

Workforce Innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

Best Value thematic work in councils 2023-24



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Key facts



Workforce 2024¹

15,532	Number of people working for the council – headcount
13,086	Number of people working for the council – full time equivalent
1,917	Number of people working for the council on a temporary or fixed term contract – headcount
11,441	Number of employees who live in North Lanarkshire
11.5%	Turnover of staff in last year
11.2	Days lost due to absence in last year per employee ²



Age profile ³

0.6%	Below 20
29.9%	20 to 39
55.3%	40 to 59
10.9%	60 to 64
3.4%	65+

¹ Headcount and FTE are based on North Lanarkshire Council employee snapshot data at April 2024. Turnover is based on 2023/24. The number of people who live in North Lanarkshire is based on the 'One Workforce' report, December 2023. Temporary staff numbers is internal council reporting data.

² Based on 2022/23 Local Government Benchmarking Framework data for non-teachers

³ Based on 2022 North Lanarkshire Council Employment gathering information

Key messages

- 1** The council's workforce planning approach is integrated with The Plan for North Lanarkshire, with a focus on developing the workforce of the wider North Lanarkshire area. In December 2023 the council published its 'One Workforce' report, a further iteration of the Workforce for the Future Strategy. It aligns with the Programme of Work 2023-28 and is supported by robust service workforce plans. The council engages with staff and trade unions in developing its plans. Senior Officers carried out an extensive programme of staff roadshows in Summer 2024 to inform staff of the council's strategic vision. There is opportunity for the council to reflect on how it incorporates the views of staff and trade unions to support transparent decision making.
- 2** A refreshed Digital and IT Strategy was developed for 2024-2027, which supports the digital priority within the Programme of Work. The council has made advancements in its digital agenda since the Covid-19 pandemic, such as through the rollout of Microsoft365, and through innovative developments in education. The council is yet to realise wider benefits. A core aim of the strategy is for North Lanarkshire to develop a skilled digital workforce. Work is underway to support this ambition.
- 3** The council updated its smarter working and hybrid working policies in April 2024. The updated policy prescribe staff to work from an office for a greater proportion of time, compared with the previous requirements. As community hubs are rolled out, staff will increasingly work from hubs as an alternative to working from home where this supports service delivery. The council monitors its hybrid working approach through ongoing feedback from managers.
- 4** The council is proactive in developing its workforce as well as that of the wider North Lanarkshire area. It has a range of initiatives to address recruitment challenges across key sectors such as social care and construction, including grow-your-own approaches. The council's Brighter Futures programme supports development of the wider North Lanarkshire workforce, through employability and skills initiatives. Work is underway in key sectors such as digital and construction to address skills gaps across the wider labour market. There are strong linkages with education providers to support the council's workforce ambitions. There are programmes in place to support succession planning.
- 5** The council works across a range of partnerships to deliver services for communities. There is a partnership approach to workforce planning through

the Health and Social Care Partnership, and the council works with other bodies through platforms such as the Glasgow City Region. Like most councils, the council does not have any shared services with workforce implications at scale. The development of the community hubs will present further opportunities for collaborative working. The council does not report on temporary and agency staffing numbers. There is room to include this in its published data.

- 6 The council regularly monitors and reports against its workforce planning activity, to relevant committees and through updates against the Programme of Work. The council reports against 28 health check indicators to monitor progress against its place-based vision. There is a strong emphasis on ongoing evaluation. This could be strengthened further through monitoring activity to distinguish between workforce planning for the council, and that of the wider area.

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

7. Workforce planning involves identifying and addressing future capacity and skills gaps, at operational and leadership levels. It requires strategic thinking, comprehensive workforce data and ongoing consultation and engagement with staff and trades unions. A council focused on achieving Best Value will have a workforce strategy that sets out expectations on how staff will deliver its vision, priorities and values.

8. To be effective, workforce planning must be integrated across the organisation. Workforce strategies must support other key plans including financial, asset, digital and transformation planning, and be under-pinned with detailed service workforce plans.

Workforce planning is embedded in developing the workforce of the wider North Lanarkshire area, in line with the council's place-based approach

9. The council uses a placed based approach, working with partners to deliver its strategic vision 'The Plan for North Lanarkshire'. This sets out a shared ambition to make 'North Lanarkshire the place to Live, Learn, Work, Invest, and Visit.' It is supported by a Programme of Work which was refreshed in March 2023, covering the period until 2028, and contains seven strategic priorities:

- **Transforming Places** – an enhanced programme to accelerate transformation of town centres and communities.
- **Invest in North Lanarkshire** – accelerated outcome delivery and investment via a more streamlined advisory service and aligned operating model and infrastructure plan.
- **Sustainable Futures** – focus commitments to Net Zero Carbon and the associated energy solutions and investments required to make it a reality.
- **Resilient People** – deliver whole family support locally, when families need it, in a way that addresses the impacts of poverty and reduces inequality.
- **Brighter Futures** – support and improve educational attainment, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, and volunteering.
- **Digital North Lanarkshire** – develop a skilled digital workforce, promote an innovative, sustainable culture and be the digital leader for a transformed North Lanarkshire.

