



## **Workforce Innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges**

Best Value thematic work in East Dunbartonshire Council 2023-24

July 2025

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Our reports are prepared in accordance with Terms of Appointment Letter from Audit Scotland dated 18 May 2022 through which the Accounts Commission has appointed us as external auditor of East Dunbartonshire Council (the Council) for financial years 2022/23 to 2026/27. We undertake our audit in accordance with Part VII of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended; and our responsibilities as set out within Audit Scotland's Code of Audit Practice 2021.

Reports and letters prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to the Council are prepared for the sole use of the Council and made available to Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission, the Controller of Audit. We take no responsibility to any member or officer in their individual capacity or to any other third party.

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# 1) Key messages

## Overview of engagement

A summary of the judgements we have made for each section is detailed below:

### **How effectively are the council's workforce plans integrated with its strategic plans and priorities?**

East Dunbartonshire Council (the Council) has introduced an updated workforce strategy for 2024 to 2027. This outlines how the Council will ensure it has the right people in the right place to meet service delivery demands and achieve its strategic priorities. Each service has developed workforce action plans, which set out how the strategy will be implemented at a service level to deliver budget decisions and the resulting updated Business Improvement Plans (BIPs). The Council could more clearly link the workforce action plans to the actions and performance measures in services' BIPs.

### **How effectively has digital technology been used to support workforce productivity and improve service quality and outcomes?**

The Council is using digital technology to improve workforce productivity and deliver services more efficiently. For example, in waste collection, infrastructure reporting, and telecare systems. Its Digital Strategy 2024–2029 sets out clear priorities for how the Council will use technology effectively. The Council has developed business cases to justify the feasibility of digital projects with progress regularly reviewed against agreed milestones.

### **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?**

The Council has adopted a SMART working model tailored to service needs and supported by digital tools like Microsoft 365. It encourages flexible working by supporting part-time, job-share, and hybrid arrangements. The Council has recognised the need to improve recording of Performance and Development Reviews (PDRs) to strengthen workforce monitoring and planning. This formed a key element of the Leadership Forum in May 2024 leading to delivery of a refreshed approach to PDR for 2025/26.

### **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?**

The Council is aware of the challenges and the need to continually review and develop the capacity and resilience of its workforce. It is responding to this challenge through strategic initiatives focused on digital skills, youth employment, partnerships with education providers, and apprenticeship programmes. Practices like SMART working, targeted training, and continuous staff engagement are helping the Council to align workforce capacity with organisational priorities and manage staff reductions.

**What progress has the council made with sharing roles or functions across its services and/or with other councils and partners?**

The Council has made progress in sharing roles and functions through collaborative arrangements with other councils, national bodies and community partners. Community engagement and the use of digital tools have supported these efforts.

**How effectively is the council measuring the impact of its workforce planning approach?**

The Council uses employee surveys and annual review of its workforce action plans to monitor the effectiveness of its workforce planning. The Council should consider linking its workforce action plans to other quantitative performance indicators already being reported on within service level BIPs so that it can better measure the impact its new strategy is having.

**Other reporting**

Where relevant to this thematic work, we have followed up Best Value Assurance Report and previous Annual Audit Report findings in the following pages. We have reported in Appendix 1 the Council's improvement actions and its response to recommendations we have made in this review.

## 2) Scope of the audit

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. This report sets out how the council is responding to current workforce challenges through building capacity, increasing productivity and innovation.

The [Accounts Commission's Strategy \(2021-26\)](#) sets out its priorities to focus on inequalities, funding, communities and recovery. The Code of Audit practice sets out the Best Value work required to report on these priorities.

### Code of Audit Practice 2020 Best Value reporting requirements

#### Best Value reporting – extract from the Code

The Accounts Commission's approach to Best Value involves reporting on individual local government bodies and thematically across the local government sector through performance reports:

- As part of their integrated wider-scope annual audit work appointed auditors use a risk-based approach to assess and report whether the audited body has made proper arrangements for securing Best Value and is complying with its community planning duties, including reporting progress against previous Best Value findings and recommendations.
- The Accounts Commission also requires the Controller of Audit to report to the Accounts Commission on each council at least once over the five-year audit appointment on the body's performance on its Best Value duty. This enables the Accounts Commission to make findings for improvement where appropriate.
- The Accounts Commission reports nationally on thematic aspects of local government bodies' approaches to, and performance in, meeting their Best Value and community planning duties. Local government appointed auditors report locally on any such Best Value thematic work prescribed by the Accounts Commission.

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?

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.

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.](#)

## Improvement recommendations

Any improvement recommendations that have been identified as part of our work in this thematic review section have been reflected in the action plan at Appendix 1, action plan reference numbers have been included in the wording above.

### 3) Workforce strategy and priorities

*This section of the report evaluates how effectively the Council's workforce plan is integrated with its strategic plans and priorities*

**We concluded:** The Council has introduced an updated workforce strategy for 2024 to 2027. This outlines how the Council will ensure it has the right people in the right place to meet service delivery demands and achieve its strategic priorities. Each service has developed workforce action plans, which set out how the strategy will be implemented at a service level. The Council could more clearly link the workforce action plans to the actions and performance measures in services' BIPs.

#### Background

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 the local authority's staff will deliver its vision, priorities and values.

