

East Renfrewshire Council

Best Value Thematic Report:
Workforce Innovation
Year Ended 31 March 2024

July 2024

This report has been prepared in accordance with Terms of Appointment Letter, through which Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission have appointed us as external auditor for East Renfrewshire Council for financial years 2022/23 to 2026/27.

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Accessibility

Our report will be available on Audit Scotland's website and we have therefore taken steps to comply with the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018.

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Executive Summary

Context

Under the Code of Audit Practice June 2021, we perform an annual programme of work in relation to Best Value and wider scope responsibilities. This work includes reviews based on annual thematic Best Value topics prescribed by the Accounts Commission (the Commission).

For 2023/24, the Commission directed auditors to report on workforce innovation. Our key conclusions against the 6 questions set by the Commission are outlined below.

 1. How effectively are the council's workforce plans integrated with its strategic plans and priorities?	The Council refreshed its approach to workforce planning in 2023/24 to support the development of its strategic planning framework, Vision for the Future. As part of the updated arrangements, a People Strategy has been developed to support the Council's aim to become a learning organisation. The Council has made recent improvements to workforce planning arrangements within service improvement planning documentation. This process supports the identification and understanding of specific risk areas within services, and allows escalation to the Organisational Development Board. The Corporate Management Team maintains good oversight over workforce planning and the development of key skills and capabilities to support wider strategic planning via the Organisational Development Board. There is scope to further improve elected member understanding of key risks and performance in the workforce.
 2. How effectively has digital technology been used to support workforce productivity and improve service quality and outcomes?	The Council has responded well to the opportunities available to make efficiencies and service improvement by adopting digital technology. The Workforce Plan 2022-25 outlined the approach to increase learning and data literacy across the Council to deliver the efficient, customer-focused services envisaged in the Vision for the Future. A Digital Transformation Programme is in place, with Workforce Productivity one of three priorities and programme boards. The Council has delivered a number of projects under the programme to date including automation projects, the development of management dashboards, significant system changes and upgrades, and the roll-out of hand-held devices for frontline staff, including those in social care. The Council's ability to continue to invest in the programme has been highlighted as a risk, although there has been a recent 'top-up' to the Modernisation Fund.

 3. 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 transformed the technology available to employees to support home working through the pandemic and has a hybrid working policy in place to support employees who can work at home for part of the week. Main Council offices are being refurbished to support modern, flexible, digital working. A review is underway to benchmark the Council's practices with other Scottish local authorities and will be reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The Council has continued to prioritise investment in staff development and well-being. An earmarked reserve was created in 2023 to employ a Health and Wellbeing Officer. In May 2023, the Cabinet supported the further allocation of £0.4 million of the Council's Investment for the Future Reserve to support investment in development of the workforce.
 4. 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's strategic planning recognises that local demographics have an impact on East Renfrewshire's ability to recruit and retain employees due to the ready availability of competitive alternative roles and sectors within the Glasgow Region. Weaknesses in travel links across the Council area have also impacted the ability to fill roles in hard to recruit services such as social care. The Council is supporting some employees in modern apprenticeships to develop capacity in key skill gaps including digital and project management.
 5. What progress has the council made with sharing roles or functions across its services and/or with other councils and partners?	The Council continues to work collaboratively with bodies across the sector, including the Glasgow City region to maximise the opportunities to increase capability. A Regional Local Government Skills Working Group is working with the University of the West of Scotland to launch courses to respond to the shortage in Planning skills. The group is also addressing skills gaps in other areas such as trading standards, health and social care. Like many other local authorities, the Council experiences recruitment challenges across key service areas including social care, facilities management, project management and digital roles. In the last year 44 roles have had to be re-advertised.
 6. How effectively is the council measuring the impact of its workforce planning approach?	The Council's recent updates to service improvement planning processes will allow it to gather additional data about the current workforce and challenges identified by individual services. In addition, the introduction of data dashboards ensures that up to date indicators are directly available to the managers of individual services. The employee survey response rate was lower than the Council anticipated, and further work should be done to increase staff engagement and facilitate effective monitoring.

| Scope of the audit

Introduction

Under the Accounts Commission's Code of Audit Practice (the Code), published in June 2021, the approach to the audit of Best Value involves reporting both on:

- ▶ individual local government bodies; and
- ▶ thematically across the local government sector.

