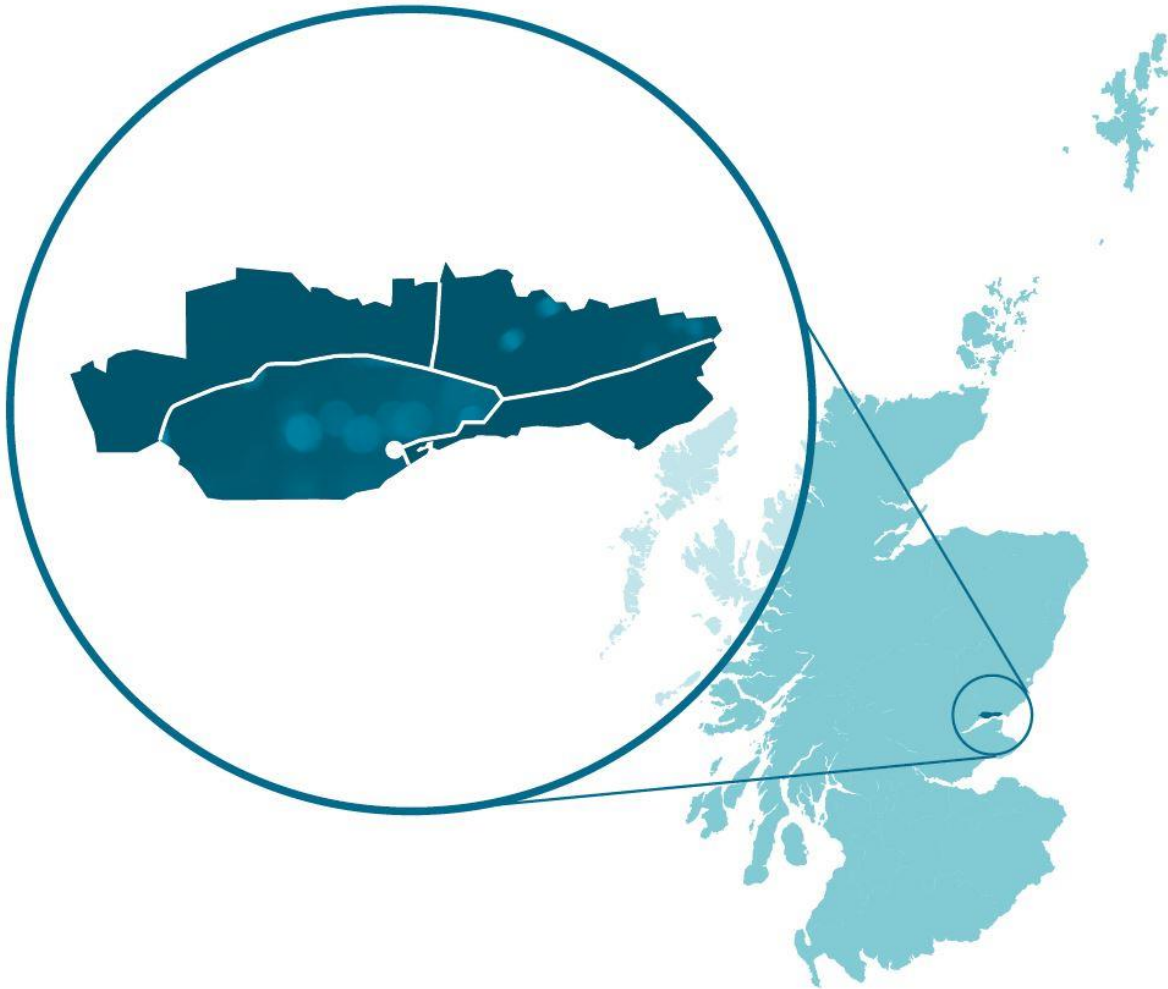


Dundee City Council

Best Value Thematic Review 2023/24: Workforce Innovation – How councils are responding to workforce challenges



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared by Audit Scotland
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Key facts



Workforce data at 31 March 2024

6,750	Number of people working for the council – headcount
6,054	Number of people working for the council – full time equivalent (FTE)
500	Number of supply / casual staff
586	Number of temporary employees
8.3%	Turnover of staff in last year
14.9	Days lost due to absence in last year per FTE employee
	Age profile
5.1%	16 to 24
19.4%	25 to 34
34.7%	35 to 49
38.1%	50 to 64
2.8%	65 and over

Key messages

- 1** The Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 sets out the council's approach to ensuring it has a skilled, flexible, high performing, motivated and well-managed workforce. Detailed service-level workforce data is provided to services to assist with workforce planning. However, better alignment is required between the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 and service plans to ensure service level workforce actions are supporting the delivery of the council's strategic priorities.
- 2** The council should continue to engage with Trade Unions and other consultative staff forums and use the information gathered through these discussions, and the results of the staff survey, to monitor the impact of service changes.
- 3** The Digital Strategy 2023-27 sets out how the council aims to maximise the potential of digital technologies to improve outcomes and services for its citizens and employees. However, the projected impact of the greater use of digital technology on the council's future workforce requirements is not yet fully considered and embedded within service plans.
- 4** Although the digital strategy 2023-27 was approved in May 2023, the Digital Leadership Board, responsible for leading on the delivery of the strategy, is still being set up.
- 5** The council has implemented hybrid working, categorising staff across six different workstyles, and the latest employee survey results suggest that staff are generally positive about hybrid working. The council is currently reviewing its hybrid working policy and senior management has identified a number of workforce benefits of hybrid working.
- 6** The workforce planning and talent management action plan is designed to support the council to deliver its key workforce planning priorities over the next 5 years. Recruiting and developing more young people offers one route to the council expanding its overall workforce capacity.
- 7** Joint working with other bodies has delivered workforce benefits for Dundee City Council. The council should continue to explore opportunities to work together with partners to utilise staff resources more efficiently or effectively in the future.
- 8** The council needs to develop smart measures and targets to monitor and report on progress against the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28. This should include reporting to elected members on the delivery of workforce priorities at both a corporate and service level.

