

Workforce Innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

Best Value thematic work in West Lothian Council
2023-24



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Key facts



Workforce 2022/23

8,500	Number of people working for the council – headcount
7,200	Number of people working for the council – full time equivalent
1,132	Number of casual/bank staff
9.5%	Turnover of staff in last year
14.85	Days lost due to absence in last year per employee



Age profile

24%	16 to 33
49%	34 to 54
27%	55+

Key messages

- 1** The council approved its People Strategy 2023-2028 in 2023, which is one of six strategies that support the delivery of the corporate plan. The Council also has a Strategic People Plan 2023-2028, and sets out the council's current workforce profile, future workforce requirements and how it will manage change and communicate with its workforce.
- 2** The council has introduced several Information Technology (IT) systems and digital developments that have delivered workforce benefits and increased productivity, for example, the council has used Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to upgrade its Customer Relationship Management system, this has automated repetitive tasks, and streamlined workflows leading to improved processing times, increased productivity and reduced administrative tasks for council staff.
- 3** The council recognises the benefits of agile working and accommodates flexible working arrangements. The council updated its flexible working policy in February 2024, and to support its approach each council post has been categorised as being suitable for one of the following work styles, fixed working, hybrid working, homeworking and mobile working.
- 4** The council continues to face recruitment and retention challenges with staff, and its proximity to Edinburgh and Glasgow can make it difficult to compete with private organisations to attract and recruit professional staff. The council has developed several solutions to deal with gaps in resources and difficulties in recruiting for posts.
- 5** The council has set targets to monitor and report on progress against the four outcomes in its People Strategy 2023-2028 which are progressed under the direction of the HR programme board. An annual update on progress will be reported to the Corporate Policy and Resources Policy Development Panel and published on the council website. The council has extensive workforce data reporting to the Corporate Management Team (CMT), Executive Management Team (EMT) and the Corporate Policy and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP), which is made up of Elected Members.

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.

8. A council focused on achieving Best Value will have a workforce strategy that sets out expectations on how the local authority's staff will deliver its vision, priorities and values.

9. To be effective, workforce planning must be integrated across the organisation. Workforce strategies need to support the council in achieving its strategic priorities. They must support other key plans including financial, asset, digital and transformation planning. They need to be underpinned with detailed workforce plans within services.

The People Strategy 2023-2028 sets out the council's approach to have a skilled and engaged workforce and to be an employer of choice

10. The council approved its People Strategy 2023-2028 in November 2023, which replaced its People Strategy 2016-2023, which supports its corporate plan and budget strategy and was informed through consultation with key stakeholders. The People Strategy 2023-2028 is one of six strategies that support the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2023-2028.

11. The People Strategy 2023-2028 sets out four key outcomes:

- an employer of choice,
- an empowered and effective workforce,
- a safe, supportive and positive work culture,
- effective leadership.

12. The strategy highlights the challenges and opportunities that the council faces, along with indicators and targets detailing how the council will measure its performance against the four key outcomes.

13. The People Strategy 2023-2028 is supported through the council's Employee Engagement Framework, which sets out how the council will engage with staff and provide supportive leadership and consistent communications. The People Strategy is also supported by the Employee Health and Wellbeing Framework, which recognises that health and well-being are key enablers of effective individual and organisation performance.

A Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028 sets out the council's current workforce profile, future workforce requirements and how it will manage change and communicate with its workforce

14. The council also has a Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028, which aligns with the People Strategy 2023-2028. It provides data on the council's current:

- workforce profile,
- age profile,
- gender profile,
- staff turnover,
- recruitment and attendance management.

15. The Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028 highlights that in order for the council to achieve its priorities it must be clear on what type of organisation it needs to become and the type of employee it will need. The Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028 sets out its future workforce requirements across each service, how it will manage workforce change and employee communication and engagement. All services have workforce plans that address workforce priorities and future planning requirements and are aligned to the Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028.

The council's governance arrangements have been streamlined to better support its corporate strategies

16. The council updated its governance arrangements in May 2024 to take account of changes to the transformation activities being undertaken with its six corporate strategies:

- People Strategy 2023-2028
- Customer Strategy 2023-2028
- Corporate Governance Strategy 2023-2028
- Performance and Transformation Strategy 2023-2028
- Raising Attainment Strategy 2023-2028
- Asset Management Strategy 2023-2028

17. The changes have streamlined the governance process and removed the need to report to an executive board, instead reporting now goes directly to the Corporate Management Team (CMT). The governance framework includes regular consultation with management and elected members.

