

Workforce Innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

Best Value thematic work in South Ayrshire Council
2023/24



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Key facts



Workforce

6,052	Number of people working for the council – headcount
4,875	Number of people working for the council – full time equivalent
65%	Percentage of workforce living in South Ayrshire (95% in Ayrshire)
1,000 (approx.)	Number of staff undertaking casual/bank work during 2022/23
11%	Turnover of staff in last year
7	Days lost due to absence in last year per employee



Age profile

1.5%	Under 21
15%	21 to 30
46%	31 to 50
28%	51 to 60
9.5%	61 and above

Key messages

- 1** South Ayrshire Council employs 6,052 staff. The council's Corporate Workforce Plan covers the period 2022-25 and includes a detailed action plan. The council recognises that it needs to make workforce planning more strategic and workforce planning is one of the council's new Transformational Change Board's projects. The council is testing out directorate-level workforce planning.
- 2** The Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 features a comprehensive range of data, including age profiles, details of casual staff used and absence statistics. It also sets out and draws themes from workforce intelligence provided by each service. The council should now develop performance measures to capture the impact of its workforce planning approach to help it monitor progress, particularly in strategic priority areas.
- 3** The council consulted with Heads of Service and Trades Unions when developing the Workforce Plan. To ensure support for its future workforce developments, the council has also engaged openly with staff groups and Trade Unions on areas of service change.
- 4** Links between the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 and the Council Plan, Digital and ICT Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan could be more explicit. However, there is clear alignment between the council's workforce plan and its service plans, and these service plans link directly to the Council Plan. The development on the service plans involved self-evaluation of workforce planning across all services. This is a positive development and has put in place the foundations on which the council can measure improvement.
- 5** The council has not yet articulated its vision for how digital technology can shape its workforce of the future. It acknowledges that its Corporate Workforce Plan needs to align with its Digital and ICT Strategy 2023-28. Delays to developing workforce reporting tools in Oracle Fusion have impeded the analysis and reporting of workforce data.
- 6** The council's Remote Working Policy provides flexibility for staff. The council's initial assessment of the impact of its new way of working is positive with further monitoring and engagement with staff planned.

- 7** The council and the Health and Social Care Partnership have introduced a number of innovative initiatives to improve the skills and capacity of their future and existing workforce.
- 8** As well as sharing its roads and transportation service with East Ayrshire Council through the Ayrshire Roads Alliance, the council shares a small number of other roles with other councils. The workforce benefits of these arrangements have not yet been captured or quantified.

Scope of the audit

1. The Accounts Commission's May 2023 [Local Government Overview 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.
2. This report sets out how the council is responding to current workforce challenges through building capacity, increasing productivity and innovation.
3. [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 or Integration Joint Board (IJB) 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.

4. 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 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?
- 5.** 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.
- 6.** 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](#).

Workforce strategy and priorities

The council recognises that it needs to make workforce planning more strategic. Links between its Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 and key plans and strategies could be more explicit but there is clear alignment between the council's workforce plan and its service plans. The council has obtained and included a comprehensive range of data in its workforce plan. There is an opportunity to use this data to inform future strategic decisions.

7. South Ayrshire Council employs 6,052 people with these staff costs equating to 40 per cent of actual 2022/23 gross expenditure. Over one third of the council's workforce is aged 51 or over and 65 per cent of council employees live in South Ayrshire. The council describes itself as having a significant reliance on casual staff. Its main areas of focus in relation to workforce are recruitment, deployment and retention, training and development and staff wellbeing.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

The council's Corporate Workforce Plan covers the period 2022-25 and includes an action plan. The council should now develop performance measures to capture the impact of its workforce planning approach to help it monitor progress, particularly in strategic priority areas.

11. The council's current workforce plan, Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25, was approved by the council in November 2022. The council had a People Strategy in place for 2020-22 but decided that instead of renewing it, and to provide a more streamlined approach, it would include all workforce-related themes in its 2022-25 Workforce Plan. Through this plan, the council intends to:

- embed workforce planning within corporate service planning and strategic change, and develop further tools and training to support managers
- enhance workforce data for managers which will also inform annual updates of the workforce plan
- help managers identify and address key 'gaps' by developing a digital skills framework, improving the current succession planning toolkit, and developing a leadership development programme
- consider and progress the future 'pipeline' of employees, enhancing recruitment and retention, and career pathways.
- maximise employee communication and feedback
- develop approaches that take cognisance of the demographic of the workforce and that support employees' wellbeing, attendance, and return to work.

12. The council's Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 includes a detailed action plan, based on the five pillars of the workforce journey, reflecting the themes set out in the paragraph above. [Exhibit 1](#) provides a summary of the council's aims, each of which have associated actions. The council has committed to provide an annual update on progress against these actions to its Service and Partnerships Performance Panel.

13. However, although the action plan is entitled 'Targets and measurements' it does not list any targets or measurements and it is unclear how the council will monitor the impact of its workforce planning approach in this way. For example, some councils have a target to increase their young workforce to a certain percentage of the workforce as a whole.

14. Monitoring the impact of workforce planning is complex with some areas easier to measure than others. The council has made effective use of tools published by the Improvement Service which help councils with their workforce planning. The council has put in place the foundations of a comprehensive process with underlying rich information. However, it has not yet developed clear indicators with associated targets for its workforce planning approach. These would help it to monitor the effectiveness of its approach and any progress being made.

