**Highland Employability Partnership**

**Com-pàirteachas So-fhastachd na Gàidhealtachd**

**Annual Report 2022/23**

**Introduction**

The Highland Employability Partnership (HEP) was re-established in 2021. It is a multi-agency approach to ensure that partners work collaboratively to deliver employability services across the area served by Highland Council.

Theaim of the HEP is to work with individuals and employers to raise as many Highland residents as possible out of poverty through sustainable and fair work; supporting those who face multiple barriers into employment and enabling progression out of poverty for those who are already in work.

The Highland Council geography accounts for 1/3 of the land area of Scotland, covering the fast growing urban and semi-urban areas around the Inner Moray Firth and the most remote and sparsely populated parts of mainland United Kingdom.

To take account of this, the HEP has been established to provide strategic Highland-wide direction, whilst 3 Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) have been established to drive operational delivery in North Highland (Caithness and Sutherland), Inner Moray Firth (Easter Ross, Mid Ross, Inverness, Nairn and Nairnshire, Badenoch and Strathspey) and West Highland (Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh and Wester Ross).

**Membership**

Currently, membership of the HEP is made up of representatives from the following organisations:

* Highland Council - Lead Partner and Lead Accountability
* Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)
* Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)
* Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)
* Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)
* Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI)
* HTSI Employability Forum
* NHS Highland
* Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
* University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)

Representatives from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and HTSI Employability Forum joined the HEP over the course of the last 12 months, further strengthening the partnership.

Each LEP is made up of the Highland Council employability client services co-ordinator for the area, plus area representatives on behalf of the DWP, DYW, HIE, SDS and one each from UHI North Highland, UHI Inverness or UHI West Highland.

Over the course of the last 12 months, the North Highland LEP added a local third-sector representative and both the Inner Moray Firth and West Highland LEPs have agreed to undertake the same, via nominations from the HTSI Employability Forum.

In addition, each LEP has agreed that a local NHS Highland representative will join their groups as soon this can be arranged.

**Meetings**

Between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023, the HEP has met on 7 occasions and each of the LEPs 8 times, mostly on-line to ensure that people from across the Highlands can take part.

Both the HEP and LEP meetings take part on a 6-weekly cycle, timetabled to ensure that sub-Highland operational discussions at each of the LEPs can feed into the next Highland-wide, strategic HEP meetings.

**HEP Delivery Plan 2022-25**

One of the first tasks of the HEP was to write a 3-year Delivery Plan, to run through until 31st March 2025. After consideration by the HEP, the 3-year Delivery Plan was approved by the Highland Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 25th August 2022 before being submitted to Scottish Government.

A copy of the 3-year Delivery Plan was published thereafter on the Employability section of the Highland Council website.

**HEP Operational Plan 2022/23**

An operational plan for financial year 2022/23 included within the 3-year Delivery Plan and will be renewed on an annual basis to reflect changing priorities. Progress towards the delivery of the operational plan was reported at HEP meetings and the final report to 31st March 2023 is included below as Annex 2.

**2022-23 Activity Report**

During 2022-23 the Highland Council Employability Team, together with contracted third and private sector providers plus grant recipients, delivered a suite of activity across Highland funded by the Scottish Government.  This included: -

* Core key worker service
* Bespoke employability activities
* Online group work
* Specialist intensive support and industry specific training
* New pilot approaches to engagement to open referral routes for hard-to-reach priority client groups

Key performance statistics for Scottish Government funded employability activity for 2022-23 is detailed below:

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| Headline: | 421 clients supported \* |
|  | 139 into employment \* |
| Male | 255 (164 under age 25 / 91 over age 25) |
|  | 88 into employment (64 under age 25 / 24 over age 25) |
| Female | 163 (91 under age 25 / 72 over age 25) |
|  | 50 into employment (30 under age 25 / 20 over age 25) |
| Other | 3 (all under age 25) |
|  | 1 into employment |

\*includes some clients who commenced with Employability Service in 2021/22

**Local Priorities**

Over the course of the year, each of the sub-Highland LEPs identified local employability issues and discussed where possible and within the remit of the groups, potential solutions to help overcome them.

The main issues identified are summarised below :-

**North Highland**

* Labour supply issues – especially the hospitality sector
* Access to affordable and reliable public transport to support training and employment
* Access to affordable childcare to suit the needs of working parents – especially wrap around, weekend and school holiday provision.
* Attract and retain people to the North Highland area – supported by access to affordable housing

**Inner Moray Firth**

* Attracting and retaining staff in several key sectors – hospitality, care, retail, and construction in particular
* Visibility of, and access to employability services within communities
* Access to affordable and reliable public transport to support training and employment
* Collation of data to inform decision making

**West Highland**

* Lack of affordable housing across the area to support employment
* Access to affordable and flexible childcare
* Collation of local level data to inform decision making
* Labour supply issues – particularly in hospitality and social care
* Visibility and accessibility of employability services within communities

**HEP Operational Plan 2023/24**

A revised operational plan for financial year 2023/24 has been completed and is included as Annex 2 to this report. This reflecting the priorities identified by the HEP partnership for progressing over the coming 12 months, how these relate to the overall NOLB principles and who from the partnership will take responsibility for progress.

