

Workforce Innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

Best Value thematic work in East Ayrshire Council
2023-24



Prepared by Audit Scotland
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Key facts



Workforce

6,751	Number of people working for the council – headcount
5,713	Number of people working for the council – full-time equivalent
75%	Percentage of the council's workforce living in East Ayrshire
1,855	Number of casual/bank staff
8.5%	Turnover of staff in last year
11	Days lost due to absence in last year per employee



Age profile

5%	16 to 24
44%	25 to 44
27%	45 to 54
24%	55+

Sources: *East Ayrshire Council Workforce Strategy 2022-27*, *East Ayrshire Performs - November 2023*, *Bank and Supply Review Report to CMT, November 2023*

Key messages

- 1** East Ayrshire Council employs nearly 7,000 people. More than half are aged 45 or over and 75 per cent live in East Ayrshire. It is experiencing high rates of staff absence and is working to reduce its reliance on casual staff. The council has stated that it will need to reduce the size of its workforce to balance its budget in the years ahead and describes its main workforce challenges as being recruitment, development and absence.
- 2** The council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27, developed as part of a suite of key strategies and plans, is clearly aligned to the strategic priorities set out in its Strategic Plan 2022-27. Serviced Improvement Plans currently include workforce information but these should be expanded to reflect and incorporate the priorities from the Workforce Strategy Action Plan.
- 3** The council engaged effectively with Heads of Service and Trades Unions when developing its Workforce Strategy 2022-27. The council plans to incorporate findings from its November 2023 Employee Survey into its Workforce Strategy Action Plan.
- 4** Our 2022/23 Best Value work concluded that the council should improve its understanding of its workforce's skills and learning and this is being taken forward in the Workforce Strategy Action Plan.
- 5** Work by the council to capture the skills and development needs of its workforce and work to identify skills gaps is at an early stage. Real-time workforce data cannot be accessed by managers with ease. The Workforce Strategy Action Plan contains Employee Development Actions. A section of the Workforce Survey also contained questions on Employee Development and work has started on identifying actions from the findings in this area.
- 6** The council's Digital Strategy set out how digital technologies will impact on the communities and services. The council have invested in the technical infrastructure to support the development of practical digital processes. There has been some use of automation within Revenues and Benefits, Waste and Education services and learning from these programmes will support the expansion of digitalisation and automation.
- 7** Indicators to measure its progress are being developed and Digital action plans for each of the five themes in its Digital Strategy 2022-27 were considered and approved by Council on 28 March 2024.

- 8** The council has introduced a new flexible working policy to promote improvements in work-life balance but has not yet reported the impact of these new arrangements on productivity and services. It is working on reducing its reliance on casual and temporary staff. Results from an organisation-wide employee survey on employee satisfaction capture the benefits of hybrid working on employee wellbeing.
- 9** Relationships between the council and Trades Unions are positive but Trades Unions report that staff morale is low due to pressures in delivering services.
- 10** The council has been successful in increasing the number of training opportunities for young people across its services and is using a range of initiatives to develop the skills and capacity of its workforce.
- 11** The council is the Lead Authority for the Ayrshire Roads Alliance shared service with South Ayrshire council. It also shares a small number of other teams and has introduced innovative flexible roles but has not captured the benefits of these.
- 12** The council monitors the effectiveness of its workforce planning approach through monitoring progress against its Workforce Strategy Action Plan. It has developed workforce performance measures, reported quarterly through East Ayrshire Performs and plans to expand these.
- 13** The council has asked services to identify where long-term workforce reduction or movement could take place to address future financial constraints but they require further support to do this.

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 also requires the Controller of Audit to report to the Accounts Commission on each council or Integration Joint Board (IJB) 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.

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

The council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27 is clearly linked to the council's strategic priorities and other key strategies.

7. East Ayrshire Council employs 6,751 people at a total cost of approximately £290 million, including pension contributions. Staff costs equate to around 42 per cent of the council's overall expenditure. More than half of the council's workforce is aged 45 or over and 75 per cent of council employees live in East Ayrshire. The council describes its main workforce challenges as being recruitment, development and absence. It is working on reducing its reliance on casual staff. Like most councils in Scotland absence rates are high as is turnover of staff. The council has set out clearly in its Medium-Term Financial Strategy that it will need to reduce the size of its workforce to balance its budget in the years ahead.

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 under-pinned with detailed workforce plans within services.

The council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27, developed as part of a suite of key strategies and plans, is clearly aligned to the strategic priorities set out in its Strategic Plan 2022-27

10. In October 2022, the council agreed a workforce strategy for 2022-27 as part of its strategic framework. The purpose of the strategic framework was to align key plans and strategies and to set out how expected outcomes would be delivered between 2022 and 2027 – the political term of the council elected in May 2022. In October 2022, the council's strategic framework was approved. It included the following strategies and action plan:

- Workforce Strategy 2022-27
- Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022-27
- Digital Strategy 2022-27
- Strategic Plan Action Plan - a detailed action plan stemming from the Strategic Plan.