Reporting to the Accounts Commission on the Council's performance in relation to its duty to deliver Best Value will be drawn from local external audit work performed under our wider scope responsibilities and work that we perform in relation to annual thematic topics.

In 2023/24, the Accounts Commission has directed auditors to report on workforce innovation and how councils are responding to workforce challenges.

| Thematic focus in 2023/24

The Accounts Commission's May 2023 Local Government in Scotland Overview 2023 report 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 therefore sets out how the Council is responding to current workforce challenges through building capacity, increasing productivity and innovation.

The report outlines our considerations against the series of questions set by Audit Scotland guidance:

- ▶ 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 practices 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?

1. How effectively are the Council's workforce plans integrated with its strategic plans and priorities?

Introduction

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 underpinned with detailed workforce plans within services.

The Council has updated its approach to workforce planning to reflect refreshed "Vision for the Future" strategic planning

East Renfrewshire Council employ just under 4,000 full time equivalent (FTE) staff, including around 570 who work for the Health and Social Care Partnership.

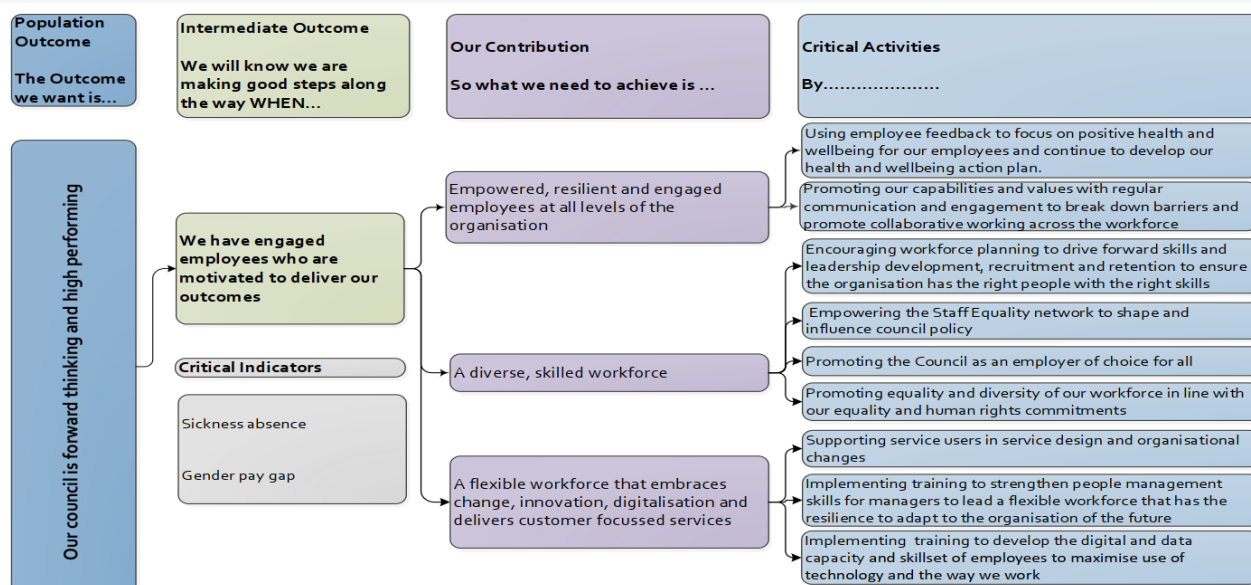
The current Workforce Plan covers the period 2022-25 and sets the context for the Council's priorities in managing its workforce, including the need to broaden skills and flexibility and to increase learning and data literacy, noting the aim that the number of staff undertaking transactional tasks will fall over the life of the Plan. The workforce priorities are:

- ▶ Empowered, resilient and engaged employees at all levels of the organisation;
- ▶ A diverse, skilled workforce; and
- ▶ A flexible workforce that embraces change, innovation, digitalisation and delivers customer focused services.