Recommendation 1

The council should develop performance measures and targets to monitor the impact of its workforce planning approach with data on future skills and capacity projections or any plans for various scenarios detailed. Additionally, workforce data such as the number of casual staff, age profile of staff and staff turnover should also be reported regularly to members.

Exhibit 1

Themes and aims from the council's Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 Action Plan

Theme	Aims
Plan - Supporting evidence and outcome-based workforce planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed workforce planning • A more comprehensive understanding of the workforce • Becoming future-proofed in developing areas
Attract - Effective recruitment to attract the best staff into the Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive pipeline of future employees • More effective recruitment
Train - Supporting staff through education and training to equip them with the skills to undertake their role effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective corporate and service-specific training • Employees at all levels have the necessary digital skills and confidence • Reduce risk/impact of critical post leaving
Employ - Making South Ayrshire Council an employer of choice by ensuring staff are, and feel, valued, and rewarded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effective communication and collaboration • An increase in Personal Development Review completion rates • Employees feel rewarded and recognised
Nurture - Creating a workforce and leadership culture focusing on the health and wellbeing of all staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective occupational health services and absence mitigations that reflect the current and future needs • Enhanced employee wellbeing

Source: South Ayrshire Council - Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25

The Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 features a comprehensive range of data, including age profiles, details of casual staff used and absence statistics. It also sets out and draws themes from workforce intelligence provided by each service.

15. To develop the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 the council analysed a comprehensive range of workforce data from its Oracle system and other systems and sources as well as examining completed workforce planning

templates returned by service leads. Over half of its workforce plan is used to present this information. The data is presented with accompanying narrative.

Workforce data supports the plan.

16. One section of the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 explores South Ayrshire's demographics, referring to a predicted population decrease, growth of pensionable population and employment, deprivation and health indicators. Eight further pages are then dedicated to various statistics about the council's workforce. This includes the size of its workforce (describing an increase over the last five years), contract type and number of casual staff. Age profiles of staff and retirement projections are set out with the following conclusions being reached:

- the age profile of the council's staff reflects its ageing population with approximately 55 per cent of the workforce in the 40-59 age range
- the percentage of the workforce aged over 55 will reach over 40 per cent in five years' time
- the impact of age on absence is clear. There are a significantly higher proportion of occupational health referrals in the 51-60 age bracket, and a higher percentage of musculoskeletal referrals for those aged over 55.
- the council needs to ensure age (and related risk) forms a key consideration in employee policies and processes (e.g. flexible retirement, succession planning, mentorship, and support related to musculoskeletal disorders) ensuring that they are reflective of the future workforce demographic.

17. The plan also sets out the number of staff working particular working styles, the number of roles advertised and a detailed analysis of staff absence which, at that time, had remained at a similar level over the previous five years. It should be noted that absence has reduced in the most recent year (2022/23) and from a national perspective, the council ranks positively compared to national averages, with eight days lost per local government employee (excluding teachers) in comparison to the national average of 13. Absence for teachers equates to four days lost on average, lower than the national average of seven days. This reflects an ongoing focus by services and HR to manage absence. The plan does not include data on future skills and capacity projections or any plans for various scenarios (see [recommendation 1](#)).

Workforce planning templates detail service workforce pressures.

18. Over 90 per cent of council services returned workforce planning templates during 2022, which informed the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25. These asked services to list activities that would impact or change their workforce, identify potential risks, forecast the impact the change might have, set out what mitigations they had put in place and describe the wider considerations that should be taken into account.

19. The Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 details these responses in a 11-page appendix. The council analysed these responses and identified a number

of themes. These were listed in the Plan and reflected in the Corporate Workforce Plan Action Plan. These include:

- Key roles which are on temporary contracts present a future risk to service delivery
- Age is an issue, especially within more senior and specialised roles.
- Many services have considered role re-design and a range of mitigation measures to ensure the workforce can meet current and future demands, but there is no consistent model or approach
- Succession planning needs further embedded and developed.
- For some services, workforce planning is considered dependent on a service review
- There are limited examples of wider consideration of out-sourcing and partnership working opportunities
- Digital skills development can aid workforce planning and reduce reliance on central services such as ICT
- Corporate activities such as Oracle Fusion implementation will affect the whole workforce, and impact greatly in services such as Finance and ICT

20. The council recognises that it needs a more integrated understanding of its workforce, and this is featured as an aim in its workforce action plan. The associated actions focus on enhancing workforce data for managers. This is discussed in more detail in paragraphs 38 to 39. Additionally, as covered in paragraphs 11 to 14 and [recommendation 1](#), given the depth of the workforce data gathered by the council there is scope to use this in a more strategic way.

Links between the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 and the Council Plan, Digital and ICT Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan could be more explicit.

21. [Exhibit 2](#) sets out the way in which the council's Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 is linked to other key plans and strategies.