Scope of the audit

1. This report covers the thematic aspect of the Best Value audit requirements. For 2023/24 the Accounts Commission has directed auditors to report on workforce innovation and how councils are responding to workforce challenges.

2. The [Local Government in Scotland Overview 2023 report](#) noted 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.

3. This report considers how Dundee City Council is responding to current workforce challenges through building capacity, increasing productivity and innovation. 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?

4. 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.

5. The coverage of the work is in line with the expectations of councils for the seven Best Value themes set out in the [Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Best Value Statutory Guidance 2020](#).

Workforce strategy and priorities

The Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 sets out the council's approach to ensuring it has a skilled, flexible, high performing, motivated and well-managed workforce.

Detailed service-level workforce data is provided to services to assist with workforce planning. However, better alignment is required between the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 and service plans to ensure service level workforce actions are supporting the delivery of the council's strategic priorities.

The council should continue to engage with Trade Unions and other consultative staff forums and use the information gathered through these discussions, and the results of the staff survey, to monitor the impact of service changes.

Integrated and effective workforce planning is essential to the delivery of a council's strategic priorities

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

7. 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.

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

The Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 sets out the council's approach to ensuring it has a skilled, flexible, high performing, motivated and well-managed workforce

9. Dundee City Council employs around 6,750 people, with spending on staff costs making up 61 per cent of the council's net revenue budget for 2024/25 which is high compared to many other Scottish councils. Therefore, maximising the efficiency and effectiveness of its people is key to the council achieving its strategic priorities and delivering continuous improvement in the delivery of services.

10. The council's [Our People Strategy 2022-27](#) provides a high level vision for how the council will support its future workforce, centred on a positive employee experience. This one-page strategy was approved by the Policy and Resources Committee in December 2022 and provides the strategic basis for the council's workforce planning.

11. The council's Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 was approved by the Council Leadership Team (CLT) in June 2023 as an operational element of the Council's approved people strategy.

12. The plan sets out the council's approach to ensuring it has a skilled, flexible, high performing, motivated and well-managed workforce. It includes sections on strategic context, employee development, digital development, service change and employee wellbeing.

Better alignment is required between the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 and service plans to ensure service level workforce actions are supporting the delivery of the council's strategic priorities

13. The council's Our People Strategy 2022-27 is aligned with the Council Plan, the Digital Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan. The Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 includes a section on the council's Our People Strategy but there is no clear alignment between the areas covered by the high-level vision set out in the strategy and the coverage of the plan.

14. Each of the council's service plans link to the Council Plan and include workforce planning actions. However, these are set out in different ways and in differing levels of detail in each service plan, so there is no consistent or direct read across between the action plan in the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 and the workforce actions identified in the service plans.

15. The most recent service plans were compiled just after the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 was approved at CLT and two services have indicated their intention to compile their own workforce plans.

Recommendation 1

The council should review workforce planning arrangements across services to ensure these support the delivery of the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28, and the council's strategic priorities.

Detailed service-level workforce data is provided to services to assist with workforce planning

16. A key element of effective workforce planning is the ability for staff across the organisation to access and monitor accurate and up-to-date workforce data.

17. The 'Workforce Planning Support' section of the council's Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 explains that services are provided with data in a Workforce Planning Tool that enables them to interrogate their own employee

demographic information. Services are also provided with heat maps to give a fuller understanding of where the demographic ‘hot spots’ are in services and where potential areas for redesign may be needed. These tools are intended to assist services in decision making where there is the need for forecasting and scenario planning in organisational change.

18. Our review of the heatmaps provided to services identified that these are centred around the council's ageing workforce and the numbers and reasons for people leaving, and also include information on new starts. The accompanying narrative to the heatmaps highlighted the importance of succession planning.

The council developed a new performance appraisal and development tool to help line managers build relationships and keep individuals feeling valued, motivated and engaged

19. The Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 highlights the importance of meaningful engagement with staff to ensure they are motivated and there is a clear focus on their development.

20. To support the council in investing funding and development efforts in the areas most needed to efficiently deliver services going forward, it introduced a new mandatory council wide performance appraisal and development tool called Quality Conversations in May 2023. This provides a framework to support line managers in having regular conversations with their employees which build relationships, provide support and keep individuals feeling valued, motivated and engaged. It is intended to provide all staff with the opportunity to regularly talk about their job and the process should be adapted to make that happen in the most appropriate manner.

21. It is expected that ‘quality conversations’ with staff will take place throughout the year with an annual quality conversation held to help clarify work related objectives for the year ahead, provide feedback and agree any support or development needed for employees and teams.

The results of the last staff survey showed that 83 per cent of respondents enjoyed their job but 47 per cent of respondents felt they did not have enough time to do their job well

22. Staff surveys provide employers with a rich source of data on employee satisfaction and engagement and help to identify areas for improvement. Regular staff surveys also allow management to track employee satisfaction levels over time to identify recurring issues or systemic problems that might be affecting staff productivity or employee well-being, and to assess the impact of changes in service delivery models and working practices.

23. The council last completed an organisation-wide survey on employee satisfaction in May 2023 but this had a low overall response rate of 20 per cent (i.e. 4 out of 5 staff did not respond to the survey). The survey consisted of 21 quantitative and 3 qualitative questions, grouped into 3 themes: Team Effort and Culture; Engagement and Connection; and Innovation, Performance and Skills.

24. The results of the staff survey showed that 83 per cent of respondents enjoyed their job and 94 per cent were proud of the work they do. However, 47 per cent of respondents felt they did not have enough time to do their job well. Respondents also said they are being asked to do more work with less time and some said that they are only managing to get through their work by working longer hours.

