

# **Workforce Innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges**

Best Value thematic work in West Dunbartonshire Council  
2023-24

July 2024

**forv/s  
mazars**

# Contents

- 1) Key messages
  - 2) Scope of the audit
  - 3) Workforce strategy and priorities
  - 4) Digital technology and the workforce
  - 5) Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment
  - 6) Developing future skills and capacity
  - 7) Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners
  - 8) Measuring the impact of workforce planning
- Appendix 1 – Improvement Action plan

Our reports are prepared in accordance with Terms of Appointment Letter from Audit Scotland dated 18 May 2022 through which the Accounts Commission has appointed us as external auditor of West Dunbartonshire Council (the Council) for financial years 2022/23 to 2026/27. We undertake our audit in accordance with Part VII of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended; and our responsibilities as set out within Audit Scotland's Code of Audit Practice 2021.

Reports and letters prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to the Council are prepared for the sole use of the Council and made available to Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission, the Controller of Audit. We take no responsibility to any member or officer in their individual capacity or to any other third party.

Forvis Mazars LLP is the UK firm of Forvis Mazars, an international advisory and accountancy group. Forvis Mazars LLP is registered by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

# 1) Key messages

## Overview of engagement

A summary of the judgements we have made for each section is detailed below:

### **How effectively are the council's workforce plans integrated with its strategic plans and priorities?**

The council's workforce planning strategy is aligned with its strategic plan and supports the "our council is inclusive and adaptable" strategic priority. The council could make better use of data available at organisation and service level, and through the workforce planning console, to identify future resource needs and improve succession planning.

### **How effectively has digital technology been used to support workforce productivity and improve service quality and outcomes?**

The council recognises that digital transformation can help it deliver services more effectively and improve productivity. It has made some savings and efficiencies from improvements in how it uses technology. The council is working to improve the digital experience and accessibility for employees and promote a culture of digital awareness.

### **How effectively is the council using hybrid and remote working and other innovative working practice such as a four-day week to achieve service and staff benefits?**

The council has a well-established approach to hybrid and flexible working. It has made savings through its use of voluntary severance and early retirement schemes. The council has used its redeployment register to find suitable roles for staff displaced by service restructures.

### **What innovative practice is the council using to develop its future workforce capacity and skills needs, and manage staff reductions in line with its priorities?**

The council faces recruitment challenges and is exploring different approaches. This includes using its graduate programme to resolve difficulties hiring specialist staff. The council can demonstrate savings and benefits from its measures to develop skills and capacity.

### **What progress has the council made with sharing roles or functions across its services and/or with other councils and partners?**

The council shares services with other councils in three main areas, with benefits including improved resilience. It is looking to expand existing arrangements and has identified potential for further ICT collaboration.

### **How effectively is the council measuring the impact of its workforce planning approach?**

The council actively monitors the progress of its workforce planning strategic actions and reports progress annually.

### **Other reporting**

Where relevant to this thematic work, we have followed up Best Value Assurance Report and previous Annual Audit Report findings in the following pages. We have reported in Appendix 1 the council's improvement actions and its response to recommendations we have made in this review.

## 2) Scope of the audit

The [2023 Local Government Overview \(LGO\)](#) notes that councils have never faced such a challenging situation. Service demands have increased after the Covid-19 pandemic and funding is forecast to reduce in real terms. Workforce pressures including recruitment in a competitive labour market, employee retention and high sickness absence levels are putting councils under continued pressure. This report sets out how the council is responding to current workforce challenges through building capacity, increasing productivity and innovation.

The [Accounts Commission's Strategy \(2021-26\)](#) sets out its priorities to focus on inequalities, funding, communities and recovery. The Code of Audit practice sets out the Best Value work required to report on these priorities.

### Code of Audit Practice 2020 Best Value reporting requirements

#### **Best Value reporting – extract from the Code**

The Accounts Commission's approach to Best Value involves reporting on individual local government bodies and thematically across the local government sector through performance reports:

- As part of their integrated wider-scope annual audit work appointed auditors use a risk-based approach to assess and report whether the audited body has made proper arrangements for securing Best Value and is complying with its community planning duties, including reporting progress against previous Best Value findings and recommendations.
- The Accounts Commission also requires the Controller of Audit to report to the Accounts Commission on each council at least once over the five-year audit appointment on the body's performance on its Best Value duty. This enables the Accounts Commission to make findings for improvement where appropriate.
- The Accounts Commission reports nationally on thematic aspects of local government bodies' approaches to, and performance in, meeting their Best Value and community planning duties. Local government appointed auditors report locally on any such Best Value thematic work prescribed by the Accounts Commission.