11. The council's Strategic Plan 2022-2027 had been considered and approved by the council, four months prior, in June 2022 and identified six strategic priorities:

- Building a fairer economy
- Tackling poverty and inequality
- Improving community wellbeing
- Supporting children and young people
- Delivering a clean, green East Ayrshire
- Ensuring financial sustainability and resilience.

12. An action to develop and implement the Workforce Strategy 2022-27 was included in the council's Strategic Plan Action Plan. The action plan also articulated the council's intentions in relation to workforce planning:

- *Continue to place our workforce and workforce development at the heart of our approach and ensure we have effective leadership and the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.*

13. The council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27 includes a 'Strategic context' section that sets out the council's six strategic priorities. It includes narrative on how the council has developed workforce-related actions linked to three of these priorities in particular – building a fairer economy, tackling poverty and inequality and ensuring financial sustainability and resilience.

14. [Exhibit 1](#) sets out the way in which the council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27 is linked to other key plans and strategies.

Exhibit 1**How the Workforce Strategy 2022-27 links with other key plans and strategies**

Links with the Workforce Strategy 2022-27	
Strategic Plan	The workforce strategy refers to the six strategic priority themes set out in the Strategic Plan. Three of these themes in particular have associated workforce-related actions
Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) / Community Plan	The most recent LOIP was approved in 2021-24 and so predates the current workforce strategy. However, the Strategic Plan themes underpin the Community Plan priorities as outlined within the LOIP and these in turn link to the Workforce Strategy. An updated LOIP covering the period 2024-2027 is being developed as part of the three-yearly review of the Community Plan that will be concluded in June 2024.
Medium-term financial strategy	Both the Medium-term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the Workforce Strategy were approved in October 2022 as part of the Strategic Framework. The MTFS refers to the Workforce Strategy in terms of how it will support services manage staff reductions and transition to a workforce level that reflects future budgets.
Digital strategy	<p>Both the Digital Strategy and the Workforce Strategy were approved in October 2022 as part of the Strategic Framework. The Digital Strategy makes reference to the Workforce Strategy and has sections on a digital workforce and digital learning. The Workforce Strategy Action Plan includes an indicator of success for all services to be remodelled...making best use of technological advances.</p> <p>The introduction of the Workforce Strategy states that it is linked to the Strategic Plan and the MTFP. It does not mention the Digital Strategy initially. However it does refer to it later on along with Community Wealth Building, Climate Change.</p>

Source: East Ayrshire Council, Audit Scotland

The HSCP workforce plan was developed independently of the council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27.

15. The Health and Social Care Partnership's (HSCP) Workforce Plan and the council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27 were developed independently of each other, four months apart, in 2022. However, the HSCP and the council do work closely together on workforce planning at an operational level. Although the HSCP Workforce Plan is driven by the national workforce strategy of the Scottish Government there are a number of areas where the HSCP and the council work together, for example in relation to modern apprenticeships, graduate interns and career pathways. The HSCP has members of staff actively contributing to the council's Workforce Planning Board ([Exhibit 5](#)). At this Board, the HSCP Workforce Plan was shared before being published in June 2022. The HSCP has confirmed its intention to work more closely with the council when developing the next Workforce Plan in 2025.

Service improvement plans were updated before the Workforce Strategy Action Plan was finalised and so do not reflect its actions.

16. The council's current service improvement plans cover the period 2021-24. In March 2023 actions were updated as part of a mid-point review. This allowed key actions relevant to each service contained within the Strategic Plan 2022-2027 to be added. The updated service improvement plans are split into two sections - reporting against previous actions and the setting out of new actions. The council plans to develop new service improvement plans in 2024, covering the period 2024-2027.

17. New Service Improvement Plans were developed for 2023. Each of these include workforce data, however, only four of the nine service improvement plans include a specific reference to the council's Workforce Strategy (Governance, People and Culture, Facilities and Property Management, Housing and Communities. Eight of the nine updated service improvement plans contain workforce-related actions.

18. The Workforce Strategy Action Plan was finalised in October 2023, one year after the Workforce Strategy was approved and over half a year after the service improvement plans were updated. As a result, there is no systematic alignment between the six priorities in the Workforce Strategy action plan and the forward-looking actions included in the service improvement plans. This should be addressed when the new service improvement plans are developed in 2024.