- **One Service** – ensure services are delivered, regardless of owner, in a streamlined, efficient, and supportive model, with the overall vision of inclusive growth and prosperity for all.

10. The Brighter Futures programme is integral to workforce planning across the council and the wider North Lanarkshire area. Raising economic growth is also core to this. It identifies six themes that target a range of employment pathways, including the council as a key employer. Workforce planning also spans across the Digital North Lanarkshire ([page 12, paragraph 22-25](#)) and One Service programmes.

11. In December 2023 the councils 'One Workforce' report was presented to the Policy and Strategy committee. This aligns to the Programme of Work and supersedes the 'Workforce for the future' Strategy' 2021-23. It sets out six priority areas ([Exhibit 1](#)), and includes an action plan until 2024/25.

Exhibit 1: North Lanarkshire Council 'One Workforce' priorities

Medium and long term challenges	'One Workforce' Priorities
Delivering our future operating model	1. Managing workforce transitions
Challenging labour market conditions	2. Pathways for progression
Shifting workplace dynamics	3. Next generation council workforce
Pay inflation	4. Vibrant and flexible workforce
Skills shortages and aging workforce	5. Employee engagement and wellbeing
Ongoing funding constraints	6. Equality and inclusion

Source: Audit Scotland and North Lanarkshire Council

12. Through the One Service programme of work, the council is aligning future workforce resources with its financial capacity, as part of the transition to a new leadership and operating model. Over 2024, Chief Officers are presenting workforce transition plans to the One Service Board. These set out how services will support the council's future operating model over the next three to five years, accounting for current and future workforce challenges, and emerging service priorities. The plans include an assessment of how services will utilise community hubs in the future, as a shift from traditional council assets.

13. In June 2024 the council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2025/26 to 2029/30 and Revenue Budget Strategy went to the Policy and Strategy Committee which sets out the financial challenges faced by the council. The document references the One Workforce report in the context of employee cost pressures linked to the pay award for future years. Whilst the council's One Workforce report highlights the challenging financial landscape, it would benefit from clear alignment to the council's MTFP.

Detailed service workforce plans have been developed

14. The [2019 Best Value Assurance report](#) recommended that workforce plans should be developed across all services, to set out the current and future workforce requirements of the council and how these support other strategies. Service workforce plans were developed in 2023 and include action plans. Service workforce plans are robust, covering key service challenges, gaps, and how the service needs to adapt, and most contain references to the council's strategic priorities and how the service will support delivery of the Programme of work. A summary of service workforce plans was incorporated within the council's One Workforce plan.

15. The council reports a range of workforce data, including Whole Time Equivalent, age, gender, length of service, grade, average salary, and proportion of the workforce who live in North Lanarkshire. There are challenges in monitoring vacancies due to how information is recorded on council systems. Vacancy data is held within services, but not recorded centrally. Services also hold vacancies to meet five per cent turnover savings, meaning there is not an accurate reflection of vacancies.

16. The council also reports on wider labour market data to assess broader social and economic trends and understand the skills profile of the wider workforce. For example, it considers data from the Skills Development Scotland Regional skills assessment.

The council recently invested in a series of staff roadshows to engage with staff on its programme of work. There is opportunity for the council to reflect on how it incorporates the views of staff and trade unions to support transparent decision making

17. During summer 2024, a programme of staff roadshows has taken place to inform staff of the council's strategic vision. The roadshows have received considerable investment, with 72 events held across 21 venues in North Lanarkshire. Over 2,200 staff attended the roadshows. The sessions were used to engage with staff on ambitions from The Plan for North Lanarkshire. Engagement from the sessions highlighted positive staff buy-in. For example, 81.9 per cent of respondents agreed that the Programme of Work was getting it right to achieve the right outcomes. The council plan to explore the findings from the roadshows at committee in December 2024. The council should use this opportunity to identify what action it is taking in relation to feedback from the sessions.

18. The last staff survey was an interim Investors in People (IIP) survey in 2023, but it received a low response rate (17 per cent). A staff survey on hybrid working was also carried out ([page 17, paragraph 41](#)). The council is considering a revised staff engagement approach for the future which will be taken forward through the One Service programme of work, with a new staff survey expected to launch later in 2024. The new survey will be based on the Scottish Government standards around Fair Work, and will also be adapted to support the context for staff in North Lanarkshire.

19. The council engages with trade union representatives through the Joint Consultative Group (JCC) and the Joint Negotiating Committee for Teachers (JNCT). Trade unions are consulted on specific issues, as well as budget proposals and service reviews. However, there are gaps in consultation on strategic issues. For example, only some services provide trade unions with early drafts of workforce plans, and consistency is needed to ensure all services engage with trade unions in the development of strategic plans.

Recommendation 1

As the council develops its staff engagement approach, it should ensure that as well as providing information to staff on council decisions, it also incorporates the views of staff and trade unions to support transparent decision making, and evidence how it is acting on findings from the Summer 2024 Roadshow sessions.

