

Workforce Innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

Best Value thematic work in Dumfries and Galloway Council 2023-24



Prepared by Audit Scotland

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Key facts



Dumfries and Galloway Council Workforce 2022/23

6,558	Number of people working for the council – headcount
5,119	Number of people working for the council – full time equivalent
891	Number of fixed-term staff
8.6 %	Turnover of staff in last year
11.8	Days lost due to absence in last year per employee* ¹



Age profile

4%	16 to 24
40%	25 to 44
27%	45 to 54
29%	55+

¹ *Includes Scottish Joint Council (SJC) sickness absence days lost per FTE. Does not include teaching sickness absence.

Key messages

- 1** Dumfries and Galloway employs approximately 6,500 people. The council has updated its Workforce Plan 2023-28 to align with its strategic priorities. Service plans for each directorate link to the Council Plan 2023-28 and contain workforce information. The People Strategy 2021-26 reflects the overarching principles within the Council Plan 2023-28. The council have data in place to support these plans.
- 2** A Change and Savings programme has been developed. This includes an ambition to have fewer but more multi-skilled staff. Workforce related savings options include a reduction in FTE numbers of at least 46 staff re-deployment and development of multi-skilled roles.
- 3** The People Strategy demonstrates an ambition to improve staff engagement and there are forums in place to support this but the council could be more transparent on how it incorporates staff views in future iterations of the Workforce Plan. The council must ensure that it effectively communicates with staff around organisational change, and ensure they are supported through redeployment and restructuring processes.
- 4** More than half of the workforce are aged 45 or over. In this context, the council is proactive in assessing its future workforce needs. It has a range of activities to develop employee skills and support succession planning, such as grow-your-own schemes, collaborating with education providers, and initiatives to develop the young workforce.
- 5** The council has an ambition to adopt a digital-first approach, as outlined in its Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-2026. A digital skills survey was carried out and improving digital access and skills is now a focus. Savings of £1.2 million have been identified through digital transformation projects over the next five years.
- 6** The council has a range of flexible working policies in place to facilitate different preferred working patterns. The council's approach to hybrid and remote working supports the operational needs of services and teams. The council monitors hybrid working as part of its Office Accommodation Strategy and employee sickness absence. It is considering how to measure the impact of hybrid working on staff productivity.

- 7** 13.6 per cent of the workforce are employed on a fixed term basis. This does not account for agency staff numbers and the council does not routinely monitor the use of agency staff at a corporate level as part of its workforce planning analysis.
- 8** There is a partnership approach to workforce planning across the Health and Social Care Partnership, with an integrated approach taken in developing the Health and Social Care Workforce Plan 2022-25. The Workforce Plan refers to an ambition to share services with other public bodies. Although the council does not share services with other public or private sector bodies that have significant implications for its workforce, it does have some smaller shared working agreements in relation to building standards and planning services to support capacity.
- 9** The council measures the impact of its workforce planning approach through council-wide progress updates and service level reporting to committees. The new Council Workforce Plan 2023-28 contains an action plan which is linked to the People Strategy outcomes and is supported by timescales and identified service leads, but the action plan is not linked to specific performance indicators. There are some broader workforce performance indicators in place, but these focus on generic measures and do not capture the range of workforce activity that takes place. The council has established metrics to monitor specific workforce planning activities, such as the number of staff undertaking leadership training. These measures contain targets which is useful for assessing performance.

Scope of the audit

1. The [2023 Local Government Overview \(LGO\)](#) notes that councils have never faced such a challenging situation. Service demands have increased after the Covid-19 pandemic and funding is forecast to reduce in real terms. Workforce pressures including recruitment in a competitive labour market, employee retention and high sickness absence levels are putting councils under continued pressure.
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 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 practice such as a four-day week to achieve service and staff benefits?
- What innovative practice is the council using to develop its future workforce capacity and skills needs and manage staff reductions in line with its priorities?
- What progress has the council made with sharing roles or functions across its services and/or with other councils and partners?
- How effectively is the council measuring the impact of its workforce planning approach?

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

Following last year's thematic review, the council has updated its Workforce Plan 2023-28 to align with the council's strategic priorities

7. Dumfries and Galloway Council employs 6,558 people at a total cost of approximately £270.7million, including pension contributions. Staff costs equate to around 41 per cent of the council's overall expenditure. More than half of the council's workforce is aged 45 or over. The gender profile of the council's workforce consists of a higher proportion of female (61.3 per cent) than male (38.7 per cent) staff. The council also have fewer professional roles in comparison to the rest of Scotland.

8. 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.

9. Our [Best Value thematic work 2022/23](#) recommended that the plan be updated to align with the council plan. The new Council Workforce Plan 2023-28 was approved by Economy and Resources Committee in March 2024. The plan is linked to the Council Plan 2023-28. It also provides linkages with the council's People Strategy 2021-26, the Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-26, and the Health and Social Care Workforce Plan 2022-25. The plan reflects the broad financial challenges ahead for the council, but it does not directly link with the council Budget 2023/24 – 2025/26. The plan was produced through consultation exercises with stakeholders, including:

- distributing a Microsoft form to service leads containing specific questions about challenges and gaps
- engaging with managers to identify risk areas and hard to fill posts.

10. The Council Workforce Plan 2023-28 sets out the Dumfries and Galloway region profile, including the age profile, population changes, and labour market trends, as well as profile for the council's workforce such as headcount and types of posts. The plan does not contain wider data such as vacancy rates, turnover, or service level information. This is included in other reporting ([paragraphs 15-16](#)). The plan sets out the council's future workforce requirements. It outlines specific factors which will impact the workforce in the future, such as environmental and political factors, and identifies associated impacts. The council would benefit from further developed scenario planning to show how it will mitigate these impacts.

11. The plan identifies areas that will help to address any challenges and optimise opportunities, through approaches such as upskilling the workforce, employee engagement, and leadership development. The accompanying action plan

contains more specific actions for each of the factors identified through an 'Assessment of needs' ([page 27, paragraphs 70-71](#)).