Management agreed recommendations to address the key areas for improvement highlighted by the last staff survey, but these are not reflected in the current service plans

25. The 2023 Employee Survey Results report includes 7 broad recommendations that management has agreed to address the key areas for improvement highlighted by the survey results and comments:

- Each Service agrees to review their specific survey results and take appropriate action.
- Knowledge sharing is encouraged in teams and services to prevent gaps in knowledge caused by people leaving or moving role.
- Workspace in council offices is equipped with the necessary digital tools and is set out to ensure that the working environment is conducive to all types of working.
- Managers be asked to review the hybrid workstyles with their teams. (Paragraphs [58.](#) and [59.](#))
- Services ensure that annual Quality Conversations are taking place.
- Line managers be reminded to hold regular team meetings and be encouraged to conduct regular supportive meetings, e.g. one to ones.
- The Employee Wellbeing Service receives more focused communication support to ensure that all employees know about the resources available to them to support their mental and physical health and wellbeing.

26. Although these recommendations have been identified, it is not clear from the 2023 Employee Survey Results report how these will be taken forward by services and we noted that actions to address these are not reflected in the current service plans.

The council has moved to conducting yearly employee satisfaction surveys and will take action to improve the response rate

27. Management advised that the council is moving to conducting an annual employee survey, with the next one due to take place in May 2024, and is taking action to improve the response rate. This should assist the council in monitoring staff satisfaction levels and assessing the impact of services changes introduced during the year, as well as whether the actions taken in response to the recommendations at paragraph [25.](#) have had the intended impact.

The council should continue to engage with Trade Unions and other consultative staff forums to monitor the impact of service changes

28. As councils face ever increasing pressures on budgets, alongside greater demand for services, it will be essential that they continue to review existing service delivery models to identify more efficient ways of working. It will also be important to continue to work with Trade Unions when introducing changes that affect their members and to develop opportunities to engage with the whole workforce on transformational change.

29. As part of our review we met with management and Trade Union representatives to discuss the current workforce challenges facing the council, and the wider local government sector in Scotland. These discussions confirmed that management consulted with Trade Unions when developing the Strategic Workforce Plan and also have regular engagement on issues affecting staff. However, both parties highlighted that relations can be strained and challenging, with Trade Union representatives suggesting that some of these tensions could be addressed by more early engagement with management on proposed changes. Management advised that the Council has established a Strategic Trade Union Forum and joint Health and Wellbeing Group to provide opportunities for such engagement.

Digital technology and the workforce

The Digital Strategy 2023-27 sets out how the council aims to maximise the potential of digital technologies to improve outcomes and services for its citizens and employees. However, the projected impact of the greater use of digital technology on the council's future workforce requirements is not yet fully considered and embedded within service plans.

Although the Digital Strategy 2023-27 was approved in May 2023, the Digital Leadership Board, responsible for leading on the delivery of the strategy, is still being set up.

The council has used digital technologies to improve the efficiency of local residents' interactions with services, and to assist staff working out in the community. It has also identified workforce benefits and savings that can be achieved through the use of further digital technologies.

Digital technology will be essential in supporting the workforce to deliver efficient and effective council services in the future

30. The [Local Government in Scotland Overview 2023 report](#) noted that digital technology will make 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 Digital Strategy 2023-27 sets out how the council aims to maximise the potential of digital technologies to improve outcomes and services for its citizens and employees

33. The council's [Digital Strategy 2023-27](#) was approved by its Policy and Resources Committee in May 2023. This sets out the council's digital vision to:

“Maximise the potential of Digital technologies to improve outcomes and services for all our citizens and employees, in a way which supports the delivery of the Council’s priorities and in particular to design a modern digital Council”.

One of the four strands underpinning this vision is that: *“Our people are engaged, skilled and committed to a transformative digital culture where they take pride in constantly learning and evolving their skills to meet customer needs.”*

34. The strategy has six strategic outcomes, one of which is ‘Digital workforce’. This states that: *“To develop and sustain a digital future for Dundee, we need a workforce with the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop new ways of working, including using new technology in order to serve our customers.”*

35. The strategy also sets out the ways in which the council will achieve its digital vision. This includes a section on ‘people’ which notes that the advancement of digital, data and technology skills should be an integral part of corporate workforce planning. It also highlights that as the council embraces the adoption of new ways of working then that there is an opportunity to continue the development of the way it works through training and support with a focus on maximizing the benefits from investment in current technology.

The projected impact of the greater use of digital technology on the council’s future workforce requirements is not yet fully considered and embedded within service plans

36. The digital strategy stresses that while digital technology can provide the tools and enable the flow of data, real improvement can only be achieved through service led redesign and implementation. The strategy also recognises that it is critical that business processes and required outcomes are fully understood before redesign activity commences, and also highlights the importance of service and operational plans considering how digital technology can contribute to furthering objectives and goals.

37. From our review of the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 and service plans it is clear that the impact of the greater use of digital technology on the council’s future workforce requirements is not yet fully considered and embedded within these plans. As digital transformation programmes progress, the council should ensure that service plans accurately reflect the projected impact on the workforce.

Recommendation 2

The council should review service plans to ensure they reflect the projected impact of the greater use of digital technology on the council’s future workforce requirements.

The Digital Leadership Board, responsible for leading on the delivery of the digital strategy, is still being set up

38. The Digital Strategy 2023-27 sets out ten high-level actions but there is no detail on how and when these will be achieved. The high-level actions include

the upskilling of staff knowledge and skills which is to be supported by detailed, operational delivery plans.

39. The digital strategy notes that oversight, governance and direction for the delivery of the strategy will be provided by the introduction of a Digital Leadership Board which will report annually to the Policy and Resources Committee (this now falls under the remit of the City Governance Committee). However, although terms of reference have now been written, the board is still in development and has not yet met.

40. In the absence of Digital Leadership Board meetings, regular meetings have been held between the Head of Customer Services and IT and the Digital Services Manager about progress with digital projects. All projects are monitored using the digital project tracker which details the long-term aims of each project, who is leading each project and updates on progress.

Recommendation 3

The council should establish the Digital Leadership Board as a matter of priority to ensure there is appropriate oversight, governance and direction for the delivery of the digital strategy.