Work is underway to update the Workforce Plan for the period 2024-27, aligned to the updated strategic planning framework. We noted in our 2022/23 thematic report that the Council has refreshed its long term strategic planning document, Vision for the Future.

The Council's Outcome Delivery Plan (ODP) 2023/24 translates strategic planning into specific actions for delivery. Exhibit 1 demonstrates how the ODP links the relevant outcome within Vision for the Future, "our council is forward thinking and high performing" to the aims of the Workplace Plan.

Exhibit 1: The Outcome Delivery Plan 2023-24 provides a direct link between the Council's approach to strategic planning and the aims of the Workforce Plan 2022-25



Source: East Renfrewshire Council Outcome Delivery Plan 2023-24, page 57

In response to the updated Vision, the Council has recently developed a draft People Strategy (2024-27), to supplement the Workforce Plan and set out its approach to become a learning organisation that continuously transforms through the learning and development of its people.

The People Strategy sets four outcomes:

- ▶ Engaged, empowered and resilient employees;
- ▶ An ambitious skilled workforce who deliver customer satisfaction;
- ▶ An organisation that promotes and values equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging; and
- ▶ Inspirational and effective leaders at all levels.

The Council's Organisational Development Board oversees workforce planning and employee engagement

A single action plan will be developed to track and monitor progress against both the updated Workforce Plan 2024-27 and the People Strategy, to align activities and resources. Progress against the action plan will be reported to the Council's Organisational Development (OD) Board.

The Council's Head of HR & Corporate Services chairs the meetings of the OD Board, with representation on the Board drawn from services, with a feed into the Trade Union/ Management meeting.

The Council merged the work of a separate Workforce Planning Group with the wider Board in 2023 to allow oversight of the key themes that underpin the People Strategy and Workforce Plan, including:

- ▶ Employee engagement, including the outcomes of the annual employee wellbeing survey;
- ▶ The Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
- ▶ Leadership and staff development programme; and
- ▶ Workforce Planning.

| The approach to service planning was updated in 2023/24

One of the key objectives of workforce planning is to identify and respond to any emerging workforce gaps. We note in Section 4 that the demographics in East Renfrewshire mean that attracting younger employees can be challenging, while the nature of a small local authority means that often there are key person dependencies.

As part of the updated service improvement planning process for 2023/24, the Council has enhanced advice for departments, and added workforce planning considerations within the service improvement planning template to capture areas such as the workforce profile, recruitment and retention factors, succession planning and health and wellbeing.

Service Planning guidance requires the inclusion of workforce actions, with the outcome that is expected as a result. Services can also highlight with concerns and issues that cannot be addressed within the service alone and are therefore escalated to the Council's OD Board.

While is too early to assess the effectiveness of this "bottom-up" process, we note in Section 2 that Council management teams have access to robust and timely data in relation to the workforce including known service areas that are difficult to recruit, sickness absence and turnover indicators.

| The strategic impact of workforce planning is reported to elected members

While workforce planning can be primarily an operational matter, elected members are kept aware of elements that may impact strategic planning via the development sessions and phased approach to updating and revising the Vision for the Future.

In addition, the Audit & Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for oversight of:

- ▶ The costs and savings emerging from early retirements or voluntary redundancies; and
- ▶ The sickness absence key performance indicator, including analysis of the key reasons for absence and the approach to support managers to respond.

There are other key indicators that may impact the Council's ability to deliver the improvements envisaged in the People Strategy, such as the age profile and turnover of staff. These indicators are available for managers to support the delivery of their service, but are not currently reported on a regular basis to elected members.

| Recommendation 1: The Council should consider how best to broaden awareness of key workforce planning issues to elected members.

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

Introduction

Digital technology will continue to 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.

The Council has recognised the opportunities available to make efficiencies and service improvement by adopting digital technology

The current Workforce Plan 2022-25 identifies the need to increase learning and data literacy across the Council to deliver the efficient, customer-focused services envisaged in the Vision for the Future.