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

#### Detailed reporting on workforce strategy and priorities

**What workforce strategies and plans are in place, when were they last reviewed and when are they next due to be reviewed? What Committee do they go to?**

The Council has agreed an updated workforce strategy covering 2024 to 2027 outlining how it will plan and prepare its workforce to deliver its organisational priorities. This builds on principles from the 'Organisation and Workforce for the Future' report presented to Council in June 2022 and the 2023/24 Budget approach. The Council will monitor its workforce requirements by analysing data and benchmarking, with quarterly reviews to assess its short, medium, and long-term needs.

The Council has committed to reviewing the workforce strategy annually and adjusting its approach to meet its workforce planning requirements and changes in the employment environment. At present, the Workforce Strategy 2024 - 2027 covers the following:

- Current Workforce profile
- Partnership working
- Workforce for the Future
- Supporting Our Workforce
- Moving Forward and Action Plans.

The workforce strategy action plan and the supporting service level workforce action plans are reported to Council annually. This includes details of how the workforce strategy is supporting staff in achieving the Council's strategic priorities. The latest update was presented to the June 2025 Council meeting.

### **What progress has been made regarding year 1 findings on the alignment of workforce planning with priorities, and demonstrating the staff capacity and skills to deliver these priorities?**

In our November 2023 Best Value Thematic Report on [Leadership of the development of new local strategic priorities](#), we identified that the Council was developing an updated workforce strategy to replace the previous strategy which covered the period to 2021. We highlighted that this was an important piece of work given the changes since 2021 in the economic climate, recruitment market and ways of working.

The workforce strategy aims to ensure that the Council has the right people in the right place at the right time, to fulfil service demands. Service level workforce action plans are designed to help the Council deliver services efficiently and effectively, considering both timing and location, while adhering to financial constraints. This approach aligns with the Council's goal of providing services based on the needs of local communities.

### **Are the workforce strategy and supporting workforce plans based on robust workforce data?**

Officers extract information to support workforce planning from the Council's Human Resources and payroll system (iTrent). This involves service areas working closely with the Human Resources and Operational Development (HROD) team. Service areas can make requests for information ranging from an analysis of absences to more detailed breakdowns of the workforce profile in each service line. HROD extract the data from the system and produce reports that service area managers can use to make informed decisions.

The workforce data includes gender, length of service, age profiles, ethnicity and disability. There is also a breakdown of workforce by numbers including headcount, full time equivalent, and turnover.

The system does not hold vacancies. The HROD team, finance team, and service area work together to identify vacancies as they arise to determine if recruitment is necessary and identify potential options for doing this. Services can also draw on information from individual staff Performance Development Reviews (PDRs), Continuing Professional Development and mandatory training requirements to assess their current skills base.

The Council uses data from exit questionnaires to understand the reasons why employees leave the Council. This is currently a voluntary form, with all leavers encouraged to complete this upon receiving a notification of their leaving date. The Council aims to use the data from these questionnaires to evaluate and inform future workforce action planning, recruitment, and retention plans.

### **Are workforce strategy and plans integrated with core strategic plans?**

The Council's workforce strategy was introduced to reflect the future shape of the organisation and how it will deliver services under a locality-based model. It has six areas of focus to align with and meet service delivery requirements:

- Digital maturity



- E-Learning
- Local Government Benchmarking
- Absence management
- Health and Safety
- Wellbeing.

These areas of focus are not specific to individual strategic priorities, but progress in these areas will support the Council to achieve its strategic priorities. The Business Improvement Plans (BIPs) for each service area sets out the strategic priorities for the service and how they align with the Local Outcomes Improvement Plans (LOIP) and the Council's overall priorities. The workforce strategy sits alongside the BIPs, supporting their delivery.

The Council monitor and adjust the workforce strategy using annual workforce action plans, which set out how the strategy will be implemented at a service level. The Council's intention is that these action plans link to the service level Business Improvement Plans (BIPs) and inform team plans and, ultimately, individual Performance Development Reviews (PDRs).

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### **Recommendation 1:**

The Council should demonstrate the link between its workforce action plans and the BIPs. For example, by aligning workforce actions to relevant BIP key performance indicators. Where possible, the Council should also ensure workforce actions have completion deadlines.

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The workforce strategy action plans are the enablers to ensure that the Council has the right people in the right place at the right time to deliver the BIPs.

The Council's workforce planning is aligned with its operational model for locality-based service delivery, agreed in June 2023 as part of the 'East Dunbartonshire Forward in Partnership: Transformative Agenda'.

The workforce action plans for each service cover:

- Service delivery needs and succession planning
- Training needs analysis
- Employee survey feedback
- Future planning.

The Council's approach to workforce planning requires Executive Officers and Service Managers to work together to identify specific resource needs and challenges and capture these in the workforce action plans. The approach allows the Council to better understand each service's capabilities and requirements. This helps officers to identify where resource gaps can be addressed through existing resources and training and development programmes, or where recruitment is required.

### **Has the council consulted with employees / trades unions over its workforce strategy?**

The Council involves employees in the consultation processes through employee surveys, most recently in 2024, following an extended survey with additional sections for the workplace and travel in 2022. The engagement survey is available on the website, along with a list of all completed consultations. The results and findings from the Employee Survey 2022 included responses across seven themes:

- Leadership

- Communications & Engagement
- Management
- Teamwork
- Wellbeing
- Our Workplace
- Travel.