The council has used digital technologies to improve the efficiency of local residents' interactions with services

41. Our review identified a number of areas where digital technologies are being rolled out to improve the efficiency of local residents' interactions with the council, and to reduce staff time dealing with request and enquiries. These include:

- Implementation of a web-based system which allows citizens to directly access and update their council tax and NDR records, including the submission of changes of circumstances which automatically update their records.
- Implementation of a Bin app to enable residents to access bin collection dates and associated refuse service information.
- Tendering for an AI chatbot / web chat facility to deal with routine enquiries and requests more quickly.

42. These types of user-led interfaces are increasingly common across the private and public sector and offer a range of benefits to both service users and service providers. However, the essential nature of many of the council's services, and the need to guard against the risks of digital exclusion, mean that it is important that these are still supplemented by traditional methods of enquiry.

The council is using digital technology to assist staff working out in the community

43. During our review management provided some examples of how the council is already used digital technology to help staff stay connected when working out in the community:

- Hand-held devices and training in Office 365 are being rolled out and the use of technology by Construction Services staff while on site to discuss jobs with colleagues and order the parts required will result in both a quicker resolution for residents and reduced job times for employees.
- The council has developed an extranet site: 'One Dundee on the Move' to allow all employees access to the content of One Dundee, the internal information page, when out in the community. This ensures they can quickly access the latest information and updates and better deal with residents' enquiries.

44. These examples demonstrate how existing digital technology can be used to improve service delivery and both the service users and employees experience.

The council has identified workforce benefits and savings that can be achieved through the use of further digital technologies

45. A range of digital projects are being progressed, which the council has identified should deliver savings and a range of workforce benefits. These include:

- The purchase of a new Cloud IT Service management system. This will improve productivity and efficiency by reducing the number of issues handled by IT staff through the introduction of self-service facilities and automation, which will result in quicker responses for users and reduce the overall turnaround time for IT requests. These improvements will also increase capacity by enabling a greater number of issues to be dealt with each day.
- The council's IT desktop transformation plan recognises the changes to the way employees work and that laptops provide employees with greater flexibility and adaptability to their work environment whether that be an office, home or other remote locations.
- The next phase of Microsoft 365 is being rolled out by the end of June 2024. An external benchmark showed an average of every employee gaining an efficiency saving in time of 1 hour per person, per week in increased employee productivity through the adoption of Microsoft 365 document management.
- The processing of revenues queries currently includes a degree of double input. The council approved a project to introduce automation in these processes. The five-year cost of this project is £92,450 but savings over this period are estimated to be £310,000.

46. Even before the roll-out of these new digital technologies, more self-service transactions have been taking place online within the council with this increasing from 44 per cent in 2021/22 to 61 per cent in 2022/23. The council recognises that training of staff is key in helping ensure that digital transformation is successful and has established a dedicated Digital Skills Team to support its workforce

47. The Digital Strategy 2023-27 states that: *“Digital transformation is 80% about the people and ways of working, and 20% about the technology.”*

48. The council has established a Digital Skills Team to support the skills required by its workforce and a digital skills plan is currently in development. One of the first activities of the Digital Skills Team was to provide face-to-face training to leaders of the council with the aim of encouraging them to cascade this learning and positive attitude towards digital to their teams.

49. The Digital Skills Team has now undertaken in-person learning sessions with teams and services to teach new ways of working. During 2023 the digital skills team delivered in-person sessions to over 30 different teams across services with 531 people attending. A Microsoft SharePoint site called ‘Digital Workplace’ for all staff to access has also been developed. This provides a one-stop shop for all digital learning needs and allows staff to get involved in events and connect with colleagues.

50. The council also has 130 digital champions across services who are involved in developing and sharing learning and demonstrating workforce benefits and productivity gains from new technology to colleagues. The Learning and Organisational Development team manage the digital champions project and engage with champions in a range of ways including events such as the Digital Champions Gathering.

The council plans to undertake a digital skills survey early in 2025 to inform future training and development of staff in the use of digital technologies

51. Despite the activity already undertaken by the Digital Skills Team to upskill the workforce in the use of digital technologies (paragraphs [48.](#) and [49.](#)) the council has not undertaken a digital skills survey since 2018. Management advised that they are planning to conduct such a survey in early 2025 to assist the council in deciding how best to target its learning and development resources and to inform the development of a digital skills plan. The survey would also allow the council to identify any barriers to staff using digital technology that require to be considered going forward.

Recommendation 4

The council should complete a digital skills survey to assess the current digital capabilities of its workforce and to identify areas for additional training and development.

Flexible working and innovative staff deployment

The council has implemented hybrid working, categorising staff across six different workstyles and the latest employee survey results suggest staff are generally positive about hybrid working. The council is currently reviewing its hybrid working policy and senior management has identified a number of workforce benefits of hybrid working.

Over 7 per cent of the council's staff are employed as casual workers. Management acknowledge that there is currently too great a reliance on casual workers for social care and early years staff and that they need to manage these numbers down over time.

Councils in Scotland have embraced flexible working and are now considering other innovative approaches to staff deployment

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

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

The council has implemented hybrid working, categorising staff across six different workstyles

54. The council introduced its hybrid working guidance for employees in 2021 to reflect changing working practices adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic. It introduced six different workstyles:

- **Not desk-based:** Desk required for less than 20 per cent of the time.
- **Fixed point:** Office based 100 per cent of the time.
- **Mainly fixed:** Office based for 80 per cent of the time.
- **Hybrid:** Office-based for more than 50 per cent of the time.

- **Hybrid+:** Working from home for more than 50 per cent of the time.
- **Flexible:** Working from home at least 80 per cent of the time.

55. The guidance recognises that the six different workstyles won't be available to everyone as it will depend on the nature of specific roles to what extent staff can work from home and some jobs (e.g. teachers and other public facing roles) require staff to work in council premises. It also acknowledges there will be other circumstances where it will be beneficial for staff to work on site to collaborate with colleagues or to support and coach other staff.