The council has issued workforce profile templates to gather information from services on future expected workforce levels

19. When developing the Workforce Strategy 2022-27, the council surveyed Heads of Service asking for feedback in key areas including workforce growth/reduction, the impact of reduced budgets, wellbeing and workforce development. The strategy set out the council's intention to build on this initial work with services to identify future workforce skill requirements and develop medium to long term plans to ensure they have the skills workforce they require to deliver services in the future.

20. The Workforce Strategy stated that detailed workforce projections and planning activity would take place during the first year of the action plan. The council has developed and issued workforce profile templates to gather information from all services on future expected workforce levels. This work is still being finalised ([Exhibit 2](#)).

Exhibit 2

The council has developed and issued workforce profile templates to gather information from all services on future expected workforce levels

In Autumn 2023, East Ayrshire Council issued templates to all services to gather information on the future workforce levels required by each service

The council has developed workforce profiles for all services. Tailored templates were issued in Autumn 2023 for all services to complete. The purpose of the workforce profile template is to encourage service heads to consider factors likely to impact on their services in the years ahead and to determine future workforce levels required as a result.

The templates issued provided tailored information to each service, eg, level of service-level budget cuts required and number of current apprentices, as well as providing additional information and offers of further support in areas such as living hours, digital and climate change.

Information requested from each service included:

- Age profile (across six age bands) and employment status (ie temporary, permanent, full-time, part-time, bank staff) of all current members of staff as at July 2023
- Areas of future service growth or service decline identified as part of the most recent Service Redesign
- Measures the service is considering in terms of succession planning and supporting the older workforce to be able to continue working if they want
- Young workforce - interested in developing apprenticeships?
- Employees funded from external funding / internal recharge - list each post along with the funding source and its duration.
- What digital plans does the service have in place?
- How will financial constraints and budget gaps impact on your workforce and the ability to provide the range of services you do? Are there areas of work you are able to identify that will stop or change as a result of the financial constraints?
- Set out how your workforce composition and FTE will change as a result of all of the above

Source: East Ayrshire Council

21. A Workforce Strategy 2022-27 Action Plan was approved in October 2023. It incorporates six priorities, each with an accompanying indicator of success, as set out in [Exhibit 3](#). The council has confirmed that the first indicator of success refers to increasing the number of young people working within the council to ten per cent of its total workforce, rather increasing the current level

of young people working for the council by ten per cent as the current wording suggests.

Exhibit 3

East Ayrshire Council's six priorities for its workforce

Under each priority is an accompanying indicator of success

1. Investing in young people

We will increase the number of young people working within the council by ten per cent over the five-year period

2. Review and update employment framework

Services will have real-time workforce information available to them, enabling effective decision-making in terms of workforce planning

3. Financial sustainability

All services will be remodelled over the period of the plan to be lean, efficient and focused, making best use of technological advances

4. Investment in the future skills of our workforce

We will have a confident, empowered and flexible workforce able to meet changing service requirements

5. Employee engagement and recognition

Workforce motivation increased, measured by workforce survey, reduced levels of absence as a result of stress

6. Supporting attendance and employee wellbeing

Absence rates will be reduced by five per cent over the period of the plan.

East Ayrshire Council's Workforce Strategy Action Plan 2023

Recommendation 1

The council should ensure that actions from the Workforce Strategy Action Plan are reflected in the new service improvement plans being developed in 2024.

Work by the council to capture the skills and development needs of its workforce and work to identify skills gaps is at an early stage. Real-time workforce data cannot be accessed by managers with ease.

22. 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.

23. The council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27 contains workforce data in an appendix including:

- Number of people working for the council (headcount and full-time equivalent)
- Number of casual/bank registered employees
- Number of leavers and turnover of staff
- Age profile of the workforce by service
- Gender and pay – by service and grade
- Ethnicity
- Absence and reasons for absence.

24. The 2022-27 Workforce Strategy Action Plan includes actions to:

- Review and develop workforce data provision enabling the creation of robust workforce monitoring tools, developing a digital dashboard with a suite of workforce information
- Scope out and procure a new Virtual learning platform with colleagues across the council and ensure workforce data is linked to this.

25. In September 2023 we noted, in our [East Ayrshire Council: Best Value thematic report on leadership of the development of new local strategic priorities](#), that the council had identified the need to establish a baseline understanding of its workforce's skills, learning and experience. The council also acknowledged that it needed to improve workforce data relating to baseline staff skills as well as identifying future staff development and retraining. This has not been progressed in the six months since we reported.

26. When the Workforce Strategy 2022-27 was published in October 2022, work was being undertaken to develop a virtual learning platform to identify skills, learning and development needs. This has been slow to progress, primarily because of the number of systems involved and is currently on hold awaiting the roll-out of Microsoft 365.