This report covers the thematic aspect of the Best Value audit requirements. The Commission has directed auditors to report on workforce innovation and how councils are responding to workforce challenges.

In carrying out the work, auditors have considered the following questions:

- How effectively are the council's workforce plans integrated with its strategic plans and priorities?
- How effectively has digital technology been used to support workforce productivity and improve service quality and outcomes?
- How effectively is the council using hybrid and remote working and other innovative working practice such as a four-day week to achieve service and staff benefits?
- What innovative practice is the council using to develop its future workforce capacity and skills needs and manage staff reductions in line with its priorities?

- What progress has the council made with sharing roles or functions across its services and/or with other councils and partners?
- How effectively is the council measuring the impact of its workforce planning approach?

An improvement action plan is included at Appendix 1 of this report. This sets out audit recommendations in key areas, and the council's planned response including responsible officers and dates for implementation.

The coverage of the work is in line with the expectations for council's arrangements for the seven Best Value themes in the [Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Best Value Statutory Guidance 2020](#).

### 3) Workforce strategy and priorities

*This section of the report evaluates how effectively the council's workforce plan is integrated with its strategic plans and priorities*

**We concluded:** the council's workforce planning strategy is aligned with its strategic plan and supports the "our council is inclusive and adaptable" strategic priority. The council could make better use of data available at organisation and service level, and through the workforce planning console, to identify future resource needs and improve succession planning.

#### Background

Workforce planning involves identifying and addressing future capacity and skills gaps, at operational and leadership levels. It requires strategic thinking, comprehensive workforce data and ongoing consultation and engagement with staff and trades unions.

A council focused on achieving Best Value will have a workforce strategy that sets out expectations on how the local authority's staff will deliver its vision, priorities and values.

To be effective, workforce planning must be integrated across the organisation. Workforce strategies need to support the council in achieving its strategic priorities. They must support other key plans including financial, asset, digital and transformation planning. They need to be under-pinned with detailed workforce plans within services.

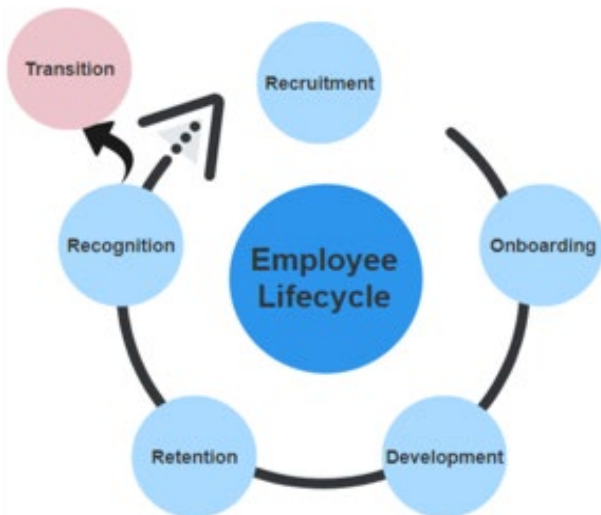
#### Detailed reporting on workforce strategy and priorities

**What workforce strategies and plans are in place, when were they last reviewed and when are they next due to be reviewed? What Committee do they go to?**

The council's People First Strategy 2022-2027 outlines how its people will support delivery of the strategic plan. It combines the council's strategies for:

- Wellbeing
- Workforce planning
- Employee engagement
- Learning and development
- Digital transformation.

The strategy is based on the employee life cycle, focusing on different stages each year. The first two years covered recruitment and on-boarding and methods to increase the diversity of the council's workforce.



*The employee life cycle*

Source: West Dunbartonshire Council Workforce Planning Strategy & Framework, February 2023

The council implemented an updated workforce planning strategy and framework in February 2023. This aims to ensure council services have:

- The right shape
- The right skill set
- The right number of employees
- People in the right location
- People at the right time and within budget.

The strategy includes a toolkit and training for managers to support effective workforce planning.

The council reviews the workforce planning strategy annually and reports progress to the Corporate Services Committee on:

- Progress against the council workforce plan
- The workforce profile and key changes
- Sickness absence data
- Progress with service workforce plans.

The most recent report was presented to the Corporate Service Committee in May 2024.

Service level workforce plans are included in service delivery plans. Officers submit these to service committees as part of the service delivery planning process.

**What progress has been made regarding year 1 findings on the alignment of workforce planning with priorities, and demonstrating the staff capacity and skills to deliver these priorities?**

We noted in our [Leadership of the development of new local strategic priorities report](#) (October 2023) that the council’s challenging financial position and ageing workforce have affected capacity. The council had also earmarked funds to support a programme of controlled early retirement and severance, which was further reducing staff numbers.