The latest employee survey results suggest staff are generally positive about hybrid working

56. The results of the last employee survey in May 2023 showed that council staff feel generally positive about hybrid working, stating that their work-life balance is better than ever. However, some said that they feel pressured to be in the office just to be seen, while others prefer to be in the office as this suits the way they like to work.

57. Trade Union representatives also advised that they welcomed hybrid working and the flexibility this offers. They did have some concerns about whether it is being applied consistently across the council but advised that they believe these inconsistencies are due to individual managers who are less keen on hybrid working rather than issues with the policy itself.

The council is currently reviewing its hybrid working policy and senior management has identified a number of workforce benefits of hybrid working

58. The council is currently reviewing its hybrid working policy to ensure it supports business needs and employee wellbeing. It is doing this by analysing information from the last employee survey, seeking views from the Council Leadership Team and Heads of Service, and undertaking discussions with Trade Unions, the Lived Experience Panel, Equalities Steering Group and the Trauma and Gendered Services steering groups. This recent exercise with the CLT and Heads of Service identified the following benefits of hybrid working:

- More effective meetings due to access to papers on Microsoft Teams, better scheduling, and time saving due to reduced travel time between locations.
- Hybrid working conditions allow the council to be more competitive in attracting staff and supporting staff retention.
- Employees have noted that they can be more focused at home when doing tasks that require concentration, and therefore are more productive.

59. As a result of the impact of hybrid and flexible working arrangements, the council is undertaking a property rationalisation project to identify the potential for the council to reduce its current office, depot and storage estate. This will

deliver property costs savings that can be reinvested in services and the council's workforce.

Responding to future workforce challenges will require the council to have a more agile and flexible workforce

60. As service delivery models continue to evolve and job roles change, the council will require to have a more agile and flexible workforce to enable it to deploy staff in the best way to meet the needs of service users in the future.

61. Management advised that deployment models and working arrangements were quickly developed during the pandemic to ensure cover for key services. This included additional support for social care, delivery of meals and prescriptions and setting up the vaccination centre.

62. More recently, the council has made changes to reflect changing workforce requirements in Corporate Business Support Services (CBSS). The current development of CBSS generic job descriptions supports greater flexibility and opportunities for staff to gain experience across other parts of the organisation. CBSS has introduced adaptable, flexible, and responsive structures which enable employees to support different service areas, creating more variety of tasks and work experiences. For example, CBSS staff based in Community Centres are dealing with short term let applications for Landlord Services in the Private Sector Services Unit, clerical work for the Chief Executives Service, and updating the work experience database for the Employability Team. Staff have gone on to gain promoted posts out with CBSS through experience gained in other areas.

63. The creation of a framework for new internal models of deployment and recruitment and agile ways of working is an action within in the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 and should assist the council in responding to future workforce challenges.

Management acknowledge that there is currently a reliance on casual workers for social care and early years staff and that this needs to be reviewed

64. The council employs around 6,750 staff but over 7 per cent of its staff are employed as casual workers. Casual workers are not permanent employees and are paid only for the actual time they work. They also don't receive all the benefits of full-time employment such as paid sick leave.

65. All councils require to use casual workers for seasonal work and to respond to spikes in demand for services, but management acknowledge that the reliance on casual workers in certain areas needs to be reviewed. One area of particular challenge is around social care and early years staff where there are recruitment challenges and staff numbers need to be maintained at certain levels to meet statutory requirements. Management advised that this is partly a legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic during which the council had a huge reliance on casual workers. However, it also recognises that it needs to review its use of casual workers and consider whether it needs to revise its policies and practices in this area.

66. There may be the opportunity for the council to permanently recruit some of its current casual workers, but many casual workers enjoy the freedom that this provides them (for example, students) and will not want to become permanent employees of the council.

Recommendation 5

The council needs to review its use of casual workers to ensure this does not present a business continuity risk for the organisation.

Developing future skills and capacity

The workforce planning and talent management action plan is designed to support the council to deliver its key workforce planning priorities over the next 5 years. The council has guidance and training to help managers identify business continuity and succession planning risks within their teams and develop local actions to address these.

Recruiting and developing more young people offers one route to the council expanding its overall workforce capacity. The council makes good use of apprenticeships to recruit and train staff but is reviewing its use of modern apprenticeships due to changes to the conditions of the scheme.

Developing the skills and capacity of the future workforce will be key to councils reducing vacancy rates and filling senior posts

67. The Scottish public sector faces ongoing recruitment and retention challenges, with high vacancy rates across public sector bodies. The [Local Government in Scotland Overview 2023 report](#) highlighted that these challenges are particularly pronounced in the local government sector with 47 per cent of services reporting vacancies in 2021 compared with 36 per cent the previous year, and 11 per cent across all sectors in Scotland. The whole-time equivalent vacancy rate for local government had also deteriorated to 8.1 per cent in 2021, up from 5.1 per cent the previous year. In comparison, the vacancy rate across all sectors in Scotland was 1.9 per cent.

68. The report also noted that councils are facing increasing challenges in filling senior roles. This may in part be due to the bottom loading of recent local government pay deals which have narrowed the gap between junior and senior roles and made the latter less desirable. Public sector pay at senior levels has also not kept pace with other sectors which has resulted in some staff leaving for better paid positions in the private sector.

69. Addressing these recruitment and retention challenges will not be easy but developing the skills and capacity of the future workforce will be key to councils reducing vacancy rates and filling senior posts.

The workforce planning and talent management action plan is designed to support the council to deliver its key workforce planning priorities over the next 5 years

70. Dundee City Council currently employs around 6,750 members of staff, with almost 41 per cent aged over 50. Management are aware that the age profile of the current workforce presents a number of business continuity and succession planning risks which are becoming ever more pressing as an increasing number of local government staff opt to retire early.