27. Gathering basic workforce information is currently a laborious task which involves a team within HR extracting data from a number of different reports and then sourcing further information from the payroll system and cleansing it. Managers cannot access this information themselves as and when they need it to make decisions. The production of real-time workforce data is still at an early stage of development, dependent on the purchase of a new server. A Digital & Systems Officer has recently been appointed and work is ongoing to create the digital dashboard and for information to be available for managers to access by the end of 2024.

28. The council could improve the basis on which it makes workforce planning decisions by expanding the information it routinely collects and reports to include the skills, learning and development needs of staff and giving managers access to this information along with the information set out in [paragraph 23](#) on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 2

The council should expand the range of workforce planning information it collects and reports to include the skills, learning and development needs of its staff. It should continue to progress the development of the digital dashboard for real-time workforce planning data reporting for managers to aid decision-making.

The council engaged effectively with Heads of Service and Trades Unions when developing its Workforce Strategy 2022-27. The council plans to reflect the findings from its November 2023 Employee Survey in its Workforce Strategy Action Plan.

29. The council consulted widely with Heads of Service and Trades Unions as well as external stakeholders when developing its workforce strategy. The strategy includes a section setting out both the internal and external engagement that took place. This included:

- meetings with the Council Management Team
- meetings with Trades Unions
- ongoing engagement with external stakeholders including Ayrshire College and Local Employability partnerships and Community Wealth-building sub-groups

30. We spoke to Trades Union representatives and they were content they had been engaged with effectively as the Workforce Strategy 2022-27 was developed. There is a monthly collective bargaining meeting between the council and Trades Unions and the Workforce Strategy is a standing item on the agenda.

31. As described in [paragraph 19](#), as part of the Workforce Strategy's development, the council conducted a Council Management Team (CMT) workforce planning survey in 2022 to gather information on what Heads of Service saw as key areas for workforce planning and development within their service in the short and medium and long term. The survey covered areas including workforce growth/reduction, the level of change required and what workforce change solutions would provide support, the impact of budget and funding, wellbeing, workforce development, coaching and leadership. Heads of Service consulted with senior managers to compile this information. The results of this survey were published in an appendix to the Workforce Strategy.

32. The council engaged directly with all employees in November 2023 through its employee survey. Questions included were wide-ranging, including

wellbeing, development, communication and engagement. Most respondents completed the survey digitally but paper versions were also provided and after discussion with Trades Unions, a number of focus groups were run for employees traditionally less likely to respond to surveys.

33. The results of the survey were reported to CMT in March 2024, noting a response rate of 25.5 per cent, slightly lower than the previous employer survey. Eighty-two per cent of respondents would recommend the council as a good place to work. CMT asked for more analysis on wellbeing and supporting attendance and confirmed that a number of actions would be identified and incorporated into the Workforce Strategy Action Plan.

Digital technology and the workforce

The council approved the establishment of the Digital Management Board and the Digital Strategy Action Plan in March 2024. Indicators to measure its progress are being developed and more detailed plans will now be developed following the approval of the Digital Strategy Update and digital action plans for each of the five themes by Council in March 2024.

34. 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.

35. Digital technology has a strong bearing on a council's workforce needs. It can be used to re-shape jobs to increase productivity and reduce back-office functions while improving service quality. Technology solutions include online services, customer relationship management systems, mobile digital devices and more recently, artificial intelligence (AI) applications.

36. The Accounts Commission's 2021 [Digital Progress in Local Government report](#) highlighted that Covid-19 accelerated the use of digital technology in councils. 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 links and inter-dependencies between the council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27 and the Digital Strategy 2022-27 should be clearer

37. The council's Digital Strategy 2022-27 was agreed by the council on 27 October 2022 at the same time as its Workforce Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Despite this, in the introduction to the Digital Strategy it mentions that it supports the council's Strategic Plan and is linked to and aligned with its Medium-term Financial Strategy 2022-27 but does not refer to being linked to or aligned with the Workforce Strategy 2022-27. Similarly, the introduction of the Workforce Strategy 2022-27 does not refer to links with the Digital Strategy 2022-27.

38. The council's Workforce Strategy is mentioned once, towards the end of its Digital Strategy, in the 'Measuring Progress' section, when it refers to

fundamental inter-dependencies between the key plans and strategies. However, these inter-dependencies are not elaborated on.

39. The purpose of the Digital Strategy 2022-27 is described as defining the council's digital vision and establishing the road-map for its continuing digital journey. The strategy sets out the council's aim to maximise the potential of digital technologies to improve services and outcomes. The Strategy recognises that Digital will have to be the driver to support effective change within Services and, importantly, release financial savings through the use of automation, digitalisation and artificial intelligence. It aims to be more about people, culture and leadership than previous digital strategies.

