

Agenda Item	9
Report No	RES/06/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Corporate Resources

Date: 20 March 2025

Report Title: Talent Strategy

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Talent Strategy and Talent Action Plan are part of the strategies that support the delivery of the overarching People Strategy. It recognises the Highland Council's need to plan, manage and improve people approaches, and supports the delivery of corporate aims.
- 1.2 The Talent Strategy supports "[Our Future Highland](#)" [Corporate Plan 2022 – 2027](#), and the following strategic outcome "Grow and retain our own talent within the Council" p20. The strategy complements Service Workforce Planning. It also reflects external partnership working which the Council is involved in such as [Work.Life.Highlands](#). The strategy and action plan supports the implementation of the Council's [Delivery Plan](#) and priorities as outlined in the [Highland Outcome Improvement Plan \(HOIP\) 2024 - 2027](#).
- 1.3 The Talent Action Plan details the implementation of the Talent Strategy from 2025 - 2027.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. **Approve** the Talent Strategy and Action Plan as supporting documents of the Highland Council's People Strategy.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** The Talent Action Plan will be implemented using existing internal resources.
- 3.2 **Legal:** There are no legal implications.
- 3.3 **Risk:** Having a sustainable workforce is included as a risk in the Corporate Risk Register. There are also staffing resource challenges associated with budget

constraints. The Talent Strategy and Action Plan assists to mitigate the risk of an insufficient current and future workforce.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):** Staff wellbeing is a priority in the People Strategy and the Service action plans, and this is reflected in the Talent Strategy & Talent Action Plan.

3.5 **Gaelic:** There are no Gaelic implications.

4. Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 20.02.2025. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there are impacts as the Talent Strategy and Action Plan applies to all staff regardless of their protected characteristics, however these will be positive with no negative impacts identified. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision making process.

4.3.3 Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment
Equality	Age – positive Disability – positive
Socio-economic	Financial – positive Prospects & Opportunities – positive
Human Rights	People – Positive
Children’s Rights and Well-being	no impact
Island and Mainland Rural	no impact
Climate Change	no impact
Data Rights	no impact

5. Talent Strategy

5.1 The Talent Strategy recognises the Highland Council’s need to plan, manage and improve people approaches, and supports the achievement of the [People Strategy](#) and implementation of the Council’s [Delivery Plan](#).

5.2 The ambition for the Council is to support a fully engaged workforce where employees are skilled, both to meet present needs, and equipped for the future; we

must be flexible, connected and motivated. Our [Delivery Plan 2024 – 2027](#) has a strong focus on talent attraction as part of [Our Future Highland](#)'s vision for the future – “maximising social, economic and partnership opportunities and resources to improve the quality of life for people in the Highlands”.

- 5.3 As one of the largest employers in the Highlands, the Council is uniquely placed to drive employability, create job opportunities and pathways for the wider community.

6. Key Enablers

- 6.1 **An ambitious culture** – Our people are our most valuable asset and our ambitious programme [Our Future Highland](#) sees us “taking forward a flexible workforce planning approach, making better use of our assets”. Embracing our ‘One Council’ approach Cluster Services will identify skills and behaviours required to achieve service, cluster and corporate priorities, fostering innovation and empowerment at all levels of the organisation.

Growing our workforce – We aim to create an environment that supports employee development, encourages flexibility, and fosters a growth mindset, ensuring we become a resilient and sustainable council. We will celebrate our learning ethos at all levels and continuously strive to improve service delivery. Our annual workforce planning will efficiently identify service needs and knowledge gaps. We will implement robust workforce plans to address current and future skills gaps and ensure effective knowledge transfer through succession planning.

Attract Talent – Our goal is to establish the Council as the ‘employer of choice’ in Scotland, with a recruitment and selection process that is a positive experience for all candidates. We are committed to nurturing our employees by prioritising their wellbeing and offering a progressive, fair work environment that supports a healthy work-life balance. As an inclusive employer, the Council values diversity and actively promotes recruitment practices that ensure equality, diversity, and inclusion at all levels of the organisation.

7. Talent Action Plan

- 7.1 The ‘Talent Action Plan’ provides the underpinning detail of actions required to deliver the Talent Strategy. The action plan will be reviewed annually as actions are met and new ones added.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

Date: 5 March 2025

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Background Papers: People Strategy (Highland Council, 27 October 2022)
Our Future Highland Delivery Plan 22-27 (Highland Council, 9 May 2024)

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment Summary
Appendix 2 – Talent Strategy
Appendix 3 – Action Plan

Appendix 1: Integrated Impact Screening Summary

Protected characteristics impact details:

Age: **Positive**

Disability: **Positive**

Talent Action Plan details working with schools and supports the Guarantee Interview Scheme for people with disabilities.

