

The Highland Council
Resources Committee – 26 November 2014

Agenda Item	20.
Report No	RES/75 /14

Highland Council Engagement and Partnership Framework
Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development

Summary

This report recommends the adoption and implementation of a Highland Council Engagement & Partnership Framework.

1. Background

1.1 At the meeting on 24 October 2014 the Joint Consultation Group agreed to support the implementation of a Highland Council Engagement and Partnership Framework. The objective of this 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.

2. The Highland Council Engagement & Partnership Framework

2.2 Benefits of the Framework include:

- 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
- 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
- Developing the partnership skills of managers and representatives
- Safer and healthier workplaces

2.3 The Framework commits all partners to a number of principles in support of the Council's wider values. In particular all partners are committed to:

- the success of the Council in our democratic role and in delivering high quality services
- respect for other partners and their interests

- building trust through greater involvement
- working together to achieve flexibility and security of employment
- early consultation and involvement
- collaboration on joint communications which clearly state the decisions, outcomes and partners' respective positions

2.4 The Framework highlights all parties' position that early communication and involvement and options based consultation is the preferred approach as this supports joint problem solving. While all partners will have the opportunity to influence decisions relating to Council business, these decisions will be made by Elected Members of the Council and, where delegated, managers and officers of the Council. The proposed framework is attached at Appendix 1.

3. Consultation

3.1 Since work was initiated in September 2013, a Joint Working Group has met on a number of occasions to develop the framework. Chaired by the Director of Care & Learning, the Joint Working Group comprises managers of the Highland Council and representatives from Unison, GMB, Unite, RCN and UCATT.

3.2 Consultation has also been carried out by trade union representatives with their colleagues and officials have consulted with managers and elected members.

3.3 The Joint Working Group considered a number of issues relating to the format and operation of the HC Partnership Forum and these were agreed by the JCG on 24 October 2014.

4. HC Partnership Forum

4.1 The HC Partnership Forum (page 7 of the Framework) will replace the JCG. A new constitution will be required and this is attached at Appendix 2. The LNCT will continue to operate for Teaching Staff and the Central Safety Committee will continue in its current format as was discussed and agreed at JCG in February 2014.

4.2 The JCG agreed to recommend that the HC Partnership Forum should operate as follows:

The staff side group should be made up of trade union representatives as follows:

- 2 places - Unison
- 2 places - GMB
- 1 place - UCATT
- 1 place - Unite
- 1 place - RCN/BDA/CSP

The management group should be made up of the Chief Executive (Chair), Depute Chief Executive, Service Directors and the Head of People & Performance (or their delegates).

The elected members group should be made up of the Leader, Depute Leader, Chairs of the Strategic Committees and the Leader of the Opposition (or their Deputies/Vice Chairs).

- 4.3 It was concluded that the most effective schedule of meetings to support partnership working would be as follows:
- a) Both the staff side and the management side would meet separately to agree issues and agenda items.
 - b) The staff side and elected member group would meet four times per year. Officers would join this meeting on an issue by issue basis to advise elected members. (The Head of People & Performance would be available throughout the meeting to advise the Chair.)
- As dates have already been set for the JCG in 2015 it is proposed that these dates are now used for these elected member/staff side group meetings. The dates are 6 February, 15 May, 14 August and 30 October.
- c) The staff side and management group would meet at least 2 weeks before the staff side/elected member group.

- 4.4 The JCG concluded that it was not possible at this point to agree on the quantification, allocation and funding of facilities time. The Group agreed that this should not be a barrier to progressing with stating the benefits of partnership working. It was agreed that the HC Staff Partnership Forum and Framework should begin operation under the proposed arrangements for a period of one year. During this period the trade union representatives will log the time they are required to spend on supporting the Framework. At the end of this period the quantification, allocation and funding of facilities time will be reviewed and necessary arrangements put in place for the ongoing support of the Framework.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Should the Resources Committee accept the recommendations of the JCG it is proposed that the first meeting of HC Staff Partnership Forum will take place on 6 February 2015. As indicated above the Central Safety Committee will continue in its current format with its first meeting also on 6 February 2015.
- 5.2 Directors will continue to work with the trade unions to review their current consultation meetings to bring these in line with the Framework.

6. Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal, equalities, climate change/carbon clever, risk, rural or gaelic implications. There may be some minimal resource implications which will be assessed during the first year of operation as per section 4.4 above.

7. Recommendations

The Resources Committee is asked to:

- a) Agree to the adoption of the Highland Council Engagement & Partnership Framework as set out in Appendix 1.
- b) Agree to the constitution of the Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum as set out in Appendix 2.
- c) Agree the composition of the Highland Council Partnership Forum as set out in section 3.2, the method of operation set out in section 3.3 and the dates for meetings in 2015 as set out in section 3.3.
- d) Agree the approach to implementation set out in section 3.4

Designation: Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development

Date: 12 November 2014

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Highland Council

Engagement and Partnership Framework

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.