The People Strategy 2021-26 reflects the principles of the Council Plan 2023-28

12. A People Strategy covering the period 2021-26 is in place. The People Strategy is an integral document for the council in supporting its strategic aims which are: Safeguard our future; Support our citizens; Support our communities; and Be a responsive council. It outlines the council's ambition of how it wants to engage and develop the workforce and identifies key priorities and drivers. It sets out the council's core behaviours – SUPPORT: *Strengthen; Understand; Protect; Promote; Open and Transparent; Respect; and Treat*. Within the People strategy there are six outcomes ([Exhibit 1](#)).

Exhibit 1. People Strategy 2021-26

The council's People Strategy has six strategic outcomes



Source: Audit Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway Council

13. In measuring progress against the People Strategy, the council has produced an action plan. Each outcome has several actions with each action having a time frame, responsible person, and a success measure.

14. Examples of actions include a staff survey, developing a coaching and mentoring programme and modernising approaches to recruitment. In November 2023, a yearly update on the People Strategy was provided to the Economy and Resources Committee. The council is making timely progress with actions and has identified clear timelines for planned work ([page 27, paragraph 72](#)).

Data is collected to support workforce planning

15. An annual workforce establishment report is compiled annually and presented to the Economy and Resources committee. The most recent report was presented in November 2023, containing details and trends of the workforce which makes up Dumfries and Galloway Council. For example, it includes a workforce trends and analysis table which allows a quick overview of workforce planning data such as FTE, headcount, vacancies, and length of service. It is used to help managers make better management decisions, support workforce planning, and build people and organisational capacity.

16. An interactive workforce dashboard has also been created by the digital team, for internal use. This brings together data from council HR systems and allows Chief officers to view workforce data in real time, and drill down into each head of service area in more detail. It provides data in five areas: the workforce at a glance; equality and diversity; positions; absence; and recruitment.

Each service directorate has its own annual service plan containing a section on workforce planning. Service plans are aligned to the Council Plan 2023-28

17. Each service area in the council has its own annual service plan which includes details on workforce engagement and the challenges for the service. Service plans for 2023/24 were taken to service committees in August and September 2023.

18. The council's four principles form a core part of each directorate's service plan, with details on how the individual service is supporting the principles. Service plans are mapped to the principles listed in the Council Plan 2023-28.

19. Each service plan contains sections on the council's intended service delivery activities and change and improvement activities for the year ahead, which are linked to other council strategies. Service-specific and council-wide performance measures are outlined, which contain targets, timescales, and benchmark information. Service plans contain a risk register. Several of the services highlight workforce related risks, for example due to loss of staff and skills gaps.

Service People Plans are in development, and will provide opportunity for robust service level workforce assessments

20. To accompany the refreshed Council Workforce Plan, the council have developed a Service People Plan template, which will support individual service plans. The template provides a prompt for services to plan and report on service workforce metrics, challenges, and opportunities. It prescribes services to report a detailed risk assessment, and action plan which is mapped to the People Strategy 2021-26. As the plans have not yet been populated by services, it is not possible to say how effective these are, but the overall template provides a space for a more detailed service assessment of workforce planning, whilst linking to strategic risks and outcomes. The Service People Plans are expected to be presented to service committees later in 2024.

The People Strategy demonstrates an ambition to improve staff engagement and there are forums in place to support this. The council could be more transparent on how it incorporates and acts on staff views in future iterations of the Workforce Plan

21. One of the six outcomes in the People Strategy 2021-26, is focussed on 'engaging our people'. This identifies the councils desire to engage with employees and support them to feel valued. This outlines a set of commitments, including:

- Facilitate meaningful 'supportive conversations' through employee engagement, which is open to all employees of Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Continue the commitment to developing strong working relationships with recognised trade unions, to help shape the councils culture with staff, based on best practice and compliance with negotiated agreements.

22. The council have activity underway to support this outcome. It held a series of supportive workforce conversations across 2022 and 2023. It plans to reintroduce pulse surveys and relaunch staff focus groups. The council also engage with trade unions, for example through Joint Consultative Group meetings. The council engaged with staffing groups in the development of the refreshed Workforce Plan through consultation with trade unions and staff focus groups. The council could be more transparent on how it incorporates and acts on staff feedback from these forums, in future iterations of the Workforce Plan.

23. The council recently undertook a staff survey which gained staff views and insights across a range of issues. This has a response rate of 28 per cent. Some of the findings indicate that there is room for improvement in relation to how the council engages with, and acts on the views, of its staff. For example, 29 per cent of respondents indicated that they had a clear understanding of the council's vision, and 27 per cent of staff believed that the council would act based on staff survey findings. Communicating change was also an area for improvement ([page 23, paragraph 58](#)).

Recommendation 1

As the council move forward with its plans for a more multi skilled workforce, it must be more transparent on how it incorporates and acts on staff feedback into future iterations of the Workforce Plan.