Digital technology and the workforce

20. The LGO notes that digital technology will make councils' future workforces look and work quite differently. In order to achieve the change required, councils need to make good use of digital technology and use the workforce in flexible ways. Digital technology has a strong bearing on a council's workforce needs. It can be used to re-shape jobs to increase productivity and reduce back-office functions while improving service quality. Technology solutions include online services, customer relationship management systems, mobile digital devices and more recently, artificial intelligence (AI) applications.

21. 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.

A new Digital and IT Strategy was developed for 2024-2027 and aligns with the council's Programme of Work

22. The previous five-year Digital and IT Strategy approved in June 2019 was significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The council undertook an annual review of the original DigitalNL programme, to assess the benefits achieved against those planned. This has informed the refreshed strategy.

23. A new Digital and IT Strategy for 2024-2027 was presented to the Policy and Strategy committee in March 2024. It provides a clear direction in terms of what it means to be digital, priorities, roles and where resources need to be targeted through a one council approach. This aligns to the Programme of Work to 2028, with the vision for a Digital North Lanarkshire being one of the seven priorities within the programme.

24. The refreshed Digital and IT Strategy contains a Delivery plan for the period 2024-27 which sets out key deliverables across the next three years. This is accompanied by a set of principles which adopt a people-first approach: Employees first; Inclusive; Digital first; Innovative; Flexible; and Connected.

25. The aim for Digital North Lanarkshire is to develop a skilled digital workforce, promote an innovative sustainable culture and be the digital leader for a transformed North Lanarkshire. Key programmes commenced through the previous DigitalNL programme have had particular impacts on workforce:

- **Digital workplace and Microsoft 365** – the rollout of Microsoft365 and investment in modern digital toolkits has progressed in line with the council's ambitions to enable staff to 'work from anywhere, with anyone at

anytime' as part of the future operating model and hub-based delivery. This was further accelerated following the onset of Covid-19. The council see this as resulting in a higher performing, agile and more secure experience.

- **Digital Platform** - this included a new Customer Relationship Management and a Customer Services Hub launched in November 2020, providing modern self-serve, and rolling out on-line services. One of the non-financial benefits of this was the intended upskilling of the workforce, but the pandemic hindered this ambition.
- **Connectivity framework** – the council has enhanced infrastructure through its community hub model. This also aims to ensure the rollout of digital council services are accessible to communities across North Lanarkshire, through improvements such as enhanced bandwidth for schools, and building capacity to support a free public Wi-Fi network across town centres, libraries, schools, leisure, and community centres.

The council's digital workforce benefits are still to be fully realised, but there are examples of where digital is enhancing service delivery

26. The council's previous DigitalNL programme and business case set out benefits to be achieved from the digital transformation programme. In February 2022, the council established a Benefits Realisation Management approach, which aimed at realising financial and non-financial benefits from digital transformation. These are categorised as financial, process, customer, employee and environmental. However, it was noted that the initial Digital NL programme did not make savings at the pace originally intended. This was largely due to the impact of the pandemic as identified savings from adult health and social care were deemed to not be realistic in the post-pandemic environment. There has also been some difficulty in quantifying savings such as time saved and carbon reductions.

27. The previous digital strategy set out financial benefits, with the council expecting to make significant savings and associated FTE staff reductions, through the adoption of digital technology, but these have not been fully realised. The current digital strategy is more focussed on outcomes and the impact on communities.

28. There are some innovative examples of where digital technology has been used to support and improve service and quality outcomes, such as in schools ([Case study 1](#)).

Case study 1: North Lanarkshire Virtual classroom

The council is expanding its virtual classroom to support outcomes for students

Background

In January 2021 a Virtual Classroom was launched to provide an online and interactive learning platform for young people during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was produced in consultation with

teachers and includes learning across key subjects such as literacy, numeracy and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

The virtual classroom has been expanded over time and aligns with progression pathways in education. It now contains a 'Tech Tuesdays' resource where six new pre-recorded lessons are released every week. The virtual classroom also provides access to a range of videos and materials which support young people's pathways into employment.

Impact

The council state that to date, the virtual classroom contains almost 4,000 accessible resources and has achieved over one million visits. The council hope that it can help to reduce the attainment gap, providing a bridge between school and home learning, with bespoke learning solutions available through the platform. It has also benefited some students who can take specific classes online, where they would previously need to travel to another school.

The skill set and knowledge of staff has been increased by digital training and the council note that it has supported efficiencies in teachers' workload.

Source: Audit Scotland and North Lanarkshire Council

Developing the digital skills of staff is an area of focus, with a refreshed digital skills survey underway

29. A key principle of the Digital and IT Strategy is 'Being digital is everyone's business'. The Delivery Plan 2024-2027 outlines actions to support the development of a skilled workforce to improve digital adoption and accelerate digital first business capabilities. These include investment in the upskilling of the council's workforce by developing a self-assessment tool to allow staff to understand their current level of digital skills and undertake further learning as appropriate. The plan is not specific on what digital skills require investment, and as yet the self-assessment tool has not been developed.