71. The council's Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 includes a workforce planning and talent management action plan as an appendix to the plan. This details the five steps to support the council in delivering its key workforce planning priorities over the next 5 years and the activities and expected outcomes for each stage of the process. The five steps identified are:

- **Step 1:** Identify key positions or occupational roles / groups.
- **Step 2:** Identify competencies required.
- **Step 3:** Identify potential successors or future talent.
- **Step 4:** Implement targeted learning and focused development strategies.
- **Step 5:** Evaluate Workforce Planning efforts.

72. Following these steps will help management to assess where the main business continuity and succession planning risks sit across services, and to identify what action is required to mitigate these risks and plan for the future.

The council has guidance and training to help managers identify business continuity and succession planning risks within their teams, and develop local actions to address these

73. The council has launched Workforce and Succession Planning Guidance to help services plan their workforce for the future and to consider, alongside the new Digital Strategy, how best to support modern practices.

74. The council has also offered succession planning training since 2017 and around 50 staff have completed the e-learning training since the start of 2023. The training is particularly targeted at managers to assist them to identify the business continuity and succession planning risks within their teams, and to develop actions to address these.

75. Management provided a specific example of where succession planning has been done successfully within Children and Families Service as shown in [Case study 1](#) below.

Case study 1

Succession planning for Support for Learning Training Officer role

Children and Families Service identified the Support for Learning Training Officer role as an essential post which has developed over several years to support the rise in the number and percentage of children and young people with complex additional support needs. This post has also expanded to include the provision of advice and support to social care settings / children's houses.

Since 2022 the Children and Families Service and Learning and Organisational Development have been working together to build capacity and ensure succession planning for this role, prior to the postholder retiring in 2024. The role has a wide remit and requires the postholder to obtain professional learning in relation to both [CALM](#) and Moving and Handling practices.

To build capacity and ensure that there wasn't one single point of risk, two individuals were identified for development. Since 2022, they have been undertaking professional accredited learning and work-based learning activities to develop into this role. The process is now underway to complete this transition and these staff will also support broader CALM learning within Children and Families which is another operational area that the council has had difficulties recruiting to.

Source: Dundee City Council

Recruiting and developing more young people offers one route to the council expanding its overall workforce capacity

76. The Annual Participation Measure (APM) is the key tool used to assess Scotland's success in achieving positive post-school destinations for young people aged 16-19. It is both an important measure of performance in education and the local economy, as well as of the City's ambition relating to fairness, inclusion, poverty, and productivity set out in the [Council Plan 2022-2027](#) and [City Plan 2022-2032](#).

77. Dundee performs very poorly in this measure and consistently has the lowest, or near lowest, participation rates across Scotland. At any time, of a total cohort of around 6,000 young Dundonians, there are typically 500-800 who are not participating in employment, education, or training. In acknowledgement of the Dundee Partnership's clear desire to improve Dundee's annual destination results for 16-19 year-olds in the city, a multi-agency working group was established and produced a joint improvement plan, [Discover Work Strategy 2022-2027 – Transforming Employability for a new Dundee](#), which aims to improve employability outcomes in Dundee, and includes plans to deliver "A Step Change in Positive Destinations for Young Dundonians". This sets out the joint Improvement Plan to inspire young people to pursue education, develop their employability skills, and realise their full potential with the support of all our key partners and services.

78. As part of the council's commitment to this plan it continues to promote and support young people to enter and sustain apprenticeships and job opportunities within the local authority. The council also works with schools and other partners to continually develop the learning pathways into the council and to promote the council as an attractive employer.

The council makes good use of apprenticeships to recruit and train staff but is reviewing its use of modern apprenticeships due to changes to the conditions of the scheme

79. Apprenticeships combine a qualification with on-the-job experience, allowing people to work, learn and earn at the same time. The council currently has a range of staff undertaking apprenticeships across services. These include 46 staff doing traditional construction and trades apprenticeships, 18 staff doing modern apprenticeships, and 8 staff doing graduate apprenticeships.

80. [Modern apprenticeships](#) are supported by Skills Development Scotland which contributes towards the costs of their training, through a training provider who works with the employing organisation. These have proved beneficial in assisting councils in recruiting, training and retaining staff, particularly in roles that were not traditionally part of an apprenticeship scheme. However, like other councils, Dundee City Council is currently considering whether it will need to reduce the number of modern apprentices it takes on due to changes in the scheme that will require employers to pay apprentices the living wage from the start of their employment. These additional costs would fall on the council as the employing body; no extra funding will be provided to cover these increased costs.

81. The Graduate Apprentice Programme has been running since 2017 with IT, civil engineering, business management apprenticeship programmes run through the University of Dundee. Since then, the council has had 8 graduate apprentices for IT, 7 graduate apprentices for civil engineering and 9 graduate apprentices for business management.

The council and the HSCP have adopted a number of approaches to try and address the increasing pressures on workforce capacity within health and social care services

82. The pressures on workforce capacity within health and social care services has increased dramatically over recent years as an ageing population has increased demand for social care services, at the same time as the sector has faced major recruitment and retention challenges.

83. The council and the Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) have adopted a number of approaches to try and address these pressures by improving the skills and capacity of their existing and future workforce. These initiatives have included:

- The council developing learning pathways to address specific recruitment challenges. For example, the Learning Care Assistant Pathway involved a group of existing employees from the council's Children and Families Service undertaking a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) 2 in Social Services – Children and Young People, an essential requirement of the Learning Care Assistant (LCA) post.
- The council has supported staff to undertake a degree of postgraduate diploma in social work with the Open University in response to social worker shortages. This allows successful candidates to achieve their

qualification on a part-time basis whilst continuing to work in their substantive post, with some study time given and 50 per cent funding towards course costs. All sponsored social work pathway candidates who have successfully completed their qualification have progressed to social work posts across Children and Families Service and Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership.

- Run in partnership with Dundee and Angus College, the Health and Social Care Academy provides the opportunity for school pupils, and for those who have left school, to study towards a National 5 level Health and Social Care and Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Services and Healthcare. It also provides the opportunity to gain a certificate and an advanced certificate in Health and Social Care, and Higher National Certificates (HNCs) in Social Services or Healthcare Practice.
- In partnership with the University of Dundee, the council has been developing opportunities to improve the transition for social work students from education to employment. One aspect of this has involved the council supporting the development of an integration day for social work students in their final year of studies focusing on the Newly Qualified Social Worker Supported Year (paragraph [84.](#)) and preparation for job applications and interviews.

