



For discussion

**Title: Cairngorms National Park Authority equal pay audit
2025/26**

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the Park Authority's 2025/26 gender pay gap, using data as at 31 March 2025. The gender pay gap across the organisation as a whole is identified, as well as across directorates, grades and contract type (full time and part time). The paper also explores recruitment data and identifies possible reasons for the pay gap.

Recommendations

The Resources Committee is asked to:

- a) Committee are asked to note the gender pay gap.

Executive summary

1. Across the organisation as a whole, there are 81 female staff and 46 male staff – so female staff make up 64% of the workforce. The overall average male hourly salary is £26.65, and the overall average female salary is £22.73 (the average hourly salary across the organisation is £24.15). This makes the 2026 mean gender pay gap 14.72%. This figure is marginally higher than the Park Authority's 2025 Gender Pay Gap of 13.67%, the 2024 Gender pay Gap of 13.14%, and 2023 Gender Pay Gap of 9.55%, as well as the 2022 figure of 12.49%, but represents an improvement on the figures in 2021 of 17.44%, 2020 of 17.92%, 2019 of 19.25%, 2018 of 20.20%, 2017 of 21.47%, and 2015 of 23.64%. This figure includes the CEO's pay. If we remove the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) hourly pay, the mean gender pay gap is 12.01% (in comparison to 11.55% in 2025)
2. If we use the median methodology to calculate the Gender Pay Gap, the figure is 9.92%, which is higher than the 2024 median of 9.05%.



3. According to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) report published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in October 2025, the national mean Gender Pay Gap has reduced to **12.8%** in April 2025, from 13.1% in April 2024 with male employees earning more than female workers. So, the Park Authority's mean pay gap is slightly higher than the national mean. The national median pay gap is 6.9%, and the Park Authority's median pay gap of 9.92% is therefore above the national median as well.
4. As a small organisation with just 127 staff, gender pay gap results can be significantly impacted by only small changes in staffing, as is illustrated in the detail of the paper below.

Background

5. An equal pay audit is designed to scrutinise all aspects of pay including profiles of the different grades and directorates across the organisation, as well as recruitment and promotion in order to highlight any areas where direct or indirect discrimination may be impacting on pay equality. The Park Authority is committed to conducting an equal pay audit as part of its approach to equalities, and we assess pay for gender equality on an ongoing basis.
6. The Park Authority has a robust and objective job evaluation system which is designed to eliminate all elements of potential discrimination in the grading of different jobs, but it is important that our processes are scrutinised to ensure that inequalities are not allowed to develop inadvertently. There may be socio-demographic reasons behind differences in pay or variations in numbers of male or female staff at different grades within the organisation which acts to skew some results, but it is not sufficient to assume that this is the case. Hence, we undertake a detailed review to seek to understand our equal pay position as fully as possible.
7. The gender pay gap is the difference between women's and men's average earnings. It is a complex issue and there is no definitive way in which to report a single figure which fully captures those complexities. There are typically two different methods to calculate the pay gap:
 - a) The median average gender pay gap is calculated by finding the midpoint in all employees' hourly pay and discarding the lowest and highest rates of pay



– such that half of the employees' earning will be above and the other half below the mid-point. The median is therefore not skewed by very low hourly pay of very high hourly pay. However, as typically men account for the majority of those with very high rates of pay and women account for the majority of those with very low rates of pay, the median can obscure some gendered differences.

- b) The mean average gender pay gap is calculated by adding all employees' rates of pay together and dividing by the total number of employees. It therefore includes the lowest and highest hourly rates of pay. International measure use the mean when calculating the pay gap which enables comparisons to be made with other countries. Guidance suggests that preference should be given to the mean, as it gives a deeper understanding of any pay gaps. This paper is based on the mean for the calculations across grade and directorate, but we have also provided the median figure for the overall pay gap.