Exhibit 2

How the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 links with other key plans and strategies

Links with the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25	
Council Plan 2023-28	The Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 was prepared before the Council Plan 2023-28 was agreed. It acknowledged the imminent change in strategic objectives, noting that the broad workforce requirements would still apply. The Council Plan refers to the Corporate Workforce Plan and describes developing a workforce sufficient to meet the ageing population as one of the most significant collective challenges in the locality. It does not refer to the themes identified in the Corporate Workforce Plan.
Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP)	The current LOIP, approved in 2019 so predating the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25, does not refer to workforce challenges. It is currently being refreshed with a new set of priority areas to be identified from April 2024 onwards. The council's revised priorities and service delivery plans are being considered when developing the new LOIP.
Medium-term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29	The Corporate Workforce Plan does not mention budgetary pressures or make reference to the council's financial plans. The council's most recent Medium-term Financial Plan (MTFP) (2024-25 to 2028-29), approved in November 2023, does not refer to the Corporate Workforce Plan specifically but it does make the link between budget gaps and service reduction. It states given the significant budget gaps projected it is inevitable that service reductions will be required in the short to medium-term and, noting that 49% of council annual spend is on employee costs, it is likely that less staff will be required to operate the reduced levels of service being provided.
Digital and ICT Strategy 2023-28	The Digital and ICT strategy was approved over a year after the Corporate Workforce Plan. There are many mentions of digital in the Corporate Workforce Plan and of workforce within the Digital and ICT strategy but the Corporate Workforce Plan, and its accompanying themes, are not referred to directly in the Digital and ICT Strategy. The council recognises that going forward it needs to align the Corporate Workforce Plan with the Digital and ICT Strategy
HSCP Workforce Plan 2022-25	The Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) has its own workforce plan which also runs from 2022-25. The council's Organisational Development service provides workforce planning support to both the council and the HSCP. This helps ensure close alignment between both plans and associated action plans. Both action plans are organised around the five pillars of the workforce journey and include similar themes.

Source: South Ayrshire Council, Audit Scotland

Historically services tended to view workforce planning as a central function. To help services take ownership, service leads were required to consider workforce planning actions from the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 in each of their 2023/24 service plans.

22. The [2021 Best Value Assurance Report](#) (2021 BVAR) recommended that “the council should improve and embed workforce planning, so that service workforce plans are developed consistently across the council. The plans should include clear links to the council’s priorities and to its strategic change programme.”

23. Although we did not make specific recommendations relating to workforce planning in the 2022/23 [BV thematic report for South Ayrshire Council on Leadership in the development of the council’s strategic priorities](#), we did note that work was needed to embed workforce planning alongside service delivery plans to deliver service priorities. The council acknowledges that workforce planning is still seen by most services as a central function, and it wants to move to a position where services take more ownership of it.

24. The council worked to address this. When refreshing the service plans that sit underneath its Council Plan 2023-28 in Summer 2023, service leads had to consider the six standard workforce planning actions from the Corporate Workforce Plan, being:

- completion of the workforce planning template and succession planning template
- review of casual staff demand, processes, and development of an online sourcing and allocation tool to support future casual work allocation.
- development of thematic and locality-based programmes of online and face to face recruitment events and vacancy/job promotion
- development of internal career pathways within services
- increased undertaking of PDR (personal development reviews) across all services, and positioning that PDR is the key tool to capture and review corporate and personal objectives.
- review light duties process and other related opportunities across services to enable employees to begin the return-to-work process sooner.

The council consulted with employees and Trades Unions when developing its Corporate Workforce Strategy 2022-25.

25. The council asked its Trades Unions Group to provide a representative to sit on the Workforce Planning Implementation Group – a group that met from June 2022 to develop the plan. A representative from UNISON was nominated for membership although they only attended one meeting between June and when the plan was published in November 2022. The Corporate Workforce Plan was shared with the Trades Union Liaison in November 2022, just prior to approval.

26. Employees were not consulted directly but the views of heads of service were included in the workforce planning templates. An employee engagement survey was conducted between January and March 2024 and the council intends to reflect the results of this in the next iteration of its workforce plan.

Workforce planning is one of the council's new Transformational Change Board's projects. The council is testing out directorate-level workforce planning and plans to roll out these new arrangements across all its directorates.

27. The council has developed a new governance structure for transformational change due for implementation in March 2024. The new arrangements involve the establishment of a Transformational Change Board to oversee all change projects, with powers to fund, direct and approve projects. Workforce planning is one of these projects.

28. In an October 2023 internal self-assessment of workforce planning, the council highlighted strategic direction and governance as areas requiring development. The council intends to make the next iteration of its Workforce Plan more strategic. To address this, directorate-level workforce planning is being introduced. One of the council's directorates, the Strategic Change and Communities (SCC) Directorate, is testing this new approach to workforce planning that will generate a Directorate Workforce Plan. A workforce planning oversight sub-group, led by an Assistant Director, has been set up, within the SCC directorate, for each of the following three themes:

- Recruitment, deployment, and retention
- Training and development
- Staff wellbeing.

29. These three themes encompass those set out in the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25. Actions flowing from the sub-groups will either be fed into the Directorate Workforce Plan or the Corporate Workforce Plan, depending on what is most appropriate. For example, actions relating to absence levels may be fed into the Directorate Workforce Plan as changes are more easily made at Directorate level, but actions related to reducing the length of time the recruitment process takes would be escalated and covered by the Corporate Workforce Plan. The council plans to replicate this structure across all directorates by April 2024.

Digital technology and the workforce

The council has not yet articulated its vision for how digital technology can shape its workforce of the future. It acknowledges that its Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 needs to align with its Digital and ICT Strategy 2023-28. Delays to developing workforce reporting tools in Oracle Fusion have impeded the analysis and reporting of workforce data.