The survey explored where staff currently worked, the positive and negative aspects of home working, and considerations for the future workplace. The survey highlighted an overall increasing trend from the previous report in employee wellbeing, engagement and teamwork culture.

In 2024, the Council launched the “Your Voice Matters” employee survey to gather employee feedback up to December 2024. The timing was intended to help ensure workforce views inform strategic planning.

We identified some concerns regarding the integrity and reliability of the consultation process. As of May 2025, the survey remained accessible on the Council’s public website, with no access restrictions in place to verify respondent identity. The Council confirmed that no responses were submitted following the December 2024 closing date. Additionally, there is no mechanism to prevent multiple submissions by the same individual, which could compromise the validity of the data collected, however this was deemed a very low risk by the Council.

Officers explained that, in their opinion, this risk was mitigated by respondents being required to provide the service portfolio they were based in, and the data being reviewed by a statistician to identify any anomalies during the analysis.

The results of the 2024 survey were reported to June 2025 Council meeting. The response rate was low but enabled the Council to draw valid conclusions based on a statistically significant sample size, with approximately 500 of the Council’s 3,000 employees (17%) taking part. Officers are considering actions to improve staff response rates for the next survey due in 2026.

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### **Recommendation 2**

**The Council should review how it operates and promotes its employee survey to improve the response rate and ensure it gathers accurate and meaningful data.**

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The Council’s workforce strategy is a key topic of discussion in its regular meetings with Trade Union representatives. These discussions take place through the weekly Joint Negotiating Group (JNG), where a range of workforce-related matters are addressed. Topics include:

- Policies and strategic proposals being submitted to the Council
- Results and insights from employee surveys, which help shape the workforce strategy
- Updates from Executive Officers regarding service reviews and structural changes.

In addition to the JNG, weekly Trade Union meetings also provide a platform for ongoing dialogue. Notably, the workforce strategy was discussed during meetings held in November and December 2023, with the updated employee survey being discussed in November 2024 with changes to core questions highlighted with the Trade Unions.

There is evidence that the Council is actively engaging with Trade Unions. During the meeting held in November 2023, one of the Trade Union representatives raised a concern around flexible working policies

being outdated. The Council acknowledged this and confirmed that several policies were to be reviewed. Since then, the Council has reviewed its approach to flexible working. In the December 2023 meeting, there was discussion around the updated workforce strategy being presented to Council, with no points of note being raised from the Trade Unions.

## 4) Digital technology and the workforce

*This section of the report examines how effectively has digital technology been used by the council to support workforce productivity and improve service quality and outcomes*

**We concluded:** The Council is using digital technology to improve workforce productivity and deliver services more efficiently. For example, in waste collection, infrastructure reporting, and telecare systems. Its Digital Strategy 2024–2029 sets out clear priorities for how the Council will use technology effectively. The Council has developed business cases to justify the feasibility of digital projects with progress regularly reviewed against agreed milestones.

### Background

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, the consideration of artificial intelligence (AI) applications.

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.

### Detailed reporting on workforce strategy and priorities

#### **What progress has the Council made in using digital technology to improve workforce productivity, service delivery and outcomes?**

The Council introduced a new digital strategy for the period 2024 to 2029. This strategy is aligned with the Scottish Government's national digital strategy, *A Changing Nation: How Scotland Will Thrive in a Digital World*. The Council's strategy covers four key themes:

- Digital Foundations
- Digital Culture
- Person-centric Services
- Digital Learning and Teaching.

The themes and digital ambition presented in the strategy recognise the Council's need to embrace and utilise technology to enhance daily operations and increase the efficiency and productivity of employees. The Council is in the process of embedding the principles and actions outlined in the strategy across all its services.

The strategy has several priorities linked to improving workforce productivity, service delivery and outcomes.

The first strategic priority under the Digital Foundations theme, Our Current and Future Technology Landscape, focuses on enhancing the Council's use of business systems and specialist software to improve service delivery. Priority actions identified in the strategy include:

- Expanding the use of analytics and cloud storage to improve data accessibility and support evidence-based decision-making
- Exploring emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, automation, and the Internet of Things to support environmental sustainability goals
- Ensure that best use is made of the applications and software available.

Under the Digital Culture theme, priority one aims to ensure that employees are equipped with the essential tools, skills and technology required to deliver Council services. Priority actions include:

- Promote skills development to become a digital workforce to deliver sustainable services
- Provide employees with the latest technologies to store, secure, manage and access information and documents
- Implement a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to enhance customer service delivery
- Implement a new Oracle Enterprise Resource Planning system to manage day-to-day business activities for finance and budgeting, procurement, project management and human resources.

These examples provided represent a sample of the 19 priorities outlined in the Digital Strategy. These priorities demonstrate the Council's clear intention to align digital initiatives with strategic workforce development, to improve staff efficiency and enhance service delivery outcomes.

The Council reviews and updates these actions on an ongoing basis. For example, a comprehensive Artificial Intelligence Policy is being developed.

