Hebridean Housing Partnership

Workforce Plan

2025/26 to 2029/30

Contents

Executive Summary

1. Our current Business Plan has four strategic goals one of which is to be an excellent employer that attracts and retains high quality staff.

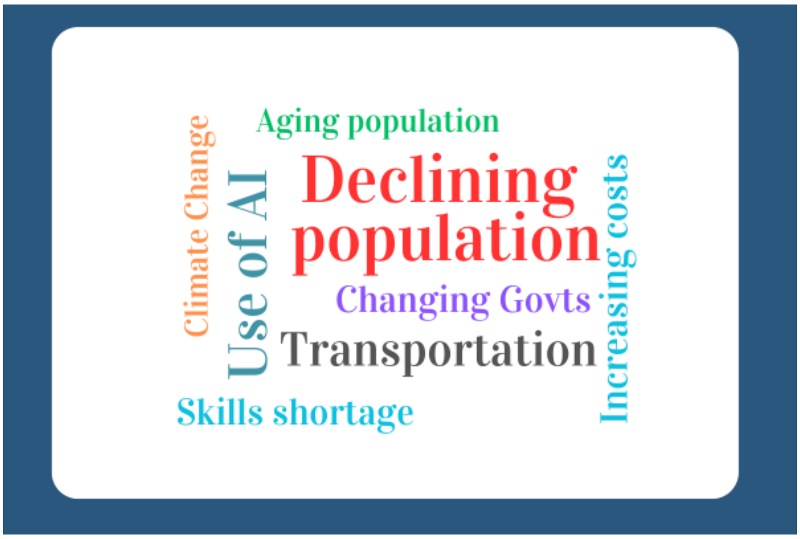
2. To deliver the strategic goals the Board recognise that we need a dedicated and skilled workforce. A Workforce Plan that aligns with our business strategy is crucial.

3. This plan will be supported by the Training Plan and Well Being Strategy.

> “Being an excellent employer that attracts and retains high quality staff”

Baseline

4. We currently have 55 posts on our establishment including 4 trainee posts. Two of the posts are on hold and there is no budgetary provision for them this year, i.e. Head of Executive Office and Graduate Trainee IT. To deliver our Strategic Goals we need to remain agile and open to doing things differently in an environment that is changing fast and challenging.



Gap Analysis

5. We analysed our data as at 31 March 2025 along with NOMIS data 2021 Census and have concluded that:

    a. Skills gaps exist;

    b. We are an aging workforce, 24% of our current workforce will reach state retirement age in the next 10 years;

    c. Our stock will increase by 5.4% in the next 10 years;

    d. Over the past 5 years the demands on staff have changed, with more time needed to support tenants because of less family support and recruitment challenges in health services leaving support services stretched;

e. The new housing system has freed up some administrative resource which is being redeployed to other areas;

f. AI can be used to release time from admin tasks which are repetitive and training will be arranged for staff and Board members.

g. There is an increasing demand on our IT services and an opportunity to broaden our handyperson service.

h. Our apprenticeship programme is working very well and our first graduate apprentice started with us in August 2025.

i. New people coming into the organisation can bring a fresh approach to how we work and provide some revitalisation;

j. Our pay & benefits need to remain competitive.

k. Compliance work on our properties has increased in volume and scope.

l. Transport links between the islands are still causing problems; and

m. We need to look at all our posts to see how they can be changed to be able to offer different working patterns for staff particularly as their lives change e.g. new parents, caring responsibilities and retirement.

n. Retirements present opportunities to reshape jobs ready for the future

6. We will address the issues above as part of the organisational review which is currently underway and through our Action Plan at Appendix 1.