30. The Accounts Commission's May 2023 [Local Government Overview in Scotland Overview 2023](#) report notes that digital technology will make councils' future workforces look and work quite differently. To achieve the change required, councils need to make good use of digital technology and use the workforce in flexible ways.

31. 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.

32. 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 acknowledges that its Corporate Workforce Plan needs to align with the Digital and ICT Strategy.

33. Audit Scotland's 2021 [Digital Progress in Local Government](#) report highlighted that workforce plans must be aligned with digital transformation plans and be dynamic, taking account of how new technologies will affect the workforce, such as the introduction of automation and artificial intelligence (AI).

34. The Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 was approved one year before the Digital and ICT Strategy 2023-28. It does refer to the development of digital skills but does not reflect what the council's vision is for the shape of its future workforce as a result of digital transformation. Digital skills and digital transformation were identified by council managers as areas requiring development. As noted in [exhibit 2](#) above, the council recognises that going forward it needs to align its Corporate Workforce Plan with its Digital and ICT Strategy.

35. The council acknowledges in its Digital and ICT Strategy 2023-28 that digital is not limited to ICT and should be considered as part of service planning, service redesign, and workforce planning. It goes on to say that it wants to foster a culture in which technology-based solutions are considered at an early stage in all business change activities and will lead on the development of governance on the use AI across the council.

36. One of the council's digital priorities is to use digital technologies to reimagine how public services are delivered to improve outcomes for citizens, communities, and staff. The actions associated with this priority include:

- continue to develop our digital services platform to enhance and expand our online capabilities
- pilot Robotic Process Automation (RPA)
- introduce Parent Portal to the schools community
- continue to work with the Local Government Digital Partnership and collaborate with other Scottish councils on initiatives and projects that exploit digital technologies to reduce the cost of services and improve outcomes.

37. Although the council details the achievements of the previous Digital Strategy in the Digital and ICT Strategy 2023-28, the impact of the use of digital technology on workforce productivity or other workforce benefits, service delivery and outcomes has not been measured. The new strategy contains a forward-looking action plan that arranges actions by four digital priorities: People, Place and Partners, Digital Economy, Digital Council and Enabling Technology and Infrastructure. The action plan sets out actions, lead services and enabling services. It does not provide commentary on how the wider impact of these actions will be captured.

Recommendation 2

The council should measure and report on the impact that digital technology has on its service delivery and outcomes, including how this can shape its workforce of the future.

The introduction of Oracle Fusion has so far restricted the analysis and reporting of workforce data because reporting tools are yet to be developed.

38. The council noted in its Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 that services have access to a range of workforce data via the Oracle HR and Payroll system, allowing them to review their workforce structure, contract status, absence levels and overtime payments, as well as demographic information related to age and gender. At that time feedback from managers confirmed that access to Oracle data did aid workforce planning but that the platform was not intuitive and had limitations. It was expected that the implementation of the

upgraded Oracle Fusion platform in 2023 would provide some initial reporting enhancements (absence data dashboards for example) but even then, further work would be required to provide managers with more meaningful workforce data, with an additional focus on workforce forecasting.

39. The new Oracle Fusion platform went live on 1 April 2023. At that time there was a focus on business-critical functions to keep the council operating and reporting was viewed as secondary to this. As a result, since this time the council's Organisational Development service, that provides workforce planning support to both the council and the HSCP, and council managers have no longer been able to pull standard workforce reports. The council has identified this as an issue and has conducted a survey of service leads to establish what reporting is required as well as setting up a working group looking at what reporting is needed for workforce planning. The newly established Fusion Development Officers (paragraph 43) are also intended to support reporting. Over the next 12 months the council is aiming to develop a workforce planning dashboard for managers with real-time data and for reports to allow themes and trends to be identified.

Recommendation 3

The council should prioritise the development of workforce planning reporting tools in Oracle Fusion to aid managers in decision-making.

The council conducted a digital skills survey of its staff to identify digital skills gaps. The introduction of Oracle Fusion in April 2023 highlighted challenges for frontline staff that the council is actively addressing.

40. The council sets out in the introduction of its Digital and ICT Strategy 2023-28 that the use of digital technology has *exposed the risk of digital exclusion and of not having the skills or resources to access vital public services, maintain learning, and stay connected with others. This risk from digital exclusion not only affects citizens but also those who work for the council.*

41. The council is continuing to identify any digital skills gaps its staff are experiencing and developing training and support, both online and face-to-face. The Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 sets out the following actions in relation to digital. Progress against these actions, reported in October 2023, is set out in italics:

- **completion of a digital skills competency framework, gap analysis and associated action plan** - *The framework was launched corporately in December 2023. A corporate digital skills survey was conducted in 2022 to identify where there were skills gaps. It received 1,300 responses and included questions on general skills, communication, handling information and being safe online. Summaries of the results were provided to all service leads.*

- **development of a digital champions network** - surveys issued to existing champions to identify improvement areas to be addressed. The council will guide champion networks using best practice frameworks.
- **consider and progress recommendations within the Digital Maturity Assessment** - Development of the next iteration of the corporate Digital Strategy incorporates recommendations from the Digital Maturity Assessment, and the Council will take part in the revised Digital Office maturity process during 2024 and 2025. The Council is also taking part in the 2024 Scottish Government Data Maturity and Pathways Project.

