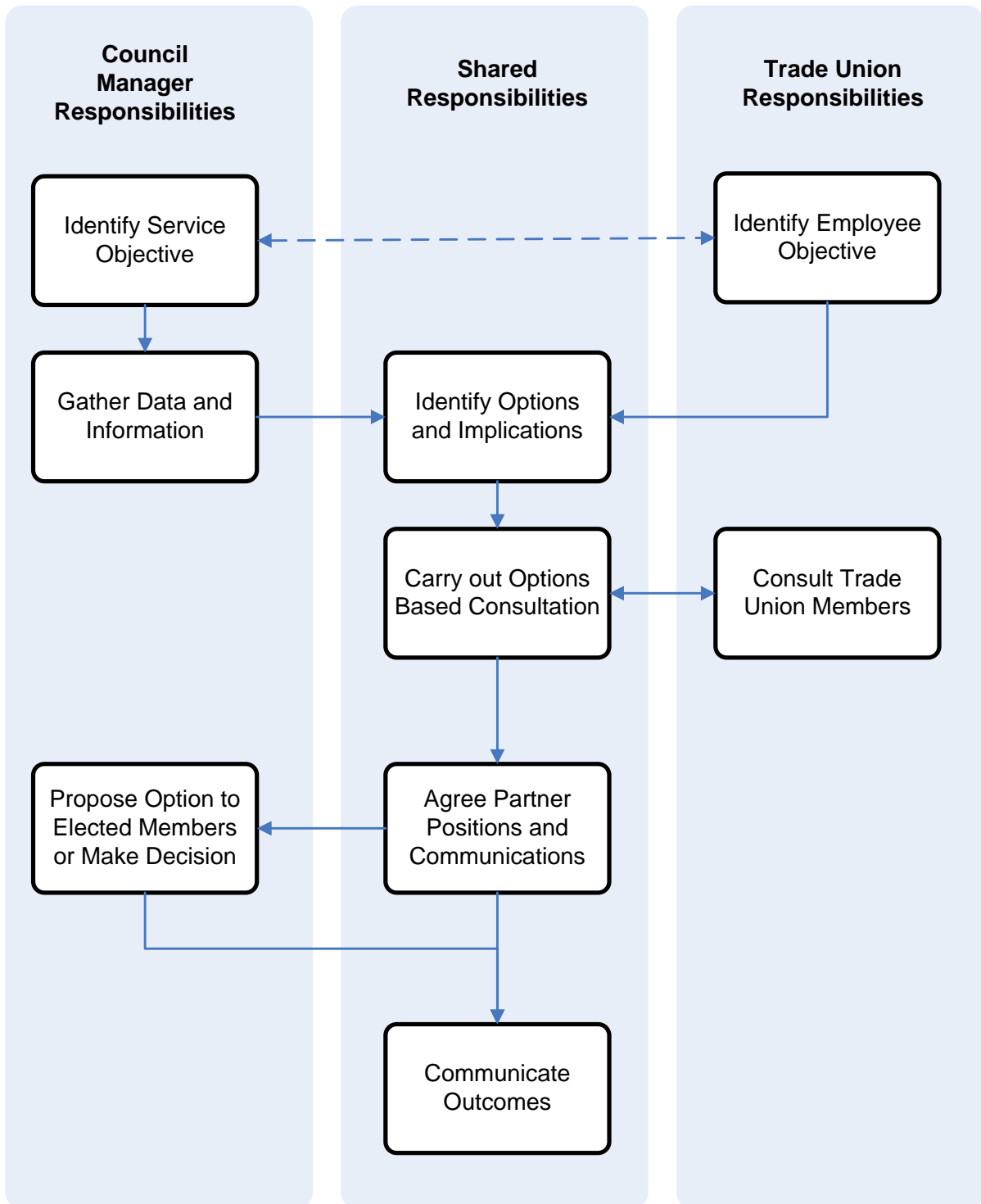
Following a suitable period of consultation the outcome will be one of three.

- It is agreed to progress one of the options,
- It is agreed to progress one of the options with modification(s),
- There is no agreement

Whatever the outcome the positions of each partner should be noted.

The decision on how to proceed will be made by Elected Members of the Council or, where delegated, by officers or managers. Where, following consultation, managers require to make proposals to Elected Members for a decision, the position of all partners should made available prior to a decision being made.

All partners have a shared interest in ensuring that communication is delivered well. Following the consultation and decision making process, all partners will collaborate on a joint communication that clearly sets out the business objective, the options and outcomes of consultation and the position of each partner. All partners will communicate this consistently and without modification.



