



Human Resources
Goireasan Daonna

Talent Strategy

2022-2027

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Section 1 - Introduction

This Talent Strategy recognises the Highland Council's need to plan, manage and improve people approaches, and supports the delivery of corporate aims. It is one of the strategies that support the delivery of the overarching [People Strategy](#). The framework of HR strategies are inextricably linked, striving for best practice and placing people at the very heart of the organisation.

The Council is ambitious for a sustainable and connected Highlands. We recognise that our people are our most valuable asset both in terms of physical and financial resource. In order to build a strong organisation we need to increase our diversity, creating an inclusive workplace to support employees to be ambitious and embrace change. The Talent Strategy will provide the foundation to build the 'ambitious, sustainable and connected' culture within the organisation.

Section 2 – What is Talent Management?

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) describes the process as follows; "Talent management seeks to attract, identify, develop, engage, retain and deploy individuals who are considered particularly valuable to an organisation".

The Council must engage a strategic approach to talent management. We are looking for skills and behaviours and a learning attitude where staff embrace organisational change, develop and grow their ability and ambition. Evolving business demands sets a new precedence for management and we must invest in the employee experience, for the entire employee life cycle. Improved career pathways will assist in achieving business outcomes, aligning to our corporate objectives, and progressive People Strategies.

There is not one definition of 'talent' that captures all, and the Council must implement programmes and strategies according to Service needs identified. All our employees have talent that can be harnessed using different interventions, allowing our staff to realise ambition and feel valued for their contribution.

Section 3 – Current Position of Talent within The Highland Council

The Highland Council continues to thrive in an ever changing climate, with an ambition to become leaner and more efficient. “Our Future Highland” Corporate Plan 2022-27 details Strategic Outcome Statements, with the following relating to the Talent Strategy:

5. A Resilient and Sustainable Council

5.1 “Grow and retain our own talent within the Council.”

In May 2022 CIPD noted 41% of Scottish businesses reporting hard-to-fill vacancies, particularly in technical, vocational and specialist skills ([CIPD May 22](#)). This is echoed nationally with the Institute for Employment Studies reporting acute labour shortages in July 2022 ([IES Briefing](#) p.8-10) with factors cited including record number of people changing jobs and a shift towards higher skilled work leading to skills shortages.

There is no doubt that the attraction of talent is becoming one of the main factors in the success of an organisation, whether in the private, third or public sector and the Council must implement a strategy that ensures a strong focus on attraction and retention to secure a workforce that is robust, diverse, flexible and thriving across the organisation.

Our ambition for the Council is to support an engaged workforce where employees are skilled both to meet present needs and equipped for the future; we must be flexible, connected and motivated. Workforce Planning data has indicated an aging workforce profile and going forward we need to transfer knowledge and experience to ensure skills gaps are identified and mitigated. All employees will require a level of digital skills, this will no longer just apply to office based or specialist/technical job roles. Inclusive digital learning will become available across all services as a core aspect of career development.

We support staff with long-term health conditions and disabilities in a number of ways including:

- Implementing the Disability Reasonable Adjustment Passport scheme enabling staff to transition into new roles with agreed adjustments

- Attendance Management training for managers and Attendance Support Officers to help staff remain in, or return to work
- A commitment to flexible working

We have demonstrated our ability to implement alternative service delivery models, and we continue to strive for excellence through the implementation of [Hybrid Working - New Ways of Working](#) programme, to enhance smarter ways of working and to encourage collaboration.

We have the opportunity to harness our progress and implement a defined corporate Council approach to Talent Management to meet both organisational and Service need to multi-skill our employees and future-proof our organisation as we move forward. Our workplace ambition is to be high performing, with a learning culture that will showcase the Council as the 'employer of choice' for the Highlands.

There are three key enablers required for the Council to develop and progress our Talent Strategy. These are:

- **An ambitious culture** - identify skills and behaviours required to achieve organisational priorities – our world of work has changed and will continue to do so. The skills and behaviours required for a role 5 years ago are different to what they are now, and this will likely change further. Each service must identify the skills required to meet service specific and corporate aims.
- **Growing our workforce** - we will create an environment that will support the development of employees encouraging flexibility and resilience. Annual Workforce Planning will identify Service needs and the introduction of the Highland Council 'Career Hub' will enable staff to develop the skills required to progress their careers whilst focused on delivering Council priorities (see [Workforce Planning](#)).
- **Attract Talent** – our goal is to establish the Council as an 'employer of choice' in the Highlands, with an improved recruitment and selection process, that is a positive experience for all candidates. As a fully inclusive employer the Council recognises the importance of a diverse workforce and actively supports recruitment that is a true reflection of the community we serve. A robust induction and onboarding process for new members of staff and clear lines of management will consciously support and nurture new staff.

