

The Highland Council Partners



Engagement & Partnership Framework

Version	Date	Author	Change	Approved
2	3 June 2021	Louise McGunnigle	Revised and updated	THC Staff Partnership Forum
1	26 November 2014	Murdo MacDonald		THC Staff Partnership Forum

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 appropriate 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.

We recognise effective employee engagement and partnership working as being central to delivering our mission to be an ambitious, sustainable and connected as a Council.

Objective

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

Our Shared Vision

We will work together to achieve a future where:

- the leadership of the Council will create and communicate the clear vision of being ambitious, sustainable and connected as we progress as an organisation. At Council, Service, Area 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 staff and develop employees to succeed through devolved decision making, encouraging staff to use their own 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 the Council and its activities.
- at all times we will act with integrity; ensuring that how we act is in accordance with our vision and 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:

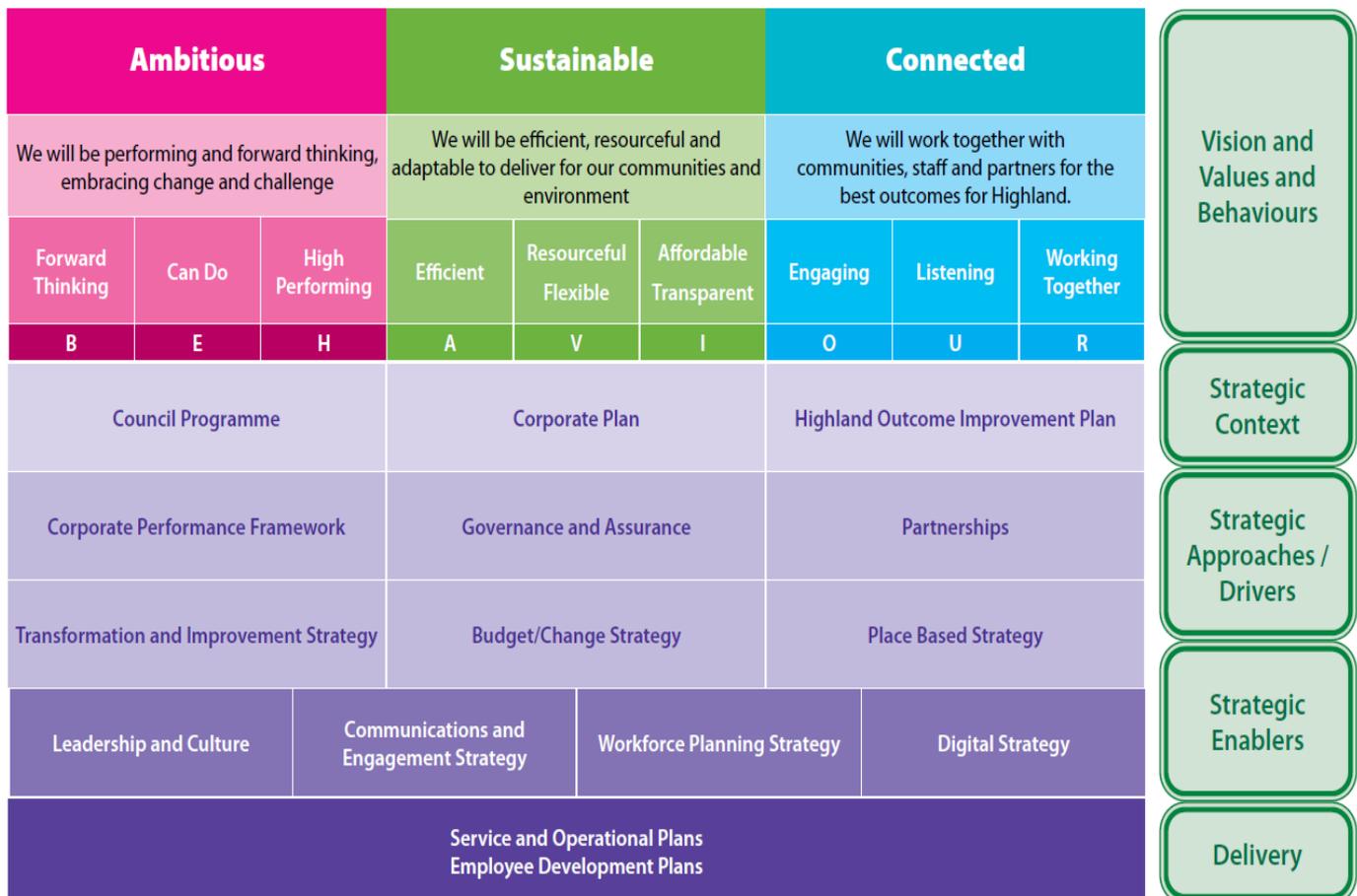
- Improved knowledge and understanding of the Council's business and activities by all the employees and partners
- Better, quicker decision making based on greater influence of employees and their representatives
- Facilitate transformation of the Council
- Change implemented with assistance rather than resistance
- Improved productivity, engagement and commitment from managers, employees and their representatives
- Improving employee relations
- Contributing to increasing levels of retention and the ability to recruit high quality staff
- Contributing to increasing levels of attendance at work
- Reducing numbers of tribunal cases
- Fostering a culture of partnership working across the Council at all levels
- Safer and healthier workplaces
- Staff wellbeing
- Creating a connected, sustainable and ambitious Council