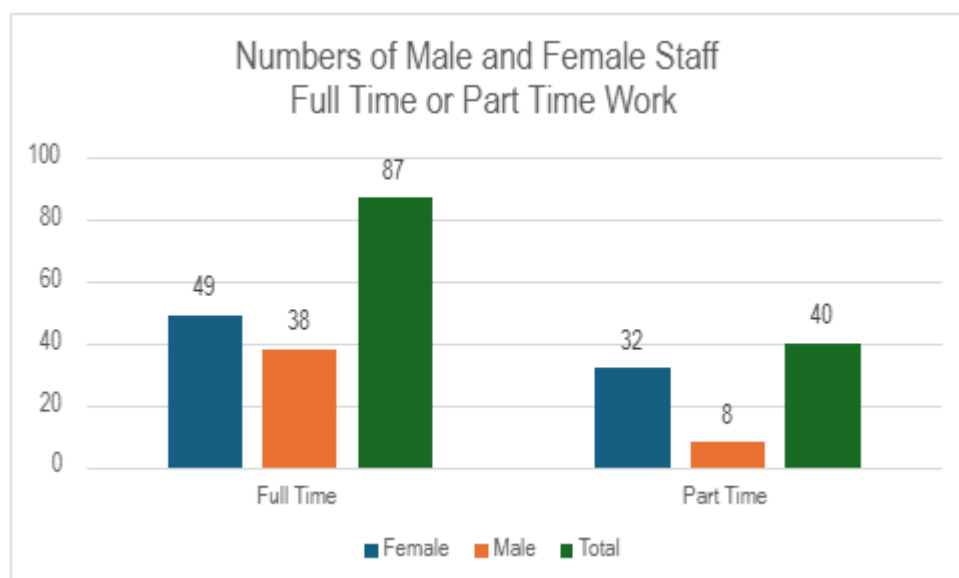
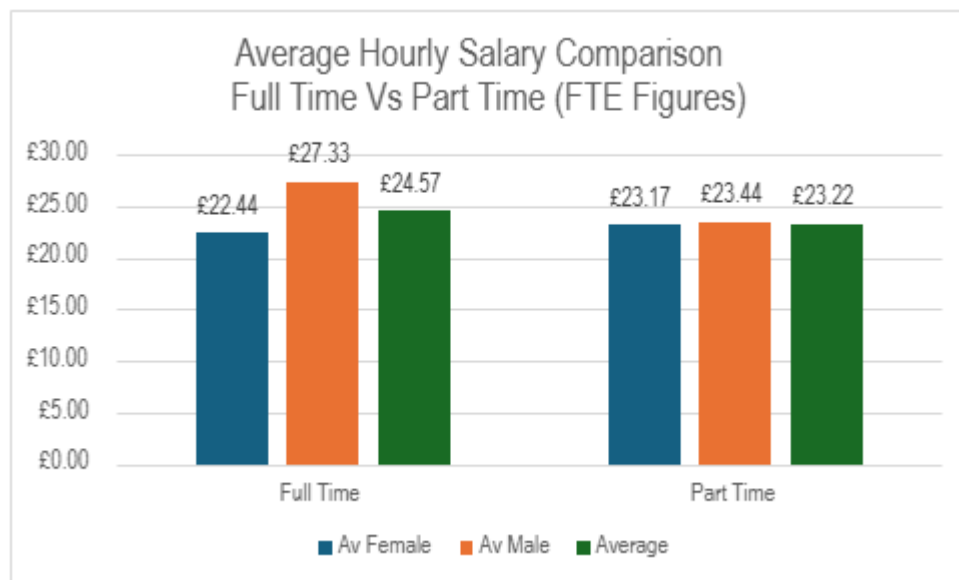
8. Where there is a "minus" preceding the pay gap percentage figure, this indicates a negative pay gap and that female staff in these positions earn more than their male counterparts.
9. Pay data of all staff in post on 31 March 2026 informed the gender pay gap calculation.

Gender pay gap results for full-time and part-time staff

10. Of our total 87 staff who work full time, there are more women (49) than men (38). The full-time pay gap across the entire organisation (comparing women's full-time average hourly pay with men's full-time average hourly pay) is 17.88%. This is an increase on last year's figure, which was 15.58%. Of the 49 full-time female staff, 45% are in the lower graded / paid bands (A – C); 29% are in band D; and 26% are in the higher graded / paid bands (E - G). Of the 38 full-time male staff, 24% are in the lower paid bands (A – C); 34% are in band D; and 42% are in the higher bands. So, the majority of full-time male staff are at the higher paid bands, where the majority of full-time female staff are in the lower paid bands.
11. 40 staff work part-time. 32 of the organisations' part-time staff are female, and eight are male. The average part-time female salary hourly rate is £23.17, which is



only slightly lower than the average male part-time salary of £23.44, making the gender pay gap for part-time staff 1.18%, which is slightly higher than last year's figure which was 0.25% but an improvement on the 2024 figure of 4.52%. Of the lower graded posts bands A – C, there is one part-time male member of staff, but 11 part-time female staff; at the middle band D range, there are 15 part-time female staff, and six male; and at the higher salary bands E - F, six are female and one is male. There continues to be more female part-time staff spread over the salary bands.