Digital technology and the workforce

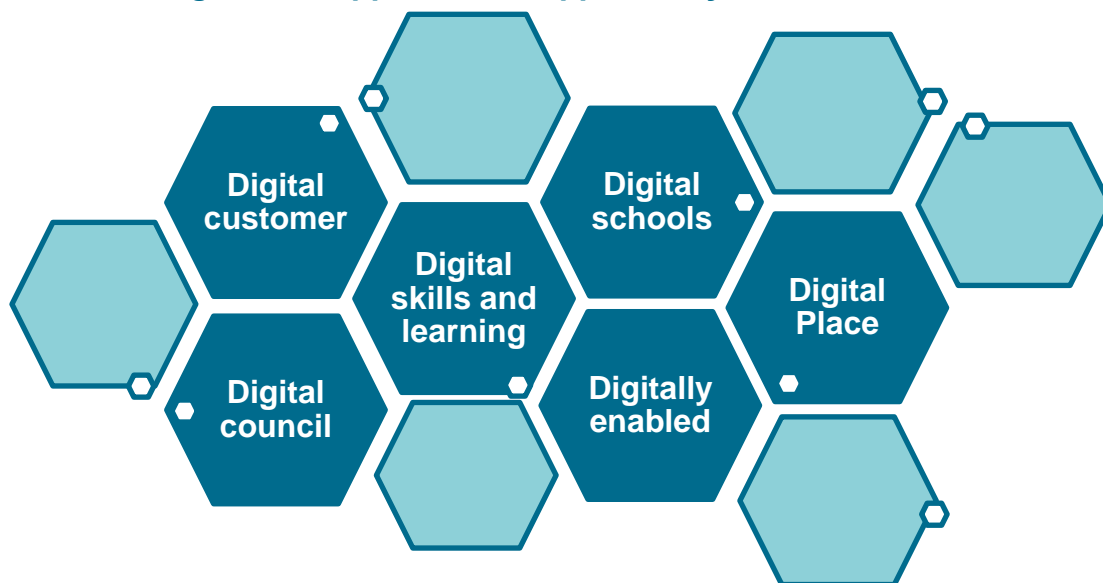
In 2022 the council published its Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-26. The strategy outlines the need to transform using digital technologies, whilst ensuring that no residents are left behind

24. The LGO notes that digital technology will make councils' future workforces look and work quite differently. In order to achieve the change required, councils need to make good use of digital technology and use the workforce in flexible ways. Digital technology has a strong bearing on a council's workforce needs. Councils need to align digital skills initiatives with wider workforce planning.

25. The Accounts Commission's January 2021 [Digital Progress in Local Government](#) report also highlighted how Covid-19 accelerated the use of digital technology in councils. The council considered the findings from this report in the development of its Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-26, which adopts a digital first approach. It was published before the new Council Plan 2023-28. It broadly supports the council's objective to offer digital services to improve outcomes and services for citizens and staff. The strategy identifies six key themes ([Exhibit 2](#)).

Exhibit 2: Digital and ICT Strategy 2021-26

The council's digital first approach is supported by six themes



26. Each theme has an ambition attached to it. Ambitions include detail on what the council is looking to achieve, what difference it will make, how it will be achieved and what the change will mean in practice.

The council's aim is to use innovative digital technology to transform services

27. The council aspire to be innovative with digital solutions, with multiple aims including providing opportunities for electronic voting, use of cloud-based systems, developing a digitally skilled workforce, support enhancement of digital learning, and improving the provision of digital and literacy skills for excluded groups.

28. The council monitors progress against the Digital and ICT Strategy, with an update presented to Economy and Resources Committee in November 2023. This outlines progress in areas such as Economy and Resources service redesign options, a key part of the council's Change and Savings programme ([Table 1, page 22](#)), and the use of technology to streamline internal recruitment processes.

29. The use of digital has supported innovative practice to develop across other services such as:

- **Waste services** - digital has supported assisted waste collection and ordering new and replacement bins. The council have recently introduced an online option for citizens to schedule a bulky uplift. In the first month 60 per cent of people used this option. If this trend continues, the council estimate a saving of 700 hours of contact centre time over the year.
- **Roads service** – restructuring of the roads service and additional investment led to a series of improvement projects, including the trialling of AI to assess road defects and identify where repairs are needed. By August 2023 approximately 70 per cent of the road network had been surveyed with the AI system.

30. As the use of digital progresses, the council are exploring ways to increase collaborative working, and sharing good practice and ideas across services and between councils and sectors.

Developing the digital workforce is a key ambition and work to address ICT access and skill gaps is ongoing

31. The Digital and ICT Strategy identifies an aspiration for the workforce, that *'staff have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to use digital solutions, develop new ways of working, and embrace new technologies'*. In progressing with its digital transformation agenda, the council is working to understand and develop the digital skills across its workforce.

32. A digital skills staff survey was undertaken between September 2022 – January 2023. It showed that most staff do not have any skills beyond foundation level. Work is ongoing with services to understand the gaps and how to provide the training needed to move forward. For example, through the creation of a Digital Champion's Network ([page 19, paragraph 49](#)) and working with Education Scotland to facilitate the Digital Leader's Programme ([page 21, paragraph 53](#)).

33. Staff in a number of council services (roads, facilities, waste and care and support services) have access to mobile devices and council systems. This includes catering staff, janitors, cleaning staff, roads and waste operatives. The council has also introduced Multi Factor Authentication (MFA) that allows staff to use their own device to access council systems. A new employee learning system has recently been rolled out and will be available on personal devices ([page 21, paragraph 54](#)), but the council must work to ensure that all staff can access wider council systems to ensure the success of creating a digital workforce.

34. One of the council's aims is to allow staff to operate "in the field" using mobile devices. The mobile devices currently being used within the council services listed above are smartphones, tablets and in cab tablets which allow staff to order materials, log when bins are not present and provide data in relation to the inspection of roads. The council believe an effective mobile digital service will deliver better customer service, greater flexibility for staff and reduced costs for travel and office space. As well as offering more flexible options for how staff work the council want to offer customers more online services which will be available 24/7 making it more convenient for them to interact with the council.

Work is underway to improve internet connectivity across the Dumfries and Galloway region

35. The rurality profile of Dumfries and Galloway Council presents a challenge for internet connectivity. The council are working with partners to enhance connectivity across the region, including increasing access to public wi-fi in council buildings.

36. The Borderlands partnership comprises of five local authorities in Scotland and England namely, Cumberland Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Northumberland County Council, Scottish Borders Council and Westmorland and Furness Council. The enhanced 5G access will support commercial and environmental applications, such as digital ticketing and payments, and providing real time traffic and destination management. It will also support a better experience for tourists to the region. The project recently received £36 million in UK Government funding after being named a new 5G innovation region. The Marina at Stranraer has been identified as a potential site for the technology.