Poverty and socio-economic impact details:

Prospects and opportunities: **Positive**

Financial: **Positive**

Employment and trainee opportunities available in the Council will have a positive impact. For existing employees, there is the potential for positive financial impact given the range of employee benefits available as well as career development opportunities.

Human rights impact details:

Article 14: Protection from discrimination - **Positive**

We are committed to fostering an inclusive workplace that values diversity and promotes equality, ensuring that all candidates are evaluated based on their skills, experiences, and potential, without bias or discrimination

Children's rights impact details: No impact.

Data protection impact details: No impact.

Island and mainland rural communities impact details: No impact.

Climate change impact details: No impact.



Human Resources
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Talent Strategy 2024-2027

Version 1.0 – January 2025

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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 achievement of the [People Strategy](#) and implementation of the Council's [Delivery Plan](#).

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. To create a robust organisation, we must embrace diversity and foster an inclusive workplace that encourages ambition and supports change. The Talent Strategy will provide the foundation to build the 'ambitious, sustainable and connected' culture, placing people at the very heart of 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's ambition is to be an 'employer of choice' in Scotland, attracting individuals with the right attitude and behaviours, coupled with a desire to learn and continuously improve, embracing organisational change, developing and growing their ability and ambition.

It is vital for the workforce to feel connected to the ambition of the organisation and a positive employee experience is critical to successfully attracting and managing our talent. We must take a holistic approach throughout our employees' life cycle. Employee development will assist in achieving business outcomes, aligning to our corporate objectives, as outlined in the Highland Council Operational [Delivery Plan](#).

Section 3 – Purpose of the Talent Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to support the delivery of the People Strategy and to:

- Build a high-performing and agile workforce
- Create meaningful growth opportunities for our employees
- Embrace diversity and inclusion
- Support an ambitious, sustainable and connected culture across the organisation
- Become the employer of choice in Scotland

Section 4 – Talent Ambition

The Highland Council's Talent Ambition

The Highland Council continues to thrive in an ever-changing climate, with an ambition to become leaner and more efficient. [Our Future Highland](#) Administration Programme 2022-27 details 'Our Highland Priorities', with the following relating to the Talent Strategy:

A Resilient and Sustainable Council - "Grow and retain our own talent within the Council."

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 a fully engaged workforce where employees are skilled, both to meet present needs, and equipped for the future; we must be flexible, connected and motivated. Our [Delivery Plan 2024 – 2027](#) has a strong focus on talent attraction as part of [Our Future Highland](#)'s vision for the future – "maximising social, economic and partnership opportunities and resources to improve the quality of life for people in the Highlands".

Workforce Planning data indicates an aging workforce profile and going forward we need to transfer knowledge and experience to ensure any skill gaps are mitigated.

Section 5 – Talent Enablers

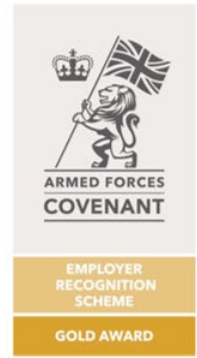
The enablers are the building blocks underpinning the Strategy's success and are essential to achieving its vision.

Three key enablers are required to deliver the strategy:

- **An ambitious culture** – Our people are our most valuable asset and our ambitious programme [Our Future Highland](#) sees us “taking forward a flexible workforce planning approach, making better use of our assets”. Embracing our ‘One Council’ approach Cluster Services will identify skills and behaviours required to achieve service, cluster and corporate priorities, fostering innovation and empowerment at all levels of the organisation.
- **Growing our workforce** - We aim to create an environment that supports employee development, encourages flexibility, and fosters a growth mindset, ensuring we become a resilient and sustainable council. We will celebrate our learning ethos at all levels and continuously strive to improve service delivery. Our annual workforce planning will efficiently identify service needs and knowledge gaps. We will implement robust workforce plans to address current and future skills gaps and ensure effective knowledge transfer through succession planning.
- **Attract Talent** - Our goal is to establish the Council as the ‘employer of choice’ in Scotland, with a recruitment and selection process that is a positive experience for all candidates. We are committed to nurturing our employees by prioritising their wellbeing and offering a progressive, fair work environment that supports a healthy work-life balance. As an inclusive employer, the Council values diversity and actively promotes recruitment practices that ensure equality, diversity, and inclusion at all levels of the organisation.

Section 6 – Talent Action Plan

The ‘Talent Action Plan’ provides the underpinning detail of actions required to deliver the Talent Strategy. The action plan will be reviewed annually as actions are met and new ones added.