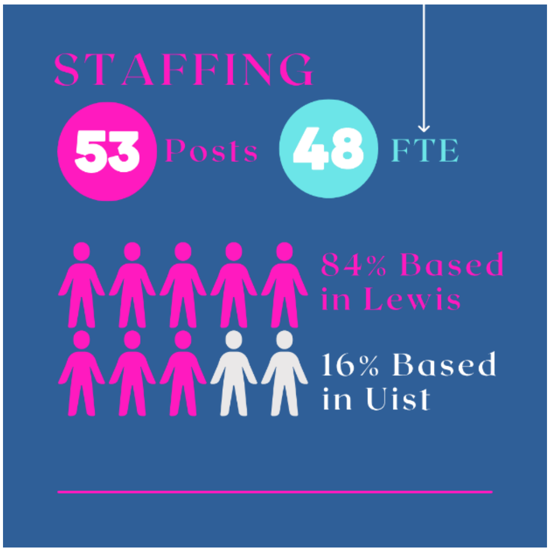
Purpose

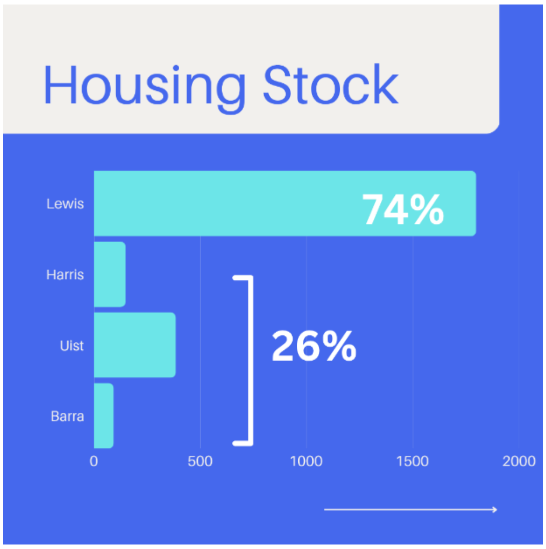
1 Business plans are essential, but without a dedicated workforce, executing them becomes challenging. Therefore, having a Workforce Plan that aligns with our business strategy is crucial. This plan is not only for succession in case of retirement, but also for filling in gaps due to various reasons like long-term illness, parental leave, maternity leave, or secondments. It aims to prevent staff from being overburdened during absences while also ensuring the achievement of our Strategic Goals.

Baseline

2 We have a total of 55 posts on our establishment, 2 are Modern Apprentices and 2 are Graduate Trainees (1 currently vacant) leaving 51 active posts and one inactive post.

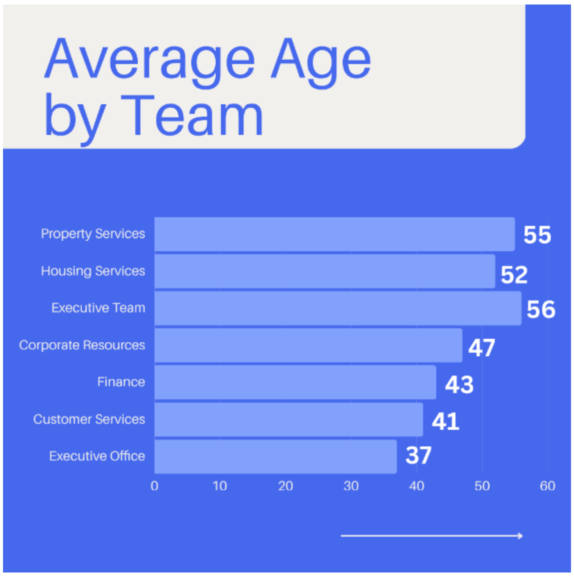
3 We manage a total of 2,431 houses from two offices, one based in Stornoway the other in Balivanich. The majority of the corporate support staff are based in Stornoway.