30. A digital skills survey was carried out in 2022, with results used to address issues and training needs. Based on a total of 1,334 responses the 2022 survey showed that 68 per cent rated their digital skills as excellent or good and only three per cent rated their skills as poor.

31. Results were fed into the Digital Skills Action plan to support objectives set up in the Digital Council theme. The council also carried out deeper dive focus groups to better understand the level of digital skills of staff within their target groups. A number of recommendations emerged from this work, including the development of a training plan and resources such as bite sized videos for staff.

32. These recommendations were never fully implemented, with remaining actions being transferred to relevant deliverables under the Programme of Work to 2028. The council now plans to carry out a refreshed digital skills survey and develop a skills self-assessment tool. As digital skills are key to the successful adoption of digital technology, it is important that the council completes this survey and puts an effective digital skills plan in place.

33. In response to the digital skills survey from 2022, the council has put in place a range of initiatives to develop digital skills and the adoption of digital technology. For example:

- **Early adopters programme** – a new digital adoption survey is underway with results due to be reported in late summer 2024. It aims to inform a digital maturity assessment and will support the aim that digital is fully adopted. The survey will inform an Early Adopters programme where nominated council staff will help to bridge gaps in digital skills, to help with the adoption of technology.
- **Technology enabled care** – there is a new technical team to support the health and social care workforce in using enhanced technology solutions, supporting locality teams to maximise use of technology enabled care.

34. The council's recognises that the development of digital skills is critical to the success of the council's Digital North Lanarkshire programme. The council considers not just the council's workforce but the wider labour market in North Lanarkshire. Skills Development Scotland data shows a higher digital skills gap in Lanarkshire than Scotland as a whole.

35. The council has set up a working group to address current and future digital skills requirements. A Digital Academy model is also in development. Three projects are underway as part of the UK shared prosperity funding, which aims to enhance the digital skills of communities in North Lanarkshire and prepare people to gain employment across the wider digital sector. As part of the council's own workforce development, it has implemented a career pathway within the Business and Digital service. This aims to enable entry level roles to build knowledge, skills, and experience across a range of business and digital roles and support onward career progression.

Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment

The council offer various schemes for employees including smarter and hybrid working, but with a greater emphasis on staff working in the community

36. During the pandemic, councils needed to make the best use of their existing workforce while continuing to monitor employee wellbeing. Home-working and hybrid working have now become commonplace. However, whatever the working practice, employers need to ensure that service quality and productivity are maintained.

37. The council highlights a commitment to the Fair Work First policy. The council and its Arm's Length External Organisations (ALEOs) offer a variety of policies to support employees in both work and personal life settings, such as job sharing, buying annual leave, and flexible retirement. Some policies have not been reviewed in several years and would benefit from more regular review to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose.

38. In 2024, 45.6 per cent of the workforce were employed on a part-time basis, an increase from 43.7 per cent in 2020/21. The council's Smarter Working policy was updated in April 2024 and outlines eligibility requirements and processes. Job roles offer varying shift patterns depending on the role requirements. Staff can request a change to their working patterns, hours and location through the smarter working policy. The number of people on smarter working arrangements is monitored by managers within each service. The council has recently started to record this information centrally. The council should utilise this data to assess how widely flexible working is being endorsed.

Hybrid working makes up a small percentage of the workforce

39. The council has a hybrid working policy, which is linked to the job role rather than the individual. The council employ over 15,000 staff, but the nature of the local government workforce means that the majority of roles are front-line service delivery, with around ten per cent of staff employed in roles which allow for hybrid working. The number of permanent home workers within North Lanarkshire council is done on a person-by-person basis.

40. In April 2024 a permanent hybrid working scheme was issued. Prior to this the council had a temporary hybrid working arrangement where staff attended a council premises six days in a four-week period. The refreshed hybrid working scheme was accompanied by staff surveys across staff and managers to gauge the opinions of employees around working preferences.

41. The staff survey in February 2023 had a 73 per cent response rate. Of the respondent's 89.4 percent were spending one to two days in a week in the office. 45.5 percent of the respondents felt that six days in the office was too many. However, the majority of the more senior grades preferred to either keep or increase the number of days in the office. Of those employees who wanted less they felt one day a week would be adequate to maintain staff relationships whilst allowing them to be more productive at home.

42. In developing the changes, the council has drawn on external research findings which show that a balance of both home and office working can support staff wellbeing and engagement. In addition, it considered performance information and data from the managers hybrid working survey, which outlined that some Chief Officers perceived hybrid working to have adversely impacted team collaboration and engagement. The council believe these changes will help foster stronger collaboration within teams and the wider workforce over the longer term.

43. In implementing the permanent hybrid scheme the council made several changes including:

- increasing the minimum required days in the office from six in twenty to ten in twenty
- having a two-week rotational pattern of Wednesday to Tuesday in the office followed by a week at home
- removal of allowance to buy equipment – instead any equipment requests will be discussed and agreed with their line manager.

44. The council acknowledges that changes to the hybrid working policy would not fully reflect staff preference, and would balance desires for hybrid working, with the wider business needs. The manager's survey also indicated that most Chief Officers thought that hybrid working either had no impact or a positive impact on performance and wellbeing.