These challenges have persisted into 2023/24, with the council reporting a 4% decrease in headcount and working hours from the implementation of savings options and recruitment restrictions. The number of employees on the council's redeployment register, SWITCH, increased significantly in 2023/24. The register supports employees displaced from their post to return to a role at the equivalent pay grade.

The council carried out a recruitment and selection audit in 2022/23 to review how it could improve the recruitment process and attract diverse talent.

The council has taken a range of measures to improve staff capacity and skills including:

- Establishing a recruitment working group to implement the recommendations of the recruitment and selection audit
- Setting up workstreams to improve the recruitment process, covering process and policy review, talent management, job quality, equalities actions and engagement
- Developing and mapping career pathways to identify new talent pools and routes into council employment
- Holding information sessions for managers on the workforce planning strategy and toolkit.

### **Are the workforce strategy and supporting workforce plans based on robust workforce data? Do they feature scenario planning?**

The council has developed an approach to identifying skills and capacity gaps using an internally developed workforce planning console. The console provides managers with real time management information, including:

- workforce profile
- absence and attendance management
- training
- turnover
- financial data.

The council surveyed managers on the console and provision of real time employment data across the council. It is using the feedback to inform future developments of the console. For example, it is looking at how to include workforce projections and trends. Going forward, the console will incorporate data that will help officers to identify resource gaps and capture these in workforce plans.

The council's annual report against its workforce plan includes a workforce profile and monitoring report with data on:

- headcount
- employees on fixed term contracts
- grade profiles
- gender and age profiles
- length of service
- new starts and leavers
- voluntary early retirement, voluntary severance, and retirements
- SWITCH
- sickness absences and reasons.

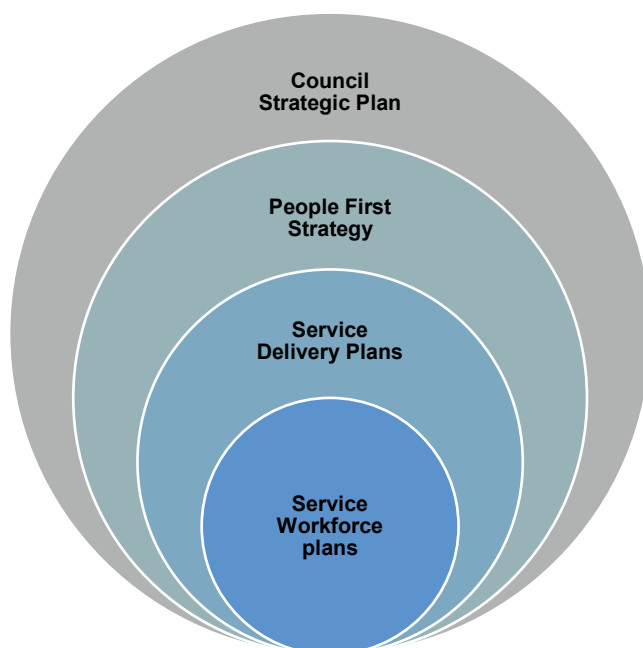


Service level workforce plans include data on employee numbers and absence but do not identify resource gaps or project future workforce requirements.

The council could make better use of the data available at organisation and service level, and through the workforce planning console, to identify future resource needs and improve succession planning (see Appendix 1, action 1).

### **Are workforce strategy and plans integrated with core strategic plans?**

In our Leadership of the development of new local strategic priorities report we reported that the council's delivery plans, and workforce and digital strategies are aligned with its strategic plan. The workforce planning process supports the council's inward facing strategic priority; "our council is inclusive and adaptable". This priority aims to ensure it is a transformational and modern council demonstrating Best Value.



Source: West Dunbartonshire Council Workforce Planning Strategy & Framework, February 2023

### **Has the council consulted with employees / trades unions over its workforce strategy?**

Employees were consulted through Trickle, the council's employee engagement platform. The council also uses employee groups such as champions and advocates to promote workforce initiatives.

Officers shared the workforce planning strategy and framework with trade union conveners. It was discussed at a conveners meeting, which includes trade union conveners and senior council officers.

### **Improvement recommendations**

Any improvement recommendations that have been identified as part of our work in this thematic review section have been reflected in the action plan at Appendix 1, action plan reference numbers have been included in the wording above.

## 4) Digital technology and the workforce

*This section of the report examines how effectively has digital technology been used by the council to support workforce productivity and improve service quality and outcomes*

**We concluded:** the council recognises that digital transformation can help it deliver services more effectively and improve productivity. It has made some savings and efficiencies from improvements in how it uses technology. The council is working to improve the digital experience and accessibility for employees and promote a culture of digital awareness.