Results by Grade

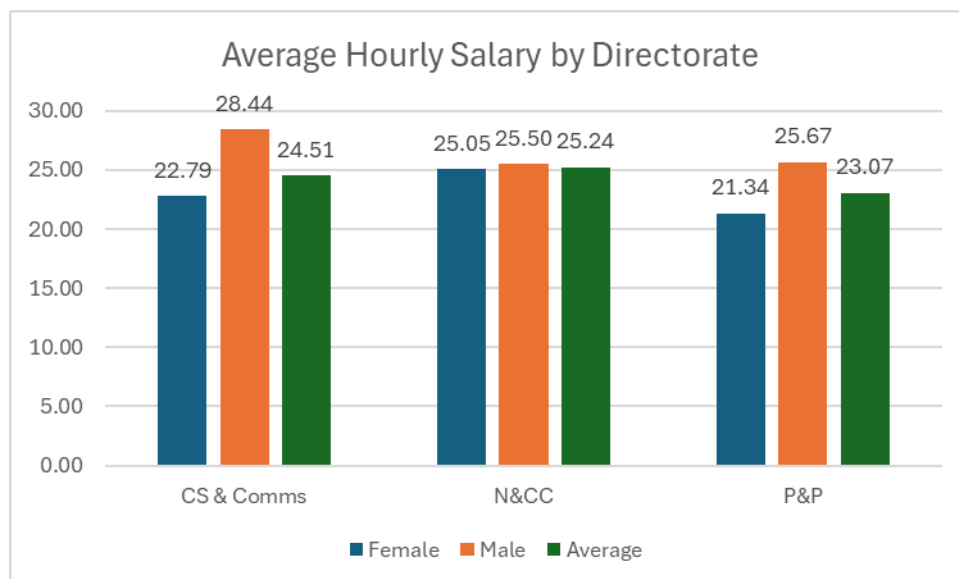
12. The Equal Pay Audit found that there were variances in salary average between male and female across the grades, with the female average higher than or equal to the male in some grades (bands B1, C, D); and lower than the male average in other grades (bands C1, E, F). There are no males in the lower salary bands A and B and no females at the highest paid band G, so there is no pay gap reported at these bands.
13. Of the 43 staff in the lower graded bands A to C, 33 (77% of lower paid staff) are female. There are no males in salary bands A and B. There is a 0% pay gap at Band B1, -2.98% at band C and 0.87% at band C1.
14. Band D is the largest band, with 48 staff, comprising 29 female staff and 19 male staff. This is a Policy Officer level of grade / pay. The gender pay gap for this grade is -2.51%. This negative pay gap indicates that there are more female staff at the higher end of the pay scale in band D than male staff.
15. Band E has 24 staff, 16 female and eight male staff (in comparison to 14 female and 11 male staff in 2024). This is a manager level of post, and it has been encouraging to note that we recruited two more women in this grade than last year. However, the consequence of this success is that we have more female staff toward the lower end of their pay bands (new recruits are placed at or near the band minimum) which explains why there is still a pay gap of 4.99%.
16. Band F has eight staff of which three are female. The gender pay gap is low in this band, just 0.40%
17. It should be noted that of the 36 management posts (bands E to G and CEO), 19 (53%) are female (this is an improvement on the 46% from last year and 40% from 2024) and represents an increase of female staff in management posts. The majority (75%) of senior management roles (F, G and CEO) are held by male staff, and this figure also remains the same as in the previous three years (2025, 2024 and 2023).