45. The council has a focus on utilising the community hubs which are being rolled out ([paragraph's 72-75](#)) where staff will increasingly work from the hubs as an alternative to working from home, where this supports service delivery. Whilst it is positive that the council engaged with staff in developing its refreshed hybrid working policy, it could be clearer on how it balanced the survey findings with wider business needs, in developing the final policy.

46. The council has not carried out a formal assessment of the impact of its hybrid working approach on service performance, staff productivity, or wider service benefits. It utilises ongoing feedback from managers to assess this. It also looks at sickness absence data. Data for the first two quarters of 2022/23 shows lower rates of sickness absence among hybrid workers, relative to overall council staff.

47. The separate survey for senior grades indicates that most Chief Officers think that hybrid working has increased recruitment and attraction opportunities, but the council's new hybrid working scheme is more structured than many

councils. The council should continue to assess the impact of hybrid working on recruitment and retention.

Recommendation 2

The council should continue to monitor the impact of its hybrid working approach. It should continually assess the impact of increasing the number of office days, in terms of performance, staff wellbeing, and recruitment and retention.

Developing future skills and capacity

The council is proactive in developing the workforce across the North Lanarkshire area, and has developed innovative sector focussed solutions to address recruitment challenges

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

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

50. Turnover has increased in recent years from 9.6 per cent in 2020/21 to 11.5 per cent in 2023/24. The council engages with staff through the exit process to understand this trend, but feedback can be varied as exit interviews are a voluntary process. The council endorse a focus on 'grow your own' approaches to address recruitment challenges, with structured career pathways having been developed across a range of services, such as facility support, built environment, protective services, business and digital, and housing.

51. The council have developed an NL Academy model across key sectors to support workforce development – this includes health and social care; digital; and the built environment. These are at different stages, with the care academy furthest progressed ([Case study 2](#)).

Case study 2: North Lanarkshire Care Academy

The Care Academy aims to build a health and social care workforce for the future, whilst providing pathways to employment and responding to inequalities

The Care Academy was developed in 2018 by the North Lanarkshire Council Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). It supports workforce planning across health and social care, the largest growing sector in North Lanarkshire, by building a skilled workforce to meet future demand and reduce skills shortages.

The Academy has identified three key areas: Developing the Young Workforce; Employability and Inclusion; and Recruitment, Attraction and Retention. The Care Academy Steering Group

provides oversight with a range of stakeholders representing the group across adult services and people services.

Progress and impact

Across 2023/24 and 2024/25, the Care Academy was allocated funding of £88,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to make investments in council staff supporting workforce development. The funding was targeted at three projects:

- **Trainee Social Worker Scheme** – pathway to support a qualification in social work. There are eight trainee students: four are on an 18-month fast track route through the Open University and will qualify as Social Workers in August 2025; four are on track to qualify in 2026/27.
- **Upskilling of Home Support Workers** – partnership with New College Lanarkshire to support staff to gain a qualification in Health and Social Care at SVQ level 2 and 3. 60 employees are undertaking qualification from late Summer 2023 – Spring 2024 cohorts.
- **Development of home support staff** – through the redesign of home support a career pathway is being developed for schedulers and senior schedulers.

Future plans for the Care Academy

In March 2023, it evolved to a pan Lanarkshire approach, in collaboration with South Lanarkshire Council. The intention is to create a single Lanarkshire Care Academy.

Source: Audit Scotland and North Lanarkshire Council

52. Integral to the Brighter Futures programme, the council's employability service and community learning and development service, support fair work and employment for residents across North Lanarkshire. This includes the council's employability programme, delivered on behalf of the ALEO 'Routes to Work' which supports local residents into employment opportunities.

53. Over 2023, around 46 staff were employed through this route in roles across the council, such as administration and childcare. This included young people who faced barriers in entering the labour market, as well as adults and parents on low-incomes, as a mechanism to tackle child poverty. People are provided with fair work opportunities, as well as access to internal council vacancies upon entry. The council record that 86 per cent of staff employed through Routes to Work were still in employment six months after job entry.

There are programmes in place to support succession planning

54. Succession planning is important to develop future leaders and ensure that essential skills remain in place. The council is utilising flexible retirement approaches, including phased retirement and part-time hour contracts for key posts, across key services, including health and social care.

55. The council has developed two leadership programmes. In 2017 it launched an internal leadership academy which involves working with The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) to deliver two separate accredited programmes aimed at a mix of aspiring and existing managers:

- **Foundational/fundamental leadership course** - 80 staff have participated in the programme; 22 have achieved an SVQ Level 3 in Management; and 24 have gained CMI Level 3 in Management
- **Influential leadership programme** - 85 staff have participated in the programme; 67 have achieved an SVQ Level 4 in Management; and 10 have gained CMI Level 5 in Management.

56. In 2024 the council developed proposals to introduce an agile leadership programme which is directed at supporting potential future Chief Officers, in line with the council's future Operating Model and Programme of Work. The council note it differs from traditional leadership programmes, through learning which allow for adjustments based on learner experience, feedback, and evolving requirements. The proposal will be presented to Corporate Management Team later this year for approval.

