Human Resources
Goireasan Daonna

Succession Planning Guidance

Contents
Clàr-innse

Introduction

Succession planning is an organisational management tool that will help the Council prepare for the future by developing and retaining talent to fill key positions. Through implementation of succession planning, Highland Council can support a smooth transition of existing employees into key positions, thus minimising disruption and maintaining continuity of service throughout any organisational changes.

The process identifies key positions, timelines and development needs of internal employees (successors) with the potential to fill these posts, to ensure future needs are met. Some successors may be ready to do the job (ready now successors), while other successors may be identified as likely to become ready in 6–12 months (short-term successors), 12-24 months (medium-term successors) or 2-5 years (long-term successors). There may also be employees that are identified as having potential to progress into a management or leadership role as their generic skills may be transferable across the Council.

Succession planning must be managed within Services, aligning with their Service Workforce Plans and the Corporate Plan. To ensure there is a high level of qualified and skilled staff able to progress into key positions as future need arises, succession planning should encompass all levels of staff rather than focusing on senior positions only. The process should involve a fair and accurate assessment of employees' potential and readiness to progress their career within Highland Council. This may be for an identified key position within their own Team/Service, or for a general management role within the Council.

This Succession Planning Guidance will:

- provide a framework for Managers to undertake a fair and consistent approach towards employees with regard to succession planning
- develop an agile and flexible workforce that will meet the future needs of the Council
- comply with relevant legislation including the Equalities Act 2010 and the Employment Rights Act 1996.

The guidance refers to staff engaged under Highland Council Terms & Conditions and should be used in conjunction with the [Succession Planning Toolkit](#).

For Teaching Staff, Succession planning is governed in accordance with locally established [Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers Agreements](#) which may vary from this Guidance.

Definition of Succession Planning

Succession planning is the process of identifying key positions within your team and developing employees, so they are ready to apply for these key positions when they become vacant.

Succession planning will address and minimise risk to service delivery through focusing on potential gaps in the organisation caused by the impact of vacant key positions. It will develop 'job ready' employees (successors) for future vacancies. These successors will be able to apply for key positions arising, thus reducing reliance on external recruitment.

Succession planning involves:

- identifying key positions and knowledge that would negatively affect service delivery if unfilled
- identifying employees in a fair and equitable way for succession planning, so they are ready to apply for vacant key positions that arise.
- considering the overall future composition of the Highland Council, aligning with Service Workforce Plans and the Corporate Plan
- promoting a diverse and inclusive workforce by ensuring that employees are able to access opportunities to fulfil their potential.
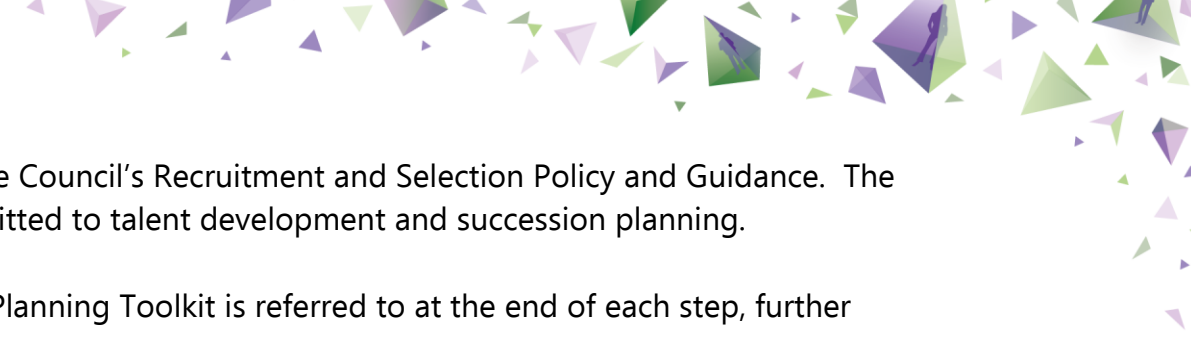
The risks of not implementing succession planning are:

- potential disruption to workplace processes, workflows and service delivery
- loss of time training a new incumbent in a key position
- loss of critical work knowledge
- lack of investment in workforce will reduce retention of staff.

Guidance for Using the Succession Planning Toolkit

This Guidance has been created to support Service Managers to identify key positions that would benefit from succession planning, and to support employees with potential to be successors and progress within the Highland Council.

Service Managers must maintain open communication with members of their team regarding succession planning.   The recruitment process for succession planning

should follow the Council's Recruitment and Selection Policy and Guidance. The Council is committed to talent development and succession planning.

The Succession Planning Toolkit is referred to at the end of each step, further information is [below](#).