40. The Finance & ICT Service Redesign amended its existing service budget to create a specialist Business Innovation team to support services to identify and realise service based digital efficiencies. For future digital efficiencies, finance officers will monetise the impact of the digital efficiencies and this will provide the council with a quantification of the savings realised.

41. The digital vision for the council is based on five key themes. While there is no direct reference to workforce, the theme most relevant to workforce is *digital council*:

- **A digital customer** – accessible online services which are so simple, quick and easy to use that they are the preferred way for residents and businesses to interact with the us.
- **Digital council** – A digital first approach will ensure we are agile, adaptive, efficient and innovative as we connect devices, networks, data and people across a safe and secure infrastructure and make informed decisions on future service based digital efficiencies and wider council investment.
- **Digital services** – digital services should be delivered with a community-based focus on key essential services ensuring our communities have safe and secure access, are supported and informed and can benefit from learning opportunities.
- **Digital communities** – ensure everyone has the opportunity and capability to be digitally included as we connect residents, business, partners and technology and promote thriving digital communities and digital investment across East Ayrshire.
- **Digital culture** – ensure our key principles are embedded in everything we do.

Council approved the Digital Management Board, its terms of reference and work plan in March 2024. The Business Innovation Team sits within the Finance and ICT service and supports services to achieve digital efficiencies.

42. The Digital Management Board will provide strategic leadership and oversight to projects and programmes being delivered in support of the five themes in the Digital Strategy. We reported in our Annual Audit Report 2022/23, that there had been delays establishing the board due in part by staff vacancies. A Digital Strategy Update was provided to Council in March 2024 and a number

of recommendations were approved including the establishment of the Digital management Board and its terms of reference. The Update outlined work that had been undertaken in relation to the Digital Strategy since October 2022 when the strategy was approved and provided details of the Digital Strategy Action Plan and future planned work.

43. We note that whilst there were delays in establishing the Digital Management Board, the council have invested in the digital infrastructure of the council. This has included investment in network security, improvements to enhance the council's on-line and telephony services and the introduction of the One Number Service to support flexible working arrangements whereby staff are contactable from all working locations.

44. Named leads are to be appointed to each of the five themes and will be responsible for reporting progress to the Board. The Board will meet monthly and report to CMT bi-annually on progress.

45. To date the council has reported examples of good progress being made against its digital strategy. However performance indicators intended to measure progress through existing corporate measures, including the impact on productivity and service quality and outcomes have not yet been reported. The council provided a high-level update on progress against its Digital Strategy as part of its Strategic Framework Update in October 2023. It reported that work had progressed on a number of elements of the strategy and reports on Digital Council (Telephony and M365), Digital Communities and a report to establish the Digital Management Board were to be presented to the Council Management Team in March 2024.

46. A CMT Digital Day was held on 6 February 2024, including a review of progress made in the last 12 months. This involved the preparation of a short paper but was primarily a presentation with an interactive element. It included the demonstration of new online services such as a video-conferencing facility for members of the public, Microsoft 365 and a new internal booking system.

47. Examples of digital progress in recent years were set out in the Digital Strategy. Examples related to the council's workforce included:

- The automation of recycling processes within Waste Services has been supported by the creation of real time dashboards that has enabled reliable performance information and efficiencies within the Service
- Automation processes have also been introduced within the Revenues and Benefits system which has been linked to the Council's Customer Relationship Management system (CRM), to support real time customer updates to individual records resulting in faster outcomes.
- Further automation has taken place within both Education and Customer Services
- Online transactions increased from 1,500 per month before Covid-19 to 25,000 per month
- Over 60 self-service applications are available online

- Giving office-based staff the essential tools, skills and technology required to deliver smarter services. Over 2,000 staff were given access to laptops, networks, mobiles and fixed telephony solutions which allow service delivery from wherever and whenever it is required.
- The development of new e-learning modules for staff training around information governance, IT skills and cyber awareness.
- The standardisation and modernisation of the range of laptops and devices available across the council, ensuring they are compatible with all of our current business applications.
- Supported services and the council's non-office based workforce by providing secure mobile technology. The fleet of Housing Asset Services operatives now use digital job lines and home care staff work more efficiently with the introduction of an electronic diary and appointment system.

48. The Digital Strategy 2022-27 has a 'Measuring Progress' section. In this the council sets out that progress will be tracked primarily using existing measures, eg service performance will be summarised using Statutory Performance Indicators. It plans to update existing indicators or create new ones to identify and monitor digital improvements within services. It sets out an intention to routinely track and report on its own set of internal performance indicators that include self-service take-up, service delivery levels and stakeholder surveys. The automation activity undertaken within a number of areas have been evaluated and it is recognised that work should be done to develop how changes to workforce productivity or service outcomes, as a direct result of improved digital technology will be measured following the full expansion and the progression of the Digital Action Plans.