Section 4 – Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this strategy is to support the delivery of the People Strategy and identify opportunities. Introducing our new Career Hub will assist our employees to identify and develop the necessary skills to meet both present and future needs. Investing in our people will demonstrate our commitment to developing a high performing, diverse and agile workforce.

The objectives of the Talent Strategy are to:

- provide a positive journey for all staff during their entire life cycle with the Highland Council from the point of onboarding.
- positively affect the ageing workforce demographic through increasing the level of new younger talent joining the Highland Council.
- positively affect the workforce diversity demographic, taking positive action to provide opportunities for candidates with protected characteristics.
- generate opportunities for staff to develop multiple skills, including digital skills and skills that are cross-service and meet organisational needs, particularly in areas of identified skills shortages.
- identify new ways of working innovatively to sustain and maintain local communities through development of hybrid cross service roles and partnership working.
- recognise and explore opportunities in areas where the provision of affordable housing for key positions would positively affect attraction, recruitment and retention of staff.
- ensure the right individuals with the right attributes and behaviours are in the right place at the right time aligned to strategic priorities.
- extract and analyse key HR metrics, benchmarking to measure improvements.
- promote the Council as an 'employer of choice' in the Highlands.

Section 5 – Implementing the Strategy

Implementation of the Talent Strategy will:

- signpost and support Line Managers to follow HR guidance during onboarding, induction, Employee Review and Development (ERD), Professional Review and Development (PRD) for Teachers and Employee Leaver procedures to encourage best practice.

- educate Managers to consider Youth Trainees, Modern Apprentices (of all ages) and Graduate Interns to positively affect the aging demographic of our workforce.
- guide Managers to consider a range of potential solutions to skills gaps identified in annual Workforce Planning required to deliver the short, medium, and longer-term Service goals.
- support Managers to consider place-based employment opportunities in partnership with other services or statutory and third sector agencies.
- foster positive staff attitude and behaviour through career opportunities and genuine commitment to employee wellbeing that will in turn increase staff loyalty and motivation.
- introduce a Career Hub to encourage and support staff to move to new job roles including lateral progression, enhancing their skills and knowledge for continued professional development and to aid staff retention.
- Embed the Council's commitment to improve the diversity of the Council workforce and promote an inclusive approach towards employees.
- Tailor the approach to specialist vacancies extending the reach to attract new talent into the organisation.
- optimise the use of people analytics to evidence improvement in the Council's management of talent.

We continue to strive to be a fair employer and have achieved Living Wage Employer status, Disability Confident Leader Level 3 and we have been awarded Armed Forces Covenant Gold level 4.

We will continue to add to our achievements building on fair work practices, developing a strong sense of corporate identity and culture. We value our partnership with Trade Union colleagues demonstrating our commitment to being a better employer and increasing the attractiveness of the Council as an employer.

We shall develop our existing staff, encouraging them to embrace continued professional development and to use the Employee Review and Development (ERD)/Professional Review and Development (Teachers' PRD) process as a catalyst for progression. The implementation of our Career Hub will allow staff to access a suite of learning opportunities and resources to support their career development.

Our aim is to increase retention through creating a culture of improvement driving forward successful outcomes for our employees.

Line Managers should implement this strategy referring to the sections below for further detail with regard to Attracting, Identifying & Developing and Retaining Talent.

Section 6 – Attracting Talent

The Highlands are unique in terms of the vast geography covered. We also face increasing competition from other businesses and other areas when attracting applicants. We are ambitious to be an 'employer of choice' in the Highlands.

We are an equal opportunities employer championing diversity, inclusion and wellbeing within the workplace. In addition, the Highland Council currently supports:

- Modern Apprentice and Graduate Apprentice opportunities
- Graduate Intern opportunities
- Youth Trainee opportunities
- Paid placements for priority groups through Employability Service
- career development
- professional development
- career pathways for all
- Disability Confident Employer Guaranteed Interview Scheme
- Disability Reasonable Adjustment Passport
- Armed Forces Covenant Guaranteed Interview Scheme
- Carer Positive Policy
- a commitment to Equalities and Inclusion and supporting diversity of workforce
- a unique environment with welcoming communities
- secure employment
- hybrid and flexible work models for some job roles
- generous employee benefits
- family friendly policies
- Employee Assistance Programme (Spectrum Life)
- Occupational Health Service
- Fair Pay for Fair Work
- Scottish Local Government Living Wage
- community based roles