**Annex 1 - 2022/23 Operational Plan**

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|  | **NOLB  Key Principle** | **Progress to 31st March 2023** |
| **NOLB Workstream - Service Design** | | |
| Operate a Highland-wide employability key worker service | Person-centred support | The service is fully operational with a hybrid internal HC and external service provider model, engaged across Highland from the Employability Services Framework. Recruitment and retention of staff has been challenging and this is continually under review.  Referrals in the main are coming from HEP partners and other face-to-face interactions. The Freephone number 0300 303 1570 offers another method to help people access the key worker service. |
| Create a Gateway / Single referral form / system, triaged to prioritise those most in need of support | Straightforward for  people to navigate | Freephone number (0300 303 1570) and generic email address [Employ.Ability@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Employ.Ability@highland.gov.uk) established and monitored by HC employability team.  A referral form (below) is already in use to refer clients into the HC Employability team, with GDPR covered under HC governance. |
| Client and service users engaged at HEP and LEPs to help service design | Dignity and respect, continuous improvement | The Highland-wide strategic HEP and 3 sub-Highland operational LEPs (North Highland, West Highland, and Inner Moray Firth) means that a wide range of organisations and officers are involved in engaging with clients and service users in communities across Highland.  In addition to the overarching objectives of No One Left Behind to help people of all ages into and to progress in work, the HEP partnership and LEPs will prioritise the following client groups across Highland for additional support to help get them into or progress in employment: -   * People aged 16 to 26, including care experienced young people. * Families more likely to experience poverty – lone parents, disabled, 3+ children, minority ethnic, youngest child aged under 1 and mothers aged under 25 * Disabled people   Over the course of 2022/23, discussions have been on-going with providers on the Highland employability framework to ensure that first and foremost, the needs of clients are met whilst ensuring the sustainability, range and quality of services offered by providers.  Moving into 2023/24, the intention is to operate a hybrid model for employability key worker support across Highland including the introduction of a new intensive support delivery model. |
| Develop a range of accredited training; industry recognised certification and VQs to address identified labour market gaps | Pathways into sustainable and fair work | Course creation and delivery in collaboration with employers is a core part of what the UHI offers, with the aim of addressing current and future labour market gaps. |
| Prepare a suite of labour market work experience opportunities across the public, private and third sectors | Right job, at the right time | A suite of existing and new work experience opportunities is available across the public, private and third sectors. |
| Data collection, sharing and dissemination driving decisions – where and who are the people in most need of support | Driven by evidence | Since the beginning of 2023 employability data summaries have been prepared and presented to the 3 sub-Highland LEPs and shared with the HEP. These focus on the most recent Universal Credit claimant counts for each LEP and the economically inactive data at Westminster parliamentary constituency level. This will be an on-going process that will a) help identify key trends at Highland-wide and sub-Highland levels and b) allow partners to focus time and resources in communities in need of additional support. |
| Engage Highland employers at HEP and LEPs | Right job, at the right time | The HEP has strong links with Highland employers, particularly via the FSB and DYW representatives. Other partners have regular dialogue with employers and representative bodies, which is helping to inform decision-making. The voice of employers is crucial in client service design. |
| **NOLB Workstream - Alignment and Integration** | | |
| Understanding and clarifying roles and responsibilities – training provided to all Highland Employability staff | Integrated and aligned | The regular nature of the Highland-wide HEP and 3 sub-Highland LEPs meetings allows an opportunity for partners to update each other on their day-to-day activities, whilst considering how their collective knowledge and resources can be utilised as effectively as possible. This has helped promote better understanding and clarification of the different roles and responsibilities of each partner. In terms of training, HEP partners recently agreed to organise a programme of on-line seminars that will bring together HEP/LEP partners and employability providers. Partners will take it in turn to lead and employers will be invited to contribute on a regular basis. |
| **NOLB Workstream – Communication** | | |
| Create a Highland Employability brand and on-line presence | Straightforward for  people to navigate | The HEP are currently in the final stages of agreeing a new brand which will be rolled out in 2023/24 as part of the communications strategy. A key part of this will be effective engagement with the public to make sure that as many people as possible know about what is on offer and how they can access support. |
| Create a Highland Employability directory mapped to the 5-stage pipeline | Person-centred support | HC Employability Team have mapped providers on the Local Employability Support Services Framework to the 5-stage employability pipeline. This provides a useful tool for ensuring that the needs of the client are matched effectively with the services provided by providers on the framework. |
| Annual Highland Employability conference | Integrated and aligned | It was agreed at the HEP meeting on 1st February 2023 that an annual employability conference as suggested in the 2022/23 HEP Operational Plan will not take place. Instead, a series of localised events, in the form of a HEP roadshow – bringing together stakeholders and open to members of the public will be organised. This will be in addition, to a programme of on-line training seminars that will bring public, third-sector and private stakeholders together on a regular basis. |
| **NOLB Workstream – Policy and Finance** | | |
| Ensure a smooth transition to No One Left Behind funding arrangements to support service delivery | Pathways into sustainable and fair work | A series of engagement events with employability providers has been useful in explaining current and future funding arrangements in relation to No One Left Behind.  Formal approval by the UK Government of Highland Council’s Investment Plan allowing access to UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation was received on 13th January 2023. One of the 3 key pillars of this fund is “People and Skills” which also incorporates the “Multiply” numeracy programme. Towards the end of March 2023, 12 projects were awarded funding from the Highland Multiply Challenge Fund to support numeracy confidence and skills building for adults aged 19-years and above. |
| Strategic spend to save programme in 2022/23 | Two HEP challenge funds – Community Engagement and Innovation - launched in September and closed to applications on 24th October 2022. A total of 12 projects have been approved for delivery over the coming months. |
| Post COVID-19 challenge fund |
| **NOLB Workstream - Governance and Risk** | | |
| Complete the governance and membership of the HEP | Integrated and aligned | The membership of the HEP continues to develop. Since the start of the year representatives from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the HTSI Employability Forum have been added to the group. |
| Establish 3 local area employability partnerships – North, Inner Moray Firth and West | All 3 sub-Highland LEPs – North Highland, West Highland and Inner Moray Firth are fully established and have met on several occasions. |
| **NOLB Workstream - Shared Measurement** | | |
| Agree shared performance indicators at the HEP level | Dignity and respect, continuous improvement | Building on the Data collection, sharing and dissemination workstream, shared performance indicators will be introduced as part of the 2023/24 Operational Plan. |
| Produce an annual HEP progress report | A draft HEP Annual report has been produced. |