Recommendation 3

The council should clearly outline how it plans to use digital technology to shape its workforce of the future and demonstrate what workforce benefits and productivity gains have been made through its use of digital technology.

The council has introduced digital ambassadors to support staff as new digital solutions are introduced. The digital communities theme of the council's Digital Strategy sets out how it is ensuring accessibility to its services and addressing digital inclusion

49. Digital inclusion is mentioned in the first paragraph of the Digital Strategy 2022-27 which states that the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of digital inclusion and managing inequalities to ensure no-one is left behind. It describes digital inclusion as being about making sure that everyone can benefit from the internet and technology and sets out three elements of this:

- access to an appropriate device

- suitable connectivity to the internet through broadband, wifi, and mobile data
- required skills, support, confidence, and motivation to use the internet.

50. The council met with Trades Unions when developing its Digital Strategy and provided assurance that the appropriate supports would be put in place for staff, if required, as digital solutions were rolled out. Digital ambassadors were introduced and embedded in services to answer queries, offer one-to-one support and signpost digital skills training. This is particularly useful in relation to the roll-out of Microsoft 365. Ambassadors were migrated first and shown how to access online support. The council is looking at how staff are accessing learning and development and developing solutions to make it more accessible.

51. The council's approach to digital inclusion is set out in the digital community theme of the Digital Strategy 2022-27. It wants to ensure everyone has the opportunity and capability to be digitally included. The East Ayrshire Digital Access Network (EADAN), which the council is a member of, was recognised nationally and awarded Silver Award at the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards in 2022 for its work in tackling digital exclusion, inequalities and isolation. During COVID-19, the council worked with partners to support over 1,500 families and households to get online. The council continues to maximise opportunities from initiatives such as Connecting Scotland to provide devices and the internet to those who need it.

Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment

The council has introduced a new flexible working policy but needs to report on its impact on productivity and services. It is working on reducing its reliance on casual and temporary staff Relationships between the council and Trades Unions are positive but Trades Unions report that staff morale is low due to pressures in delivering services.

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

53. Home-working and hybrid working (a combination of office and home-based working) have now become commonplace. 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.

Office-based staff have been allocated one of four different workstyles by the council, depending on their role. To promote a better work-life balance employees can work their contracted hours flexibly. The council's formal flexitime scheme ceased in March 2022

54. As part of its 2017-22 Transformation Strategy, the council created different categories of roles for its office-based employees: fixed, flexible and mobile. The remote category was added as a result of Covid-19 when home working became the standard for office workers. [Exhibit 4](#) provides definitions of these four categories along with the numbers and percentages in each category of the 2,000 office-based employees in December 2023.

55. In April 2022, all office-based employees had the new allocated working style added to their contract following agreement from managers and heads of service. While workstyles are allocated to posts, employees can request to amend their workstyle on an individual basis. As at August 2023, 329 changes to workstyle had been made.

Exhibit 4

East Ayrshire Council's four working styles for office-based jobs

Office-based jobs in East Ayrshire Council are assigned to one of four different categories. Figures relate to December 2023.

Fixed	Flexible	Mobile	Remote
204 (10%)	966 (49%)	698 (35%)	110 (6%)
80-100% of time is primarily working at a single office base or work location	50-79% of time is office based. Able to work at different / multiple work locations. Occasionally works at home, or another location 1-2 days per week, or directly home to external appointments	20-49% of time is office based. Able to work at home, or another location, or travel directly from home to other locations and client visits out in the field.	Less than 20% of time is in office base. Able to work at home, or another location or travel directly from home to other locations and client visits out in the field.

Source: East Ayrshire Council

56. In March 2022 the council's formal flexitime system was removed and replaced with a requirement that employees work their contracted hours flexibly, to suit their personal circumstances while ensuring business needs are met. Flexitime had been suspended for those working at home since March 2020. Standard core times were removed as was the requirement to formally apply for periods of time off for appointments etc unless a full day was being requested. The council's intention behind this revised arrangement was to support employees in achieving an effective work-life balance by ensuring they do not exceed their contracted hours. The council has not considered a four-day working week.

The council consulted with staff and Trades Unions on changes to flexible working, workstyles and wellbeing

57. The council notes in its Workforce Strategy 2022-27 that '*The wellbeing and support of our employees is a key council priority*'. Its new flexible working policy was agreed with Trades Unions and was informed by various workforce surveys and meetings of focus groups, known as think tanks. A workforce survey focusing directly on the review of flexible working was conducted in May 2021 with nearly 1,000 respondents. The findings included the majority of employees no longer seeing core hours as necessary and a blended approach of some home and some office working being favoured. Workforce surveys conducted over the last few years have also contributed to the development of an increased number of wellbeing resources for employees to access including mental health first aid, supporting wellbeing e-learning and healthy habits.