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.



The Council recognises our employees' desire for security of employment and trade union partners recognise our requirement to fully 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 at appropriate levels. Consultation will be entered into with a view to reaching agreement and carried out with the aim of addressing Council and 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 and maintain an appropriate skill set. All partners are committed to providing the resources required to realise the benefits of partnership working, ensuring time is invested to deliver the desired benefits.

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

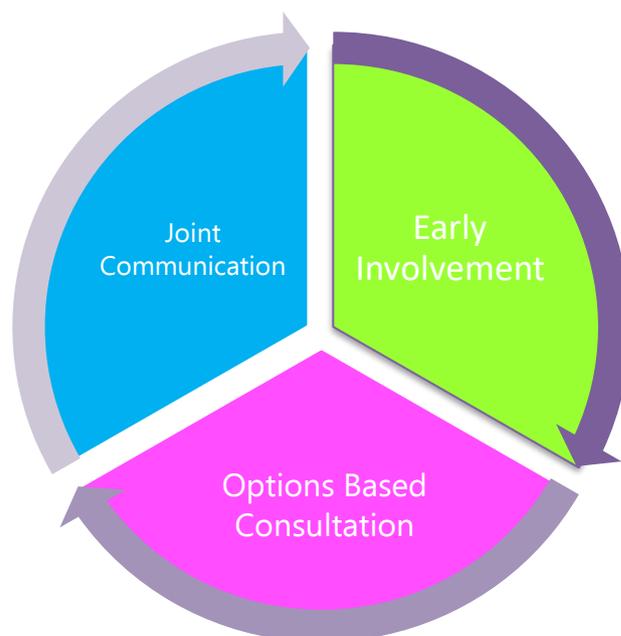
All business will be discussed in partnership with the aim of producing the best decision for the Council, whilst considering the views and concerns of our employees and their representatives.

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 prompt and readily understood communication with those affected by decision making. This is particularly important when employees may have concerns as to how their post or service 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.

Our partnership in practice will be built on the three tenets of early involvement, options-based consultation and joint communication.



Consultation and Decision Making

In line with best practice we will adopt the definitions of communication, consultation and collective agreement recommended by Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service).

Employee **communications** means the provision and exchange of information and instructions which enable an organisation to function efficiently and employees to be properly informed about developments.

Consultation is the process by which management and employees, or their representatives jointly examine and discuss issues of mutual concern. It involves seeking acceptable solutions to problems through a genuine exchange of views and information.

Collective bargaining is the process by which employers and recognised trade unions seek to reach agreement through negotiation on issues such as pay and terms and conditions of employment. It is quite different from consultation where the responsibility for decision-making remains with management. With collective bargaining both employer and trade union take responsibility for fulfilling the bargain.

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 from the inception stage.

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 an initial assessment and consider 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 effect 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.