### Background

The LGO notes that digital technology will make councils' future workforces look and work quite differently. In order to achieve the change required, councils need to make good use of digital technology and use the workforce in flexible ways.

Digital technology has a strong bearing on a council's workforce needs. It can be used to re-shape jobs to increase productivity and reduce back-office functions while improving service quality. Technology solutions include online services, customer relationship management systems, mobile digital devices and more recently, artificial intelligence (AI) applications.

Councils need to be innovative in their use of technology and build on new working practices that emerged during the pandemic. In doing so, they must also consider service quality and the needs of people experiencing digital exclusion.

### Detailed reporting on digital technology and the workforce

#### **What progress has the council made in using digital technology to improve workforce productivity, service delivery and outcomes?**

The council recognises that digital transformation can help it deliver services more effectively and improve productivity. It is considering how innovation and automation can improve service delivery, for example use of chat bots, electronic forms and automating some payroll processes.

The council is implementing 365 SharePoint to help support remote working and allow better data sharing.

Fit for Future is the council's approach to service innovation. It involves subject matter experts reviewing services, making recommendations, and identifying savings. Seven reviews have been completed across seven service areas, with findings shared using infographics and show and tell presentations.

The last Fit for Future review was completed in December 2022. Since then, there have been no requests for new reviews. Officers believe this is due to services being focused on budget savings and subsequent service reviews. The council's digital team has reviewed the Fit for Future approach in the interim. The digital team continues to support services with digital solutions, project support, training and development, and automation of processes and forms.

### **Has the council demonstrated workforce benefits and productivity gains through its use of digital technology?**

The Fit for Future reviews have identified potential total savings ranging from £0.47 million to £1.08 million. The council has also made some efficiencies from its use of automation and online forms.

### **Has the council engaged staff and service users over new ways of working, and considered service accessibility and digital exclusion?**

The council is working to improve the digital experience and accessibility for its employees. An example is the tech desk at the council's main offices where employees can get help and advice from the ICT team. It has resulted in a reduction in calls to the ICT service line. The council is planning to open pop up tech desks in other offices.

The council ran a second digital skills survey from October to November 2023 which focused on awareness, learning, barriers, opportunities to improve, and support. Due to a low response rate, the council is taking a more direct approach to promoting digital awareness.

The council is running a digital skills programme for 2024/25 with a different digital theme each quarter. The first three phases will cover:

- developing digital skills, through digital champions (Digi Champs), and emphasising the importance of digital skills to service users
- how the council can develop data into useful management information which supports decision making
- rolling out 365 SharePoint.

This work aims to promote a culture where digital awareness is everyone's responsibility. The Digi Champs will share learning and support the rollout of new technology. Each service will have a digital lead at senior management level.

### **Improvement recommendations**

We have not identified any risks or weaknesses as part of this thematic review section.

## 5) Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment

*This section of the report considers how effectively the council is using hybrid and remote working and other innovative working practice such as a four-day week to achieve service and staff benefits*

We concluded: the council has a well-established approach to hybrid and flexible working. It has made savings through its use of voluntary severance and early retirement schemes. The council has used its redeployment register to find suitable roles for staff displaced by service restructures.

### Background

During the pandemic councils needed to make the best use of their existing workforce while continuing to monitor employee wellbeing. Councils continue to look to new ways of working to improve job satisfaction and reduce sickness absence and staff turnover.

Home-working and hybrid working (a combination of office and home-based working) have now become commonplace. Some councils are also considering more radical working practice such as a standard four-day working week. However, whatever the working practice, employers need to ensure that service quality and productivity are maintained.

### Detailed reporting on flexible working and other innovative staff deployment

#### **Describe the council's policy and practice regarding home/remote working and any other flexible working arrangements?**

The council has adopted four work styles:

- Fixed – A single base/location (80 to 100% office based)
- Flexible – Home and other bases/locations (50 to 80% office based)
- Mobile – Home and travels to different locations (20 to 40% office based)
- Remote – Home and other bases/locations (20% office based).

Employees are required to complete a work assessment to help them, and their manager, identify which category best describes their role and whether the work style is appropriate.

The council's flexible working policy recognises that this may change as the needs of the business and service users change. The policy sets out several considerations managers and employees must make to ensure that agile working does not impact service delivery and people management responsibilities. Line managers are required to review agile working arrangements annually.

The council's flexible working policy has been in place for several years and was last fully updated in March 2020. Since then, the way people work has changed significantly with remote and hybrid working becoming common. The council is considering developing a new policy and/or further changes to the current offering (see Appendix 1, action 2).

The council offers flexible retirement to employees who are members of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). Teachers have access to phased retirement if they are members of the Scottish

Teachers' Pension Scheme (STPS). This allows people to work in a reduced capacity and access their pension. It also helps the council retain skills and experience for longer.