Developing the young workforce is a priority area

57. The council is proactive in engaging with young people across education and employability settings, to promote jobs and pathways to in-demand sectors and address the challenge of an ageing workforce. The council is aligning curricular activity with labour market demand, through a focus on areas such as digital and STEM subjects. A 'Developing the young workforce delivery plan, 2022-25' sets out the council's approach to working with partners to support employability and enhanced positive and sustained post-school destinations. As a key employer, the council supports initiatives such as:

- **S6 Qualification in social work** – through the Care Academy, the council is developing a Higher National Certificate in Social Care for young people in S6, in partnership with New College Lanarkshire. This will lead to entry to year 2 of the HND certificate and the team are exploring a route for this to lead to third year of a degree at the University of the West of Scotland.
- **Modern apprenticeships (MA)** - offers 16-24 year olds the opportunity to undertake a one year placement within the council and achieve a qualification at SCQF Levels 5, 6, or 7. In March 2024 the council hosted seven MA roadshows attended by 226 young people, promoting upcoming council MA vacancies. The council's summer 2023 intake employed 44 MAs across roles such as Additional Support Needs roles within schools, early learning and childcare roles, horticultural roles, and digital technology technicians. For 2024/25, similar demand for MAs has been identified across services.

58. There are a range of initiatives which target digital skills in young people, such as through the digital schools initiative and virtual classroom ([Case study 1](#)). The council's recent 2023 summer placement programme has also provided benefits for the council as well as outcomes for young people ([Case study 3](#)).

Case study 3 – Summer Placement programme

A six-week summer placement programme has supported young people into positive destinations

In summer 2023 the council launched a six-week summer placement scheme to support the One Workforce priority 'next generation council workforce'. The programme facilitates pupils from across North Lanarkshire schools and local colleges to gain paid work experience in council services, namely: Chief Executives; Adult Health and Social Care; and Enterprise and Communities. Young people participating in the programme received weekly check-ins from the council's Talent and Organisational Development (TOD) team.

For the summer 2023 intake, 23 young people were enrolled, and all secured a positive destination at the end: 21 young people secured a sessional contract with the council; one gained employment in a home care role; and one accepted a place on the Housing MA programme.

The programme is being rolled out for summer 2024, with 112 young people having secured placements both within the council and across other sectors:

- 92 council based roles across clerical and corporate based roles; assistant sports coach; and care based roles
- 20 built environment based roles

The council has applied learning from the 2023 pilot intake. It is making further improvements to the programme, including increasing the lead-in time for recruitment and an extended induction process.

Source: Audit Scotland and North Lanarkshire Council

The council collaborates with partners to support workforce development in hard-to-fill roles

59. The council works with education providers across school and college settings ([paragraph's 57-58](#)), and through Graduate Apprenticeships (GA) for existing staff to work and undertake a degree qualification. Since 2018, the council has delivered six cohorts of GAs in partnership with universities, with a further cohort underway for 2024. The programme is spread across 14 frameworks, such as accounting, construction, and digital. For example:

- **Construction and the built environment** – delivered by Edinburgh Napier University, there have been over 13 GAs taken on, with programmes in roles such as Building Standards and Quantity Surveying.
- **Planning and design degree** – through the Glasgow City Region (GCR) partnership, the council is leading the development of a GA for qualified Planners in 2025. This will be delivered by the University of the West of Scotland. It will have Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) accreditation and include an accelerated route for experienced staff.
- **Business and digital** – since 2018 there have been eight GA places across Business and Digital degrees including cyber security and IT software development. The council has also revised entry criteria for entry level internships and Graduate developer roles that are harder to recruit.

60. Our [Social Care briefing](#) underlined the substantial workforce challenges facing the sector, with an ageing workforce and poor terms and conditions. The development of a social work student hub illustrates one example of how the council is addressing these challenges ([Case study 4](#)).

Case study 4 - Social work student hubs

The student hub model is supporting recruitment challenges in social work

In 2023 the council developed a student hub model in social work to provide students with practical experience to become a qualified social worker. Students gain support from a Practice Learning Officer and receive peer support, teaching, and presentations from external speakers.

From August 2023 until March 2024 a Community Care Hub and a Justice Hub have been in operation. The council plan to rollout a further three hubs in 2024.

Impact

- Students have gained direct experience of managing complex caseloads with direct support from colleagues in the setting.
- 60 Social Work students were placed within North Lanarkshire; 52 being external students from four universities - 14 of these students have secured social work posts within North Lanarkshire and are now progressing to the councils Newly Qualified Social Worker supported year.
- The council has received positive feedback from students on the programme, and university tutors have praised the learning experience and support offered to students.

Source: Audit Scotland and North Lanarkshire Council

61. Services outline the need for skills development in key areas, such as digital. The council is working to address skills shortages in specific sectors through the establishment of industry level sector boards. A sector board has been established for the built environment, where partners across the council and construction businesses collectively assess challenges. The council is commissioning research on overall skills gaps for the sector.