Significant IT and digital developments go through a due diligence process involving submission and approval of a business case. Once confirmed, these projects are tracked with milestones across each quarter of the financial period and a programme dashboard. There is also a digital development KPI tracker illustrating all ongoing projects and their delivery status.

### **Has the council demonstrated workforce benefits and productivity gains through its use of digital technology?**

The Council has demonstrated clear workforce and productivity benefits through the strategic use of digital technology across several service areas. One notable example is the transition to a three-weekly refuse collection schedule, supported by the implementation of advanced digital routing and planning software. This technology has enabled more efficient route optimisation, leading to reductions in staff hours and fuel consumption, ultimately lowering operational costs.

In the area of infrastructure services, the integration between the Council's Roads Management System and its CRM platform has streamlined the process for residents to report road and lighting faults or request grit bin services. This integration not only enhances the customer experience but also improves internal workflows, allowing staff to respond more efficiently to community needs.

The introduction of a new Housing Management System has further contributed to operational improvements. It has simplified the rent increase process by automating notifications and ensuring clear, timely communication with tenants, thereby reducing the administrative burden and improving transparency.

The launch of the Green Waste Permit system for the 2025/26 season introduced several digital enhancements, including online payment functionality, automated daily processing of permit requests, and improved management reporting. These features support more efficient service delivery and reduce manual processing time for staff.

Finally, the Council has deployed a cloud-based digital Alarm Receiving system for telecare customers in East and West Dunbartonshire. This system not only prepares the Council for the 2027 analogue switch-off but also modernises service delivery, ensuring greater reliability and scalability in supporting vulnerable residents.

### **Has the council engaged staff and service users over new ways of working, and considered service accessibility and digital exclusion?**

The Council launched a Digital Development Support Programme in August 2023 to help companies in East Dunbartonshire fully use, grow or transform their digital capability. The programme aims to support Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to improve their digital take-up, knowledge, skills, capacity and confidence to champion digital technologies to benefit their businesses.

The Council's new digital strategy includes digital inclusion as one of the six priorities under the Digital Foundations theme, underlining the Council's commitment to digital inclusion. The Council has adopted SMART working principles, which support a flexible and productive work culture. These principles focus on technology, effective leadership, and working collaboratively to deliver outcomes. The long-established SMART approach, initially introduced in 2012, involves enabling employees to work effectively from office locations or remotely, whilst maintaining service delivery and collaboration.

In 2020, as part of the Connecting Scotland Programme, the Council distributed digital devices to individuals and families across its communities. This initiative was delivered through a partnership involving the Scottish Government, Local Government, and Third Sector organisations, aiming to reduce digital exclusion.

The Council has also signed up to Scotland's Digital Inclusion Charter, an organisation set up with support from the Scottish Government to promote digital inclusion.

The 2022 post-Covid employee experience survey, in addition to the established five core survey themes, asked staff about positive and negative aspects of home working and themes for consideration for the future workplace. Conversations around training and identifying individual's development needs predominately take place as part of the PDR process. The digital strategy also includes a priority to encourage new ways of working with technology and promote increased digital literacy.

## 5) Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment

*This section of the report considers how effectively the council is using hybrid and remote working and other innovative working practice such as a four-day week to achieve service and staff benefits*

**We concluded:** The Council has adopted a SMART working model tailored to service needs and supported by digital tools like Microsoft 365. It encourages flexible working by supporting part-time, job-share, and hybrid arrangements. The Council needs to increase the uptake and improve recording of Performance and Development Reviews (PDRs) to strengthen workforce monitoring and planning. This formed a key element of the Leadership Forum in May 2024 leading to delivery of a refreshed approach to PDR for 2025/26.

### Background

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

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

### Detailed reporting on workforce strategy and priorities

#### **Describe the council's policy and practice regarding home/remote working and any other flexible working arrangements?**

As part of the Council's Workforce Strategy 2024–2027, a revised approach to SMART working has been adopted. This involves four defined workstyles, aligned with service delivery models, role-specific requirements, and advancements in digital and technological systems. These workstyles have varying degrees of flexibility:

- Frontline: Roles that require physical presence at a specific location to deliver services.
- Fixed Base: Public-facing roles that necessitate direct interaction with service users.
- Flexible/Mobile: Roles that combine home-based work with periodic attendance at offices, sites, or frontline locations.
- Remote/Hybrid: Roles primarily based at home or other non-office locations, with minimal requirement to attend a physical workplace.

The Council is committed to enabling flexible and hybrid working arrangements, supported by the deployment of Microsoft 365 and other digital tools to maintain operational productivity and service delivery standards.



Flexible working options are available to employees across the Council's workforce. Employees may submit formal flexible working requests, and the Council's Flexible Working Policy supports part-time and job-share arrangements to accommodate diverse employee needs.

The principles underpinning SMART working have been reaffirmed through the "East Dunbartonshire Forward in Partnership" initiative. The Council endorses the "Anytime, Anywhere" model, which supports a range of workstyles and promotes flexibility in how and where work is performed. Each role is assigned a designated workstyle based on operational requirements. While home working is an option within the Remote/Hybrid category, it is not a default arrangement.