In 2021, the council was recognised by the charity Flexibility Works as one of the ten most flexible employers in Scotland.

**Has the council assessed the impact on i) service quality and outcomes and ii) workforce wellbeing, including consultation with staff and trades unions?**

The council monitors service delivery aims using its performance management system, Pentana. It measures outcomes using citizen surveys, the Citizens Panel (a group of residents who have volunteered to give their views on local issues and priorities) and social media.

The council uses Trickle, peer support forums, trade union meetings, data trends and employee feedback to monitor workforce wellbeing. Its wellbeing policy was codesigned with trade unions and employees. The council reports annually to the Joint Consultative Forum (council officers, elected members and trade union representatives) on employee wellbeing and attendance, with the latest report in June 2024.

The council surveyed staff based in its main office to understand their working patterns, their satisfaction with hybrid and flexible working arrangements, and how they could be better supported.

The council launched additional wellbeing support in 2023/24, including employee counselling, self-help resources, and financial and physical wellbeing support. Progress on its other wellbeing projects has been limited due to officer capacity.

**Has the council demonstrated budget savings, efficiencies and other benefits resulting from its deployment of staff?**

The council has made budget savings through its use of voluntary severance and voluntary early retirement schemes. It has also used SWITCH to manage the successful redeployment of staff following service restructures.

Services have been asked to review their workforce planning requirements and explore opportunities to deliver services differently and more effectively to support savings proposals for 2024/25.

**Improvement recommendations**

Any improvement recommendations that have been identified as part of our work in this thematic review section have been reflected in the action plan at Appendix 1, action plan reference numbers have been included in the wording above.

## 6) Developing future skills and capacity

*This section of the report assesses what innovative practice the council is using to develop its future workforce capacity and skills needs and manage staff reductions in line with its priorities*

**We concluded:** the council faces recruitment challenges and is exploring different approaches. This includes using its graduate programme to resolve difficulties hiring specialist staff. The council can demonstrate savings and benefits from its measures to develop skills and capacity.

### Background

Councils need to find innovative ways to ensure the workforce capacity and skills they need to deliver services in the future. Training and development opportunities can help to attract and retain employees and ensure skills are in place. Many councils work with their partners to offer apprenticeship schemes or vocational qualifications. Succession planning is also important to develop future leaders and ensure that essential skills are in place.

Jobs can be re-designed to optimise the workforce and improve services. For example generic roles across health and social care disciplines. Leaders need to engage with staff and trade unions over fundamental workforce reform. This is particularly challenging in an environment of potential job losses.

### Detailed reporting on developing future skills and capacity

**What is the council doing to develop the skills and capacity needed for a resilient future workforce? Does the council work with education providers to ensure that education and training aligns with future skills needs?**

The council has found recruitment into some roles challenging and is exploring different approaches. For example, through graduate, school leaver and modern apprenticeship programmes. It is also considering how to develop talent internally. The Health and Safety team is a good example of the council using its graduate programme to resolve difficulties recruiting specialist staff and assist succession planning (see case study 1).

The council works with West College Scotland to promote apprenticeships and other council job opportunities at work fairs.

### Case study 1: People & Technology – Health and Safety

It was recognised that the Health and Safety team had an average age demographic of 59 years with retirement of some employees being possible over the next 5-10 years. Previous recruitment exercises had also proven difficult with little response and suitable candidates with experience to fill the council's requirement for a Health and Safety Officer (Grade 8). The demand for such roles during and following the Covid 19 Pandemic has increased which is also thought to have added to recruitment difficulties. The team had previously delivered the service by having expertise in lead areas but due to reductions and recruitment difficulties within the team, the team were having to move to covering all aspects of health and safety with a more generic approach to ensure service delivery. In order to secure future requirements around recruitment and retention in the service it was necessary to consider the development of a talent pool and succession planning for progression within the team.

In order to ensure a future talent pool could be established a two year graduate training programme was created, initially recruiting two recent graduates at Grade 5. During the two year programme the graduates were exposed and trained in all aspects of health and safety including areas such as fire safety, noise and construction. The graduates were mentored by the experienced members of the team, by shadowing and being supported to undertake key aspects of role such as audits and accident investigation.

Following this two year graduate programme some members of the team decided to retire as predicted and due to the development of this programme and creation of this talent pool the graduates were equipped with the experience and knowledge for successful appointment to fill the Grade 8 roles. This has been so successful we have moved into a further graduate training programme and currently have a new graduate being developed. Our success factors are:

- Creation of future talent pool from which to recruit from;
- Development of opportunities for graduates;
- Succession planning of key skills and requirements;
- Positive impact on age demographic of the team mitigating the risk of loss of experience and skills within future years.