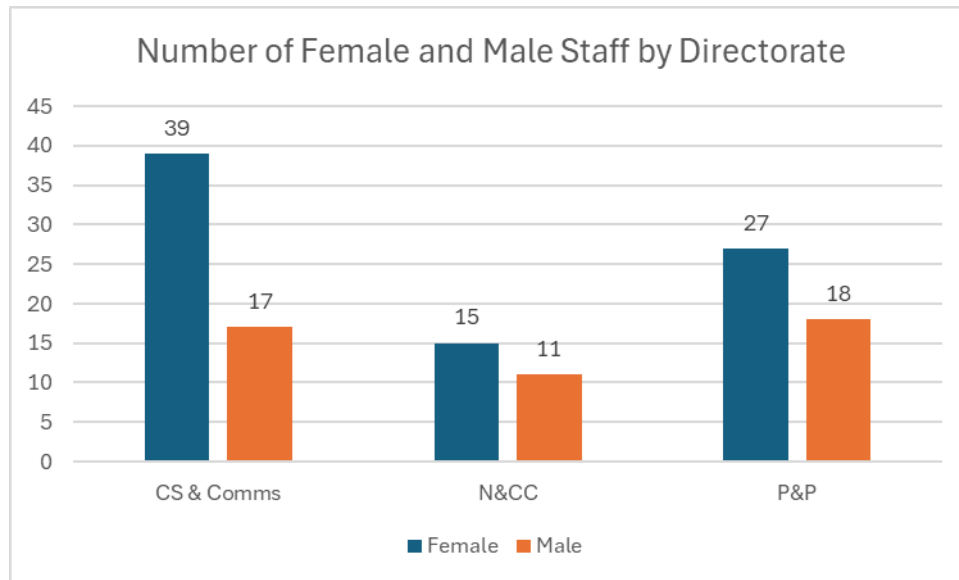


Results by Directorate

18. An analysis of the salary levels by Directorate across the organisation showed that the average female salary was lower than the average male salary in the Communications, Corporate Services, and Planning and Place Directorates. Much of this difference appears to be due to the higher levels of female staff at admin or support officer levels within these Directorates, combined with significantly more males than females at the higher paid bands F and G across the organisation. The female salary is also lower than the male in the Nature and Climate Change Directorate. This is a change on last year, where the female figure was slightly higher. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that there have been recent female appointments to the lower salary bands in this directorate.

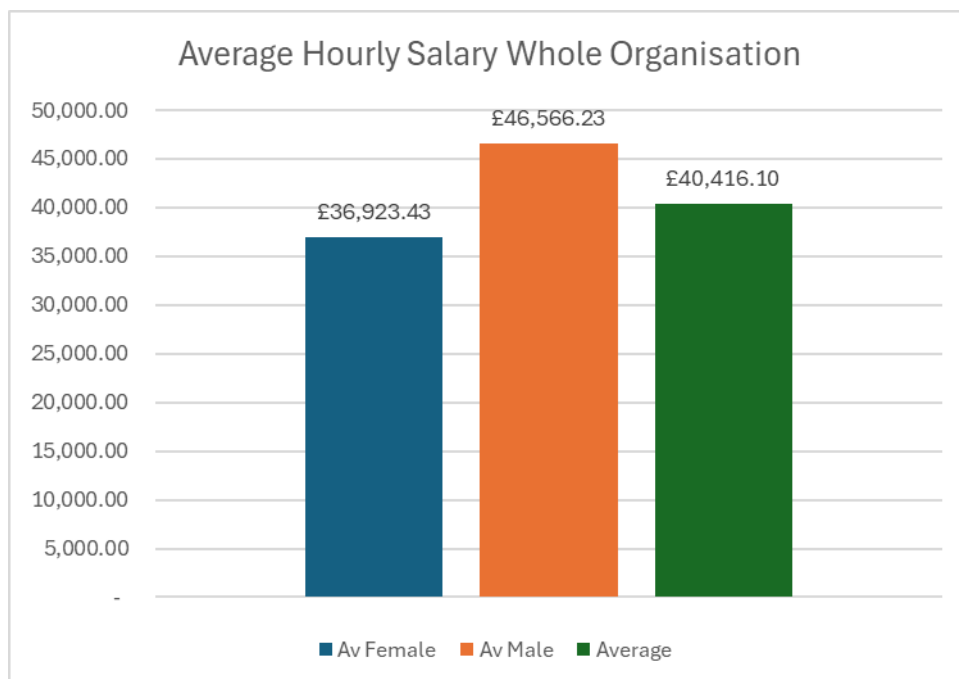
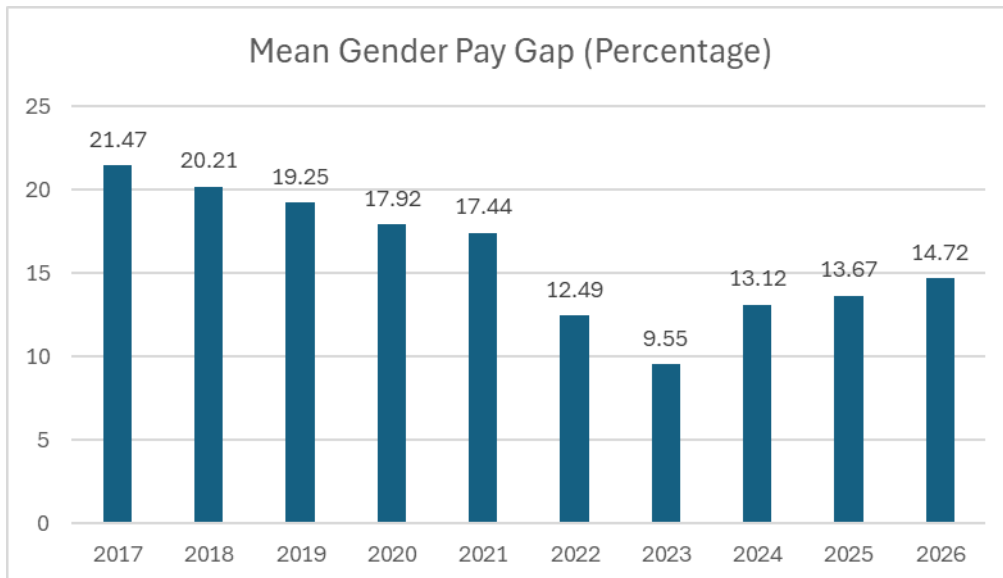
Directorate	Gender pay gap
Corporate Services and Communications	19.85% (13.14% excl CEO)
Nature and Climate Change	1.75%
Planning and Place	16.85%