### **Has the council assessed the impact on i) service quality and outcomes and ii) workforce wellbeing, including consultation with staff and trades unions?**

The Council evaluated the impact of hybrid and remote working arrangements through its 2022 Employee Experience Survey, which covered employees' wellbeing. 43% of respondents reported working from a traditional workplace setting, with the remainder adopting home-based or hybrid working models. It is not possible to determine the results for each type of workstyle due to results being aggregated across the Council.

The 2022 survey found an overall improvement in staff wellbeing compared to the previous survey conducted in 2019. A similar trend was also shown in the 2024 survey results. Feedback on hybrid working was mixed, with both benefits and challenges identified, with the main advantage being increased productivity due to less interruptions at the cost of reduced access to equipment. Suggestions for enhancing the physical workplace environment included the provision of outdoor spaces, watercoolers, and improved parking facilities. Respondents considered these factors influential to encourage a return to office-based work.

Employee performance is monitored through the Council's PDR process. This process applies uniformly to all employees, regardless of their workstyle, enabling consistent evaluation and comparison of performance across different working arrangements.

Data from the 2023–2024 *How Good Is Our Service* (HGIOS) report identified a very low uptake of PDRs. One of the key performance indicators under the Customer Services and Organisational Development service, "Percentage of employees who have PDR conversations", had a target of 85% for the year. The actual recorded value was only 6.03%. For education staff, the average uptake across the first three quarters of 2023–2024 was similarly low at 5.64%.

These results are reflective of the approach taken during Covid and the post-pandemic recovery period when formal PDRs were replaced by more regular and informal conversations with employees on objectives and priorities. An exercise was undertaken at the Council's Leadership Forum in May 2024 to review and update the PDR process, with an updated approach launched for 2025/26.

The lack of regular PDRs may result in unclear role expectations, insufficient feedback, and missed opportunities for professional development. It may also limit the Council's ability to effectively monitor and evaluate staff performance, particularly under flexible and hybrid working arrangements. The Council's new approach is designed to mitigate these risks.



In addition to the informal approach in place since the pandemic, the Council also believes that a greater number of PDRs may be taking place than are currently recorded. Officers think there is discrepancy due to limitations within the existing HR/payroll system, which has restricted reporting capabilities, and a challenging process for uploading and documenting information. The Council is currently in the process of implementing an updated HR/payroll system with improved reporting and usability, due to launch later in 2025/26.

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**Recommendation 3**

The Council should identify and review actions to improve PDR completion rates. It should also consider how to ensure reviews are properly recorded.

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**Has the council demonstrated budget savings, efficiencies and other benefits resulting from its deployment of staff?**

The Council believes promotion of its hybrid and flexible working policy, from the initial stage of recruitment, helps to increase the pool of applicants for its roles. This is a major benefit of the policy.

The Council has carried out an analysis to assess potential cost savings associated with remote working arrangements. Its review of the accommodation strategy indicated projected savings of £209,967 in the 2026/27 financial year and £357,676 in 2027/28, partly attributable to reduced office maintenance requirements. Additionally, while not currently quantifiable, it anticipates reductions in employee travel time and fuel expenses.

The HGIOS strategic reports outline several key performance indicators (KPIs) across service lines, many of which are influenced by the revised working arrangements. Notable impacts include:

- Tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> produced: A measurable decrease in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions has been observed, attributed to reduced commuting and increased homeworking.
- Participation in PDRs: There is a noted shortfall in the percentage of staff engaging in PDR processes.
- Digital Transformation Programme Delivery: 77% of projects within the Digital Transformation Programme were delivered on time, surpassing the target of 75%.

There is scope for the Council to consider more closely the cost savings and budget efficiencies from the new workforce strategy and flexible working policies. The Council see the primary purpose of the workforce strategy and action plans to ensure the right people resources are in place to deliver the objectives of the BIPS however in many cases this will also result in financial savings.

## 6) Developing future skills and capacity

*This section of the report assesses what innovative practice the council is using to develop its future workforce capacity and skills needs and manage staff reductions in line with its priorities*

**We concluded:** The Council is aware of the challenges and the need to continually review and develop the capacity and resilience of its workforce. It is responding to this challenge through strategic initiatives focused on digital skills, youth employment, partnerships with education providers, and apprenticeship programmes. Practices like SMART working, targeted training, and continuous staff engagement are helping the Council to align workforce capacity with organisational priorities and manage staff reductions.

### Background

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.

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.

### Detailed reporting on workforce strategy and priorities

#### **What is the council doing to develop the skills and capacity needed for a resilient future workforce?**

The Council has implemented a range of initiatives to support the development of a resilient future workforce. These are focused on digital capability, youth employment, and strategic workforce planning.

The Microsoft 365 Adoption Hub provides staff with access to training and guidance to enhance digital proficiency, complemented by a Digital Champion network that offers peer support. The Council is engaging with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations Essential Digital Skills Framework and is collaborating on the development of a new digital competency framework. This initiative is being led in partnership with the Digital Office, South Ayrshire Council, and the Society of Personnel and Development Scotland (SPDS).

Service workforce action plans include measures to address capacity and skills development, such as increased opportunities for job shadowing and coaching. These are supported by the PDR process, which is intended to identify individual training needs and development opportunities. However, the current low uptake of PDRs limits the effectiveness of this approach.