The council has not published the detail of options for reducing its workforce to meet future savings targets

62. Leaders need to engage with staff and trade unions over fundamental workforce reform. This is particularly challenging in an environment of potential job losses.

63. The council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2025/26 – 2029/30 outlines a budget gap of £100.084 million over the five year planning period. Work is ongoing to support the council's future operating model, through a series of service reviews and consideration of savings options ([page 9, paragraph 12](#)), but the council has not published the detail of future savings on workforce numbers.

Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

The council collaborates with partners to utilise collective resources. It does not have any shared services with other public bodies that have workforce implications at scale

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

65. 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.

66. There are instances of shared working between the council and other public bodies, but these do not have significant workforce implications. For example, it has insourced its Business Gateway Services which it delivers on behalf of North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council.

67. The council collaborates with partners across the region to deliver shared goals and support communities, through forums such as:

- **Community Planning Partnership (CPP)** – the council works with local partners, communities and the third sector, to facilitate community planning and collectively deliver The Plan for North Lanarkshire, focussing on a shared ambition of inclusive growth and prosperity for all.
- **The Glasgow City Region Deal** – the council has received investment from the City Deals programme. This has focussed predominately on infrastructure allowing for better connected communities through improved transport links to the Glasgow City Region and Central Scotland.
- **Clyde Valley residual waste contract** – the council have entered a long-term contract as with a consortium of five local authorities (East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire). The contract will help the council meet the conditions of the Scottish Government Zero Waste Plan and Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012.

68. The council also works with ALEOs where services are delivered by partners on behalf of the council. This includes a long-standing partnership with

Mears to deliver the housing repairs service in North Lanarkshire. The council does not include external providers within its workforce plan, but providers such as Mears support the council's wider workforce development by providing Modern Apprenticeships for young people in North Lanarkshire. The council could be clearer on the role of third parties on supporting local workforce development.

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

69. Partnership working between the council and NHS Lanarkshire is long standing. North Lanarkshire accounts for just under a third (9,740) of the total HSCP workforce (32,048). The third and independent sector make up the majority of this (7,670) and the remaining is the council's adult social care (2,070).

70. The HSCP Workforce Plan 2022-25 was approved by NHS Lanarkshire in October 2022 and contains an action plan to address workforce challenges. There is limited detail on the composition of the council's workforce profile and requirements but in 2023 the council published a year two strategic workforce plan. This provides more detailed analysis of the composition and requirements of the adult social care workforce, and links to the council's strategic priorities.

71. The council is also working with partners across the HSCP to expand the Care Academy ([Case study 2](#)). It has an agreement with South Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire. This is designed to support training and workforce developments in the care sector. Through the care academy, partners are exploring a model for shared apprenticeships in areas such as home care. The partnership has received university recognition. Glasgow Caledonian University has signed Memorandums of Understanding with both councils.

Community Hubs are providing an opportunity for more collaborative working with partners and other services

72. The council is working with partners to provide services within the community. In 2020 the council created nine Community Boards which divides the council area into smaller areas to better reflect the identity of the community and the challenges they face.

73. A key element of the council plan includes the introduction of community hubs. The hubs are designed to bring together education, other local services such as social care, businesses and partnership organisations. A key aim of the hubs is to allow local people to have access to services and support within their own communities. This will support the council's longer-term vision around its future operating model ([paragraph 12](#)) with hub-based delivery and use of digital technology being a key part of this model.

74. The hubs will be available to multiple groups as well as individuals with them being used to drive solutions to issues within the community such as financial help, new mothers and social drop ins. The hubs will also be utilised by employees to allow them to carry out duties without travelling to a council

building to use facilities. This has been a welcome addition by health and social care employees, where the hubs will offer provisions such as rest facilities.

75. To date, three of the community hubs have been completed – Newmains and St Brigid's, Riverbank and Chryston, with several more in development. The council is still working through the details of how these will work going forward, areas such as staffing, access, and security are still to be finalised.

Community hubs form part of the council's property rationalisation programme

76. As well as providing a more collaborative approach the hubs are also part of the council's property rationalisation programme. The programme aims to reduce its buildings down to six from twenty-four. Since 2017 the council has had a 15 per cent reduction in its office base and increased utilisation in remaining buildings by 40 per cent. There are also plans to reduce the depot estate by 50 per cent. This process is currently ongoing, and the council is in discussion with impacted employees and the trade unions as to the implications of the changes.

The council does not report on temporary and agency staff at council wide level

77. Temporary staff, including agency, are utilised in some roles, for example positions that are harder to fill, or where there is a need for roles to be carried out over the short-term. The council notes that it does not have a high reliance on agency workers, although this has increased recently due to shortages in some professional roles. Temporary and agency staff are utilised to fill positions such as social workers, land management seasonal roles, and finance roles to support demand for new government grants.

78. The council collects data on the number of temporary staff internally, but this is not reported. Similarly, the council does not have a clear system for monitoring and documenting agency staff numbers centrally. This data is held by services, and the council is working to record this centrally.