As a result, the Council's Digital Transformation Strategy 2021-24 is structured around three priorities and programme boards:

- ▶ Customer Experience;
- ▶ Business Systems and Processes; and
- ▶ Workforce Productivity.

The programme boards are subject to oversight by the Corporate Management Team on a six monthly basis to ensure that planned savings and benefits are achieved and that the programme priorities, dependencies and resources are well-managed. An update report summarising key activities is provided to the Cabinet annually.

Workforce Productivity Board focuses on embedding new technologies to support frontline and management teams, getting the most out of investments in technology and new ways of working including a building refurbishment programme.

The Council continues to embed Microsoft 365 across the organisation for corporate staff. In addition, a specific project, The Way We Work continues to embed technologies within Council buildings to improve the effectiveness and experience of teams, including continuing to support hybrid working.

| The Council's digital transformation resources are prioritised based on a shared understanding of need

The Council has a specialised digital transformation team to support the development of key projects.

A project prioritisation guide is in place to manage the resources available to meet demand for projects based on a range of factors including:

- ▶ Safety or safeguarding issues;
- ▶ The level of committed and verified savings that can be achieved;
- ▶ Reputation or data security;
- ▶ The impact on customer and/or employee experience.

A dashboard is in place to allow the CMT to monitor the progress of each project. The Council has also developed a capacity heatmap to monitor the workload of individual team members to highlight any over-allocation. This is considered to be critical to deliver projects to plan, and to support the sustainability of the team, which is a shared internal corporate resource.

We noted in our 2022/23 Annual Audit Report that the Council's earmarked reserve to fund modernisation was topped up as a result of the underspend but that the fund was at risk of being depleted.

The 2024/25 budget approved in February 2024 highlighted future challenges for long-term funding of the Modernisation Fund. At February 2024 the projected balance remaining at March 2025 was £2.6 million.

| Recommendation 2: The 2025/26 budget process needs to address the funding of the digital transformation programme.

| A range of projects have been delivered to help support staff experience and deliver improved customer services

The Council has delivered a number of projects under the Digital Transformation Strategy to date including:

- ▶ Projects that reduce transactional tasks completed by members of staff (including automation projects within the Customer Experience Programme, see below);
- ▶ Projects that make process improvements, including the development of management dashboards for services and managers provide easy access to live data on indicators such as sickness absence (see **Exhibit 2**) and mandatory training compliance;
- ▶ Projects that support frontline delivery, such as hand-held devices for social care staff and the roll-out of the Analogue to Digital Telecare Project; and
- ▶ Significant upgrades in systems such as the implementation of a new Housing Management system, and the Revenues and Benefits finance system.

The workforce productivity programme focuses on automation, and developing single sources for business information which drives management reporting and reporting to Committees. Key projects include the development of an in-house

Exhibit 2: Good Practice The Council has developed a series of management information dashboards available on the Microsoft Teams platform



The dashboards are created by the Council's internal transformation team. This screenshot provides one example, on managing absence, where the dashboard provides:

- ▶ Insights into absence reasons by role, location, department and service;
- ▶ Tracking of the absence performance indicator over time; and
- ▶ Views of the cost of absence by department, location and type of absence.
- ▶ Other examples include invoice payments, FOIs, complaints, contracts and mandatory training.

Source: East Renfrewshire Council

corporate performance management system, replacing purchased software, and the development of a series of management information dashboards.

The Council's aim is to provide a single source of information for managers on current key performance and workforce statistics (**Exhibit 2** provides one example).

The Customer Experience Programme is focused on improved customer processes. This includes the development of the MyEastRen Customer Portal, which allows communities to directly interact with a range of services including housing and schools. This service also allows communities to sign up to pay Council Tax online and receive e-bills.

Examples of the development of automated processes include new online arrangements for:

- ▶ Money Advice Referrals;
- ▶ Out of hours homelessness;
- ▶ Additional payment functionality (such as for bulky uplifts);
- ▶ Abandoned vehicles;
- ▶ Short Term Lets; and
- ▶ Business Waste.