Source: West Dunbartonshire Council Workforce Plan 2022-2027: Update & Annual Action Plans 2022/23

### **Has it demonstrated savings and other benefits resulting from its workforce skills and capacity measures?**

The council has seen some benefits from its workforce skills and capacity measures including improved attendance rates and survey data indicating that employees feel valued.

The council can demonstrate the impact its digital transformation work is starting to have. For example, a chat bot which helps residents to report and resolve missed bin collections has been shortlisted for a Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Excellence Award. It has also identified savings from Fit for Future reviews.

The workforce planning console has improved the quality of data available to managers and reduced requests to the People and Change team. The console can also be used to identify anomalies in the organisation structure, which supports development of the council's Strategic Operating Model for how it organises its services and resources.

The council's use of SWITCH to manage staff redeployment has helped to reduce turnover and retain skills, while mitigating redundancy and exit costs.

The council's financial challenges, the effect of the rising cost of living and pay disputes have had a negative impact on employees' wellbeing. However, it has made some progress in reducing sickness absence rates.

The council's performance data shows that there has been a small improvement in full time equivalent days lost per employee for all staff (13.7 full time equivalent average days lost in 2023/24 compared to 14.0 average days in 2022/23). This is the second year in a row that sickness absence levels have decreased.

### **How does the council minimise any negative impact from workforce reform and reductions?**

The council is using SWITCH to mitigate the negative impact of service restructures on staff. Employees on the redeployment register have pay protection for up to 12 months. It is also providing access to wellbeing support to all employees. The council is working to create efficiencies through better use of data, digital tools and automation (see Section 4).

### **Improvement recommendations**

Any improvement recommendations that have been identified as part of our work in this thematic review section have been reflected in the action plan at Appendix 1, action plan reference numbers have been included in the wording above.



## 7) Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

*This section of the report considers what progress the council has made with sharing roles or functions across its services and/or with other councils and partners*

**We concluded:** the council shares services with other councils in three main areas, with benefits including improved resilience. It is looking to expand existing arrangements and has identified potential for further ICT collaboration.

### Background

Councils should look to work collaboratively with their partners to make the best use of their existing workforces and plan for the particular workforce needs in their areas. They should also work across traditional service department roles within councils to deliver improved services and outcomes.

Examples of this include generic working across health and social care, professional posts or functions shared between councils, and services delivered through empowered communities.

### Detailed reporting on joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

**In what areas the council has implemented shared services with other councils and partners? Has the council realised workforce benefits through these shared arrangements/functions?**

The council shares services with other councils in three main areas:

- internal audit
- civil contingencies
- information and communications technology (ICT).

The council has a shared internal audit and fraud service with Inverclyde Council. It is discussing expanding this arrangement with neighbouring councils to address recruitment and retention challenges and improve resilience.

The council joined a shared civil contingencies service in October 2016 covering Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire. Renfrewshire Council leads the service. Each council has a link officer, with Renfrewshire Council providing cover for staff absences.

The council has collaborated with other councils on ICT, including:

- Sharing a data centre with East Dunbartonshire Council
- Establishing a Microsoft 365 learning hub
- Joint procurement exercises
- Supporting other councils with HR and Pay systems
- Hosting systems.

The council has identified potential to expand these arrangements and share more ICT services.

The main benefit of sharing services is improved resilience. Officers have also identified better career progression and staff development, increased job satisfaction, retention of key skills, and more knowledge sharing.

### **To what extent the council delivers functions through its communities, the third sector, private sector or other providers (including ALEOs)**

West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust manages facilities including leisure centres, community halls, football pitches and a theatre on behalf of the council. The trust is a charitable organisation and uses its profits to subsidise its health rehabilitation and outreach programmes. This activity helps supports the council's health and wellbeing strategic plan objectives.

The council also supports a range of volunteering opportunities. It works with West Dunbartonshire Community and Volunteering Service (WDCVS). WDCVS is a registered charity which supports, promotes and develops volunteering and third sector activity across West Dunbartonshire.

### **To what extent the council delivers functions using temporary workers**

The council had 509 employees on fixed term contracts (8.9% of its total workforce) at 31 March 2024. Temporary workers are most prevalent in the council's social care service due to recruitment challenges and higher absence levels.

### **Has the council and its partners managed any barriers to shared working?**

The council has found that the main reasons shared services have not progressed is challenges in aligning employees' terms and conditions and implementing efficient governance arrangements. Officers believe the lead authority model, as used for the civil contingencies service, works best in overcoming these barriers.