The council have identified savings that digital technology can offer

37. The council have estimated that savings of up to £1.2 million could be achieved through the delivery of two Digital Transformation savings options, by rationalising the digital estate and through service redesign over the next five years (2023/24 – 2027/28) ([Table 1, page 22](#)). The Digital Service Redesign savings option will initially focus on the areas of Revenues and Benefits, Roads Maintenance and Works, Internal Recruitment and Leisure and Sports Management. The IT Systems and Infrastructure savings option focuses on joining up systems and consolidating the council's ICT infrastructure to manage this in an efficient manner throughout the council. The initial focus will be on CRM, council website and customer portal, with opportunity for further rationalisation.

38. Both of these savings options were included in the budget for 2023/24 to 2025/26 which was approved by Council in February 2023. Each savings option

shows how it is linked to the Council Plan 2023-28 themes and strategic outcomes. The savings options also highlight whether there will be an impact on workforce/staffing numbers.

Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment

The council has a range of policies in place to support flexible and hybrid working. Individualized approaches to hybrid working are adopted across services and teams

39. Flexible working is a core part of the council's workforce planning approach. In 2022/23 there were 4,272 people on flexible working arrangements, accounting for 65 per cent of the workforce. This is a slight reduction since 2021/22, where 4,652 people were on flexible working arrangements. The council attribute this to having fewer people employed on part-time contracts, following the cessation of fixed term contracts that supported Covid-19 recovery where staff were redirected into various roles.

40. The council facilitates broader flexible and hybrid working patterns where staff can request to work contracted hours at times that suit them, whilst accommodating business needs. The council have a range of flexible working policies in place which support its vision where '*work is what we do, not a place we go*'. These are reviewed regularly and provide guidelines for staff who wish to work remotely. Examples include:

- **Smarter working policy and procedure** - supports modern, flexible and dynamic working practices where employees can request alternative working patterns to suit their circumstances whilst delivering service needs.
- **Annual leave purchase scheme** – allows individuals to request up to 72 hours (full time equivalent) additional annual leave per leave year. This aims to promote health and wellbeing and support work-life balance. In 2022/23, 260 employees purchased additional annual leave.
- **Carers Policy** – provides support and flexibility for registered carers. The number of people on the carers register has increased year-on-year.

41. These policies are integral to supporting employee wellbeing, but engagement with staff has outlined some areas for improvement. The 2023 people survey reported that 63 per cent of respondents agreed that they had a good balance between work life and private life. Whilst only 30 per cent of respondents felt that the council is genuinely interested in the wellbeing of staff, 73 per cent agreed that their line manager is supportive of health and wellbeing. In addition, 61 per cent of respondents knew where to access information to help maintain wellbeing. Supporting awareness of all flexible working policies on offer will be important to ensure that these are utilised effectively. The council has work in place to support

employee wellbeing, such as providing wellbeing newsletters and implementing Supportive Workforce Conversations ([paragraph 46](#)).

42. The council is promoting hybrid working as a staff benefit for hard-to-fill positions, to attract suitable candidates from out with the region, and support staff retention to existing posts. It is outlining flexibility in job descriptions to attract a wider pool of applicants and to allow staff to be working towards a promoted role. The Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) also note that hybrid working will support recruitment to attract individuals in the future, to roles that are based elsewhere in the UK.

The council's approach to hybrid and remote working supports the operational needs of services and teams. It is beginning to explore how to measure the impact of hybrid working on staff productivity and service performance

43. The council has not carried out a formal assessment of hybrid working in relation to service performance or staff productivity. It monitors hybrid working as part of its Office Accommodation Strategy, to support analysis of council buildings and desk utilisation. It also uses measures such as sickness absence and considers feedback from services to monitor hybrid working more broadly.

44. The Human Resources Directorate within the council is beginning to explore the development of a set of metrics, to assess the impact of hybrid working against service performance and productivity. It will take this work forward as part of its digital agenda ([pages 13-14, paragraphs 31-34](#)) to explore data trends in relation to staff numbers and efficiencies, hybrid working, and service delivery. This work will be supported by an ongoing qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of hybrid working across teams.

45. There are examples where some services utilizing remote working has supported individual preferences and flexible approaches to service delivery. For example, hybrid working is a key part of the Finance and Procurement service's working approach and has allowed other services to utilise the working space. The council will continue to monitor the impact of remote working against its property estate through its office accommodation strategy. Smart working practices are key to the strategy's aims to maximise the use of fewer assets.

46. Across 2022 and 2023 the council carried out a series of *'Supportive Workforce Conversations'*. These highlighted the positive impact that working from home had on employee work-life balance, and that consideration should be given to allow all staff to access some form of hybrid working. The council is considering how it can extend hybrid working practices to roles with more structured requirements. For example, it is supporting social care staff to complete administrative related tasks remotely. Engagement with Joint Trade Unions in 2024 will also look at extending flexible working arrangements for some staff groups.

47. The HSCP Workforce Plan 2022-25 also contains reference to developing models of hybrid working where roles are suitable or where specific parts of the role could be carried out remotely. The council's and HSCP's digital agenda will influence the direction of these initiatives.

Recommendation 2

The council should continue to monitor the impact of its hybrid working practices when it is considering how to roll them out more widely to staff and ensure that staff across the council are aware of flexible working policies on offer.

Developing future skills and capacity

The council is proactive in identifying the needs of its future workforce and there are a range of council-wide and service initiatives that support workforce development

48. The rurality and age profile of the population of Dumfries and Galloway presents particular challenges for the council in attracting and retaining people with the right skills. These factors, alongside national workforce challenges, mean that some professional roles are harder to fill, including head teachers, social workers, and planners.