**Forums**

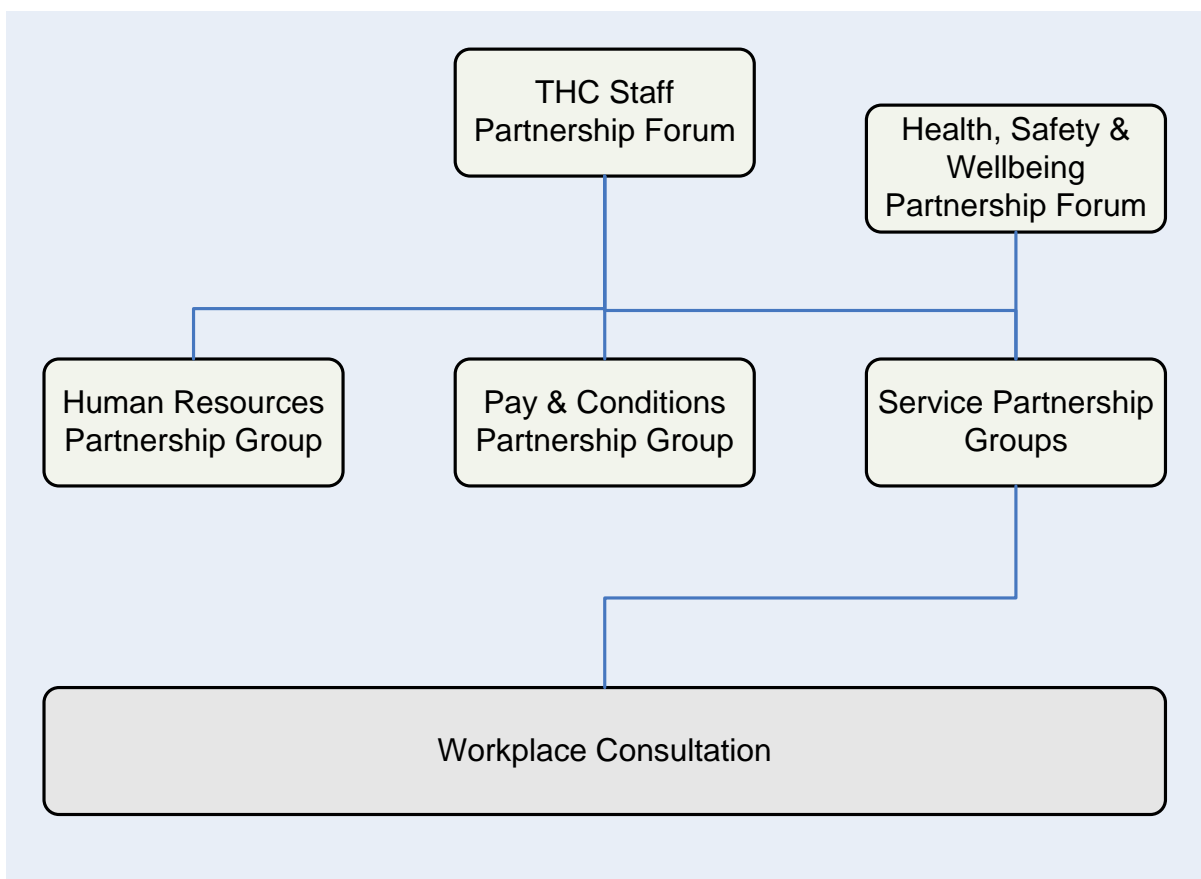
A partnership that only exists between senior managers and senior trade union officials would limit our potential to achieve our aims. We believe that operating the principles of partnership and the options based consultation approach across all levels of the Council will create a consultative culture to the benefit of all partners. This approach extends the responsibilities and benefits associated with the consultative approach to all line managers and employees.

The structure of the various forums that support partnership working will reflect the business and agendas that require to be addressed. The Highland Council Partnership Forum will:

- Progress discussions around corporate objective and initiatives
- Monitor the operation of the Engagement and Partnership Framework
- Review any issues escalated from the various forums

The Highland Council Partnership Forum will broadly agree the business, membership and timetable of the various meetings. Although not prescriptive or exhaustive business progressed by the various group will include:

- Corporate change and improvement initiatives
- Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues
- Service planning and budget setting
- Service initiatives and improvements
- HR policy and procedures
- New ways of working
- Terms and conditions of employment
- Workplace arrangements: Rotas, leave, cover, etc.



The Highland Council recognises its responsibilities as an employer in terms of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of our staff. The Highland Council Health, Safety and Wellbeing Partnership will be managed within the Partnership Framework and the

commitments and principles set out in the Framework will apply equally to the discussion of Health, Safety and Wellbeing issues. However, these issues will continue to be progressed through the existing [Highland Council Health, Safety and Wellbeing Partnership](#).

## **Resources**

We appreciate that all partners, particularly those directly involved in options based consultation, will require further training and development and that this will require investment. Current management development activities and trade union representative training will be supplemented by tailored training provided by Highland Council Employee Development Team to equip partners with the following key attributes:

- Commitment to the council's values
- Commitment and principles of the framework
- Understanding budgets and financial data
- Understanding project plans
- Understand the principles of risk management
- Options appraisal skills
- Communication and consultation skills
- Listening and assertiveness skills

We are confident that the consistent application of this framework will yield significant benefits particularly in better, quicker decision making based on greater influence of employees and their representatives. We appreciate that this will require a significant preventative investment in trade union facilitation time. All partners are committed to making adequate resources available to support the partnership.

## **Monitoring**

The Highland Council Partnership Forum will be responsible for monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of engagement and partnership working. Measures will include:

- Progress against outcomes
- Values and attitudes of participating partners
- Employee Survey (and follow up surveys)
- Employee engagement data
- Employment Data: Turnover, Attendance, tribunal numbers, etc.