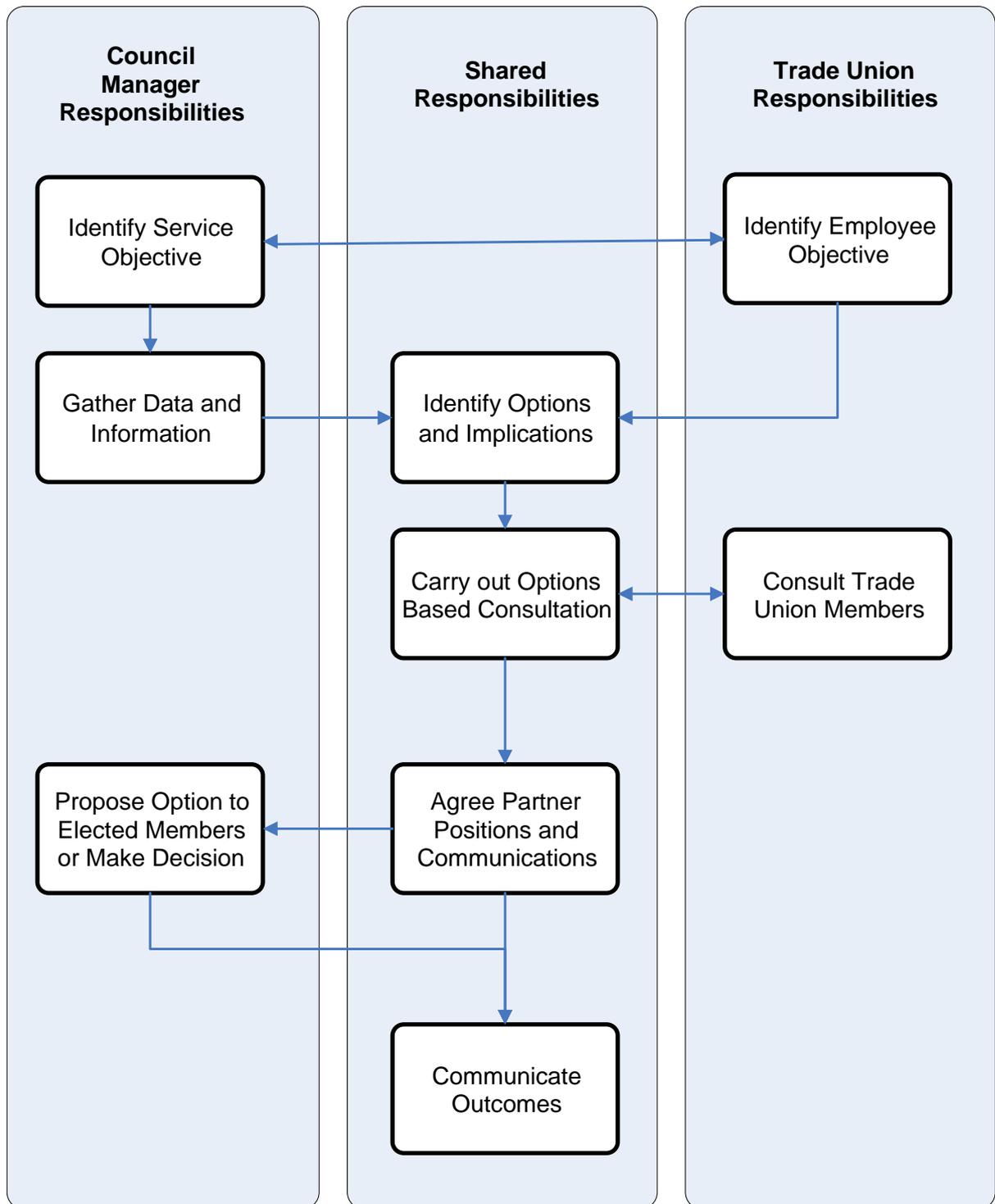
Following a suitable period of consultation the outcome will be one of three.