42. Staff have encountered problems due to the roll-out of Oracle Fusion. Frontline workers have experienced issues in requesting annual leave and recording sickness absence. This has been due to a large number of staff being required to do this at a small number of terminals, usually at the same time, at the end of a shift. Feedback from staff indicates that they have not found the new system to be intuitive. Prior to the new system being introduced workshops had been held offering guidance but take-up was low in some services.

43. The council has acknowledged this as an issue and there is an action in the ICT and Digital strategy to improve digital access for members of the workforce who currently have little or no access to ICT on a day-to-day basis. The council is rolling out more training programmes as well as looking at an app that employees can put on their mobile phones. It has been piloted with 100 members of staff and feedback has been positive. In November 2023, dedicated officer roles were approved in HR and Finance to co-ordinate and lead of the continuing development of Oracle Fusion. The roles will include providing day-to-day support in the development and maintenance of the system, working in conjunction with service leads to scope, develop, and implement new system functionality and delivering training to service users.

The council is aware of the ways in which some communities can be digitally excluded and has plans in place to mitigate this.

44. The council acknowledges that digital exclusion continues to be an issue with access, affordability and skills being key factors that must be addressed. It set out in its Digital and ICT Strategy 2023-28 the intention that no one in the community would be left behind in terms of digital and that it would do this by:

- continuing to retain its traditional contact channels
- providing assisted digital services via telephone
- using its libraries and learning centres to give its communities access to digital technology
- working with its partners to provide learning opportunities for its communities to understand the benefits and limitations of digital and develop the skills they need to be safe and productive online.

Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment

The council's Remote Working Policy provides flexibility for staff. The council's initial assessment of the impact of its new way of working is positive with further monitoring and engagement with staff planned. The council is actively trying to reduce its reliance on casual workers.

45. 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, reduce sickness absence, and staff turnover.

46. 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 practices, employers need to ensure that service quality and productivity are maintained.

The council's Remote Working Policy includes five different workstyles, promoting flexibility for its staff.

47. In March 2021 the council established the Future Operating Model Steering Group which looked to develop a longer term, sustainable model of working post covid, including proposals for working from home. Fundamental to the project was establishing fair, flexible and supportive working arrangements to ensure staff have a good work life balance and remain healthy, engaged, and productive. It also included the implementation of new workstyles and considered a reduction in the number of buildings the council occupies and the related carbon footprint.

48. Workstreams were established to identify and support the development of proposals, with Trade Unions participating in each workstream. The council also carried out a Corporate Covid Survey in December 2020 gathering employees' experiences of working from home. Following consideration of this and the work carried out as part of each workstream, the Remote Working Policy was approved in March 2022 as part of the Future Operating Model. It identified five different workstyles with each post in the council attributed to one of these styles:

- Office workers
- Hybrid workers

- Agile workers
- Home workers
- Front line workers

49. All employees received written communication of their designated workstyles. The policy also allows for changes to workstyle proposals based on the provision of services or an employee's individual circumstances.

The council's initial assessment of the impact of its new way of working is positive with further monitoring and engagement with staff planned.

50. The council undertook an initial assessment of the Future Operating Model in March 2023, reflecting on its impact on the office estate, carbon footprint, efficiencies, and staff.

51. The Future Operating Model has highlighted opportunities to rationalise the office estate, allowing the council to make informed decisions about office buildings moving forward. Overall consumption of gas and electricity at the council's County Buildings has fallen.

52. Analysis from the all-staff survey shows that hybrid, agile and home workers are fully embracing the new way of working with the majority of the 450 respondents feeling that the new way of working is working well for the council. These staff have indicated that they have a good work/life balance.

53. The majority of hybrid, agile and home workers agree that they feel more productive in their new way of working. This sentiment is shared by the majority of service leads who have seen increases in productivity among hybrid and home workers.

54. A further employee engagement survey has been undertaken between January and March 2024 which is aligned to the key themes within the council's workforce plan. The results of this will influence the next iteration of the Workforce Plan and will give further insight into the impact of the council's new workstyles.

55. Efficiencies from the new way of working have also been identified in areas such as transport costs and office administration. Officers have identified £170,000 of savings so far, with a further review of costs planned.

Good practice – staff engagement

The council has engaged openly and transparently with all staff groups and trade unions on areas of service change and workforce planning developments. This is important as the council plans for a more multi-skilled workforce.

The council is actively trying to reduce its reliance on casual workers.

56. The council estimates the number of staff undertaking casual/bank work to be around 1,000 members staff in 2023. For some services the average number of hours worked per casual staff member can be over 600 hours.

57. In some services, due to recruitment difficulties, there is no other option but to rely on casual staff. However, the council recognises that some services have an overly high reliance on casual staff and are looking to reduce their use, if appropriate. Service reviews have helped to reduce the use of casual staff.

58. Every service has an action in its service plan to review its use of casual staff (review of casual staff demand, processes, and development of an online sourcing and allocation tool to support future casual work allocation). Thriving Communities has historically relied on casual staff for youth work or sports coaching. Many of these casual staff will have been on contracts for just three hours a week with a number of different people covering the role in different locations. Thriving Communities is now considering introducing a ten-hour contract post to cover numerous locations and making it either an annualised or permanent post.