49. The council is proactive in responding to these challenges. A progress update to the Economy and Resources Committee in November 2023 outlined progress to date with the People Strategy 2021-26 ([Exhibit 1](#)). Progress includes developing initiatives such as the Inspire Pathway to promote opportunities for the future workforce and 'grow your own' initiatives ([paragraphs 50-53](#)). It has also created a Digital Champions Network, where individuals in the council are nominated to support digital capability across services.

50. Succession planning is a challenge for the council due to challenges in retraining suitably skilled staff. The council has taken forward initiatives to support leadership development. For example:

- A leadership development framework is in place which aims to develop the council's future leaders across supervisory, management and leadership roles. The council hosts bi-annual leadership development events. Leadership programmes have supported the development of 15 managers per year over the last ten years.
- The locally delivered Professional Learning programmes in education supports teachers and early learning and childcare staff to progress through accredited leadership programmes, in collaboration with Education Scotland and universities. Enrolment figures in 2023-24 for Introducing School Leadership has shown an increase, following a decline in numbers during the Covid-19 pandemic years. The council attributes the programme as having had a subsequent impact on succession planning with the majority of those in promoted posts having completed the programme.

51. Some services have targeted recruitment to support hard-to-fill roles ([Case Study 1](#)). Our [Social Care briefing](#) underlined the substantial workforce challenges facing the sector, with an ageing workforce and poor terms and conditions.

Case Study 1: Social work services

Dumfries and Galloway Councils approach to social work recruitment

In Dumfries and Galloway, the council and HSCP have distinct responsibilities for social work services.

- The council have responsibility for children and families' services, justice services, mental health officer and social work out of hours service.
- All other adult services are delegated to the HSCP.

Social work services have the highest turnover rate (11 per cent) across the council's four directorates. The service has its own People Strategy Delivery Plan 2021-26 and a Social Work Services Workforce Plan 2022-25 which identifies national and local drivers of social work services. It sets out an action plan for December 2022 – December 2023. It highlights the development of careers for both new employees and the existing workforce.

Progress with social work recruitment practices includes:

- A successful funding bid from Scottish Government and Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) to progress early implementation of the supported first year in practice for Newly Qualified Social Workers.
- Development of the Social Work Career Pathway: From 2005 – 2023 a studentship programme was in place. This was replaced in 2024 by a new Traineeship programme – includes registration with the SSSC through education provision, and staff will work to a higher-grade structure within the council, with clearly defined operational responsibilities.
- Activity to support developing the young workforce, with involvement in school events to attract young people to pursue a career in social work.

Source: Audit Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway Council

52. Developing the young workforce is embedded within workforce planning activity. Initiatives such as the development of trainee posts, graduates, and modern apprenticeships have contributed to attracting young talent. For example:

- **Kickstart** – a programme supported by UK and Scottish Government funding and led by the councils Employability & Skills Service. It provided young people aged 16-24 with paid work placements within the council and a gateway to NHS placements. For the council's own placements, there was an uptake of 58, from the 171 placements offered. Of the 58 placements: 15 progressed to jobs within the council for a further 52 weeks post kick-start. The council has since established its own 'Placement Plus' model to address shortages in key services and provide accredited training for people aged 16-67.
- **Apprenticeships** - The Employability and Skills service is working closely with Organisational Development as part of the Inspire Framework to

support the increase in the number of people who can access Apprenticeship opportunities within Dumfries and Galloway Council. The council's last cohort of five graduate apprentices has retained three within the council, and the other two apprentices were employed within the Dumfries and Galloway region.

The council collaborate with education providers to support recruitment to in-demand roles

53. The People Strategy 2021-26 emphasizes the importance of working with partners across the region to support workforce development. This includes collaborating with education providers to enable individuals to study whilst gaining work experience within the council and supporting service capacity. For example:

- **Education Scotland Digital Leaders programme** - supporting school staff's digital skills to produce a baseline for all staff working with children and young people.
- **The Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer Service Grow-your-own Chartered Surveyors programme** – partnership with Skills Development Scotland and Napier University to create a position for a Trainee Valuer. The process has been successful in recent years as the Service adjusted to the demands of new legislation relating to Non-Domestic Rates.
- **Early learning and childcare (ELC) 1140 hours recruitment exercise** – several intakes of staff were supported to gain a qualification in preparation for the full implementation of 1140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare from August 2020. The council collaborated with Dumfries and Galloway College, University of West of Scotland, and University of Edinburgh.

A new learning management system has been developed to support an employee-led approach to training

54. Supporting employee learning and development is an integral part of the People Strategy 2021-26. The council has historically monitored employee learning through each of the councils four service directorates. In January 2024, the council rolled out its new Learning Experience Platform (LXP). It aims to provide an interactive approach to learning that is employee-led, whilst being accessible on home devices to support flexibility. The rollout of public wi-fi across the region should also help to support digital inclusion ([page 14, paragraph 35](#)). The system will support ongoing performance development activity, assisting with learning plans, CIPD recording, and career opportunities. Employees will be required to complete an evaluation of learning activity to inform ongoing workforce planning.

Future workforce related savings options have been identified, including reduction in staff numbers of at least 46 FTE, staff re-deployment and multi-skilled roles

55. The council's approved budgets for 2023/24 to 2025/26 includes a Change and Savings Programme to support the council in achieving a balanced budget. [Our Best Value thematic work 2022/23](#) sets out the background to some of this work in relation to the council's wider strategic outcomes. Of the eighteen savings options identified, seven of these have implications for the council's workforce. The scale of the workforce related savings options varies.