The council has not measured the impact of changes to the working arrangements of its staff in terms of productivity, budget savings or other efficiencies or impacts on services.

58. The new flexible working policy has been in place for around two years and through the standard workforce data presented quarterly via East Ayrshire Performs ([paragraph 92](#)) and the 2023 employee survey, the council is

gathering useful intelligence on employee wellbeing. However, the council needs to do more to assess the impact of its changes to its flexible working policy in terms of productivity, budget savings or other efficiencies or impacts on services.

Results from an organisation-wide employee survey on employee satisfaction capture the benefits of hybrid working on employee wellbeing

59. The council undertook a Workforce Survey in November 2023 which covered a range of topics in relation to how its staff feel about the council. This included working environment, leadership, wellbeing and engagement. Employee focus groups also took place during November with groups of staff who historically were less likely to engage with surveys. Results have been analysed and were reported to the CMT in March 2024. Key findings in relation to staff satisfaction with working arrangements include:

- Eighty-two per cent of respondents would recommend the council as a good place to work
- Seventy-seven per cent of respondents, an increase of three per cent on surveys conducted in 2015 and 2017, reported they are able to balance their work demands with personal or family life
- Sixty-nine per cent of respondents agreed that they were usually able to finish work within the normal working day, an increase of 13 per cent on 2017
- Twenty-six per cent of respondents did not feel they were able to work in a flexible way
- Qualitative comments in relation to remote/hybrid working included working from home being more productive because of less distractions, it offering greater flexibility and a relaxed way of working. However some respondents did find it could be isolating.

Recommendation 4

The council should measure the full impact of changes to working arrangements of staff. This could include productivity, service quality, costs and other measures. The council should then use these findings, alongside existing monitoring, to inform improvements to maximise job satisfaction and productivity.

A positive relationship exists between the council and Trade Unions with engagement channels working well but Unions refer to there being low staff morale at the council because of pressures on staff

60. As part of our work we met with Trade Union representatives who confirmed there are good working relationships between the council and the Trade Unions. Trade Union representatives are included in all the key meetings with council

representatives to discuss individual issues or ongoing work that may impact staff. Informal channels of communication also work well.

61. Trade Union representatives, however, feel that despite these good working relationships, there is scope for them to be involved in discussions at an earlier stage, especially in relation to service reviews. They felt that they are only consulted towards the end of the process, once decisions are made and were of the opinion that through earlier engagement or consultation they would be able to add further value or context to the area under review. The representatives also advised us that morale amongst staff is low. Employees are reporting being stretched to cover multiple roles at the same time, feeling unappreciated and that managers and the public do not recognise the pressure they are facing.

Developing future skills and capacity

The council has been successful in increasing the number of training opportunities for young people across its services and is using a range of initiatives to develop the skills and capacity of its workforce.

62. 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.

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

The council has created a Workforce and Future Skills Team to support the expansion of the younger workforce. Ensuring there are adequate resources to dedicate to workforce planning at service level is a challenge

64. The council created a Workforce and Future Skills Team in March 2022 to support the expansion of the younger workforce by taking forward a range of workforce projects developed as part of the Workforce Strategy Action Plan. It has ten members of staff, with the majority focused on the expansion of apprenticeships, work experience and other training opportunities across the council. Two of the challenges the team are experiencing are ensuring there are adequate resources at service level to dedicate to workforce planning and the dynamic nature of the environment in which they operate.

65. The council has identified an ageing workforce as one of its future challenges and has been actively introducing programmes designed to boost its young workforce. It knows that to have effective succession planning it needs to increase the number of young people working for the council and is aiming to increase this to ten per cent of the workforce as a whole by 2027. The council recognises that having the appropriate pay, benefits and employment framework in place will help it to attract young people into the council.

66. The council introduced an Apprenticeship Framework in April 2020. This provided greater equality in rates of pay for apprenticeships by raising the

starting pay rate for the youngest employees starting in training roles to above the national minimum wage for apprentices.

67. In February 2022, the council introduced a £6 million Jobs and Training Fund from the Covid Recovery and Renewal programme. This set a target to increase the number of training opportunities available for modern and graduate apprenticeships and graduate internships across the council area, with a mix of council opportunities and grants for modern apprenticeships provided to local businesses.

68. The council set a target of 200 placements to be available over a three-year period, from April 2022 to March 2025. As at September 2023, 117 trainees had started with the council. In the first six months of 2023/24, services have made bids to the Jobs and Training fund for 49 modern apprentices, two graduate apprentices – the first the council has had - and five graduate interns. Young people are doing modern apprenticeships across the council from customer services to early years to horticulture.