59. There is a financial impact for the council for using casual staff. The costs of casual staff can exceed those of permanent employees. Also, any staff member who requires access to council systems will require a Microsoft licence. This is paid per user and is required to be paid whether the licence is being used regularly or not.

60. The council is planning to share data on the use of casual staff with the Directorate sub-groups, as they are established across the council, to allow them to discuss how to reduce their use in each service.

Developing future skills and capacity

The council and the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) have introduced a number of innovative initiatives to improve the skills and capacity of their future and existing workforce.

61. 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.

62. Jobs can be re-designed to optimise the workforce and improve services. Leaders need to engage with staff and trade unions over fundamental workforce reform. This is particularly challenging in an environment of potential job losses.

The council's Thriving Communities service provides workforce planning support across the council.

63. The council's Thriving Communities service was created in June 2021 and provides a range of support across the council in relation to service delivery and workforce planning through a number of programmes. These include Supported Employment and Modern Apprenticeship programmes. The council benefits from the impact apprentices have within its service areas, including supporting skills gaps and future workforce needs.

The council has introduced a number of initiatives to improve skills and capacity for its future and existing workforce.

64. The council recognises that it has an ageing workforce, with over a third of the current workforce aged over 50. This is combined with an above average future elderly population which will impact on the skills, capacity, and availability of staff in the future. In response to this the council has introduced a number of innovative programmes to try to address these demographic pressures.

New roles have been introduced to aid staff retention.

65. During a review of the Thriving Communities service structure, it was identified that there was a high turnover rate in certain roles. When feedback was received from employees, the primary reason for leaving was because of a lack of options for career progression. The grading meant that there were roles at level 5, with the next grade at level 9 which required a qualification which not everyone at level 5 had. The service decided to introduce an intermediate grade to allow people to progress within the service. This reduced the turnover rate.

A programme for the long-term unemployed is in place.

66. EVOLVE is a programme focusing on those aged over 25 who are experiencing long-term unemployment (defined as being out of work for 12 months). The programme provides a six-month paid employment based within the council or with a third sector organisation, with participants paid the real living wage and supported by a dedicated Thriving Communities Officer and their workplace mentor. The programme provides candidates and employers the opportunity to gauge suitability for permanent employment. Initially 49 people joined the programme with 29 of them completing it. Of these, 28 have since progressed into employment and one moved into further education. The council's Thriving Communities Employability Team continues to support 17 people who left the programme early.

A work experience programme provides opportunities for young people.

67. The Workout Programme is the council's work experience programme for young people. The programme started in 2014 with one school and ten places, and now offers around 100 places. From September to March, young people are offered a work placement with either the council or in a private sector organisation which is organised via the programme. The young person is supported by a key worker from the Thriving Communities team throughout their placement. The young people attend several sessions prior to their placement, such as team building and health and safety training.

68. Feedback from participants has been positive. They note that they feel like they are part of the organisation as they are given a uniform and a badge to wear and are given responsibility to carry out the job. At the end of the programme, a ceremony is held within the Town Hall to recognise the placement the young people have completed.

69. The programme has had an impact on positive destinations for young people, particularly for those who are care experienced or who are at risk of disengaging from school. There has been a lot of support for the programme from services offering placements, in particular property maintenance, sport, and leisure services and the (HSCP).

Adult apprenticeships have been created.

70. Some services are facing difficulties in recruiting to certain roles. The property maintenance service was having difficulties in recruiting craft employees, due to demand from the external construction industry and the fact neighbouring councils provided a higher rate of pay. The service worked with Thriving Communities to create four adult apprentice positions for two joiners and two plumbers. This opportunity was then advertised to all council staff. The success of this approach led to a further six new craft apprentices in 2022/23. By August 2026, the number of time-served tradesmen available will have increased by ten new craft operatives.

Work with Ayrshire College and the HSCP encourages social care applicants.

71. Thriving Communities has worked closely with Ayrshire College and the HSCP to develop a basic Introduction to Care Course that supports individuals looking to start their career in social care or to support anyone who requires

some additional training to return to this area of work. Thriving Communities provide additional support via a key worker and support with interview skills and PVG application support and CV writing.

The HSCP is exploring ways of attracting people into care roles and has introduced a grow your own social work programme.

72. Audit Scotland's 2022 [Social care briefing](#) highlighted that the social care workforce has high vacancy rates with many services facing recruitment problems. Together with the increasing demand for social care this presents a risk to the capacity and quality of social care services. The workforce issues being experienced nationally are replicated within the South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership.

73. The HSCP was looking at exploring the option of introducing a health and social care visa to attract people into care roles. A short life working group, with representatives from HR, OD, and Care at Home, was set up in July 2023 to focus on the viability of a corporate sponsorship licence and the international health and social care visa. A corporate sponsorship licence will allow the council to consider applications from workers who have a skilled worker visa, from which they receive a small but regular number of applications. A corporate licence would apply to a range of roles across the council, not just social care.

74. The health and social care visa enables the council to recruit workers from a wide list of countries determined by the Home Office. Workers' entry to the UK is dependent on their social care employment with the council and the visa typically lasts three years. This would be done via a specialist agency who would assist with aspects of recruitment, such as assessing English language skills, qualifications etc. The council would have a 'pastoral' responsibility to assist the worker in securing accommodation for the initial one to three months. Costs are significant, £1,500 for the corporate sponsorship licence and £3,500 for the visa. The HSCP has considered these costs against the ongoing recruitment demands, future pressures and high turnover are within three years of employment and have agreed to meet all other costs.