Since the introduction of the new workforce strategy, the Council has identified skills and capacity gaps across services and is looking at different ways of attracting talent. For example, through social media, local recruitment events, extending its early careers programme, and its Grad+ and Graduate Accountant schemes. This is an important step as the Council faces similar challenges to other Local Government bodies in terms of resourcing and an ageing workforce, with the age profile showing 2,585 employees (49%) are over 45 with only 6% of the workforce aged under 25.

The Council has several initiatives to increase the capacity of its workforce. A key component of the workforce strategy is the “Developing Our Young Workforce” programme, which includes the Modern Apprenticeship scheme launched in 2013. This initiative aims to build internal capacity by equipping young people with practical skills and experience across a variety of roles. The Grad+ Programme, introduced in 2014, further supports this objective by offering structured work placements to underemployed graduates, enabling them to apply their academic knowledge in real-world settings.

Since 2013, over 160 young people have been recruited through apprenticeship programmes, with 115 completing their training and 55 securing full-time employment with the Council. The Council continues to explore new apprenticeship frameworks annually, including in emerging areas such as ICT/Cyber Security, Civil Engineering, Social Care, and Building Standards, in response to evolving service demands and sector-wide skills gaps.

### **Has it demonstrated savings and other benefits resulting from its workforce skills and capacity measures?**

The Council has identified benefits from its SMART working framework, including reduced travel to work which contributes positively to environmental sustainability.

At this stage, the Council has not had sufficient time to fully assess the impact of its latest workforce strategy. This means it has not been able to demonstrate measurable efficiencies or cost savings directly attributable to the measures it is adopting.

### **Does the Council work with education providers to ensure that education and training aligns with future skills needs?**

The Council works with education providers to support the development of skills for high demand roles.

The Council participates in and offers apprenticeship programmes, which serve as a structured and effective method for recruiting into roles anticipated to be in demand in future years. These programmes also contribute to skills development through targeted training initiatives. The Council’s modern apprenticeship programme, which has received national recognition and is endorsed by Skills Development Scotland, has been in operation for over a decade and has supported the employment of more than 100 young people from across East Dunbartonshire.

[Scotland’s Local Government Workforce Report](#) published by SPDS in 2024 highlighted a national skill shortage across various statutory disciplines. The report includes a case study on East Dunbartonshire Council’s effective use of local universities and colleges to develop a pipeline for students to progress into careers at local authorities.

The Council uses its membership of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), who represents the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland, to identify national skills shortages and lobby education providers to offer courses which address these gaps.

### **How does the Council minimise any negative impact from workforce reform and reductions?**

To help reduce the potential negative effects of workforce reform and reductions, the Council has embedded several measures within its workforce strategy. This includes its use of staff survey and voluntary exit questionnaires, and regular consultation with Trade Unions.

## 7) Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

*This section of the report considers what progress the council has made with sharing roles or functions across its services and/or with other councils and partners*

**We concluded:** The Council has made progress in sharing roles and functions through collaborative arrangements with other councils, national bodies and community partners. Community engagement and the use of digital tools have supported these efforts.

### Background

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.

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

### Detailed reporting on workforce strategy and priorities

**In what areas the council has implemented shared services with other councils and partners? Has the council realised workforce benefits through these shared arrangements/ functions?**

The Council has shared service arrangements and collaborative functions with other councils and partner organisations across several operational areas. These partnerships have supported both improved service delivery and workforce development.

The Community Planning and Partnership (CPP) team works closely with external agencies and local communities to deliver key priorities, including the administration of the East Dunbartonshire Community Grant Scheme, the Winter Connections Programme, and Strategic Partnership Agreements.

The CPP team also jointly coordinates the Community First Capacity Building Programme, which supports the Council's four Locality Plans by bringing together groups with shared experiences within the localities. These initiatives are delivered in collaboration with partners such as the Home Office and the Scottish Government.

The Council participates in shared learning initiatives with other Scottish local authorities. For example, staff have taken part in the "Building Racial Literacy" programme, a national professional learning initiative. Also, the Early Years team engaged in a Collaborative Improvement process facilitated with Education Scotland. These activities have helped promote the exchange of best practice.

The Council also provides external services to other public sector bodies, including West Dunbartonshire Council where a shared data centre is used to enhance Information and Communication Technologies, and local housing associations. Another example is the Council's cloud-based digital Alarm Receiving Platform for telecare customers in East and West Dunbartonshire. East Dunbartonshire Council delivers the alarm responding service through this platform to customers from both councils through its 24/7 Emergency Response Centre. These arrangements reflect the Council's role in supporting wider local government functions beyond its own administrative boundaries.

The Council's Traffic and Transport team collaborates with national and regional bodies such as Strathclyde Partnership for Transport and Transport Scotland. These partnerships enable the Council to access additional funding and technical expertise, supporting the delivery of transport services across the region.

### **To what extent the council delivers functions through its communities, the third sector, private sector or other providers?**

The Council has stated its intention to maintain and promote close relations with local communities to assist how it delivers services. These partnerships support the Council's aim to enhance service delivery and community engagement.

The Council actively engages with local communities, particularly in areas such as housing. The operations teams liaise directly with tenants to assess needs and tailor support to residents' priorities.

The Council has established formal channels of communication and collaboration with voluntary organisations, including East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action. The Council also provides funding to the East Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau to support the delivery of advice and support services to the public.