Step 1 – Identify Key Positions

Numbers 1 to 3 below are used to identify the '**key positions'** for the purpose of succession planning.

1. **Critical positions** - Start by identifying positions that are critical within your Service (e.g. single points of failure, singular posts in rural areas etc). These are the positions that, if left vacant, would significantly impact service delivery.

2. **Potential vacant positions** - Using age profile information from Service Workforce Planning, identify positions likely to become vacant due to retirement. Also consider any other known factors that may result in a position becoming vacant and associated timescale.

3. **Hard to fill positions** - These are positions that persistently take longer and/or more effort to fill than others. This may be due to the level of specialist knowledge required and/or national skills shortage, industry demand or location. Services should plan in advance to have a pool of appropriately skilled candidates ready to apply for hard to fill positions.

Manager/Leadership vacancies across the Council - Service Managers may or may not have management positions within their team, nevertheless they should be aware of the criteria that would make a good manager for the purpose of succession planning.

See [Succession Planning Toolkit](#) (Step 1 Tab)

Step 2 – Define Key Position Criteria

Managers must define the skills, competencies, knowledge, and qualifications required for each **key position**. Questions that Managers should consider are:

1. Is a formal qualification required to undertake this key position? (e.g. – degree, SVQ, HND etc.)
2. Is work experience required?
3. For this key position, what skills and knowledge are required?
4. What are the main duties and responsibilities of this key position?

5. Are there any additional competencies required?

Once you have a clear understanding of what the key position entails, this will assist to identify potential successors and guide their development including any formal qualifications that may be required.

See [Succession Planning Toolkit](#) (Step 2 Tab)

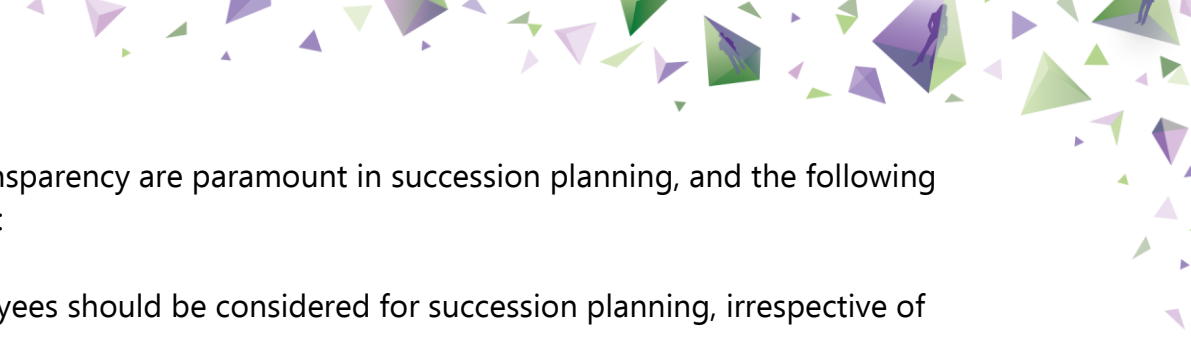## Step 3 – Assess & Identify Potential Employees

Service Managers should consider employee's readiness for succession planning on an ongoing basis, particularly in advance of scheduled [Employee Review and Development (ERD)](#) meetings. Employees that excel in their current role and demonstrate adaptability and a willingness to learn should be considered as having high potential.

Knowledge of an employee's existing abilities and potential for growth will encourage positive discussion regarding skills development, career progression and succession planning and this should be recorded on the agreed ERD Plan under 'skills and development'. Succession planning should be discussed with all employees during their ERD to ensure fairness.

Where an employee demonstrates they have some of the skills, competencies and knowledge required for a key position, the Service Manager should discuss with the employee whether they want to further develop their skills and knowledge to become 'job ready' to make an application should the key position become vacant.   The development actions required to meet key position criteria must be discussed, agreed and recorded on Step 3 of the [Succession Planning Toolkit](#) and in the employee's ERD. Where more than one employee expresses an interest in a key position, managers should endeavour to give each employee development opportunities according to their needs.

The Service Manager must explain to the employee that succession planning does not guarantee them a future key position and that the Council's usual recruitment process will apply. All appointments are awarded on merit, however, succession planning with an employee will assist them to be a strong candidate in the recruitment process.

The succession planning process must remain objective and be respectful to all employees. When assessing employees in relation to succession planning, managers must remain aware of any budget restrictions when planning employee development and be mindful that the service budget must meet any training/qualification costs.