The framework supports joint problem solving and through meaningful consultation we aim to reach the best possible business decisions with all partners having the opportunity to influence these decisions which 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.

The trade unions will retain their right to act independently of each other and from the partnership agreement.

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 will 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 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.

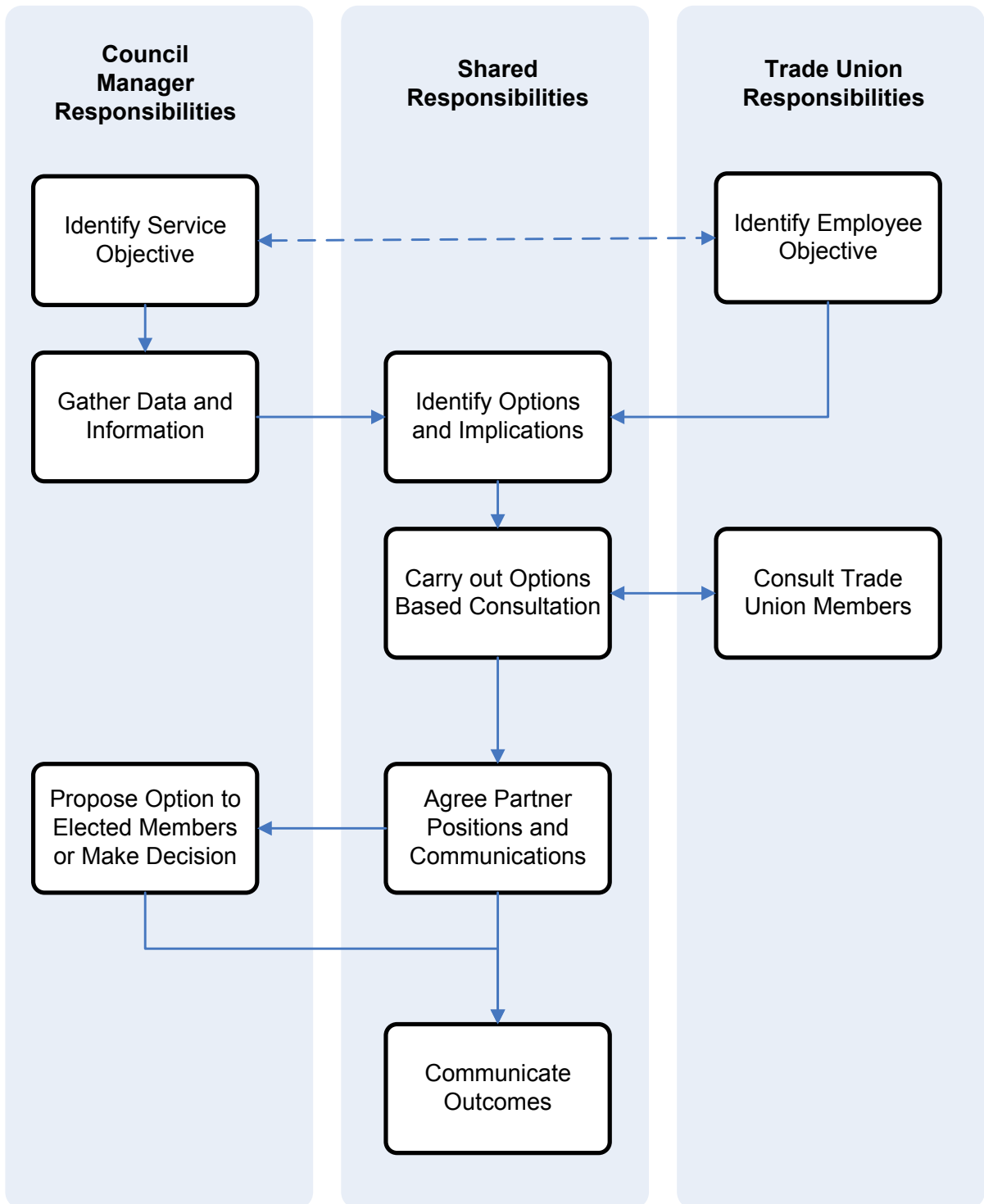
Following a suitable period of consultation the outcome will be one of three.