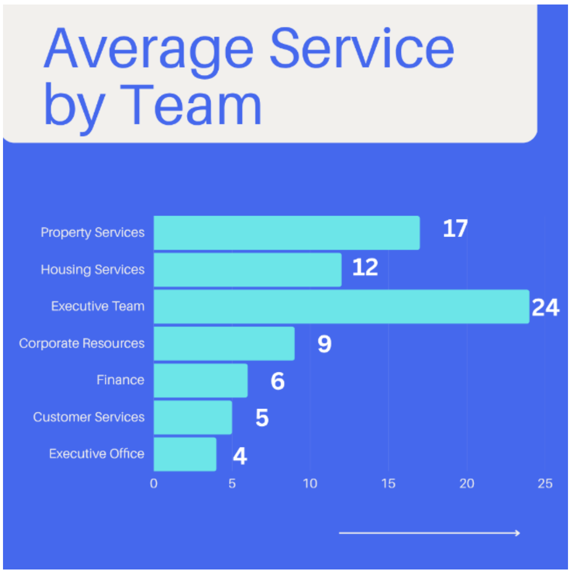




Age Profile

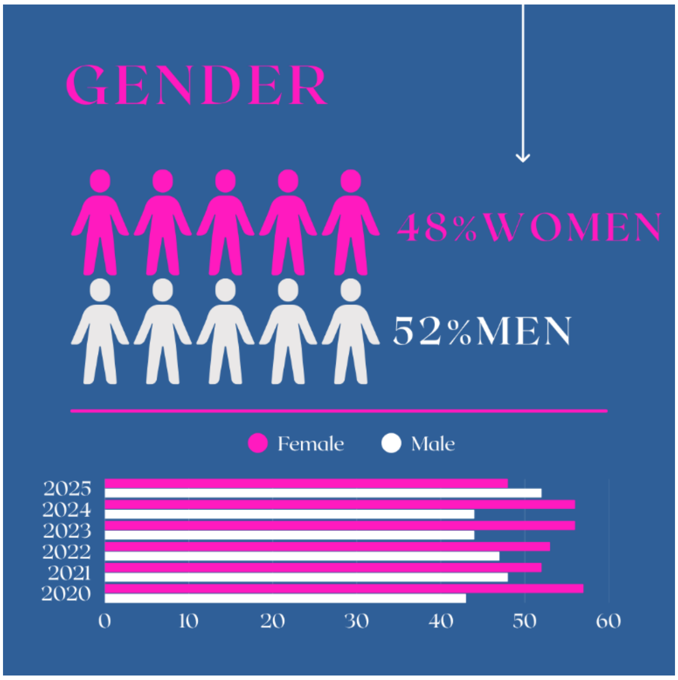
4 The average age of the team is 48.1 years and the average length of service is 11.0 years.





Gender Split

5 The gender split has moved this year with more men and less women 48% women and 52% men.



Staff Turnover

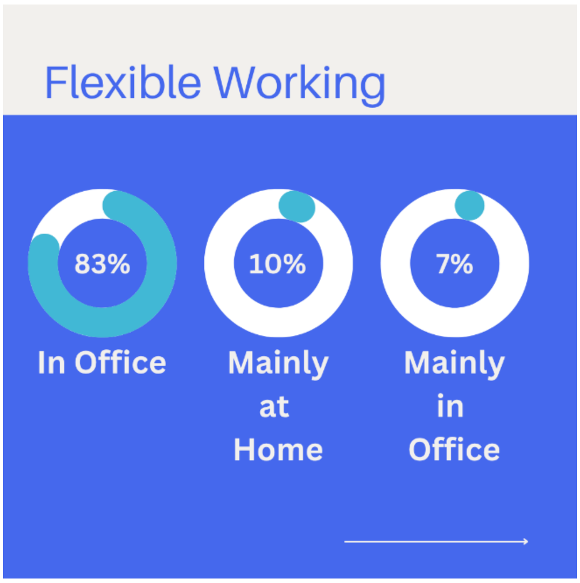
6 Our turnover increased this year from 7.5% to 9.4%, the UK Average is 35%.