Appendix 3: Talent Action Plan

Talent Action Plan 2025-2027 – Review and Update Report provided each January

Strategic Area	Identified area of action	Target	How we will achieve	Measure/impact	Target Date	Responsible
Develop Employer Brand	Marketing of Highland Council	Increase the number of applications for vacancies	Communicate vision and values of HC internally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Senior leaders to cascade ○ Corporate Comms support material and messaging 	Employee satisfaction increase	Dec 25 ongoing Dec 25 ongoing	CMT Corporate Comms
			Design an identifiable brand including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highland Council – where people matter (consider professional input) 	Highland Council viewed positively in community & Scotland and branded as the employer of choice	Oct 25	Talent Team WFTF
			Promote our family friendly policies; competitive terms & Conditions; generous benefits – Employee Assistance Programme, Live and working in Highlands. Accredited Scottish Local Government Living Wage Employer.	Potential & existing employees aware of offering	Mar 25 ongoing	Talent Team
			Production of video for use on HC website, MJS and social media platforms.	Videos will add to attractiveness of Highland Council as an employer and the Highlands as a place to live, increasing applicants	Aug 25	Corporate Comms
			Develop Cluster specific videos highlighting range of jobs and careers in the Highland Council		Aug 26	Corporate Comms
	Diversity and Inclusion	Increase the diversity of our workforce	Align all People Policies to our Equal Opportunities Policy	Myview demographics	Jun 25 ongoing	HR
		Increase EDI awareness	Promote Mandatory equal diversity and inclusion e-learning Increase specialist EDI training Management training - neurodiversity	Completion rates	Ongoing	L&D
		Attract more diverse applicants	Research available toolkits, local & national networks	Increased diversity of applications	Nov 25	Talent Team

Strategic Area	Identified area of action	Target	How we will achieve	Measure/Impact	Target Date	Responsible
Talent Attraction	Foundation Apprenticeship	Pathway from schools to HC employment	Develop Foundation Apprenticeship opportunities	No. of pathways and opportunities developed	Jan 26	L&D/WFTF
	Modern Apprentice	+ 20%	Encouraging services to use establishment vacancies for MA or GA's	% increase of MA's and GA's employed	Jan 26	L&D
	Graduate Apprentice		Expand the MA & GA Framework available to hiring managers	Increase the number of MA & GA Frameworks available to hiring managers	Jan 26	L&D
	Graduate trainee		Develop a Corporate Graduate Trainee Programme		Jan 26	L&D and HR
	Shared Modern Apprenticeships	To have a structured approach to shared MAs	Develop an approach to shared Modern Apprenticeships – public, private & 3 rd Sector	Partnership Working & increased range of MA's and opportunities Positive impact on depopulation	Oct 25	WFTF Portfolio
	Marketing the Council as an employer to Secondary School pupils	No. of engagement activities in schools	Career campaign	Positive impact on THC workforce age demographic	May 25 ongoing	Talent Team/CO WFTF Secondary Education
	Youth Trainee opportunities	Develop programme	Meeting Our Council's Future Workforce needs work stream	Implementation of Youth Trainee Programme	Oct 25	WFTF Portfolio Board
	Professional Trainee opportunities	Develop corporate approach	Consolidate existing service approaches	Measured through workforce planning	Oct 25	Talent Team/HR BPs Cluster SMTs

Strategic Area	Identified area of action	Target	How we will achieve	Measure/Impact	Target Date	Responsible
	Hybrid and flexible work models for some job roles	Officer roles are considered hybrid unless there is a justifiable business need to be fully office based	Include in Recruitment & Selection Guidance and training for managers Include in Flexible Arrangement Working Guidance	Improved reputation as flexible employer Reduction in hard to fill roles.	Ongoing	HR/Talent/L&D
	Guaranteed Interview Scheme (disability & Armed Forces)	Maintain award status	Included in vacancy advertisements, guidance, policy and training	Accredited employer – Disability Confident Leader and Armed Forces Covenant Gold status	Disability Leader status review 2026 Gold Covenant status review 2025	Talent Team/OD BP
	Employee benefits	Competitive benefits offering	Employee Benefits Platform & additional local discounts & lifestyle savings Terms and Conditions Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Accredited Scottish Local Government Living Wage Employer	Positive impact upon staff wellbeing Positive impact upon Highland Council employer brand	ongoing	HR
	Family friendly policies -		Policy & Guidance – Carer Positive Policy, Guidance and Support Sessions and paid leave Flexible working arrangements Special Leave Maternity, Paternity, Surrogacy, Fostering & Adoption, Neo-Natal etc	Positive impact upon staff wellbeing Reduction in absenteeism Positive impact upon Highland Council employer brand	As per Policy Review Schedule	HR/HR Sub
	Partnership Working TU's		Regular meetings to collaborate HR sub meeting	HR Sub meeting Union support	ongoing	HR/Unions
Talent Development	Supporting development opportunities for employees	100% ER/PRD completion	Annual Employee Review and Development meeting with Line Manager with a focus on career and/or professional development. Teachers PRD with Headteacher	Employee development Positive impact upon retention; succession planning and employee engagement and satisfaction	Sep 25	All Services