- 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 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

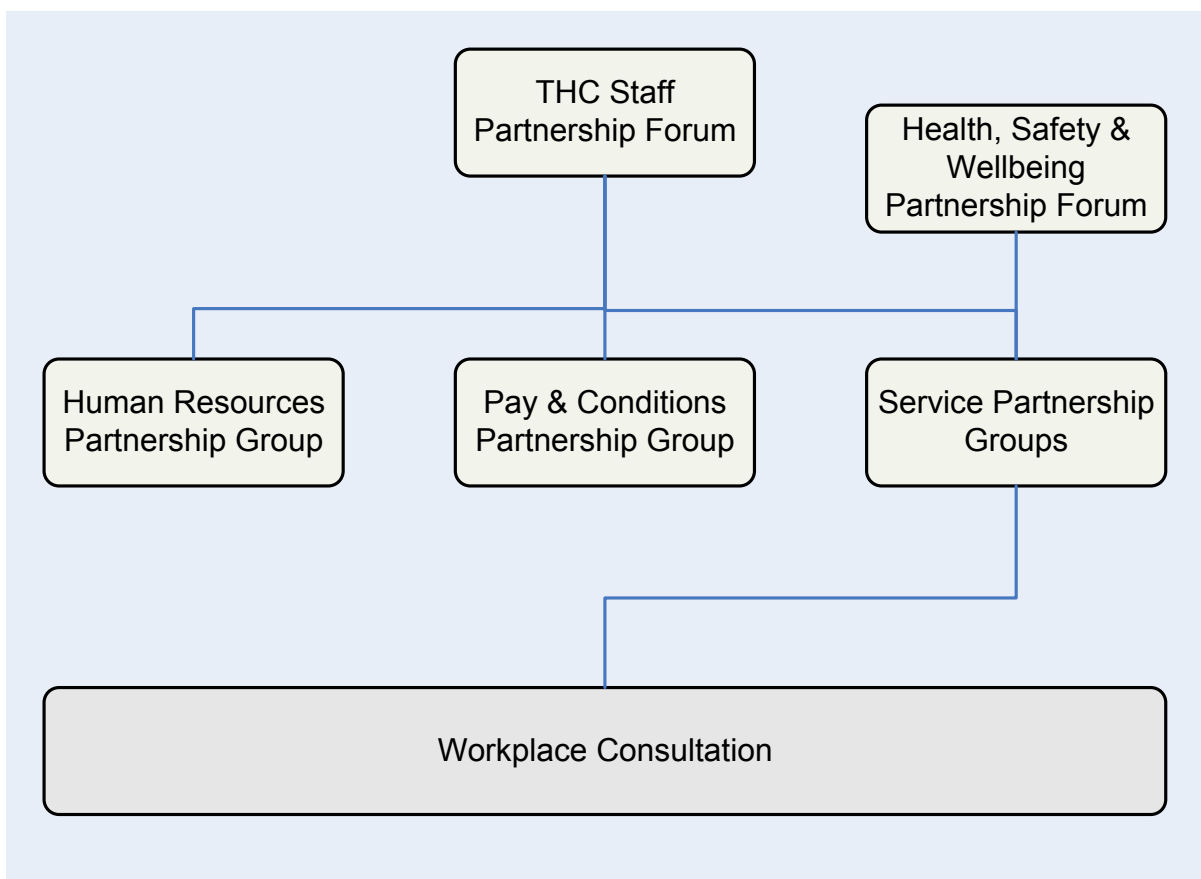
A partnership that only exists between senior managers and senior trade union officials would limit our potential to achieve our aims. We believe that operating the principles of partnership and the options based consultation approach across all levels of the Council will create a consultative culture 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 Staff 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 Staff 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 with the Central Safety Committee continuing in its current format as the forum for formal consultation on health and safety issues.

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's Learning and 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 Staff 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.

The Highland Council Staff Partnership Forum - Constitution

Membership

The Membership of the Staff Partnership Forum shall be:

Elected Members Group: Leader, Depute Leader, Chairs of the Strategic Committees and the Leader of the Opposition (or their Deputies/Vice Chairs).

Management Group: Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive, Service Directors and Head of People & Performance (or their delegates).

Staff Side Group: trade union representatives from Unison (2 places); GMB (2 places); UCATT (1 place); Unite (1 place) and RCN/CSP/BDA (1 place).

In the event of any member of the Staff Partnership Forum being unable to attend a meeting the relevant group shall be entitled to nominate another representative to attend in his/her place.

Functions

The functions of the Staff Partnership Forum will primarily be to support the Highland Council Engagement and Partnership Framework (Appendix 1). Although not prescriptive or exhaustive, business progressed by the Staff Partnership Forum will include:

- Corporate change, transformation and improvement initiatives
- Corporate Improvement Programme
- Corporate budget proposals/consultation
- Review any issues escalated from other partnership groups eg Service Partnership Groups or the Central Safety Committee
- Monitoring the operation of the Engagement and Partnership Forum

Meetings

The Elected Members and Staff Side Group will meet 4 times per year. Secretariat support will be provided by Democratic Services. The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive, Directors and other appropriate officials shall attend meetings as required. The meetings will be chaired by the Leader or nominated elected member with the Head of People & Performance attending as adviser to the Chair. The meetings will be minuted by Democratic Services and circulated to members of the group for confirmation at the next meeting.

The Management and Staff Side Group will meet at least 2 weeks earlier.