7 We offer Flexible Working with 10% of staff mainly working from home.

8 Our lower turnover rate could be indicative of a few things:

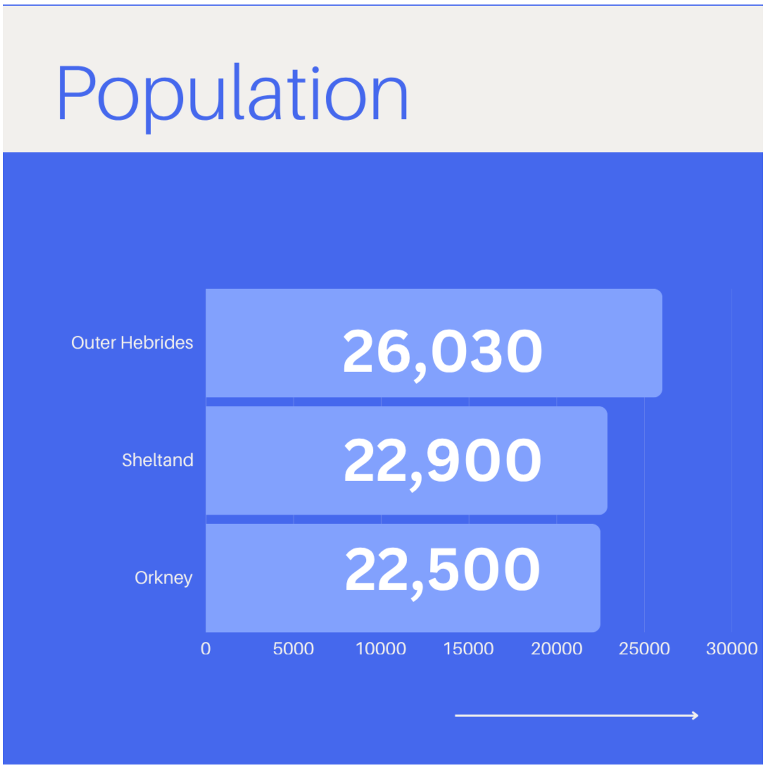
a. We are a good employer and people want to stay with us; and/or

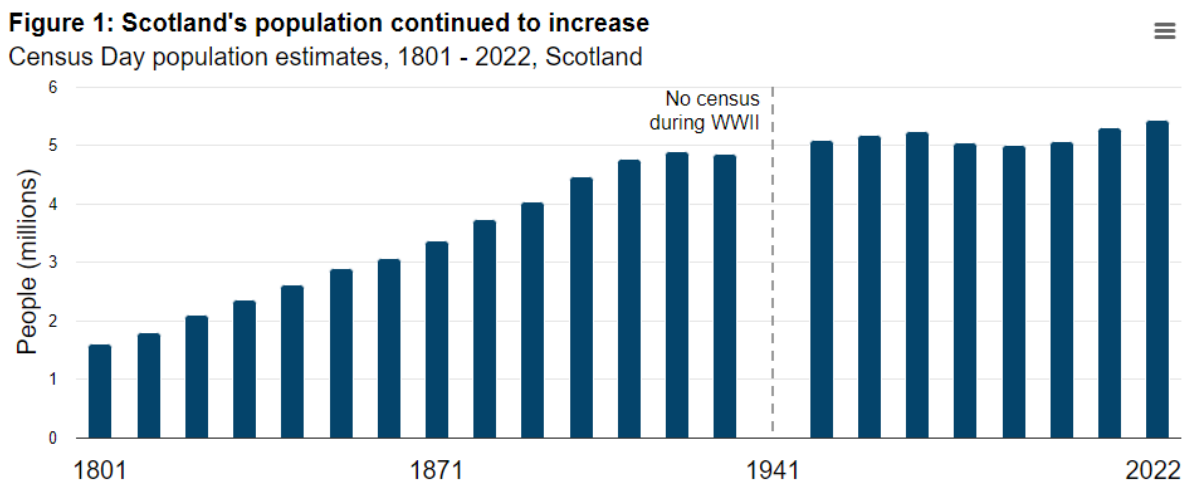
b. People are comfortable doing jobs they have done for years and don't want a change