Strategic Area	Identified area of action	Target	How we will achieve	Measure/Impact	Target Date	Responsible
	Workforce Planning led development activities	Service Training Plans	Implement the Workforce Planning Strategy Utilise the data from Service Annual Workforce Planning exercise to plan the future of the business need and identify staffing resources required Service specific programmes for example, Grow Your Own, Management Development Programme, undertaking LGV driving licence, etc	Identifying skills gaps and difficult to recruit to posts Mitigation of service skills gaps Addresses workforce planning areas of risk Employee Development	Annual Review Ongoing ongoing	HR BP's Talent Team HR HR BP's Talent Team L&D Career Coach
	Defined approach to supporting Secondments	Increase secondment opportunities	Supporting cross-cluster and service opportunities	Employee development Organisational resilience & development Employee retention	Aug 25	CMT Talent Team L&D (Management Connections)
	Opportunities for job rotation, on the job training and shadowing, employee coaching and mentoring	Create a shadowing and rotation programme	Work with services to develop a shadowing/ rotation programme to be discussed at ERD	Take up of shadowing/ rotation programme	Jan 26	HR BPs Career Coach & Services
	Managers' use of Succession Planning Toolkit (SPT)	+ 25%	Soft roll out of SPT to cluster services Introduce into Management Connections training programme	Single points of failure within teams mitigated. 'Job ready' employees	Jan 26	HR BPS & Talent Manager
	Employee Development	Upskilled & fulfilled Employees	Launch Career Hub 2025 – Promote through L&D, Traineasy, Viva Engage	Career Hub available to all employees	Dec 26	L&D Career Coach
	Professional Qualifications	Increased in job related qualified employees	Use of workforce plans to identify qualification need Increase investment & promote career related qualifications for employees.	Reduction in hard to fill vacancies More skilled workforce	Ongoing	HR BPs L&D Services

Strategic Area	Identified area of action	Target	How we will achieve	Measure/Impact	Target Date	Responsible
Talent Development	Employee Engagement/ Development	IIP Accreditation	Pilot in Corporate Cluster work towards IIP accreditation	Increased Satisfaction levels Employee development Organisational resilience & development Employee retention	Feb 26	CMT/HoPeople
	ICT and Digital Learning opportunities,	Increase awareness across workforce Increase digital skills of workforce	Increase ICT and digital learning opportunities council wide (ie not just computer-based job roles) Digital Champions to support and promote digital learning	Increase in digital skills across the workforce	ongoing	ICT Digital Team
	Career Pathways	Portfolio of Career Pathways	Pilot in one Service where there are hard to fill career vacancies Develop service specific career pathways	Clearly identifiable career pathways available to employees and managers. Support ERD's	Dec 25	L&D/Career Coach WTF
Talent Retention	Disability Reasonable Adjustment Passport	Increase awareness	Increase awareness – Managers to discuss at ERD as appropriate Promote through OHSW service	No baseline as personal to employee and line manager	ongoing	HR/L&D OHSW
	Employee wellbeing	Increase awareness of policies and support available	Carer Positive Policy – recognises and supports carers commitments MH Reps available for employees Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Employee Benefits Platform Management support & comms Right to Disconnect Policy Flexible Working Policy	wellbeing survey Staff survey Reduction in absenteeism	2025 Wellbeing Survey	HR OHSW L&D

	Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service	Keeping people at work	Informed guidance on how to support employees to remain or return to work	Reduction or avoidance of long-term absenteeism	Quarterly review	HR
Strategic Area	Identified area of action	Target	How we will achieve	Measure/Impact	Target Date	Responsible
	Increase employee engagement	% Improvement Employee Survey IIP Accreditation	Viva Engage Platforms- raise awareness of and use of. Staff Connections CE Engagement Sessions ACE Blogs Implement Suggestion Scheme	Improved data in next employee engagement questionnaire/IIP	Jul 26	HR Corp Comms CMT CMT Cluster ACE
	Redeployment	Avoid redundancies	Upskill candidates on redeployment register	Successful placements	ongoing	HR/Career coach
Exit Strategy	Exit Questionnaire	Increase no of ex-employees receiving Exit Questionnaire	1.updated MyView details will improve ex-employee access to HC Leaver questionnaire	Increased response rate	Jun 25	HR Systems Team Talent Team
	Exit Questionnaire data	Continuous improvement as an employer	Address any highlighted issues with services Share positive feedback with services	Improved retention	ongoing	HR Systems Team Talent Team
	Employee turnover rate	Reduction in employee turnover	Sharing positive and negative feedback with services will promote good practice and reduce turnover rate	Retention of skills and experienced employees	ongoing	HR Systems Team Talent Team