Recreational and leisure services in the Council area are also delivered through external bodies. For example, Mugdock Country Park, a subsidiary of the Council, is responsible for managing and delivering a range of outdoor and leisure activities. Council managed trust funds contribute to the delivery of community-based services and support initiatives across the local area through grant awards.

The Council is also engaged in national transformation initiatives including being part of the Joint Transformation Programme led by SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives). The Council participated in a workstream focused on digital shared services. This included involvement in the development of a prototype national online Blue Badge application process, delivered in partnership with the Improvement Service and seven other local authorities.

### **To what extent the council delivers functions using temporary workers?**

The Council primarily delivers its functions through a directly employed workforce, with limited reliance on external providers such as the third sector, private sector, or other delivery partners. According to the Council's most recent workforce strategy, approximately 91% of the workforce is employed on permanent contracts.

The high proportion of permanent staff indicates a stable internal workforce structure and supports the Council's approach to succession planning, as it reduces dependency on temporary staffing arrangements that can lead to higher turnover and potential disruption in service delivery.

Temporary or fixed-term contracts are used on an exception basis, typically where specialist expertise is required for specific projects or procurement activities. This targeted use of temporary staff ensures that core functions remain under the direct control of the Council, while still allowing flexibility to meet short-term or specialist needs.

### **Has the council and its partners managed any barriers to shared working?**

The Council has demonstrated effective management of barriers to shared working through coordinated co-production arrangements with key partners, including Police Scotland. It has addressed one of the primary challenges identified in such partnerships, communication across organisational boundaries, through the strategic use of digital technology.

The Council has implemented regular remote meetings and used collaborative platforms to facilitate consistent engagement and information sharing between agencies. For example, the continued rollout of Microsoft 365 which allows audio and video communication via Microsoft Teams as well as shared access to files using Microsoft file sharing. This approach has helped to overcome logistical and communication barriers, ensuring that joint initiatives are effectively planned and delivered.

## 8) Measuring the impact of workforce planning

*This section of the report considers how effectively the council is measuring the impact of its workforce planning approach*

**We concluded:** The Council uses employee surveys and annual review of its workforce action plans to monitor the effectiveness of its workforce planning. The Council should consider linking its workforce action plans to other quantitative performance indicators already being reported on within the service level BIPs so that it can better measure the impact its new strategy is having.

### Background

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.

### Detailed reporting on workforce strategy and priorities

#### **Does the council monitor the effectiveness of its workforce planning practice? Are there examples of overall impact?**

The Council monitors the effectiveness of its workforce planning practices through periodic employee experience surveys. These surveys assess current workforce practices, and the aggregated results are analysed to identify key themes. The insights from this analysis inform future workforce planning initiatives.

Workforce-related risks across key service areas are included in the Council's Workforce Strategy Action Plan. This plan is reviewed on an annual basis and addresses critical areas such as succession planning, staff training, employee retention, and horizon scanning. These reviews aim to ensure alignment between workforce capabilities and service delivery needs.

An example of strategic implementation is the introduction of the updated workforce strategy. While this is a significant step in developing the Council's workforce planning approach, insufficient time has passed to fully evaluate the outcomes of the strategy.

The Council does not report on operational efficiencies or cost savings directly attributable to its workforce planning actions, particularly those related to optimising employee skills and improving capacity. This is because action plans sit alongside and are enablers of the BIPs and business cases that support budget decisions.

Most of the actions within the Workforce Action Plans are qualitative by nature and many are ongoing, this makes it harder to measure their progress or impact. It also is difficult to clearly link the workforce action plans to the actions and more quantitative performance measures in the BIPs (see Recommendation 1).

#### **Do monitoring reports inform future workforce planning?**

The Council reviews the workforce strategy annually and refreshes it as required in line with budget decisions and resulting BIPs. The Council also aims to monitor its workforce requirements by analysing data and performing benchmarking against other authorities, with quarterly reviews to assess its short-, medium- and long-term requirements.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Improvement Action plan

Rating	Description
<b>Level 1</b>	The identified risk and/or significant deficiency is critical to the business processes or the achievement of business strategic objectives. There is potential for financial loss, damage to reputation or loss of information. The recommendation should be taken into consideration by management immediately.
<b>Level 2</b>	The identified risk and/or significant deficiency may impact on individual objectives or business processes. The audited body should implement the recommendation to strengthen internal controls or enhance business efficiency. The recommendations should be actioned in the near future.
<b>Level 3</b>	The identified risk and/or significant deficiency is an area for improvement or less significant. In our view, the audited body should action the recommendation, but management do not need to prioritise.

The table overleaf details the issues/risks that we have identified as part of this thematic review and our recommendations to the Council to address.