Population

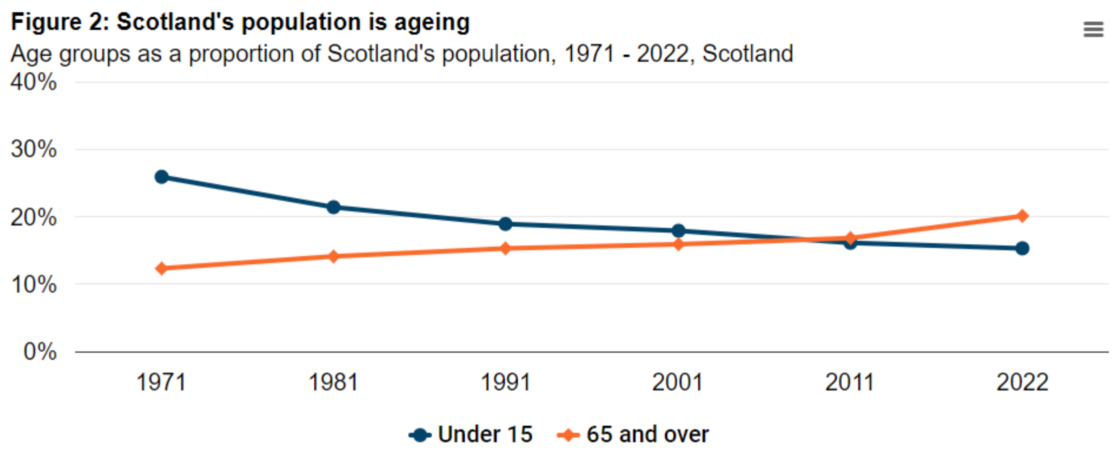
9 Since the 2011 Census, Scotland's population has grown, but the Outer Hebrides population has gone down. Out of the three island authorities, the Outer Hebrides has seen the largest % decline at 5.5%. Shetland was next at 1.2% but Orkney bucked the trend increasing its population by 3%.





10 The population in Scotland grew by less than other areas in the UK at 2.7% as opposed to 6.3% for England and Wales and 5.1% for Northern Ireland. Migration is what is keeping the population high as deaths outstripped births.

11 The extract below from the Census website confirms that Scotland is an aging population.



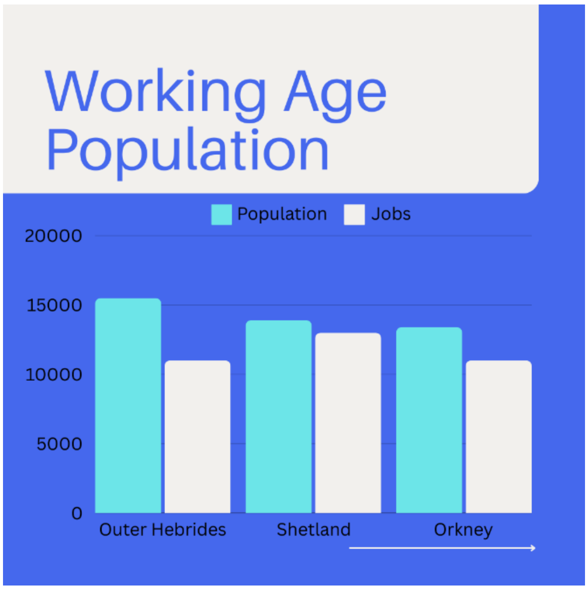
12 The reducing “under 15” population directly impacts the working population of the future.

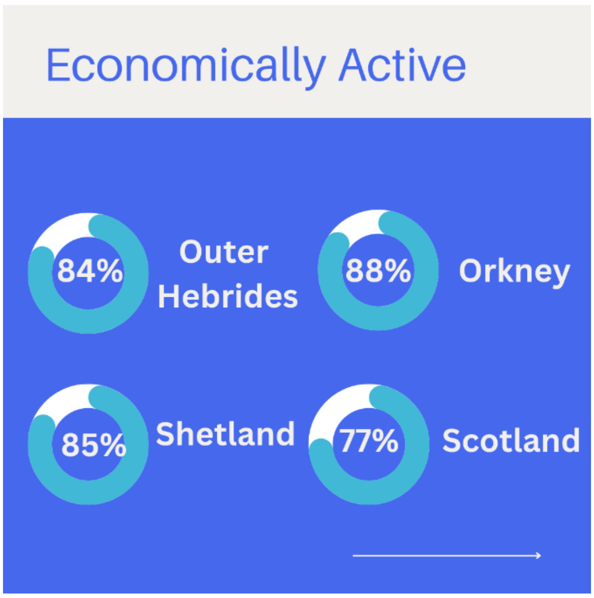
13 Either people will have to continue to work longer or we need to attract people from other countries to move to Scotland.