Recommendation 3

The council should include data reporting on its temporary workforce as part of published workforce data, and once available it should include data on agency workers.

Measuring the impact of workforce planning

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

The Programme of Work is informed by 28 Health Check Indicators

80. The council's One Workforce plan is supported by a Delivery Plan for 2023/24 and 2024/25 which contains a RAG status and commentary on each of the actions. An update on progress with the One Workforce Plan will be reported to Policy and Strategy committee later in 2024.

81. In March 2024 the Delivery Plan for the Programme of Work to 2028 was presented to the Policy and Strategy committee. The Brighter Futures programme contains 22 deliverables - 10 of which relate specifically to the council's own workforce. Each deliverable has a set of actions, timescales, relevant reporting committee and progress reporting schedules.

82. In April 2024, the council reported its first quarterly monitoring position against the Delivery Plan for the Programme of Work to Corporate Management Team (CMT). This reports against the council's 28 health check indicators, which the council use to assess progress against its seven strategic priorities, in line with its place-based vision. The health check indicators on workforce are focussed on wider economic activity and employability. The report also included commentary on the One Workforce report. This is largely focussed on general workforce demographic data, challenges, arrangements around hybrid working, and sickness absence.

83. There is a strong emphasis on ongoing evaluation. The 28 health check indicators focus on outcomes for the wider area. The council could strengthen its monitoring approach further. It should ensure that in addition to the 28 health check indicators, it internally monitors the impact of its broader workforce planning activity, on its own workforce capacity and development.

The council monitors progress with its workforce initiatives across a range of forums

84. The council is comprehensive in monitoring the range of workforce initiatives that it offers, such as apprenticeships, employability programmes, and

initiatives under the Brighter Futures programme. The council report on specific elements of its workforce planning across a range of forums:

- **Workforce for the future** - The council report on various aspects through progress reports to the Policy and Strategy Committee and CMT.
- **Service workforce plan action plans** – service workforce plans contain an action plan until 2024/25, accompanied by a RAG status and action owner and completion dates. Services are to provide update reports to CMT twice yearly, and workforce plans will be refreshed in 2025/26.
- **Workforce change steering group** – internal structure where matters which impact staffing change are raised.
- **Brighter Futures** – progress against each deliverable is reported to the relevant committee.
- **UK Shared Prosperity Funding** – reporting of workforce elements in relation to the NL academy model is reported to the Finance and Resources Committee.
- **Sector boards** – the development of sector boards will monitor specific activity across health and social care, digital, and the built environment, which has already been established.
- **Sickness absence** – monthly/quarterly reports are presented to Business Management Team.

85. In assessing workforce planning more broadly, the council looks at sickness absence, pay gap reporting, and exit interviews. The council evidences that it takes action based on this analysis. For example, in response to high levels of mental health sickness absence, the council has identified actions such as the development of absence action plans and mental health awareness sessions. The council would benefit from collective reporting against the various streams of workforce planning activity that takes place.

Appendix 1

Improvement Action plan

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
<p>1. Acting on staff engagement feedback</p> <p>The council engages with staff and trade unions via staff surveys, roadshows, and trade union forums. However, it is not always clear how the council utilises feedback in to council decisions and policies.</p>	<p>As the council develops its staff engagement approach, it should ensure that as well as providing information to staff on council decisions, it also incorporates the views of staff and trade unions to support transparent decision making, and evidence how it is acting on findings from the Summer 2024 Roadshow sessions.</p>	<p>Response: There are several strands of work underway which will allow the council to progress this recommendation, including a refreshed staff survey and a review of trade union consultation arrangements. These will be taken forward along with the feedback from our 2024 Roadshow sessions to deliver an improved engagement approach.</p> <p>Responsible Officer: Fiona Whittaker, Chief Officer (People Resources).</p> <p>Implementation Date: December 2025.</p>
<p>2. Hybrid working policy</p> <p>Flexible and hybrid working policies are more structured in North Lanarkshire, relative to other councils and organisations. This may make the council a less attractive place to work, in the context of ongoing recruitment challenges.</p>	<p>The council should continue to monitor the impact of its hybrid working approach. It should continually assess the impact of increasing the number of office days, in terms of performance, staff wellbeing, and recruitment and retention.</p>	<p>Response: The council will continue to monitor the impact of its permanent Hybrid Working Scheme, through both manager and staff surveys, and in terms of performance, recruitment and retention in hybrid roles.</p> <p>Responsible Officer: Fiona Whittaker, Chief Officer (People Resources).</p> <p>Implementation Date: January 2026.</p>
<p>3. Temporary workforce</p> <p>The council does not report data on temporary, including agency staff, although it is held by services.</p>	<p>The council should include data reporting on its temporary workforce as part of published workforce data, and once available it should include data on agency workers.</p>	<p>Response: Work is underway to implement a more centralised approach to reporting on and managing temporary workforce resources, including agency workers. This work will be fully</p>

progressed to improve future reporting.

Responsible Officer: Fiona Whittaker, Chief Officer (People Resources).

Implementation Date:
December 2025.

Workforce innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

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