Issue/risk	Rating	Recommendation	Agreed management action/ timing
<p><b>1. Aligning workforce action plans to BIPs</b></p> <p>The Council monitor and adjust the workforce strategy using annual workforce action plans, which set out how the strategy will be implemented at a service level. It is difficult to clearly link the workforce action plans to the actions and performance measures in services' Business Improvement Plans (BIPs), and some of the actions lack clear timelines and milestones for completion.</p> <p>There is a risk that the Council cannot effectively measure the impact its workforce actions are having on service delivery.</p>	<p><b>Level 3</b></p>	<p>The Council should demonstrate the link between its workforce action plans and the BIPs. For example, by aligning workforce actions to relevant BIP key performance indicators. Where possible, the Council should also ensure workforce actions have completion deadlines.</p>	<p><b>Management's response:</b></p> <p>The Council's Workforce Strategy and action plans sit alongside the BIPs and outline the actions to ensure that the right workforce is in place to deliver the BIP priorities. They are intrinsically linked, and both support the delivery of BIP priorities and outcomes as reported in HGIOS monthly, six monthly and year end reports.</p> <p>The Council will look to cross reference workforce strategy action plan elements with BIP priorities and objectives where relevant and also cross reference workforce strategy in the annual BIPs. The workforce strategy action plans align to the BIP timescales and where possible, specific timescales within the workforce strategy action plans will be considered.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer:</b></p> <p>Angela Fegan, Executive Officer – Customer Services &amp; Organisational Development</p> <p><b>Implementation date:</b></p> <p>Next review, June 2026.</p>

Issue/risk	Rating	Recommendation	Agreed management action/ timing
<p><b>2. Employee survey</b></p> <p>In 2024, the Council launched the “Your Voice Matters” employee survey to gather employee feedback up to December 2024. The timing was intended to help ensure workforce views inform strategic planning.</p> <p>We identified some concerns regarding the integrity and reliability of the consultation process. As of May 2025, the survey remained accessible on the Council’s public website, with no access restrictions in place to verify respondent identity. The Council confirmed that no responses were submitted following the December 2024 closing date. Additionally, there is no mechanism to prevent multiple submissions by the same individual, which could compromise the validity of the data collected, however this was deemed a very low risk by the Council.</p> <p>The survey response rate was low with approximately 500 of the Council’s 3,000 employees (17%) taking part.</p>	<p><b>Level 3</b></p>	<p>The Council should review how it operates and promotes its employee survey to improve the response rate and ensure it gathers accurate and meaningful data.</p>	<p><b>Management’s response:</b></p> <p>It is not compulsory to complete the employee survey and the Council response rate is not inconsistent with the sector. The response rate enabled the Council to draw valid conclusions based on a statistically significant sample size and the very low risk of anyone other than a Council employee being able to seek and find the link to the survey and submit entries to compromise the validity was deemed negligible compared to accessibility.</p> <p>Engagement and awareness raising of the survey takes place in a wide range of ways, but it is ultimately an employee choice whether to participate or not.</p> <p>Discussions have already begun with the Council’s Leadership Forum and with TUs to look at ways of increasing participation in the next employee survey, due in late 2026.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer:</b></p> <p>Angela Fegan, Executive Officer – Customer Services &amp; Organisational Development</p>

Issue/risk	Rating	Recommendation	Agreed management action/ timing
			<b>Implementation date:</b> Next employee survey, December 2026.
<b>3. PDR completion</b>  Data from the 2023–2024 <i>How Good Is Our Service</i> (HGIOS) report identified a very low uptake of Performance and Development Reviews (PDRs). One of the key performance indicators under the Customer Services and Organisational Development service, “Percentage of employees who have PDR conversations”, had a target of 85% for the year. The actual recorded value was only 6.03%. For education staff, the average uptake across the first three quarters of 2023–2024 was similarly low at 5.64%.  These results are reflective of the approach taken during Covid and the post-pandemic recovery period when formal PDRs were replaced by more regular and informal conversations with employees on objectives and priorities. The lack of regular PDRs may result in unclear role expectations, insufficient feedback, and missed opportunities for professional development. It may also limit the Council’s ability to effectively monitor and evaluate staff performance, particularly under flexible and hybrid working arrangements. The Council’s new approach is designed to mitigate these risks.	<b>Level 2</b>	The Council should review and identify actions to improve PDR completion rates. It should also consider how to ensure reviews are properly recorded.	<b>Management’s response:</b>  Since the Covid pandemic and recovery period a more informal approach to PDRs was carried out with regular conversations between line managers and individual employees on objectives and priorities.  Aware of the need to then revise the PDR process, the Council’s Leadership Forum focused on PDRs in May 2024 resulting in a streamlined approach being launched in April 2025 with improved and simplified paperwork and a new approach for group PDRs for areas where numerous employees undertake the same role.  The Council is also replacing its HR & Payroll system, with implementation underway and the new system due to launch towards the end of 2025/26. Improved functionality in terms of PDR recording and reporting and better links to training needs, which will further support workforce strategy action plan reporting.  <b>Responsible officer:</b>

Issue/risk	Rating	Recommendation	Agreed management action/ timing
<p>The Council also believes that a greater number of PDRs may be taking place than are currently recorded. Officers think there is discrepancy due to limitations within the existing HR/payroll system, which has restricted reporting capabilities and a challenging process for uploading and documenting information. The Council is currently in the process of implementing an updated HR/payroll system with improved reporting and usability, due to launch later in 2025/26.</p>			<p>Angela Fegan, Executive Officer – Customer Services &amp; Organisational Development</p> <p><b>Implementation date:</b></p> <p>New approach was launched in May 2025 with revised annual reporting available in June 2026.</p>

## **Workforce innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges.**

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