The council has an effective working relationship with Trade Unions, engaging with them regularly

18. The council engages regularly with Trade Union representatives, meeting every six weeks, and the relationships between senior officers and Trade Union representatives are effective. The council did not directly consult with Trade Unions as part of developing the People Strategy, providing them with a copy after the Strategy had been developed. Whilst this is not unusual and not standard practice amongst most councils the council may wish to consider engaging with trade unions to develop future People Strategies as best practice.

Digital technology and the workforce

19. The [Local Government Overview 2023](#) 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.

20. Digital technology has a strong bearing on a council's workforce needs. It can be used to reshape 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.

The council's Performance and Transformation Strategy 2023-2028 focuses on utilising technology and innovation to improve service delivery in council services and the automation of back-office processes to increase efficiency

22. The council's Performance and Transformation Strategy 2023-2028 replaces the Digital Transformation Strategy and parts of the Improvement and ICT Strategies. It provides the principles for transformation and the approach to managing data and information to improve council performance.

23. There is a focus on utilising technology and innovation to improve service delivery in council services and the automation of back-office processes to increase efficiency. The strategy also includes aspects of a "Data Strategy" which looks to address the opportunities that exist to leverage data, information, and knowledge for improvement purposes.

24. A key part of the council's approach to transformation is the expansion of digital innovation in ways of working. Extending the use of technology and automation will help to make services more sustainable, as well as increase flexibility and choice for customers. The performance of the strategy will be monitored by a number of key indicators, which will be progressed under the direction of the corporate board. An annual update on progress will be reported to Corporate Policy and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel and published on the council website.

25. The primary strategy for addressing the council's digital requirements is the Performance and Transformation Strategy but there is recognition that this needs to link to workforce priorities.

26. The People Strategy 2023-2028 sets out the ambition to have an empowered and effective workforce, which addresses the digital and analytical skills gaps which remain a critical area of focus for the council. This will involve fostering a digitally proficient workforce by identifying skills gaps and providing appropriate digital training. Performance on this will be measured through employee engagement surveys and digital maturity assessments.

The council has introduced several corporate and service-level IT systems and digital developments that have delivered workforce benefits and increased productivity

27. The council has rolled out 2,900 Microsoft 365 (MS365) licences across services and provides corporate staff access to the MS365 functionality, which provides staff the opportunity to drive improvements in the areas of productivity, and collaboration. The council's Fort Client Remote Access enables around 2,000 staff to have remote access from home via a secure Virtual Private Network (VPN) to all council network applications and systems.

28. The council uses Objective File Plan, which is its Electronic Content Management (ECM) system for the secure management and disposal of electronic information. The system allows the council to optimise data assets more effectively and can support smarter and more agile working in the council and increase the performance and efficiency of key business processes. A key feature of transformation activity is Objective workflow, which is delivering digital business processes in several services. Objective workflows have increased process performance by automating common or repeatable tasks and the implementation of workflows is an important part of the council's digital programme.

29. The council's Televic Video Conferencing (TVC) system enables the council to broadcast live meetings to members of the public via the council's YouTube channel, utilising both Microsoft Teams and the Televic software. The system also enables council officers to attend council meetings for specific items of business, removing the requirement to travel to and from the Civic Centre. The TVC system has delivered productivity gains through the removal of lost time due to travel to committee meetings, and at the same time allows officers to continue to work remotely whilst waiting to attend the committee meeting for the specific item of business they are attending.

The council has invested in Robotic Process Automation to improve and streamline internal processes

30. In June 2021, the council approved proposals to pursue a combination of approaches to maximise the benefits of automation through an upgrade to the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and investment in an Intelligent Automation solution across a range of service areas. The proposals highlighted there were a range of financial and non-financial benefits, which were associated with automation, robotics and artificial intelligence (AI):

- Frees up human talent – As the virtual workers undertake the time-consuming and repetitive tasks this frees up employees to undertake the tasks which add value and require a specifically human touch.
- Improved productivity – The virtual workers will work 24/7 and can complete repetitive IT-based tasks much more quickly.
- Improved service levels – The faster and more efficiently you can complete tasks the more able you are to improve service levels. Customer requests can be dealt with more effectively and with a greater focus on positive outcomes first time
- Increased accuracy – Once programmed the virtual workers will follow the scripts and will not make mistakes, which supports compliance and quality control. It also means that time is not spent rectifying the mistakes that employees may make.
- Reduced cost – the use of automation will improve efficiency and reduce the time it takes to complete core tasks, so operational costs are reduced. The virtual workforce can be scaled up or down according to changes in workload. It is estimated that robotic automation can complete routine tasks at up to two-thirds the cost of an employee.
- Centralised control – As automation connects diverse systems this can provide a central point for monitoring and control. It enables changes to processes to be deployed quickly across a range of services which can promote data security.
- Rapid ROI – Automation can be quick to deploy and scale up, which means that the organisation will very quickly be able to see a return on its investment.