84. A further specific challenge faced in the health and social care sector is presented by the high number of new social workers who leave during their first year of employment. To try and address this the council has taken part in the newly qualified social worker support programme. This is a Scottish Government pilot to support social workers through their first year of employment through a range of support including one-to-one coaching from an experienced social worker.

Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

The council's involvement in Tayside Contracts Joint Committee has protected it from some of the recruitment and retention challenges it could have faced in the delivery of construction and facilities services. The Street Lighting Partnership and Roads Maintenance Partnership have delivered further workforce benefits for Dundee City Council.

The council is working together with its Tayside partners to ensure best use is made of existing staff and resources, and to increase the skills and opportunities of the local workforce.

The council should continue to explore opportunities to work together with partners to utilise staff resources more efficiently or effectively in the future.

Collaborative working across services and partners will be essential to allow councils to continue to deliver high quality services to the public

85. As the pressure on public sector finances continues to increase, 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 look to work across traditional service department roles within councils to deliver improved services and outcomes.

86. Examples of this would include staff working across health and social care functions, professional posts or functions being shared between councils, and services being delivered through consortium arrangements or by empowered communities.

The council's involvement in Tayside Contracts Joint Committee has protected it from some of the recruitment and retention challenges faced by other councils in the delivery of construction and facilities services

87. As highlighted in the [Best Value Assurance Report \(September 2020\)](#), since its formation in 1996, Tayside Contracts Joint Committee has delivered a range of construction and facilities services for its constituent councils: Dundee City Council, Angus Council, and Perth and Kinross Council, and a range of other public sector bodies (for example NHS Tayside and the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board).

88. During 2018/19 it opened its new central production unit to provide school dinners to children across Tayside, with the potential to expand operations at the unit to also provide a meals service to other local authority areas and make full use of the capacity available.

89. This joined up approach has benefited the three councils by delivering efficiencies and economies of scale in the delivery of these services, including the use of specialist plant and machinery, and by protecting them from some of the recruitment and retention challenges they could have faced if they had continued to each provide these services locally.

The Street Lighting Partnership and Roads Maintenance Partnership have delivered further workforce benefits for Dundee City Council

90. In addition to the joint approach for construction and facilities services across Tayside (paragraphs [87.](#) to [89.](#)) the Street Lighting Partnership between Dundee City Council, Perth and Kinross Council, Angus Council and Tayside Contracts, first established in 2006, provides all inspection, maintenance, improvement and management activity in the three council areas. Dundee City Council has also worked in partnership with Tayside Contracts through the Roads Maintenance Partnership since 2012.

91. Management advised that both partnerships have optimised efficiency through integrated service delivery since inception and continue to provide best value and resilience through shared services operating with multi-discipline staff roles. They also highlighted that the partnership operating arrangements have provided a range of workforce benefits, including:

- The operating structure has provided opportunities for efficiencies and reduced staff costs.
- The larger teams provide more resilience to accommodate workload fluctuations and facilitates the continuation and retention of in-house specialisms.
- Combined expertise has enhanced and expedited the delivery of technological innovations and service modernisation initiatives.

Dundee City Council and Angus Council share a Chief Internal Auditor and work together to provide out of hours social work services

92. The former Senior Manager – Internal Audit, the Principal Internal Auditor, left Dundee City Council in November 2021. Following three unsuccessful campaigns to recruit a replacement, the council agreed a partnership arrangement with Angus Council to share its Chief Internal Auditor on a part-time basis, with 40 per cent of their time spent on Dundee City Council and 60 per cent of their time spent on Angus Council. This pilot arrangement commenced in October 2022 and was initially for a 12-month period.

93. The pilot arrangement proved effective and the councils are now entering into a long-term arrangement to share this resource on a 50:50 basis, with an

ongoing commitment for both teams to share information, work more closely together, and undertake joint audits where practical in the future.

94. This partnership arrangement has ensured that Dundee City Council's chief audit executive role is filled, and that the internal audit annual opinion, required by Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, will be provided.

95. Another area where Dundee City Council and Angus Council staff work together is to provide an out of hours social work service. This service is managed by Dundee City Council's Children and Families Service and provides a social work service outwith normal working hours to Dundee City Council and Angus Council as part of a joint agreement between the two local authorities.

96. The social work out of hours service also works in close co-operation with other out of hours services such as health agencies, the police, the department of work and pensions, housing and community alarm / home care teams, as well as being a contact point for access to a mental health officer.

97. Anyone in the Angus or Dundee areas who has an urgent problem or crisis can call the service and the joined up approach ensures that they are directed to the best service to assist them, and that the most efficient use is made of staff resources.

The council is working together with its Tayside partners to ensure best use is made of existing staff and resources, and to increase the skills and opportunities of the local workforce

98. The Tayside Collaborative has five working groups which reflect the priorities identified in the [Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families](#). These cover pre-birth and early years; learning and attainment; health and wellbeing; looked after children, care leavers and young carers; and safeguarding and protection; and promote a multi-agency approach to ensure the best service is provided to residents and that the best use is made of the staff and other resources of the partner bodies.

99. The [Tay Cities Region Deal](#) brings together public, private and voluntary organisations in the council areas of Angus, Dundee, Fife and Perth and Kinross partners to work together to deliver a smarter and fairer region. These include projects to support the [Inclusive Tay](#) regional economic strategy objective to tackle the high levels of unemployment levels across the region.

The council should continue to explore opportunities to work together with partners to utilise staff resources more efficiently or effectively in the future

100. As detailed in this section of the report, the council has embraced joint workforce arrangements with other bodies in a range of areas. However, there may be further opportunities for the council to work with partners to tackle shared workforce challenges in the future.