Table 1: Council Budget Proposal 2023/24 – 2025/26, Change and Savings Programme Workforce savings options

Directorate	Savings option summary
Council wide	<p>Targeted Savings from Other Transformational Ideas – fall in FTE staffing through new service operating models, in conjunction with more multi-skilled staff, and retraining staff to transfer into new roles.</p> <p><i>Savings:</i> Cumulative savings of £0.75 million in 2023/24, £4 million in 2024/25 and £12 million in 2025/26.</p>
Economy and Resources	<p>Digital Service Redesign and IT Systems and Infrastructure (Digital Strategy Implementation) – the digital service redesign savings option focuses on efficiencies through reduced costs of provision, automation, and 25 FTE staffing reduction over five years to 2027/28, across a range of services, namely, Revenues and Benefits, Roads Maintenance and Works, Internal Recruitment and Leisure and Sports Management. The IT systems and infrastructure savings option focuses on joining up systems and consolidating the council's ICT infrastructure to manage this in an efficient manner throughout the council. The initial focus will be on CRM, council website and customer portal, with opportunity for further rationalisation.</p> <p><i>Savings:</i> Cumulative savings of £1.2 million by 2027/28 across both savings options.</p>
Education and Learning	<p>Delivery of Curriculum – 6 FTE fewer teaching staff through review of the curriculum structure and subject choice in secondary schools.</p> <p><i>Savings:</i> £0.15 million for 2024/25 and £0.30 million for 2025/26</p> <p>Removal of cover - removal of 10 FTE teachers in secondary schools relating to cover potential against absent teaching staff from 2024/25.</p> <p><i>Savings:</i> £0.25 million for 2024/25 and £0.50 million for 2025/26.</p> <p>Digital learning – 4 FTE fewer teachers through acceleration of digital learning and larger class sizes for less popular non-practical subjects.</p> <p><i>Savings:</i> £0.1 million for 2024/25 and £0.2 million for 2025/26.</p>

Management points in secondary schools – no change to FTE but reduced management capacity in secondary schools through re-structure, alongside reducing school rolls.

Savings: £0.25 million for 2024/25 and £0.5 million for 2025/26.

Communities

Community led Coaching – cease of current football coaching programme, removing 1.5 FTE posts and staff to be redeployed.

Savings: £0.027 cumulative across 2023-24 – 2025-26

56. DGTransform is a policy adopted by the council to identify alternative employment, for employees who have been displaced from their current position. It aims to retain the skills and experience of employees, offer staff alternatives where job capability is under review, and support service critical roles. Between January-December 2023, 15 employees had successfully been redeployed; 13 were engaged in a development project; and there were 14 live cases. Opportunities to try new roles and gain promotions have arisen from this policy, but there are instances where redeployment has been unsettling for staff and has meant changes to contract terms and conditions.

The 2023 People Survey results showed that the management of organisational change is an area for improvement

57. As councils adapt how services are delivered, it is important that the workforce is consulted with through organisational change. The Accounts Commission's [Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023](#) highlighted that leaders must be open with their staff about difficult decisions ahead and be clear about how change will be achieved.

58. The council's 2023 People Survey indicated that the management of organisational change requires improvement. For example, only 16 per cent of respondents agreed that change had been well communicated, and 19 per cent agreed that the reasons for change are clear. In addition, 21 per cent of respondents agreed that they were supportive of new ideas and ways of working.

Recommendation 3

The council must ensure that it is transparent and communicative with all staffing groups around organisational change, and work to ensure that staff are appropriately supported through redeployment and restructuring processes.

Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

Although the council does not share services with other public or private sector bodies that have significant implications for its workforce, it does have some smaller shared working agreements in relation to building standards and planning services to support capacity. It collaborates with partners to utilise collective resources

59. The [Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023](#) highlighted that shared services and shared professionals can help to address recruitment pressures and skill shortages, whilst offering efficiencies, but only a few councils are sharing services.

60. The 2019-22 Workforce Plan refers to an ambition from the previous Council Plan 2017-22, to share services with other public bodies. Although the council does not share services with other public or private sector bodies that have significant implications for its workforce, it does have some smaller shared working agreements in relation to building standards and planning services to support capacity. These are:

- **Building Standards** – the council is finding it difficult to recruit experienced Building Standards staff, especially in rural areas, due to a shortage in qualified staff. Although there has been a successful “grow your own” programme in place, there remained gaps in experienced staff. Following discussions with the professional body for Building Standards, North Lanarkshire Council came forward to offer assistance as they had additional capacity due to scaling up their resource for specific project work which had not come to fruition. Following the set-up of technical and legal requirements, including data sharing agreements, an arrangement is in place with North Lanarkshire Council to provide Building Standards support to Dumfries and Galloway Council with their officers processing building warrant applications remotely. The process is all managed by Dumfries and Galloway Council who register the applications and issue the final decisions. No more than 10 applications per week are selected for processing by North Lanarkshire Council staff and is delivered through online working. The council is of the view that this arrangement is very effective and is working very well for both sides. The arrangement has been positively recognised by the Scottish Government’s Building Standards Division.
- **Planning** - there is a national shortage of qualified experienced planning officers and due to the departure of a number of senior planners, there

was a lack of capacity within Dumfries and Galloway Council. The council entered into an arrangement with CAPITA to provide two contractors, who are based in Northern Ireland and work remotely and work is charged on a performance basis. The council feel that this arrangement, which has been in place since July 2023, is working effectively and is renewable on an annual basis.

61. The council also collaborates with partners across the region to deliver shared goals and support communities, for example:

- **Community Planning Partnership (CPP)** – the council works with local partners in the NHS, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and the third sector, to facilitate community planning. Partners must work to align their resources through the CPP.
- **South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership** – the council participate in this partnership, alongside Scottish Borders Council, and other partners. It aims to enable inclusive and sustainable economic growth across the South of Scotland where partner capacities and resources are harnessed to maximum effect.
- **Communities** – the voluntary workforce is a key part of delivering vital services across Dumfries and Galloway and can support financial savings. For example, across the Dumfries and Galloway HSCP, it is estimated that an approximate value of 12,445 hours of volunteering in one year, after deducting costs associated with employment, is £97,743. Volunteers also support with essential services, such as maintaining community facilities.

62. The council also participates in local authority workforce benchmarking networks. For example, it is part of the Society of Personnel and Development Scotland (SPDS) Workforce Planning Group and engages with other local authorities through SOLACE – a UK network for public sector and local government professionals.