31. The upgrade to the CRM system was completed in 2022. The council has a number of indicators and targets which monitor the performance of the CRM system and are reported to the Corporate Policy and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel every quarter. The performance scorecard notes that the majority of indicators are achieving the targeted level of performance.

32. The council is now progressing further automation programmes, of other internal processes that can be improved or streamlined through automation. The council looked externally to other councils, who had already introduced Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to better understand how it can be used to benefit its own services.

33. The council has progressed this through investment in RPA and since it commenced in September 2022, there are a total of 20 projects live or in current development with a further eight awaiting initial assessment.

- There are six live projects, these include a new automation to allow parents/guardians to purchase extra nursery hours, other live projects support largely tasks in Finance and Property Services such as online

forms for free school meals and school clothing grants, invoice/timesheet processing and budget forecasting.

- There are a further 14 projects in varying stages of development, ranging from initial assessment of options to final testing before going live.

The council has implemented several systems within services that have led to improved productivity and the streamlining of the services

- **CM2000 (Call Confirm Live) - Social Policy**

Is a fully integrated electronic scheduling system designed specifically for integrated health and social care services. It is used to plan, schedule and record visits of care staff undertaking care at-home visits. The solution has allowed the service to optimise service capacity, manage care worker absence, manage care worker non-contract activities such as training and assessments and ensure the service runs as efficiently and effectively as possible.

- **Capita Total Mobile - Building Services**

All repair and maintenance activity is managed through the Capita Total Mobile solution, and approximately 160 employees working on Housing Revenue Account work receive their jobs directly to their mobile devices and travel to their first job from their home rather than coming into the workplace to receive paper job lines, all other associated documents are completed on the device. This has increased the number of jobs completed by each employee and resulted in a reduction in nonproductive time and fuel costs.

- **Groupcall**

Groupcall is the main communication system that enables the council/schools to contact parents and carers. The system synchronises with the SEEMiS education management information system and the messenger function allow schools to simultaneously send text, voice and email messages to mobiles, landlines or computers to parents, pupils, staff or any other contact detailed in SEEMiS.

- **Internet of Things (IoT)**

The council has introduced devices with sensors, processing ability, software and other technologies that connect and exchange data with other devices and systems over the Internet or other communications networks. For example, the introduction of IoT Bin Sensors has enabled waste collections to be optimised as the sensors provide real-time data on fill levels, allowing the authority to optimise waste management operations, reduce costs, improve service quality, and enhance environmental sustainability through data driven decision-making and efficient resource allocation.

The council will look for opportunities to automate processes that will increase productivity

34. The council recognise the need to maximise the use of proven technology by introducing systems and appropriately skilled staff to meet the changing demands of their customer. The council will look for opportunities to automate processes that will increase productivity. Digital services will result in increased data generated and a growing demand for skills in data analysis, data science and machine learning. They recognise that ongoing investment in upskilling their workforce to keep up with emerging technologies is critical. The council is also presently looking to see how Power BI can be used to improve processes across corporate services, by utilising Power BI skills that have been developed in its education services.

The council has not progressed work to understand what digital skills it will need for the future

35. The council completed an audit of its staff digital skills in October 2022, 91 per cent of council staff assessed themselves as having basic digital skills and the results from this audit have been used to target training. As part of the audit the council invited staff to nominate themselves as digital champions, these digital champions have been used to help council staff to upskill their digital skills and tackle digital exclusion. The council acknowledges that addressing digital and analytical skills gaps will remain a critical area of focus, but it has not progressed work to understand what digital skills it will need for the future.

Recommendation 1

The council should progress the recommendations of its digital skills audit to better understand what digital skills it will need for the future.

Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment

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

37. Home-working and hybrid working (a combination of office and home-based working) have now become commonplace. Some councils are also considering more radical working 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 acknowledges that effective workforce planning and more flexible approaches to work will help their workforce

38. The People Strategy 2023-2028 recognises that the council must attract and retain talent in an increasingly competitive labour market facing a greater demand for flexible working practices.

39. One of the main themes of the strategy is to ensure employees are empowered and that they have the autonomy, flexibility and accountability to make a positive difference in their day-to-day environment.

40. Within 'Developing Workforce Skills and Capacity' in the strategy, it is noted that the transformation of council services will require changes in workforce numbers and skills. This will require effective planning and more flexible approaches to help their employees be ready for the future.

To support flexible working the council has categorised each post across four different workstyles

41. The council recognises the benefits of flexible working and accommodates flexible working arrangements. The council updated its flexible working policy in February 2024, and to support flexible working each council post has been categorised as being suitable for one of the following work styles

- **Fixed working** - Employees in posts categorised as fixed working will normally be required to work from a designated council location for all hours worked. A suitable council location will be identified in the contract of employment as their contractual work base.
- **Hybrid working** - Employees in posts categorised as suitable for hybrid working may be able to combine work from a council location with

homeworking. A suitable council location will be identified in the contract of employment as their contractual work base.

- **Homeworking** - Employees in posts categorised as suitable for homeworking may work the majority of their contracted hours at home, with less frequent attendance in the office than hybrid workers. They will not be required to work from home but may take the opportunity to work from home.
- **Mobile working** - Employees in posts categorised as suitable for mobile working will spend much of their weekly contracted hours out in the community, returning to the workplace or homeworking as necessary to complete required admin tasks or plan work.

42. The council has advised that each of the four workstyle categories provide relevant council staff with some opportunity for home working. Employees must complete a homeworking risk assessment when applying to work from home. This is then assessed by their line manager who will decide on suitability for home working.

43. The council has not completed a formal assessment of the benefits of its approach to flexible working. However, council services have a range of performance indicators in place to monitor performance, service quality and adherence to service standards. Individual service performance is scrutinised at the West Lothian Assessment Model (WLAM) panels chaired by the council's Chief Executive and reported to the council's Performance Committee. Quarterly service performance is reported to each Policy, Development and Scrutiny Panel. The council has a biennial employee survey, with the next one due in Autumn 2024, and some of the questions will be used to seek feedback from staff on the council's flexible working arrangements.

The council recognises the importance of employee engagement, which it has incorporated into its People Strategy

44. The People Strategy 2023-2028 established the importance of regular and meaningful engagement with employees. As part of this, it published an employee engagement guide which includes an employee engagement schedule detailing the types and frequency of engagement.

The employee survey only had a response rate of 26 per cent and the council is focusing on activities to improve participation rates for the employee survey in 2024

45. The council last completed an employee survey in September 2022, with the next one due to place in Autumn 2024. The employee survey only had a response rate of 26 per cent, which is lower than the 50 per cent achieved for the 2018 survey and the target of 75 per cent that the council had set for 2022.

46. The 2020 survey was postponed due to the pandemic and the council has advised that the results of the 2022 survey are reflective of anecdotal feedback of staff survey fatigue following regular 'pulse surveys' throughout the pandemic. The council is undertaking further work to improve participation rates

for the employee survey in autumn 2024 and there is a People Strategy action to review and implement effective approaches to employee engagement, to ensure employee contribution and achievement is recognised. These changes will be reflected in a revised Communication and Engagement Framework. Actions are currently being progressed to capture employee views on this to support the development.

Exhibit 1

The 2022 employee survey consisted of eight categories; the table below details the overall levels of satisfaction for each category of the employees who responded

Category	2022 result	2018 result	Change
Workforce planning	81 per cent	83 per cent	-2 per cent
Reward and Recognition	68 per cent	69 per cent	-1 per cent
Leadership and Management	66 per cent	68 per cent	-2 per cent
Involvement and Empowerment	69 per cent	72 per cent	-3 per cent
Teamwork	79 per cent	83 per cent	-4 per cent
Learning and Development	73 per cent	79 per cent	-6 per cent
Equality and Diversity	88 per cent	88 per cent	0
Community Impact	73 per cent	-	-

Source: West Lothian Council, Strategic People Plan 2023-2028

47. Although there was a low rate of response from employees for the 2022 employee survey the levels of satisfaction with seven comparable categories were reasonable and had not dropped significantly since the 2018 results.