The Council must proactively plan future recruitment, the Workforce Planning Strategy supports the delivery of the right people, with the right skills at the right time. Our Talent Strategy must therefore develop the following enablers:

- **Career Hub** – Implementation of Career Hub, a suite of learning opportunities and resources to support career development.
- **Careers Page on Highland Council website** - Attractive careers information & job opportunities section on Highland Council website and intranet. Each Service will have a section to use as a promotional platform for current and future needs, using recruitment focused multi-media to highlight career opportunities and link to current vacancies.
- **Corporate Job Description and Person Specification** – more attractive, corporate themed template.
- **Promotional and marketing materials** - Develop a suite of promotional and marketing materials alongside a social media campaign to highlight the perfect uniqueness of the Highlands.
- **Job Pack** to provide an overview of life in the Highlands and working for Highland Council with practical information regarding housing, schools, amenities and services.
- **Branding campaign** to raise the profile of the Highland Council with the ambition to be considered an employer of choice in the Highlands.
- **Engagement with Local Communities** - a presence at Highland schools and local recruitment fairs to showcase the Highland Council as an employer of choice, offering lasting and progressive career opportunities.
- **Engagement with Further Education Establishments** - Proactively market the Highland Council to undergraduates at UHI North, West and Hebrides, and Robert Gordon University (RGU) at University Careers Fairs and adopting summer internships.
- **Introduce New Employment Programmes** – Grow Your Own, Management Development Programme, Career Returner Programme.
- **Work Placements** –short term opportunities including vocational student placements, summer intern placements and work experience for school pupils.
- **Convention of the Highlands and Islands** – utilise opportunities presented via the forum Convention of the Highland and Islands.
- **Career Pathways** – identify and promote potential Career Pathways.

Section 7– Identifying & Developing Talent

The Highland Council needs employees to be engaged, motivated and committed to the organisation. In order to meet both the Council's priorities and the needs of employees we will foster an environment that supports agility and flexibility, establishing a culture where all Managers continuously develop their staff. Managers should regularly review with employee's opportunities for further career development. This may include:

- promotion of training and career opportunities through their annual Employee Review and Development (ERD)/Professional Review and Development (Teachers' PRD). For example - job rotation, on the job training and shadowing, coaching and mentoring.
- directing employees to Career Hub.
- professional qualifications.
- Service specific programmes for example, Grow Your Own, Management Development Programme, undertaking LGV driving licence, etc.
- Secondments.
- ICT and Digital Learning opportunities, including Digital Champions (see [Digital Strategy](#)).

Section 8 – Retaining Talent

Retaining staff is a key component of the Talent Strategy and the wellbeing of our employees is a priority. Employee engagement is paramount and we should demonstrate how we value staff, nurturing a culture that values and increases diversity at all levels of the Council.

To be inclusive and retain staff we should consider:

- making improvements for staff, informed by the analysis of the Annual Staff Engagement Survey and the Annual Health and Wellbeing Survey.
- utilising the data from Service Annual Workforce Planning exercise to plan the future of the business need and identify staffing resources required.
- upskilling our existing staff through our Career Hub as staff roles evolve and new skill levels and capabilities are required.
- working with HR to deploy staff from the Redeployment Register when filling vacancies.

- ensuring Managers remain up to date and follow the [New Ways of Working](#).
- increasing management training available with particular focus on wellbeing of staff.
- encourage Managers to adopt a weekly health and wellbeing check-in for all staff (home working, hybrid or site/office based).
- Increase support for Digital Learning for all employees as detailed in the Council's Digital Strategy.
- encouraging two-way open and honest communication between Managers and staff.
- being a flexible working employer to support staff to gain the work-life balance they seek.
- provide support to staff with disabilities and those with long term health conditions.
- Support collaborative working across the Council.
- implementing a Recognition scheme for staff during employment.
- continuing to work within the Engagement and Partnership Working Framework in place with Trade Union organisations to ensure staff voice is heard.
- using data gathered from Employee Exit Questionnaire to inform services of any issues that need addressed; and any good practice that has been appreciated by former staff members.

Section 9 – Employee Exit Process

Employees moving jobs within the Council or leaving the Council's employment will receive an invite to complete an on-line Employee Exit/Mover Questionnaire.

Data gathered from Employee Exit/Mover Questionnaires will be analysed by the Talent Team and passed to HR Business Partners to share with respective Services to improve employee experience, enhance organisational effectiveness and assist in long term staff retention.

A baseline turnover rate will be established, and an annual stability index will be reported.

Any areas identified as requiring change can be addressed and any factors that could help retain Highland Council Employees can be developed further.

For further information see [Employee Exit Policy \(including Movers\)](#).