There is a partnership approach to workforce planning across the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP)

63. The 2018 report [Health and social care integration: Update on progress](#), highlights the importance of workforce planning on wider strategic planning for Integration Authorities. In the Dumfries and Galloway HSCP, most staff are employed by the NHS (46 per cent) and third sector (47 per cent). Seven per cent are employed by the council, comprising roles in adult social work.

64. The HSCP Workforce Plan 2022-25 was approved by the Integration Joint Board (IJB) in March 2022. The plan provides a detailed analysis of the workforce profile across the partnership, as well as challenges and opportunities, an action plan, and key areas of focus for the partnership. It is linked to the council's People Strategy 2021-26. It was developed through engagement with representatives from across the council, NHS, third sector, and trade unions.

65. The council has utilised shared working opportunities across the HSCP and is proactive in supporting recruitment activity through the partnership, through a

variety of routes such as secondary school education pathways, as well as routes that do not require formal qualifications, and further education options. For example, as part of the HSCP Inspiring Futures Event, the council facilitated schools across the region to attend Dumfries and Galloway College to find out about careers in health and social care.

66. Hybrid and remote working practices have also supported the council and HSCP to reduce spending on their estates through sharing office accommodation. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, teams from the council and HSCP have moved in to one building at Mountain Hall.

Temporary workers are an important part of the councils workforce but the costs of agency staff are not reported as part of workforce data

67. Permanent employees make up 86.4 per cent of Dumfries and Galloway Council's workforce, with the remaining 13.6 per cent of the workforce being on fixed term contracts. The number of employees on fixed-term contracts has increased by 24 per cent, from 719 in 2018/19 to 891 in 2022/23. An increase in fixed-term posts is partly due to the council's response to the pandemic.

68. Whilst temporary contracts can offer the council, and employees, a degree of flexibility, this work is often less desirable for applicants than longer-term employment. Fixed-term posts have been utilized in roles such as:

- Roads maintenance – additional capacity is often required to support the councils winter road programme
- Temporary supply teaching staff – temporary teaching staff remains a priority to support wider teaching recruitment.

69. The cost of temporary staff can also be higher than the costs of permanent employees. The cost v benefit of these staff should be monitored and reported. The temporary workforce includes staff on fixed-term contracts who are employed directly by the council, as well as external agency staff, but data reporting on the temporary workforce does not include agency staff. The council does not monitor agency staffing trends within its workforce analysis at a corporate level. The council monitors specific elements of agency spending, such as in health and social care, as part of broader procurement compliance monitoring, but gaps remain in oversight of agency usage within the council's corporate workforce planning analysis. The council plans to include agency costs as part of its workforce development programme for 2024.

Recommendation 4

The council should monitor and report on the cost v benefit of utilizing the agency staffing workforce, including collecting data on the number of agency staff employed.

Measuring the impact of workforce planning

The council measures the impact of its council-wide workforce planning approach. The refreshed workforce plan contains an action plan which is linked to the People Strategy outcomes

70. The council's previous Workforce Plan covering the period 2019-22 contained an assessment need and action plan. This did not identify indicative timescales for completion of specific tasks and did not attribute actions to specific council departments. It also did not map specific performance measures against the action plan. A review against the action plan was carried out in November 2023, but this was not published at the time.

71. A snapshot of the council's assessment has been incorporated into the new Workforce Plan 2023-28. The assessment outlines progress in areas such as developing a multi-skilled workforce and career pathways. The new Council Workforce Plan 2023-28 contains an action plan, which now identifies timescales, and specific service leads. This is linked to the outcomes contained in the People Strategy but it does not identify specific performance measures. Some performance measures are contained within other documents ([paragraphs 74-75](#)). The council intend for the new workforce plan to be a live document, with annual updates to committee ([paragraph 78](#)).

72. The council monitor progress against its People Strategy 2021-26 through update reports to committee. The strategy contains a number of 'success measures' which are largely qualitative in nature. Progress has been made across several areas with a range of activity underway, such as programmes to develop skills and succession planning ([pages 19-21, paragraphs 50-53](#)), and staff engagement exercises ([page 11, paragraphs 21-23](#)). Further work is identified for the future.

73. In February 2024, a paper on council-wide workforce risks was presented to the Audit and Scrutiny committee. It highlights risks around recruitment and the associated impact on delivering the councils priorities. The council outline the internal controls and planned actions that are underway to mitigate against these risks, including delivering on the People Strategy, and examples of developing the existing workforce, and attracting new talent. Consideration of these issues at council-wide level is timely in supporting the new Council Workforce Plan, and giving profile to the challenges that remain around workforce.

Council-wide workforce performance indicators are monitored but these do not reflect the range of activity that is carried out

74. The council reports on a set of generic internal council-wide performance indicators that measure trends such as sickness absence and gender pay gap, through the annual workforce establishment report ([page 10, paragraph 15](#)). The council monitor the number of staff completing annual performance development reviews. Between 2019/20 and 2022/23, performance across most of these measures remained stable. The percentage of staff who completed an annual development review has fallen from 55 per cent to 36 per cent over the period, against a 95 per cent target. The council attribute at least part of this fall because of reviews taking place, but not being recorded. The council is exploring other ways to monitor staff development.

75. Council wide performance reporting does not capture specific activity in relation to workforce innovation. Whilst individual services report on recruitment initiatives to committees, the council does not report on performance measures which capture areas such as apprenticeship completion rates or retention following completion, although some of this is collated internally. Targeted monitoring of these areas would support a more comprehensive oversight and help to showcase areas of workforce innovation.

Service reporting supports council-wide workforce planning

76. Each service directorate has a nominated person responsible for workforce planning. Service plans for 2023/24 contain a section on workforce planning and workforce engagement ([page 10, paragraphs 17-19](#)) as well as information on the demographic profile of the service's workforce and employee spending. Six-monthly updates against 2023/24 service plans are to be reported. Service plans contain a series of measures. These largely focus on standard corporate indicator data, such as sickness absence, and annual performance development reviews.