**Annex 2 - 2023/24 Operational Plan**

Theaim of the HEP is to work with individuals and employers to raise as many Highland residents as possible out of poverty through sustainable and fair work; supporting those who face multiple barriers into employment and enabling progression out of poverty for those who are already in work.

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| **Planned Actions for 2023/24** | **NOLB  Key Principle** | | **Action led on behalf of the HEP by:** |
| **NOLB Workstream - Service Design** | | | |
| Operate a hybrid model for employability key worker support across Highland including the introduction of a new intensive support delivery model. | Person-centred support | | HC |
| Develop a programme of community activity to identify potential clients and develop clear referral routes onto employability services. | HC & DWP |
| Identify and engage with parents and employers as the basis for the design and delivery of in-work progression projects. | DWP & FSB |
| Robust and regular data collection at Highland-wide and sub-Highland geographies to inform decision making and to measure progress. | Driven by Evidence | | HC |
| In collaboration with employers, develop training options to address identified labour market gaps | Pathways into sustainable and fair work | | UHI |
| Engage clients to inform service design and support the continuous improvement of service delivery. | Dignity and respect, continuous improvement | | HTSI |
| Prepare a suite of labour market work experience opportunities across the public, private and third sectors | Right job, at the right time | | HC & HTSI |
| **NOLB Workstream - Alignment and Integration** | | | |
| Improve integration and alignment of service and service standards within and across partners | Integrated and aligned | | HC |
| Promote a simple and clear “front door” point of entry to access HEP services – both in person and on-line | DYW |
| **NOLB Workstream – Communication** | | | |
| Create a communications strategy to raise the profile of the HEP and employability services. | Straightforward for people to navigate | | DYW |
| **NOLB Workstream – Policy and Finance** | | | |
| Identify and specify resources that HEP partners will commit to supporting collective poverty alleviation projects. | Integrated and aligned | | HC |
| Ensure that NOLB, UK Shared Prosperity, Child Poverty and other funding are aligned, supporting those who face multiple barriers into employment and enabling progression out of poverty for those who are already in work. | HC |
| Support NH, WH and IMF LEPs to progress locally identified projects. | Person-centred support | | HC |
| **NOLB Workstream – Governance and Risk** | | | |
| Strengthen links between the HEP / LEPs and the CPP structures at Highland-wide and local levels. | | Integrated and aligned | CPP and HEP |
| HEP to establish a risk register, to be reviewed on a regular basis. | | Dignity and respect, continuous improvement | SDS |
| Create and agree a conflict resolution procedure for the HEP, incorporated into the HEP Terms of Reference (due for review in August 2023) | | SDS |
| **NOLB Workstream – Shared Measurement** | | | |
| Identifying and supporting the “value added” elements created because of HEP collaboration, over and above day-to-day responsibilities of each partner. | | Integrated and aligned | NHS Highland |
| Set baselines and monitor progress in relation to the shared HEP performance indicators | | Dignity and respect, continuous improvement | SDS & HIE |