Overall Organisational Results

19. Across the organisation as a whole, there are 81 female staff and 46 male staff, so female staff make up 64% of the workforce. The overall average male hourly salary is £26.65, and the overall average female salary is £22.73 (the average hourly salary across the organisation is £24.15). This makes the mean gender pay gap 14.72% (and lower at 12.01% if you removed the CEO from the calculations). This figure is marginally higher than the 2025 figure of 13.67%, the 2024 figure of 13.12% and the 2023 figure of 9.55%, and 2022 of 12.49%, but lower than the preceding five years (2021 of 17.44%, 2020 of 17.92%, 2019 of 19.25%, 2018 of 20.20%, 2017 of 21.47%, and 2015 of 23.64%). The gender pay gap has gone up in the previous two years but does show an ongoing overall downward trend when compared with 2015, with a 10% reduction in gender pay gap since 2015.
20. If we use the median methodology to calculate the Gender Pay Gap, the figure is 9.92%. This is an increase on the figures from 2024 of 9.05%



21. The statistics show an increase in the mean pay gap generally. But the analysis of the data presented in the table below actually highlights that the gender pay gap is negative or at 0% across three grades – ie female hourly rate is higher or equal to the male hourly rate. There is a marginal pay gap at band F, where the male hourly rate is slightly higher than the female rate. The pay gap has reduced at band C1 and there is an increasing pay gap at band E. However, at band G pay, representing the highest paid staff there are no female staff at this grade. By comparison, there are no male staff in grades A or B, representing the lowest paid



staff. As such, while there is no statistical pay gap at these grades, when these grade are included in the total organisational pay gap, they has the effect of distorting the overall gender pay gap, and actually masks the fact that across all other pay bands, the organisation is doing pretty well, and when compared to the figures for 2024/25, there is an improving pay gap in 2 grades (highlighted green).

	Pay Gap		
Grade	2025/26	2024/25	2023/24
A	Nul	Nul	15.99%
B	Nul	Nul	0%
B1	0.00%	-0.52%	-0.30%
C	-2.98%	-4.32%	-4.05%
C1	0.87%	5.43%	2.55%
D	-2.51%	-4.43%	-2.55%
E	4.99%	3.19%	1.29%
F	0.40%	0.56%	3.48%
G	Nul	Nul	Nul

Recruitment Statistics (January to December 2025)

22. In 2025, a total of 21 roles (37 posts) were advertised, with 35 posts recruited. The majority of posts were advertised internally in the first instance. Of the two posts that were not recruited, these were advertised late in 2025 and appointed to in early 2026.
23. There were 24 internal applicants with five internal appointments. Of the 24 applicants, 12 were female and 12 were male. For the internal appointments three were female and two were male.
24. In 2025, of a total of 856 external applicants there were 421 (49%) female, 412 (48%) male applicants and 23 not disclosing. Of the 30 appointments through the external round, 21 were (70%) female and 9 (30%) were male.
25. So, looking at overall totals, there was a slightly higher number of female applicants (421) to male (412). There were also a significantly higher number of female to male appointments, female 24 (69%), male 11 (31%). This help to explain why the organisational pay gap has gone up marginally, as when someone is newly appointed to a role, they are typically appointed on or near the band



minimum. This proportion will drive a temporary increase in the gender pay gap calculations.