Recommendation 6

The council should look to identify further opportunities to work together with partners to tackle shared workforce challenges in the future.

Measuring the impact of workforce planning

The council is looking to learn from the experience of staff across all services and grades to shape future employee experience approaches and activity.

The council needs to develop smart measures and targets to monitor and report on progress against the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28. This should include reporting to elected members on the delivery of workforce priorities at both a corporate and service level.

It is important that management monitor the impact of their workforce planning and delivery approaches to ensure the effectiveness of workforce planning arrangements

101. To assess whether the council's workforce planning arrangements are effective, it is important that management 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 is looking to learn from the experience of staff across all services and grades to shape future employee experience approaches and activity

102. The council's Our People Strategy 2022-27 is framed around a positive employee experience which lays the foundation for strong workforce practice and strategic workforce planning. Therefore, to understand how this operates in practice management have been carrying out a piece of service design to identify improvement areas in the employee experience.

103. To explore the issues faced, research interviews have been carried out with all service areas and a range of employees of various grades (including modern apprentices, graduate apprentices, workplace graduates, new starts, leavers and heads of service) have been interviewed to gain an insight into their experience with Dundee City Council. The results of this work will be used to shape future employee experience approaches and activity.

The council needs to develop smart measures and targets to monitor and report on progress against the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28

104. The council has set out, in its Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28, what performance measures it intends to use to capture the impact of its workforce planning approach (people analytics, employee surveys, wellbeing and absence data, turnover and retention information) but has not yet set targets for these or reported on them.

105. Management advised that as the 5-year plan was only launched in June 2023, it feels it is too early to measure the impact of the actions being taken. However, it acknowledges that it needs to develop smart measures and targets to monitor and report on progress against the plan in the future.

Management should put arrangements in place to report to elected members on the delivery of workforce priorities at both a corporate and service level

106. As detailed at paragraph [11.](#), the council's Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 was approved by the Council Leadership Team in June 2023 but management has not yet considered how it will report to elected members on progress against the plan.

107. Given the importance of the delivery of the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 in achieving the strategic priorities within the Council Plan, management should put arrangements in place to report to elected members on the delivery of workforce priorities.

Recommendation 7

The council needs to develop smart measures and targets to monitor and report on progress against the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28. This should include reporting to elected members on the delivery of workforce priorities at both a corporate and service level.

Appendix 1 - Improvement Action plan

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
<p>1. Alignment of Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 and service plans</p> <p>Each of the council's service plans links to the Council Plan and includes workforce planning actions. However, these are set out in different ways and in differing levels of detail in each service plan, so there is no consistent or direct read across between the action plan in the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 and the workforce actions identified in the service plans.</p> <p>Risk: Workforce planning arrangements across services do not support the delivery of the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28, and the council's strategic priorities.</p>	<p>The council should review workforce planning arrangements across services to ensure these support the delivery of the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28, and the council's strategic priorities.</p> <p>Paragraphs 13. to 15.</p>	<p>Workforce planning arrangements will be reviewed and a consistent approach adopted across service plans.</p> <p>Responsible officer: Head of People</p> <p>Agreed date: March 2025</p>

2. Impact of greater use of digital technology

The impact of the greater use of digital technology on the council's future workforce requirements is not yet fully considered and embedded within the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28 and service plans.

Risk: Service plans do not accurately reflect the projected impact of the greater use of digital technology on the council's future workforce requirements.

The council should review service plans to ensure they reflect the projected impact of the greater use of digital technology on the council's future workforce requirements.

Paragraphs [36.](#) and [37.](#)

Agreed

Responsible officer: Head of Digital and Customer Services

Agreed date: March 2025

3. Establishment of Digital Leadership Board

The Digital Leadership Board, responsible for leading on the delivery of the digital strategy, is still being set up.

Risk: There is a lack of oversight, governance and direction for the delivery of the digital strategy.

The council should establish the Digital Leadership Board as a matter of priority to ensure there is appropriate oversight, governance and direction for the delivery of the digital strategy.

Paragraphs [38.](#) to [40.](#)

Agreed

Responsible officer: Head of Digital and Community Services

Agreed date: September 2024

4. Digital skills survey

The council has not undertaken a digital skills survey since 2018.

Risk: The council lacks up-to-date information to inform the development of its digital skills plan.

The council should complete a digital skills survey to assess the current digital capabilities of its workforce and to identify areas for additional training and development.

Paragraph [51.](#)

Agreed

Responsible officer: Head of People

Agreed date: March 2025

5. Reliance on casual workers

Over 7 per cent of the council's staff are employed as casual workers.

Risk: The council's current reliance on casual workers may present business continuity risks for services.

The council needs to review its use of casual workers to ensure this does not present a business continuity risk for the organisation.

Paragraphs [64.](#) to [66.](#)

The Council will review its use of casual workers and consider whether policies and practices should be reviewed.

Responsible officer: Head of People

Agreed date: March 2025

6. Joint working with partners

The council has embraced joint workforce arrangements with other bodies in a range of areas. However, there may be further opportunities for the council to work with other partners to tackle shared workforce challenges in the future.

Risk: The council may not be utilising its staff resources as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The council should look to identify further opportunities to work together with partners to tackle shared workforce challenges in the future.

Paragraph [100.](#)

The Council will continue to explore opportunities for partnership working.

Responsible officer: Head of People

Agreed date: March 2025

7. Measuring the impact of workforce planning

The council has still to develop smart measures and targets to monitor and report on progress against the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28.

Risk: Workforce planning arrangements may not be supporting the delivery of the strategic priorities in within the Council Plan.

The council needs to develop smart measures and targets to monitor and report on progress against the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-28. This should include reporting to elected members on the delivery of workforce priorities.

Paragraphs [104.](#) to [107.](#)

The Council will develop appropriate reporting for both Elected Members and the Corporate Leadership Team.

Responsible officer: Head of People

Agreed date: March 2025

Dundee City Council

Best Value Thematic Review 2023/24:

Workforce Innovation – How councils are responding to workforce challenges

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