The council's ICT service has overcome some technical challenges to ensure that council and NHS employees working in the Health and Social Care Partnership can access the same systems and can view each other's calendars.

## **Improvement recommendations**

We have not identified any risks or weaknesses as part of this thematic review section

## 8) Measuring the impact of workforce planning

*This section of the report considers how effectively the council is measuring the impact of its workforce planning approach*

**We concluded:** the council actively monitors the progress of its workforce planning strategic actions and reports progress annually.

### Background

Councils should monitor the impact of their workforce planning and delivery approaches. This should include cost, service quality and productivity benefits as well as employee wellbeing. This in-turn should inform their workforce planning approach. Councils and their partners should also understand the wider impact of their employment practice on the local economy.

### Detailed reporting on measuring the impact of workforce planning

#### **Does the council monitor the effectiveness of its workforce planning practice?**

Officers monitor the progress of workforce planning strategic actions using Pentana and report progress to the Corporate Services Committee annually. The May 2024 report indicated the council was making good progress implementing these actions.

#### **Are there examples of overall impact?**

The council's annual workforce plan update reports include case studies providing examples of the impact of workforce planning actions. For example, the council's Citizen, Culture and Facilities Service has introduced a new model for training staff which helped improve capabilities and resilience within the workforce (see case study 2).

### Case study 2: Citizen, Culture & Facilities – Contact Centre

Employee engagement within the Contact Centre was challenging due to the repetitive nature of the role. The restrictive nature of the job being PC based, with a headset and a constant stream of calls requires dedicated and highly motivated individuals. Only customer focused and motivated team members ensure each and every Citizen calling is warmly welcomed to the Council and given excellent Customer Service with each call being giving a unique response.

There was a request from the team for development opportunities to be established to ensure they were effective at their role and fully aware of all activities across the Council. Our initial approach was to develop a “Champion Model” where individual team members could elect to be a department representative and be trained to the highest standard in a specific task. For example, a Council Tax Champion. They learn this role to the highest level on systems, processes, policy implementation and then return to the Contact Centre to support the wider Contact Centre team when they have a challenging Council Tax call. This prevents a request for a call back or manager escalation providing a quality customer experience and improved employee satisfaction.

This Champion model spreads across all Services the Contact Centre represents and in turn, has made for a valuable team to the wider Council as our team members are already exceptional individuals with a high quality of training, immediately ready to start work in the recruiting department when applying for other roles within the Council. Over the years we have successfully taken Modern Apprentices and entry level employees through a development channel to become competent individuals in Housing, Revenues and Benefits, Organisational Development and ICT. In addition, due to their Corporate knowledge, our teams’ skillsets have also been directly applicable to promoted posts within complaint handling giving a clear career pathway from Grade 3 to Grade 4 and Grade 5 posts. One individual has been developed through this structure on to a Grade 6 and then Grade 9 post through a number of development opportunities.

The service will continue our Champion Model to ensure our team are as effective as they can be whilst creating a talent pipeline to encourage our teams to apply for promoted posts across the Council

Source: West Dunbartonshire Council Workforce Plan 2022-2027: Update & Annual Action Plans 2023/24

### Do monitoring reports inform future workforce planning?

The workforce plan update report includes, as an appendix, a workforce profile and monitoring report with a wide range of employment data. The council could make better use of this information to identify future resource needs and improve succession planning (see Section 3 and Appendix 1, action 1).

### Improvement recommendations

Any improvement recommendations that have been identified as part of our work in this thematic review section have been reflected in the action plan at Appendix 1, action plan reference numbers have been included in the wording above.

## Best Value Assurance Report and previous Annual Audit Report findings for measuring the council’s impact of workforce planning

We have followed up on Best Value Assurance Report and previous Annual Audit Report findings, see the table below for the progress the council has made during 2023/24.

Previously reported findings	Management response and implementation timeframe	Work undertaken and judgements made in 2023/24	Conclusions reached
<p><b>2018 Best Value Assurance Report</b></p> <p><b>Staff absence</b></p> <p>Some staff are finding the pace of change challenging and staff absence remains an issue. The council is taking positive steps to try and address this and should continue to explore opportunities for improvement.</p>	<p>Management Response: (West Dunbartonshire Council Best Value Assurance Improvement Plan – July 2018)</p> <p>Implement action plans supporting employee wellbeing strategy with focus specifically on physical and mental health.</p> <p>Additional functionality to be added to workforce management system to enable more effective reporting/ management of sickness absence.</p> <p>Target team specific change support/ training on a project by project basis.</p> <p>Introduce routine scrutiny of attendance management process compliance through</p>	<p><b>Progress against the recommendation</b></p> <p>The council reports annually to the Joint Consultative Forum (council officers, elected members and trade union representatives) on employee wellbeing and attendance. The latest report was in June 2024.</p> <p>The council’s performance data shows that there has been a small improvement in full time equivalent days lost per employee for all staff (13.7 full time equivalent average days lost in 2023/24 compared to 14.0 average days in 2022/23). This is the second year in a row that the council’s sickness absence levels have decreased. The main reasons for absence continue to be minor illness, acute medical conditions and personal stress. Front line employees have the highest levels of sickness.</p> <p>The 2022/23 Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) data shows that sickness absence days per employee have increased to 6.4 days for teachers and 15.3 days for other local government employees. The council’s position against other councils has declined to 12th for teachers and 27th for other local government employees. This is the most recent LGBF data available.</p>	<p><b>Conclusions</b></p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>The council launched additional wellbeing support in 2023/24 and has made some progress in reducing sickness absence rates.</p>