We noted in 2022/23 that projects including the service for birth registration resulted in 93% of interaction moving to an online form, and therefore significantly reducing staff time.

The Council has taken initial steps to estimate the impact of new technology on workforce productivity

As in most organisations, the Council's drive to engage technology has a number of aims, including efficiency, customer service improvements and supporting staff wellbeing.

In some circumstances, there is a specific business case associated with the project to deliver savings through reduced expenditure or reduced staff costs. In these cases, the efficiency savings due to technology advancement are highlighted within budget papers.

The Council uses a number of wider approaches to measure the impact of digital technology, including customer satisfaction surveys linked to online tools and functions, and staff satisfaction and feedback.

As Exhibit 3 highlights, in some cases the Council has been able to estimate the

impact on staff time where there was no existing system in place. In other cases, such as the implementation of the Revenue and Benefits system, the Council has been able to align the staffing structure to respond most effectively to the system capabilities.

Equality impact assessments have been used to respond to digital exclusion

A significant proportion of the Council's workforce do not work in offices with access to digital kit. As a result, QR codes are used on posters to provide direct links to the quarterly insider magazine, and paper copies of employee survey are used to prevent internal digital exclusion.

The Council also considers the impact of technology changes on equality groups, including disabled employees, by using impact assessments and tests of change on pilot groups of staff. Independent website audits and booking accessibility checks are conducted by Ability.Net.

Exhibit 3: The Council has estimated the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) savings associated with some task automation projects

The Council has developed process automation to ensure all recent data legislation requirements are met. The tasks below were beyond the functionality of the previous system and therefore relied on manual processes, resulting in an increasing risk for the Council to meet GDPR requirements.

Task	Data retention manager	Data transformation	Case Auto-closure
Activity	260,000 submissions 100,000 forms submitted 160,000 bookings submitted 100% of data is removed based on data retention rules	200 csv files transferred daily - Bespoke Garden Waste PermiServe csv - Bespoke Education FileMakerPro csvs	38,000 cases auto-closed 22,000 Garden Waste 3,000 Missed Bins 3,000 Education Admissions
Impact	Est. 2 minutes for each 5.3 FTE cost avoidance	Est. 2 -7 minutes each 1.1 FTE cost avoidance	Est. 3 minutes each 0.6 FTE cost avoidance

Source: East Renfrewshire Council

3. How effectively is the Council using hybrid and remote working and other innovative working practice to achieve service and staff benefits?

Introduction

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.

The Council transformed technology to support home working through the pandemic

The Council's The Way We Work project emerged during the pandemic as Microsoft 365 was rolled out across departments to support the delivery of services throughout the pandemic. The project has evolved to become business as usual with the aim to establish a work culture "to ensure the delivery of the highest quality services, empowering our people to work in new ways, ensuring services are delivered flexibly to suit our communities and citizens' needs."

The Council's hybrid working arrangements will be considered by the Audit & Scrutiny Committee

The Council's Hybrid Working Policy was most recently approved in May 2023. It specifies that based upon the needs of the individual service, a limited percentage of employees may work from home for up to 40-60% of the time. This is fully dependent on the needs of the service and means that such employees must attend the workplace a minimum of two days a week.

As a result of the nature of Council services, the ability to benefit from hybrid working is relatively restricted, and as a result only 14% of the workforce currently work on a hybrid basis.

In November 2023, the Council's Audit & Scrutiny Committee requested a report for a future meeting to summarise the advantages and disadvantages of working from home. Work on the report is underway, drawing on local experience and benchmarking with other councils across Scotland.

The Council has set aside specific funding to support staff wellbeing

In 2022/23, we noted that the Council had set aside a small earmarked reserve, the Employee Wellbeing & Development Fund. In May 2023, the Cabinet supported the further allocation of £0.4 million of the

Council's Investment for the Future Reserve to support investment in development of the workforce.

To date, the earmarked reserve has been used to temporarily fund health and wellbeing resources and the associated programme of work (**Exhibit 4**).