26. An analysis of the recruitment data highlights the following:
- a) There were slightly more female appointments to the lower graded band A / A1 posts than before with four females to three males being appointed.
 - b) There were no appointments at band B.
 - c) In the last year, there have been a higher number of female (eight) / male (four) appointments at band B1 (seasonal ranger level).
 - d) Bands C / C1 included three male appointments and four female appointments.
 - e) There were six female appointments at band D and one male.
 - f) There were two female appointments at band E.
 - g) There were no appointments at bands F and G.
27. As part of our commitment to our Equality Outcomes regarding improving the diversity of our staff makeup and increasing the number of women at senior positions, we have continued to take the following actions:
- a) At recruitment we have reduced the number of essential criteria to ensure those that remain are indeed essential (research has indicated that women are less likely to apply for positions if they do not meet all the essential criteria). All job descriptions have to be approved by the HR team, who will robustly challenge the perception of the necessity for each essential criterion.
 - b) Most posts are now advertised with the potential of being part time or job share.
 - c) The recruitment page of the website provides links to all our equality policies, like the menopause policy, support for pregnancy loss policy etc.
 - d) All recruitment panels contain male and female members.
 - e) Recruitment advertising has been revamped to highlight the benefits of flexible working.
 - f) Recruitment advertising includes narrative to encourage applicant diversity.
 - g) We are supportive, when possible, of secondment opportunities.
 - h) We removed core hours, adopted a hybrid working policy and have significantly improved remote accessibility to IT facilities.



- i) Ongoing review of organisational structure with more policy positions being developed at lower grades, which were traditionally where only “admin” roles, more heavily slanted towards women were graded.
- j) We have developed a Women Advancing to Leadership network. This network includes female staff in bands E and F who meet quarterly to network and share experiences. They also did a Women Advancing to Leadership training course which provided excellent and useful tools for management and progression.

Conclusions from the Audit

- 28. It is worth noting that as an organisation of 127 staff, the median and mean calculations can be impacted by just small changes in staff positions.
- 29. The recruitment of more women than men, and the resulting placement of more women on or near the lower pay band will also create a pay gap. But this should be temporary at a moment in time and should even out over the coming years as the staff will progress by annual progression awards to the top of the scale.
- 30. Park Authority jobs are evaluated to determine which band they should be placed in. The potential for all forms of inequality is thus reduced by the fact that jobs are objectively evaluated, and salaries allocated according to the job content rather than the person. There is still potential for inequality within evaluation systems, such as the weighting given to particular types of work, for example caring tasks have often attracted a lower weighting than manual labour in the past, which indirectly favours more men than women. The Park Authority evaluation system has been designed and equality impact assessed to ensure this type of discrimination does not happen within the Park Authority. There have been no instances of internal complaints nor allegations of any inequalities arising from our evaluation system in the last 10 years.
- 31. The Park Authority has a number of policies designed to ensure that male and female members of staff have equal access to career progression. Male and female staff are given support in managing childcare commitments and in dealing with other work life balance issues, to enable them to work effectively at any level of the organisation. We have a range of part time, job-share, annualised hours and



hybrid working arrangements which have been accessed equally by men and women across the organisation.

32. As a public sector organisation committed to no compulsory redundancies and staff retention measures, there is little scope for the Park Authority to proactively address the gender pay gap position other than through wider work being done on broadening applications from wider ranges of people as and when turnover arises. Our current turnover levels are historically low, which exacerbates this issue.
33. Whilst the gender pay gap has marginally increased in 2026 it is still broadly improving in the time since we started reporting on this data and we are starting to see the impact of the interventions implemented to support the Equality Outcomes of ensuring there is a gender balance in the senior positions. However, we cannot become complacent and recognise that continued work and monitoring must be an organisational priority going forward. The external Equality Advisory Panel and the Internal Equality Advocacy Group will play a key role in scrutinising, challenging and supporting this action.

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