Grow our own social work programme.

75. The HSCP also has a Grow Your Own Social Work programme in place. This provides opportunities for staff to undertake an Undergraduate qualification or Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work. Currently the programme has two cohort groups on the Post Graduate Diploma and two cohort groups on the Undergraduate programme. They are commencing the process in the coming months for an additional undergraduate intake.

Good practice – workforce initiatives

The council has introduced a number of initiatives to improve skills and capacity for its future and existing workforce. This has included collaboration with partners to seek opportunities for its workforce growth in key areas such as social care.

Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

As well as sharing its roads and transportation service with East Ayrshire Council through the Ayrshire Roads Alliance, the council shares a small number of other roles with other councils. The workforce benefits of these arrangements have still to be captured or quantified.

76. 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.

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

78. The council noted in its Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 that it has limited examples of wider consideration of out-sourcing and partnership working opportunities.

The council shares its roads and transportation services with East Ayrshire Council through the Ayrshire Roads Alliance. The council is undertaking a review of this partnership.

79. South Ayrshire Council, alongside East Ayrshire Council share council roads and transportation services through the Ayrshire Roads Alliance. The Alliance has been in place since April 2014 and is governed by a Joint Committee of elected members from the two councils, with the service being led by East Ayrshire Council. The services it delivers includes roads maintenance, winter maintenance, design and infrastructure, traffic and transportation and road safety.

80. The council has stated the benefits of the service are reduced duplication and economies of scale with one authority providing all back-office support, for example HR, Finance, legal services, information technology and procurement. All plant, equipment and resources are shared across the two authorities. However, these benefits have never been quantified.

81. Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to comply with the Accounts Commission and COSLA Code of Guidance on funding external bodies and following the public pound. The quality of the service and value for money are key aspects of following the public pound. The council is currently undertaking a review of Ayrshire Roads Alliance partnership, based on the available data, to

ensure this represents Best Value. As part of the review, it will produce an options appraisal on future delivery.

The council also has shared arrangements in place with the other Ayrshire Councils for a small number of roles.

82. The Ayrshire Archives is a joint initiative between South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and North Ayrshire councils for the preservation and management of records transferred to them or created by them. South Ayrshire council is the lead authority with responsibility for the central repository and staff management, with additional public access points in North and East Ayrshire.

83. The Ayrshire Civil Contingencies Team (ACCT) is a joint service for the three Ayrshire Councils, established in 2009. The team has four members of staff and there are an additional two officers employed in other areas of the council who volunteer for the on-call cover. Initially the team worked more with their original councils but over the years this has changed to the team having a lead officer with responsibility for specific areas of work and working with all three councils and HSCPs.

84. The team has developed a broad skillset due to varied risks across the three areas. There have been additional benefits for the three councils as the ACCT provides joint training and exercising for staff from all three councils and HSCPs. For example, staff from the three Ayrshire councils can attend training held in one of the councils where normally this training would have to be repeated across the three councils.

85. The council has not captured the extent to which there have been workforce benefits resulting from these shared roles. These might include reduced workforce, costs, or service benefits.

86. The council is actively involved in SOLACE transformation work and one of the workstreams is looking at what services could be shared and what the benefits would be. The council is open to being involved in any projects resulting from this workstream.

Measuring the impact of workforce planning

Through self-evaluation of workforce planning across its services, the council has put in place the foundations on which it can measure improvement. The council should use this baseline data to set performance indicators and associated targets to capture the effectiveness of its workforce planning approach. The council's new approach to workforce planning is designed to lead to more detailed and frequent scrutiny of progress.

87. 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 has recently gathered rich service-level intelligence through workforce and succession planning templates. This information will help it to plan its workforce planning approach and could be used as a baseline for charting its progress.

88. All services were issued with workforce planning and succession templates to complete in Summer 2023:

- The workforce planning maturity matrix, designed by the Local Government Association, requires services to complete a self-evaluation of how advanced workforce planning is across areas such as data, demand, supply, gap assessment and strategy development. This was completed for all services in the council and directorate and council scores were also calculated.
- The succession planning template asks services to assess roles based on critical need to the organisation and risks associated with these roles, such as the need to fill the position if it becomes vacant or if the role involves a unique set of skills or knowledge base. Roles are scored and given a red, amber, or green (RAG) rating. This was completed for a wide range of critical roles in the council.

89. A Workforce and Succession Planning Toolkit is available on the council's intranet to provide service leads with further guidance on horizon scanning, planning templates and service case studies. An informative awareness video

for service leads and managers on the template process has also been developed.

90. The results of the workforce and succession planning exercise were collated into a report for each directorate in December 2023. The scoring mechanism and the use of the RAG rating allowed directors and service leads to easily see the areas marked as red. There is a wealth of information contained within these reports and they provide a good baseline for directorates. There are plans to repeat this exercise in 18 months' time to ascertain if and where progress has been made.

Good practice – self-evaluation

Through self-evaluation of workforce planning across its services, the council has put in place the foundations on which it can measure improvement.

The council's new approach to workforce planning is designed to lead to more detailed and frequent scrutiny of progress.

91. The council set out in its Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 that an annual update on progress would be reported to the Service and Partnerships Performance Panel, with actions incorporated within the council's corporate performance reporting systems.