Exhibit 4: Good Practice The Council's Health and Wellbeing programme of work during 2023/24 has included:

- ▶ The development and delivery of training courses on building resilience and managing mental health. The training has been delivered on 19 occasions to employees;
- ▶ Further training has been provided to managers and leaders on how to incorporate wellbeing into the quality conversations that they hold with employees;
- ▶ Over 70 team wellbeing activities have been developed and facilitated with 650 employees;
- ▶ Health checks have been organised through occupational health and local pharmacies. The checks include with weight, blood pressure, glucose type tests undertaken. Over 400 employees have participated and 90% reported in feedback that the check had encouraged them to make lifestyle changes to improve their health and wellbeing; and
- ▶ Financial wellbeing courses to cover range of money management topics, as research demonstrates significant proportion of non work related stress is related to financial insecurity.

Source: *East Renfrewshire Council*

4. 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?

Introduction

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.

Local demographics have an impact on East Renfrewshire's recruitment and retention

The Council's Workforce Plan recognises the specific challenges in recruitment and retention as a result of:

- ▶ The proximity to the Glasgow jobs market, including competition from other sectors;
- ▶ Travel links that are direct to the city, but not yet within the Council area; and
- ▶ The size and scale of the Council

meaning that jobs often develop into hybrid roles. This can make leavers more difficult to replace on a like for like basis.

The Council's analysis of its workforce notes that 51% of employees are aged 45 and over. The Council makes use of graduate apprenticeships and modern apprenticeships to target the younger demographic and respond to specific areas that are challenging to recruit. For example, the Council has 6 employees completing a Technical Apprenticeship Diploma in Digital Technology: Data Analytics SCQF Level 8 and a further 2 completing the Level 8 Diploma in Project Management.

Retention is also a key area of focus, including the investment in training and development and supporting the wellbeing of current employees.

The Council has a well-established leadership development programme across the organisation

The Council has had a Leaders for the Future programme in place for around 10 years. The programme includes 12 modules, providing specific training on leading, engaging and developing teams, along with communication and managing conflict. In addition, participants are required to work on a project independently that relates to one of the organisational capabilities - digital change, prevention & community empowerment.

The programme has been extended to other groups within the organisation. Managers for the Future and Supervisors for the Future programmes are now in place.

| The People Strategy outlines further focus on developing leadership skills

The People Strategy outlines that the ability to deliver the outcomes within Vision for the Future will be met by empowering and equipping managers and leaders to understand their leadership role in influencing organisational success.

The Strategy aims to achieve this by:

- ▶ Developing leaders and managers at all levels who are visible, capable, positive, confident, and enthusiastic, who strengthen networks and key strategic relationships.
- ▶ Ensuring leaders and managers at all levels engage, listen and respond to their people.
- ▶ Equipping leaders and managers at all levels with the skills and confidence to successfully drive change and undertake all aspects of people management.

As part of the revised strategy, the Council is reviewing the content of existing training material to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Progress will be measured in part by monitoring the outcomes for individual employees who participate in the leadership development programme. We noted that organisational capacity and poor response rates for feedback limits further analysis on the effectiveness or return on investment of the programme (refer to **Recommendation 4**).

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

Introduction

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.

Councils across Scotland have taken action to respond to skills shortages

Across Scotland, there are limited arrangements to share resources. The Council participates in arrangements to share resource for discrete service areas such as Non-Domestic Rates administration and the 4-council civil contingencies service but acknowledges that the model could be used for other roles in the future.

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) in Scotland is working with the Improvement Service on developing six workstreams to improve collaboration, for example within digital shared services to maximise the capability across Scottish local government.

Shared platforms already exist for areas such as My Job Scotland and resources including parentpay.

The Council is a member of Glasgow City Region, which has supported collaboration more locally

The Council is a member of the Glasgow City Region, where partners work collaboratively to use data from the Intelligence Hub to plan in the medium to long term. A Regional Local Government Skills Working Group is working with the University of the West of Scotland to launch a 2 year conversion course and full undergraduate course for Planning Skills.

The group is also addressing skills gaps in other areas such as trading standards, health and social care.