14 In the Outer Hebrides the situation is more acute and there are significant gaps in a number of key sectors in the islands. We are facing the same challenges as every other rural area in Scotland which means we are competing to attract people to come and work in our area. So what can we offer to encourage them to come West instead of North?

Working Age Population

15 The Working Age population in the Outer Hebrides is around 15,000 people. We have a lower weekly gross pay than Orkney or Shetland which might make it harder to attract people to come to the Outer Hebrides.





Future Needs

16 A stable workforce with low turnover may look like a good thing, but are we going to face a real crunch in the not-too-distant future when more staff with a strong knowledge base and experience reach retirement? Despite all the technological advancements, we have yet to find a way to extract detailed information shaped by experience and intuition from people's minds! (Although it could be argued that AI is about to change that considerably).

17 On the other hand, there is a risk that if older employees stay in the same job for too long, creativity may be stifled, and we lose the opportunity of bringing new employees with new skills on board.

18 Based on our current turnover rate, staffing structure and expected retirements we expect to fill 25 posts during the life of this plan, which is about 5 a year.

Retirements

19 If staff retire at state pension age, we will have 6 retirements over the next 5 years, one of which has taken place in July 2025. It is very likely that a number of staff will retire ahead of state pension age but that has not been confirmed.

20 It generally takes about 3 months to fill a vacant post and probably a further 3 months for the person to be fully up to speed with how we work and their new role. If we were filling post like for like we would expect to be able to fill the posts left vacant from retirement.

21 A couple of members of staff have expressed the wish to apply for phased retirement which generally involves going part time for two to three years before retiring completely. This will allow opportunities for acting up by other team members providing resilience.

22 As part of our Flexible working we have looked at all our posts to see how they can be adapted to enable Flexible working. We will also review how jobs are likely to change over time and this will be done as part of the organisational review due to be undertaken over the next 18 months.

Retirement Due by Team next 5 years

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Executive Office						1
Housing Services	1				1	
Property Services					1	1
Executive Team				1		

Changing Demands

23 Over the past 10 years we have seen a trend of increasing the workload of RSL's to deal with welfare concerns, compliance and governance matters. There has also been an increase in the resource required to deal with communications. Technology has helped with some of the additional burden but there are some aspects that cannot be dealt with by technology.

Welfare Cases

24 The increase in the number of welfare cases being managed by the Housing Services Team.

Compliance Work

25 There has been a significant increase in the amount of compliance work required in our properties e.g. fire suppression systems, EICR.

Data Analysis

26 The value of data integrity cannot be underestimated. When you have full confidence in your systems it should reduce the amount of time required to gather data for planning etc. It should free up storage space on our systems and thus reduce costs (eventually).

27 With the new housing system, it is vital that it is supported by data analysis with robust systems in place to ensure the data is sound.

Communications:PR

28 There has been a significant increase in the amount of time required to deal with Press and Media enquiries. This is an area where we need to enhance the skills we have and perhaps realigned available resources.

Estate Management

29 Handyperson Service -possible expansion and being able to offer the service to others via the subsidiary.

Senior Management

30 The organisation review will look at proposing options to provide staff with a career path to prepare them to be in the best position to apply for senior management roles.

Flexible Working

31 According to HR Review hybrid or flexible work models have had the lowest overall turnover rates since 2019 with fully remote roles predicted to have the highest retention rate in 2023 with 39.3%

32 Our Retirement Policy makes provision for staff to apply for Flexible retirement so we will need to look at all posts to see how we can enable that for as many jobs as possible. There will be some jobs where it is not feasible, but these should be few in number.