77. In 2023/24 the Learning and Resources service developed some new performance measures that are specific to workforce and contain targets. Other services may look to draw on these measures, for example:

- Increase participation by 10 per cent of teachers undertaking Introducing School Leadership.
- Target of 70 per cent of probationers gaining employment in teaching in Dumfries and Galloway.

The council uses available information to guide future workforce planning

78. The council uses a range of workforce information available to inform future workforce planning. The new Council Workforce Plan was informed by assessments of progress in relation to the People Strategy, and previous Workforce Plan. The council plan to review the new workforce plan on an annual basis. This will support more regular monitoring of progress and will ensure that the workforce plan reflects any changing needs of the council.

79. The 2022/23 Annual Workforce Establishment report ([page 10, paragraphs 15-16](#)) describes how the council is addressing challenges evidenced by the data. For example, the turnover rate is 8.6 per cent, lower than it was in 2018/19 (9.5 per cent) but an increase since 2021/22 (7.9 per cent). The council is developing metrics around internal movements to include within further workforce reports. Modernising approaches to recruitment will also support this.

80. Other examples of information being utilised to inform workforce planning:

- **Digital skills survey** – the survey identified gaps among the digital skills across the workforce. The council have a programme of work underway to develop its digital workforce ([pages 13-14, paragraph 32-34](#)).
- **Wellbeing** – data has indicated increased levels of stress experienced by staff. The council has developed initiatives such as ‘wellbeing champions’ and a workplace stress policy. The staff survey reported that 59 per cent of respondents would feel comfortable asking for help in maintaining their wellbeing, suggesting that further work is needed in this area.

81. It is important that the council continues to measure the impact of workforce initiatives in relation to skills, service performance and productivity, and wellbeing.

82. The Improvement Service publishes tools to help councils with their workforce planning. The council may wish to use these to help capture the effectiveness of its approach by comparing scoring over time. The LGO workforce planning maturity matrix is a table for councils to use to measure their current capability and maturity in relation to different aspects of workforce planning. It can provide a framework for organisations to improve their workforce planning capabilities.

Recommendation 5

The council should continue to monitor the impact of workforce initiatives on service performance and staff development, through reporting on appropriate metrics which capture the impact of any activity. It should also measure the impact of wellbeing approaches and their impact on staff wellbeing and sickness absence.

Appendix 1. Improvement action plan

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
<p>1. Workforce strategies and priorities</p> <p>It is not clear how staff feedback on workforce planning is incorporated into final workforce related plans.</p>	<p>The council should continue to support staff to feed into workforce planning activities. It must be more transparent on how it incorporates and acts on staff feedback into future iterations of the Workforce Plan.</p>	<p>Development of Service People Plans – through team meetings, focus groups and development sessions.</p> <p>All feedback to be captured in a People Plan engagement feedback document and linked through to future iterations.</p> <p>People Plans to be aligned with Service Planning and reporting.</p> <p>Organisational Development Manager December 2024</p>
<p>2. Flexible working</p> <p>The council has a range of flexible working policies in place, but it could do more to ensure that staff are aware of these policies, and work to ensure that flexible working is supported as much as possible, to staffing groups across the organisation.</p>	<p>The council should continue to monitor the impact of its hybrid working practices when it is considering how to roll them out more widely to staff and ensure that staff across the council are aware of flexible working policies on offer.</p>	<p>Publicity campaign led by HR and Communications Team to whole workforce to reinforce policies in place for flexible working.</p> <p>Update and refresh HR guidance on Connect annually to ensure most up to date info available to workforce.</p> <p>Carry out periodic staff surveys for those on flexible working patterns to assess impact/benefits.</p> <p>To develop HR Metrics alongside the roll out of HR Business Partnering to assess the strategic impact of flexible working</p>

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
		<p>on productivity and performance.</p> <p>Human Resources Manager</p> <p>December 2024</p>
<p>3. Developing future skills and capacity</p> <p>The council have implemented a series of changes to how services are delivered, but strategic changes are not always communicated to staff.</p>	<p>The council must ensure that it is transparent and communicative with all staffing groups around organisational change, and work to ensure that staff are appropriately supported through redeployment and restructuring processes.</p>	<p>Develop an internal communication plan and guidance to support Organisational Change.</p> <p>Organisational Development Manager</p> <p>March 2025</p>
<p>4. Monitoring the Temporary workforce</p> <p>The council do not collect data on the number of agency staff employed within the council.</p>	<p>The council should monitor and report on the cost v benefit of utilizing the agency staffing workforce as part of its routine workforce planning analysis.</p>	<p>HR Business Partners to engage with Chief Officers and Procurement to support systems development on the contracting, recording, analysis, cost, efficiency, and performance of agency staff working within services.</p> <p>Report six monthly to Senior Leadership Team as part of an HR Metrics report on usage of agency staff, cost, and benefit analysis to the service.</p> <p>Human Resources Manager</p> <p>November 2024</p>
<p>5. Measuring the impact of workforce planning</p> <p>As the council progresses with its workforce planning activity, measuring the impact of initiatives, such as skills programmes and wellbeing initiatives, will be important to allow</p>	<p>The council should continue to monitor the impact of workforce initiatives on service performance and staff development, through reporting on appropriate metrics which capture the impact of any activity. It should also measure the impact of wellbeing approaches and their impact on staff wellbeing and sickness absence.</p>	<p>Develop a People Experience Framework to evaluate and measure the success and impact of our action plans. This includes measuring our action plans from our People Strategy, Council Workforce Plan and People Survey.</p>

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
ongoing monitoring of such approaches.		The People Experience Framework will be presented to committee annually. Human Resources Manager June 2025

Workforce innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

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