Recommendation 2

The council should continue to take steps to improve participation rates for the 2024 employee survey.

Developing future skills and capacity

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 and ensure skills are in place. Many councils work with their partners to offer apprenticeship schemes or vocational qualifications. Succession planning is also important to develop future leaders and ensure that essential skills are in place.

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. The council's People Strategy 2023-2028 recognises the workforce capacity challenges and sets out the strategic opportunities for the council to attract and retain staff. The council's focus is developing a stronger employer brand, reviewing and enhancing policies that support flexible working and better promoting the benefits of working for the council.

The council faces recruitment and retention challenges of staff and has developed programmes such as apprenticeships, succession planning and skills training to deal with the challenges

51. The council faces recruitment and retention challenges with staff, and its proximity to Edinburgh and Glasgow can make it difficult to compete with private organisations to attract and recruit professional staff.

52. Several service areas continue to report difficulty in recruiting to specialist posts including:

- Teaching posts in STEM subjects
- Skilled trades including Electricians, Joiners and Mechanics
- IT posts
- Environmental Health Officers
- Social Workers

53. The council has developed several solutions to deal with gaps in resources and difficulties in recruiting for posts. Examples include:

- revising the criteria for social care posts to allow for qualifications to be achieved in employment
- redesigning jobs through organisational change to be more attractive to job seekers
- developing a business case for recruiting qualified solicitors by offering a market supplement, this is a short-term remedy but will allow the council to respond to current market conditions.

54. The council has recently introduced an online exit survey, to understand why employees are leaving and how it can introduce improvements to better retain staff.

55. The council has also tried innovative recruitment practices such as redesigning posts and looking at qualification criteria to ensure services and staffing numbers can be maintained.

56. The council is in the process of piloting stages three and four of a Succession Planning Framework across services to develop the necessary skills and capacity. All services have already completed stages one and two of the frameworks which involved an assessment of imperative posts.

A key aim of the council's People Strategy is to recruit young people into roles at the council

57. The council has done this through careers fairs at local schools, apprenticeship and graduate schemes. As of January 2024, the council had approximately 67 apprentices, with the majority of these working in Housing, Customer and Building Services (HCBS).

58. The council also runs an employability programme, Skills Training Programme, for school leavers who need support to move into employment and training. The programme offers accredited training and a paid work experience placement. Since the pandemic, the HR service has taken on five skills placements, with two having progressed into employment within that service.

The Health and Social Care Partnership has launched a mentoring programme to help with the retention of new care staff

59. To help with the retention of new care staff, the West Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) launched a mentoring project in 2022. This programme offers mentoring support to new social care staff during their induction period. From February 2022 to August 2023, the programme supported 36 new care staff under the programme, with a total of 12 staff members still being in post for over a year. The HSCP is looking to replicate the mentoring programme in other areas of the workforce.

The council uses fixed-term contracts across all council services where there is a temporary need and/or funded time-limited project work

60. In April 2023, the council had 1,132 staff employed on fixed term contracts with 818 of these being employed in education services. The council uses fixed-term contracts across all council services where there is a temporary need and/or funded time-limited project work. The council has guidance on the use of fixed-term workers in place to ensure good practice utilisation and management of fixed-term workers and has monitoring arrangements in place, which include oversight of the length of service. A profile of the workforce, including the temporary workforce, is shared with the Trade Unions representatives on a quarterly basis.

61. Services such as Social Policy and Education also have supply bank workers to offer ad hoc cover for a range of posts, which is used to cover short unplanned absences. This allows the council to provide contingency where unexpected staff absence or gaps in resourcing could impact the delivery of critical services. At times, leavers may opt to remain on Supply Banks to offer ad hoc support to services e.g. upon retirement.

Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

62. Councils should look to work collaboratively with their partners to make the best use of their existing workforces and plan for the particular workforce needs in their areas. They should also work across traditional service department roles within councils to deliver improved services and outcomes.

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

The council provides a shared service for payroll and HR system processing to public service partners, providing an income stream for the council

64. West Lothian Leisure (WLL) delivers the council's sports and leisure services. WLL was established on 1st February 1998 and is a company limited by guarantee.

65. The council provides a shared service for payroll and HR System processing, to West Lothian College, WLL and the Improvement Service. The council also offer an HR and OD Advice service to the Improvement Service, as well as offering contingency arrangements to COSLA. This offers low-cost services to other public sector partners with an understanding of their organisational landscape and provides an income stream for the council.