Previously reported findings	Management response and implementation timeframe	Work undertaken and judgements made in 2023/24	Conclusions reached
	<p>workforce management system reports.</p> <p>Lean process improvement approach embedded in wider strategic improvement framework.</p> <p>Implementation timescale: October 2019</p>	<p>The council launched additional wellbeing support in 2023/24, including additional employee counselling, self-help resources and financial and physical wellbeing support. The council has also trained mental health first aiders and wellbeing advocates. Mental health first aiders act as a listening ear and signpost employees to support. They also gather and share feedback from front line employees on wellbeing needs and initiatives. The wellbeing advocates share information relating to wellbeing resources.</p> <p>The council has a range of other initiatives to support employee wellbeing. Progress on these projects was limited in 2023/24 due to resource restrictions and other demands on the council's People and Change team.</p>	

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Improvement Action plan

Rating	Description
<b>Level 1</b>	The identified risk and/or significant deficiency is critical to the business processes or the achievement of business strategic objectives. There is potential for financial loss, damage to reputation or loss of information. The recommendation should be taken into consideration by management immediately.
<b>Level 2</b>	The identified risk and/or significant deficiency may impact on individual objectives or business processes. The audited body should implement the recommendation to strengthen internal controls or enhance business efficiency. The recommendations should be actioned in the near future.
<b>Level 3</b>	The identified risk and/or significant deficiency is an area for improvement or less significant. In our view, the audited body should action the recommendation, but management do not need to prioritise.

The table overleaf details the issues/risks that we have identified as part of this thematic review and our recommendations to the Council to address.

Issue/risk	Rating	Recommendation	Agreed management action/ timing
<p><b>1. Workforce data</b></p> <p>The council could make better use of the data available at organisation and service level, and through the workforce planning console, to identify future resource needs and improve succession planning.</p> <p><b>Risk –</b> The council is not able to easily identify resource gaps, through the workforce planning console, and make informed resourcing and recruitment decisions.</p>	Level 2	The council should ensure workforce data allows officers to identify resource gaps and supports succession planning.	<p><b>Management’s response</b></p> <p>Action is agreed as already part of planned developments to console.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer</b></p> <p>Chief Officer P&amp;T/Strategic People &amp; Change Manager</p> <p><b>Implementation date</b></p> <p>March 2025</p>
<p><b>2. Hybrid and flexible working policy</b></p> <p>The council’s flexible working policy has been in place for several years. Since then, the way people work has changed significantly with home and hybrid working becoming common.</p> <p><b>Risk –</b> The council’s policy does not fully reflect current working practice.</p>	Level 3	The council should develop a new flexible/hybrid working policy or update its existing policy.	<p><b>Management’s response</b></p> <p>Action is agreed as already part of planned policy review and will likely only require an update.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer</b></p> <p>Chief Officer P&amp;T/Strategic People &amp; Change Manager</p> <p><b>Implementation date</b></p> <p>December 2024</p>



## **Workforce innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges**

Audit Scotland's published material is available for download on the website in a number of formats. For information on Audit Scotland's accessibility principles, please visit:

<https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accessibility>

Forvis Mazars is the brand name for the Forvis Mazars Global network (Forvis Mazars Global Limited) and its two independent members: Forvis Mazars, LLP in the United States and Forvis Mazars Group SC, an internationally integrated partnership operating in over 100 countries and territories. Forvis Mazars Global Limited is a UK private company limited by guarantee and does not provide any services to clients. Forvis Mazars LLP is the UK firm of Forvis Mazars Global.

**Visit [forvismazars.com/global](https://forvismazars.com/global) to learn more about the global network.**

The logo for Forvis Mazars, featuring the word "forv/s" in a blue, lowercase, sans-serif font above the word "mazars" in a larger, bold, blue, lowercase, sans-serif font.