The Council also plays an active part in the West Partnership Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC), with the Director of Education the current RIC Lead. There is strong evidence that West Partnership is supporting individual LAs to deliver excellence and equity by adding value and supporting collaboration.

The Council is part of the Clyde Valley Residual Waste Contract, which is a 5-council shared service - for East Renfrewshire Council, alongside East Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire, North Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. This is a 25 year contract with a waste management partner, Viridor, to provide the councils with waste transfer stations, a primary materials reprocessing facility and a final destination, Waste to Energy plant.

There are a number of challenging areas for recruitment and retention in East Renfrewshire

Like many other local authorities, the Council experiences recruitment challenges across a number of service areas including social care, facilities management, project management and digital roles.

In the last year 44 roles have had to be readvertised, including 16 within Education,

| 6. How effectively is the Council measuring the impact of its workforce planning approach?

Introduction

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.

| The Council's understanding of its workforce is being enhanced by recent developments

The Council's recent updates to service improvement planning processes will allow it to gather rich data about the current workforce and challenges identified by individual services. In addition, the introduction of data dashboards ensures that up to date indicators are directly available to the managers of individual services.

The size and scale of the Council means that data and key risk areas within the workforce are generally well understood centrally.

| Quality conversations is the Council's performance management and development process

The Council's Quality Conversations process is well established and allows line managers to hold development conversations with staff. However, data from the 2022/23 employee survey identified that:

- ▶ 22% of the respondents disagreed that their manager regularly checks in with them; and
- ▶ 25% of employees do not have regular conversations for goals and development.

The Council's Organisational Development Board oversees the action plan in response to the survey, which includes the regular promotion of the importance of the Quality Conversation process.

| Recommendation 3: Performance discussions are a critical process for any organisation to ensure that employees continue to fulfil their roles effectively and develop throughout their career. The Council should take steps to improve participation rates and value of Quality Conversations across the Council.

| Only 24.6% of the Council's employees completed the Employee Wellbeing Survey in 2023

The Council's 2022/23 employee wellbeing survey took place in April - May 2023. Most responses were completed electronically, but the Council also made arrangements to distribute paper codes to fieldwork sites for employees with no access to corporate facilities.

The response rates varied across services from 23.4% in Education, to 33.9% in Business Operations and Partnerships. Overall, the response rate was below 25%, which means it is challenging to draw overall conclusions. The headlines from the wellbeing survey include:

- ▶ 86% of respondents are clear about their roles and responsibilities;
- ▶ 74% report that they get personal satisfaction from work;
- ▶ Over half consider that they have adequate facilities in the workplace to support wellbeing; and
- ▶ Overall, the staff satisfaction score was 72.85.

In 2023, the Council also piloted a new question set in relation to financial health, to help support targeted money advice services. Around a fifth of employees reported that they are not managing their personal finances well. Actions taken in response include home energy awareness sessions and budget cooking masterclasses. The Council also provides access to a range of lifestyle savings and financial support and advice to employees working in partnership with Salary Finance.

| The Council's People Strategy relies on feedback from employees to monitor the outcomes of its approach

As part of the revised People Strategy, the Council has outlined the key measures that it will use to monitor the effectiveness of its action plan.

A number of the indicators that the Council has indicated that it will use to measure progress relies on outcomes from the employee wellbeing survey. The Council accepts that there is scope to improve upon the response rate of less than one in four employees and is also planning to broaden the content of the survey towards employee engagement rather than focused directly on wellbeing, which may be limiting responses.

| Recommendation 4: The Council must take steps to increase the response rate to the employee.

| Appendices

A

Recommendations and action plan

B

Best Value responsibilities under
the Code of audit practice

A

Recommendations and Action Plan

We include an action plan to summarise specific recommendations included elsewhere within this Report. We grade these findings according to our consideration of their priority for the Council or management to action.

Classification of recommendations

Grade 1: Key risks and / or significant deficiencies which are critical to the achievement of strategic objectives. Consequently management needs to address and seek resolution urgently.

Grade 2: Risks or potential weaknesses which impact on individual objectives, or impact the operation of a single process, and so require prompt but not immediate action by management.