66. The council does not presently have any formal arrangements in place for sharing services with other councils.

The council has a good working relationship with the West Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership

67. The council works well with the HSCP and they have a good working relationship. The HR team in the council work closely with their colleagues in the HSCP and NHS, working collaboratively on the recruitment and retention of staff and other broader workforce elements they can link into.

Measuring the impact of workforce planning

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

The council has set targets to monitor and report on progress against the four outcomes in its People Strategy 2023-2028, which are progressed under the direction of the HR programme board

69. The council has set out, in its People Strategy 2023-2028, what performance measures it intends to use to capture the impact of its workforce planning approach, setting targets for each outcome. These performance measures are progressed under the direction of the HR programme board.

70. An annual update on progress in the outcomes and actions will be reported to the Corporate Policy and Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP) and published on the council website.

The People Strategy 2023-2028 includes 9 performance and transformation actions, which focus on improving customer experience, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of services, reducing the costs of delivering services and increasing the use of technology.

71. The council has extensive workforce data reporting to the CMT, EMT and the PDSP, which is made up of Elected Members.

72. Regular workforce management reports are also reported to an extended CMT group, comprising CMT plus other officers. The reports detail the progress made with implementing the council's efficiency programme and provide an analysis of workforce management reductions required to deliver approved budget reductions during 2023/24-2025/26.

73. The council has developed and implemented a range of monitoring arrangements to oversee the implementation of organisational change. These include a number of activities and processes under the umbrella of Workforce Planning which include:

- A Workforce Model to identify and track those affected by organisational change;

- Monitoring meetings involving Heads of Service, the Corporate Transformation Team, and HR are held to review progress in implementing the Your Say 2028 Savings, proposals affecting Full Time Equivalent (FTE) numbers and to plan the implementation of those proposals which are phased into future years.
- Key Stage Reviews (KSRs) of projects at key stages of the proposal development and implementation. The KSR process will be designed to support the successful delivery of each proposal.
- Provision of monthly monitoring data to CMT on levels of sickness absence, the numbers and cost of early retirement and voluntary severance, volume of recruitment activity and FTE staffing numbers;
- Provision of quarterly monitoring data to CMT on council-wide staffing profile and associated costs
- Monthly monitoring and update meetings involving the Depute Chief Executive, Head of Corporate Services, HR Services Manager and nominated trade union officials.

Appendix 1

Improvement Action plan

Issue / risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action / timing
<p>1. Digital Skills</p> <p>The council completed an audit of its staff digital skills in October 2022, 91 per cent of council staff assessed themselves as having basic digital skills and the results from this audit have been used to target training.</p> <p>The council acknowledges that addressing digital and analytical skills gaps will remain a critical area of focus, but it has not progressed work to understand what digital skills it will need for the future.</p>	<p>The council should progress the recommendations of its digital skills audit to better understand what digital skills it will need for the future.</p> <p>Paragraph 35</p>	<p>Digital skills audit recommendations to be progressed and the actions relating to digital skills set out in the Customer Strategy 2023-28, People Strategy 2023-28 and the Performance and Transformation Strategy 2023-28 will be monitored by the Customer, Performance and Transformation Board and HR Programme Board.</p> <p>Progress on the strategy actions will also be reported to the Corporate Policy and Resources PDSP as part of the annual reporting on the corporate strategies.</p> <p>Responsible Officer: Depute Chief Executive</p> <p>Agreed date: December 2024</p>
<p>2. Council employee surveys</p> <p>The council's last employee survey was completed in September 2022, which had a response rate of 26 per cent. This was lower than the 50 per cent achieved for the 2018 survey and the target of 75 per cent that the council had set for 2022 survey.</p> <p>The low response rates from council employee surveys will impact the usability of the information collated and it may not reflect the views of a</p>	<p>The council should continue to take steps to improve participation rates for the 2024 employee survey.</p> <p>Paragraph 45</p>	<p>The council will promote the 2024 Employee Survey through a range of channels to raise awareness and encourage participation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service manager and team leader briefings 2. An article in Inside News (the council's internal employee newsletter). 3. An article on the council's Intranet (internal website for employees) 4. Trade Union endorsement. 5. Direct email from the council's Chief Executive.

Issue / risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action / timing
majority of the staff employed by the council.		Responsible Officer: HR Services Manager Agreed date: September 2024

Workforce innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

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