- 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 be clearly stated 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

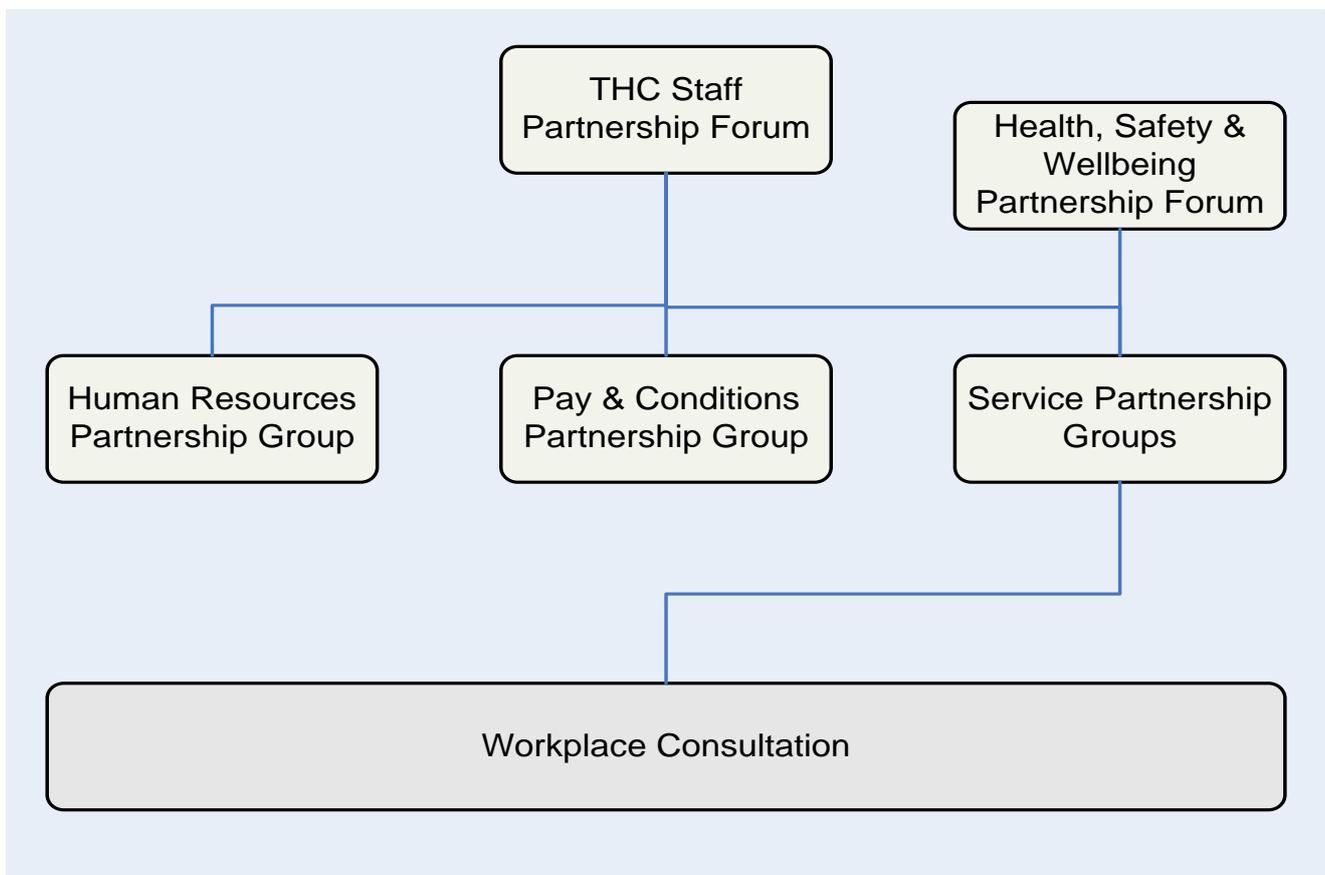
A partnership that only exists between senior managers and senior trade union officials would limit our potential to achieve our aims. We believe that operating the principles of partnership and the options-based consultation approach across all levels of the Council will create a consultative culture 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](#) (via Central Safety Committee)

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 organised by Highland Council Learning and Development Team, working with relevant providers 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 by achieving well informed outcomes based on greater involvement of employees and their representatives. We appreciate that this will require a significant preventative investment in trade union facilitation time and support trade union representatives and officials being released from their duties to engage in partnership work. 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: general information, including staffing levels, turnover, attendance, tribunal numbers, etc.