92. The council has made good progress in its first year against the actions set out in its Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25. An update was provided to members in October 2023. This focussed on those actions in the plan that were due for completion by December 2023. Out of 31 actions, 11 were complete, 8 were incomplete and the rest were on target for completion by their target date or ongoing. For those actions that were not complete, these were mainly in relation to the health and wellbeing of staff. Completed actions included:

- incorporating workforce planning into the service planning process
- incorporating workforce planning into the Transformation Programme
- revising the workforce planning and succession planning manager toolkit
- providing workforce planning training for CLT and service leads
- development of a digital champions network.

93. Actions not completed, but given short extensions by the Service and Performance Panel to allow full completion included:

- aligning future workforce monitoring equality reports with workforce planning reports and updates
- consideration of notice period requirements to ensure the council is consistent with other employers

- A short life working group in conjunction with HSCP exploring the international Health and Social Care Visa and refugee talent pool
- development and implementation of a corporate employee opinion survey
- consideration on ageing workforce over the next 10 years when reviewing personnel policies.

94. The council has since developed an additional layer of workforce planning governance and oversight, as described in paragraph 27. The new process is currently being piloted in the Strategic Change and Communities Directorate. In terms of scrutiny this involves each of the three sub-groups (recruitment, deployment and retention, training and development and wellbeing):

- reporting on the work undertaken to the ELT Transformation Board on a quarterly basis
- developing directorate workforce planning actions, with clear links to service planning
- assisting in progressing the range of relevant actions and activities within the action plan contained in the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25
- confirming ownership and timescales of actions and activities, and to progress required short-life working groups.

The range of workforce data reported in the Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 is not regularly reported.

95. The council sets out the range of workforce data it uses to inform its workforce planning approach in its Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25. This is listed in paragraphs 16 and 17. While detailed absence data is reported annually to the Service and Partnerships Performance Panel, other workforce data such as number of casual staff, age profile of staff and staff turnover is not. The council does not have a target to reduce sickness absence (see [recommendation 1](#)).

96. The council's Annual Performance Report 2022/23 was approved in December 2023. Although it includes updates on activities carried out in relation to workforce planning, e.g. development of the workforce plan and training conducted, it does not report against any indicators. Similarly, progress against the Council Plan 2023-28 is reviewed quarterly but does not report on staff-related indicators.

97. Between 2019/20 and 2022/23 levels of sickness absence have fallen from an average of ten days per year to seven days per year. The direct cost (not an additional cost, but the proportion of the payroll which is being paid to employees not at work due to sickness absence) of absence in 2022/23 was £4.585 million which was a reduction of around £0.490 million from 2021/22 (and down £0.230 million from 2019/20, although a direct comparison is difficult given the impacts of pay awards etc).

Appendix 1 – improvement action plan

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
<p>1. Workforce performance measures</p> <p>The council's Corporate Workforce Plan 2022-25 includes a detailed action plan. However, this does not list any targets or measurements and it is unclear how the council will monitor the impact of its workforce planning approach in this way.</p>	<p>The council should develop performance measures and targets to monitor the impact of its workforce planning approach with data on future skills and capacity projections or any plans for various scenarios detailed. Additionally, workforce data such as the number of casual staff, age profile of staff and staff turnover should also be reported regularly to members.</p> <p>Paragraph 14</p>	<p>Management response</p> <p>As part of the Council's revised Transformation Process, specific workforce targets and expectations will be set, cascaded, and reported against. Future workforce updates to members will reference key workforce data and metrics (see response to issue 3).</p> <p>Responsible officer</p> <p>Lyndsay McRoberts - Depute Chief Executive/Director of Education</p> <p>Actioned by</p> <p>December 2024</p>
<p>2. Impact of Digital Strategy actions on the workforce</p> <p>The Digital and ICT Strategy 2023-28 has an associated action plan that sets out actions, lead services and enabling services. However, it does not contain detail on the measures the impact of these actions will have on the use of digital technology on workforce productivity or other workforce benefits and service delivery and outcomes.</p>	<p>The council should measure and report on the impact that digital technology has on its service delivery and outcomes, including how this can shape its workforce of the future.</p> <p>Paragraph 37</p>	<p>Management response</p> <p>The revised Transformation Process and associated structure will ensure closer alignment between the Digital and ICT Strategy, service delivery and the workforce. The required focus on value added/benefits realisation will become embedded into the process.</p>

Responsible officer

Louise Reid - Assistant
Director Strategic Change

Actioned by

December 2024

3. Workforce information from Oracle Fusion

The new Oracle Fusion platform went live on 1 April 2023. At that time there was a focus on business-critical functions to keep the council operating and reporting was viewed as secondary to this. This has led to there being fewer workforce reporting tools, creating limitations in what analysis can be undertaken.

The council should prioritise the development of workforce planning reporting tools in Oracle Fusion to aid managers in decision-making.

[Paragraph 39](#)**Management response**

This will be a priority over the next 12 months. Projects and procurement activities related to Fusion enhancement will be required to consider workforce planning data and reporting, and how they improve the development of future workforce plans. Accessibility and availability of reports across a range of stakeholders will be a key aim.

Responsible officer

Louise Reid - Assistant
Director Strategic Change

Actioned by

March 2025

Workforce innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

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