Technology

33 The advancements in technology are providing opportunities to reduce the number of resources dedicated to administrative tasks and allow staff to be redeployed in other areas where demand is increasing. It might also provide more opportunities for flexible working as mentioned above.

34 The freeing up of resources due to new systems do not extend to the staff who provide support for all our IT systems. An exercise is required to analyse the level of resources required internally and

externally to provide robust IT support including ensuring that expertise is shared by staff and not held by one or two people.

35 AI is changing the way we work and it is important to embrace it, with all the necessary safeguards so we can be as agile and skilled as possible enabling us to deliver consistently excellent services.

Debt Management

36 Debt has been increasing over the past three years at a higher rate than in the past, particularly in Former Tenant arrears and Rechargeable Repairs. An analysis of the process and resource we deploy to collect debt will be undertaken to ensure it is being targeted at the right time and in the most effective way. We also need to consider whether employing our own lawyer could bring benefits.

Increasing expectations

37 As service standards rise so do the expectations of customers. People expect more for the same price. As a starting point we will identify how expectations have changed over the last three years and the implications on our resources. An assessment will be made whether we need to incorporate a "buffer" in our resources going forward or whether it can be accommodated through the benefits from new technologies.

Supply-what's the market like

38 At the end of July there were 33 (2024:41) vacancies being advertised on HiJobs with the majority of these in the Health sector and Local Government.

39 We recently carried out a benchmarking exercise which confirmed that the rates we are paying for the type of jobs we have is right for the current market. We will carry out another benchmarking exercise in 2026.

40 Based on our current turnover rate, staffing structure and expected retirements, we expect to fill 25 posts during the life of this plan.

41 We are exploring options for our Subsidiary Dachaigh Property Solutions which could involve employing additional staff.

Gap Analysis

42 To attract the best candidates for any post we are committed to benchmarking our salaries to ensure they remain competitive, building and developing a good wholesome culture so people are happy in their work and providing training opportunities for our current staff so they can gain news skills.

Pay

43 Our Gross Weekly Pay is £755 based on an average salary of £39,285. We offer a very good overall package including 18% Pension contribution, the package will be kept under review to ensure we are attracting great candidates.

44 We are a Living Wage and Living Pension employer and committed to Fair Work First principles which should make us an attractive employer. We are also signed up to the Army Covenant (Bronze level) which could make us more attractive to veterans.

Promotion Prospects

45 There can be too big of a gap between some posts and it is proposed that as part of the organisational review we look at providing more opportunities throughout the structure for advancement-the downside of this will be more tiers rather than a flatter structure, but it is hard to see how there is any other option, so we will start work on the organisational review early in the new year.

Job Design

46 When posts become vacant there will be a more robust process for managers to go through before the post is released to ensure we don’t miss opportunities for a job redesign.

47 We are assessing the benefits of AI and how it might free up time for staff.

48 Areas to look at Data Analysis, Compliance (Properties), Communications, Welfare, Estate Management support for new IT systems.

49 We can’t increase the cost of the service unless there is a very clear reason to do so with a demonstrable benefit to the tenant. Tenants will need to be asked for their views around any changes to service delivery.

Culture & Wellbeing

50 We spend a minimum of 30% of waking time at our work and this should be as positive an experience as possible by ensuring we have a good vibrant culture where people trust each other and support each other when things are tough.

51 We are building on the culture work done in 2024 and will present a Wellbeing Strategy to the Board in November 2025.

52 Our Gender Gap report for 31 March 2025 confirmed there are no equality issues with our pay structure.

Apprentices

53 Our apprenticeship scheme has proved beneficial, but the volume of applications has not been overwhelming. There is work to be done in developing the scheme and strengthening our relationship with the Apprenticeship Team at the Comhairle. Our first Graduate Apprentice started in August 2025.

Action Plan

54 The Action Plan is at Appendix 1. It will be monitored by Management Team quarterly with a six month report going to the Personnel Working Group and an annual update to the Board.