Grade 3: Less significant issues and / or areas for improvement which we consider merit attention but do not require to be prioritised by management.

No.	Findings and / or risk	Recommendation / grading	Management response / Implementation timeframe
1	Workforce planning can directly impact strategic delivery and elected members may therefore benefit from a broader understanding of the key workforce issues that may impact the Council's ability to deliver the improvements envisaged in the People Strategy, such as the age profile and turnover of staff.	The Council should consider how best to broaden awareness of key workforce planning issues amongst elected members. <i>Grade 2</i>	Response: Agreed. It is proposed that a more comprehensive workforce planning summary be included in the annual Financial Planning report to Councillors as part of budget setting. Responsible officer: Head of HR & Corporate Services Implementation date: March 2025
2	The 2024/25 budget approved in February 2024 highlighted future challenges with the funding of the Digital Transformation programme.	The 2025/26 budget process needs to address the funding of the digital transformation programme to continue to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of services. <i>Grade 2</i>	Response: Completed. As the 2023/24 accounts are finalised, it has been agreed to allocate a further £2M into the Modernisation Fund. This will be agreed by Members in September. Responsible officer: Head of Accountancy Implementation date: September 2024

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Recommendations and Action Plan continued

No.	Findings and / or risk	Recommendation / grading	Management response / Implementation timeframe
3	Data from the 2022/23 employee wellbeing survey identified that: ▶ 22% of the respondents disagreed that their manager regularly checks in with them; and ▶ 25% of employees do not have regular conversations for goals and development.	Performance discussions are a critical process for any organisation to ensure that employees continue to fulfil their roles effectively and develop throughout their career. The Council should take steps to improve participation rates in Quality Conversations across the Council. <i>Grade 2</i>	Response: Agreed. The communication of Quality Conversations and timeframes will be enhanced. The current wellbeing survey questions will be reviewed and broadened to a focus on employee engagement. In addition, question wording will be changed to make it clear to employees what is meant by 'Quality Conversations' and that this includes one-to-one meetings between employees and managers. Responsible officer: Head of HR & Corporate Services Implementation date: May 2025
4	A number of the indicators that the Council has indicated that it will use to measure progress on the People Strategy relies on outcomes from the employee survey. In 2022/23, the Council achieved a response rate to the wellbeing survey of less than one in four employees.	The Council must take steps to increase the response rate to the employee survey. <i>Grade 2</i>	Response: Agreed. There are plans to broaden the content of the next employee survey, with more of a focus on employee engagement. Steps will also be taken to improve completion rates including via communication and sustained promotion and encouragement from leadership. Responsible officer: Director of Business Operations & Partnerships Implementation date: May 2025

B Code of audit practice: Best Value responsibilities

| The Council's responsibilities

Local government bodies have a duty to make arrangements to secure Best Value. Best Value is defined as continuous improvement in the performance of the body's functions. In securing Best Value, the local government body is required to maintain an appropriate balance among:

- ▶ the quality of its performance of its functions
- ▶ the cost to the body of that performance
- ▶ the cost to persons of any service provided by it for them on a wholly or partly rechargeable basis.

In maintaining that balance, the local government body shall have regard to:

- ▶ efficiency
- ▶ effectiveness
- ▶ economy; and
- ▶ the need to meet the equal opportunity requirements.

The local government body shall discharge its duties under this section in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.

In measuring the improvement of the performance of a local government body's functions for the purposes of this section, regard shall be had to the extent to which the outcomes of that performance have improved.

The Scottish Government's Statutory Guidance on Best Value (2020) requires bodies to demonstrate that they are delivering Best Value in respect of seven themes:

1. Vision and leadership
2. Governance and accountability
3. Effective use of resources

4. Partnerships and collaborative working
5. Working with communities
6. Sustainability
7. Fairness and equality.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is designed to help empower community bodies through the ownership or control of land and buildings, and by strengthening their voices in decisions about public services.

Specified audited bodies are required to prepare and publish performance information in accordance with Directions issued by the Accounts Commission.

| Auditor's responsibilities

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.

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