Fairness and transparency are paramount in succession planning, and the following should be noted:

- All employees should be considered for succession planning, irrespective of whether they have previously expressed desire to move into another post or not.
- Employees may wish to progress within their current section and Service, or they may wish to develop transferrable skills that would be beneficial in more than one service to allow them to apply for a broader range of positions.
- Some employees may not wish to participate in succession planning which is perfectly acceptable.
- Some employees may wish to participate in succession planning but are not ready at this time. This should be recorded in their ERD under 'future plans' and revisit at 6-month ERD Review Meeting.

Succession Planning for Potential Managers/Leaders

Service Managers should also identify any employees that show skills pertaining to a management or leadership role. Succession planning should be undertaken with staff that exhibit continual high performance and demonstrate the attitudes and behaviours of a leader in their current role. Where generic management attributes are identified, Service Managers should aim to support the employee's professional development with the ultimate goal of preparing them to apply for a managerial position within the Council.

See [Succession Planning Toolkit](#) (Step 3 Tab)

Step 4 – Succession Planning Tracker

Once Steps 1-3 are completed on the Succession Planning Toolkit, the information should be input into Step 4 - Succession Planning Tracker. This will provide a tracker that summarises the Team's key positions, current incumbents, timelines and 'successors', i.e. the employees you have identified as potential applicants for future key positions.

Where there is a potential key position becoming vacant and a lack of 'ready now' successors that could apply, Managers should identify this risk and take action to mitigate.

See [Succession Planning Toolkit](#) (Step 4 Tab)

Step 5 – Review and Update

Managers should regularly review their Succession Planning Toolkit and update any changes to key positions and the development and readiness of employees. This will ensure that the Succession Planning Tracker is up to date and will assist to identify any gaps that need to be addressed.
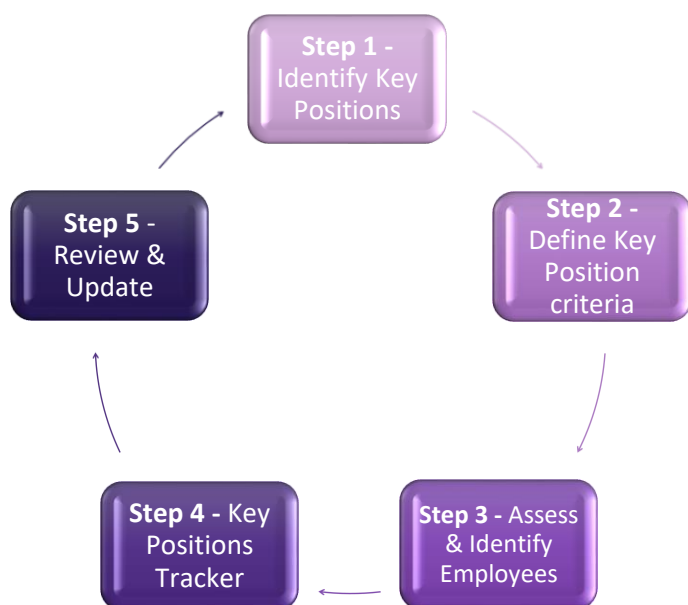
Succession Planning Toolkit

Use of the four-tab excel workbook will record Team information regarding key positions and employees that will assist Managers with succession planning.

An overview of the Succession Planning Toolkit follows, and this should be referred to in conjunction with the steps outlined above.

Step 1: Identify Key Positions – this will identify 'Key Positions' within your Team for succession planning purposes.

Step 2: Key Position Criteria – this will define the skills, competencies, knowledge and qualifications required for each 'Key Position' as identified in Step 1.

Step 3: Assess & Identify Employees for Succession Planning – this will assess all Team Members to identify their potential for succession planning.

Step 4: Succession Planning Tracker – this will provide a Succession Planning Summary Sheet to track 'key positions', timelines, potential applicants (successors) and identify any succession planning gaps.
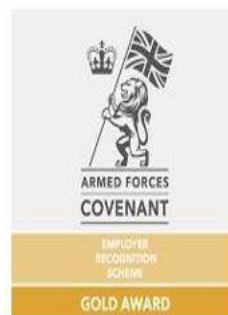

Figure 1- The 5 Steps of Succession Planning

Step 5: Review and Update – any changes to key positions or employee information should be update in the Succession Planning Toolkit.

Quick Links

The Hyperlinks listed here will redirect you to the related guidance, letters, information, and relevant organisations mentioned in this policy.

HR Microsite	**[Click Here](#)**
Recruitment & Selection Page	**[Click Here](#)**
Employee Review and Development	**[Click Here](#)**
Acting Up Arrangements	**[Click Here](#)**
Secondments	**[Click Here](#)**
People Strategy	**[Click Here](#)**
Talent Strategy	**[Click Here](#)**
Workforce Planning	**[Click Here](#)**