69. The Workforce and Future Skills Team is involved in the Local Employability Partnership and has established links with secondary schools across East Ayrshire, Ayrshire College and Skills Development Scotland. In secondary schools, training officers link with careers advisors linked to the schools to ensure that the Modern Apprenticeship scheme is being promoted. The Local Employability Team has been working on developing a pre-apprenticeship programme to encourage young people to work for the council ([Exhibit 5](#)).

70. The Local Employability Team is developing a pre-apprenticeship programme to support care-experienced young people and those who have disengaged with school. The programme offers ten places for young people between October and December and a further ten places between March and May. The programme will combine a work placement with employability qualifications and at the end of the programme participants will be considered for suitability for an apprenticeship place. Any council apprenticeships identified will be ringfenced for this group in the first instance. If an apprenticeship is available in an area where a young person had worked, and they are deemed suitable for the role, they will automatically be matched to that modern apprenticeship. It is proposed that a training allowance be paid during the pre-apprenticeship.

71. The council is undertaking a cross-cutting review of employability initiatives delivered directly or commissioned by the council, the outcome of which is due to be reported to elected members in June 2024.

The council is using a range of initiatives to develop the skills and capacity of its current workforce

72. The council also has a framework in place to help develop the skills of its current workforce. In June 2019, the FACE Framework was approved by the council. It introduced four 'FACE' qualities and behaviours across the workforce: Flexible, Approachable, Caring and Empowered. The framework was developed to implement wholesale transformational change and to change the council's culture to be more flexible in the way it works. The qualities and behaviours have been incorporated into employment policies and procedures.

73. As part of this framework, the council has introduced an annual development review called FACE Time which allows employees and line managers to have a 'career conversation'. This allows employees to identify whether they are looking to progress their career or remain in their existing role and to identify and equip them with any skills and knowledge required to progress their career. This helps with succession planning and is part of the succession planning framework the council developed to identify critical skills. In the last 12 months, the council has reported that 38 per cent of staff have had a FACE Time review.

The HSCP's Social Worker Trainee Programme allows existing employees to gain a social work qualification

74. The Health and Social Care Partnership has introduced a 'grow our own' scheme, the Social Worker Trainee Programme, which offers existing employees from across social work services the opportunity to undertake study towards a social work qualification. In 2022, six social worker trainees were offered places and will complete the training in 2024. Seven further trainees have been selected for year two of the programme and commenced study in late 2023.

The council is developing new ways of filling posts that are hard to recruit to

75. The council reported in its Workforce Strategy 2022-27 that areas such as health and social care, HGV Drivers, teaching, accountancy, regulatory and engineering posts have all been difficult to fill. As a result, it is looking to develop new ways of filling these vacancies. For example, a vacancy for a senior accountant had been advertised on multiple occasions but remained unfilled due to no-one applying with the appropriate qualifications and experience. To address this, the council is now recruiting at accountant level and proposing training any interested employees towards the senior accountant level.

Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

The council is the lead authority for the Ayrshire Roads Alliance with South Ayrshire council. It also shares a small number of other teams and has introduced innovative flexible roles but has not captured the benefits of these.

76. 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.

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

East Ayrshire Council, alongside South Ayrshire Council share roads and transportation services through the Ayrshire Roads Alliance

78. East Ayrshire Council, alongside South Ayrshire Council share roads and transportation services through the Ayrshire Roads Alliance. The Alliance has been in place since April 2014 and is governed by a joint committee of elected members from the two councils. It delivers roads services including roads maintenance, winter maintenance, design and infrastructure, traffic and transportation and road safety. The Alliance was expected to yield savings of £8.6 million in its first ten years through reduced management and administrative costs and from negotiating better deals for larger orders. Actual savings in this time period were £21.3 million 'due to prevailing economic conditions' across both councils.

79. East Ayrshire Council is planning to review the benefits of continuing its involvement in the Ayrshire Roads Alliance this year and is currently supporting South Ayrshire Council in a similar review.

A jointly – funded Corporate Fraud Team investigates fraud across East and North Ayrshire

80. A Corporate Fraud Team (CFT) for North and East Ayrshire, to investigate fraud and share learning and information, has been in place since August 2016. It is delivered by North Ayrshire Council but is jointly funded by both councils. The arrangement was initially in place for three years but has been extended on numerous occasions, with it most recently being extended until March 2025. The CFT work deals with referrals of fraud around Council Tax, Business Rates,

Scottish Welfare Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments, Blue Badges and Housing Tenancies, and acts as the first point of contact for the National Fraud Initiative. The benefits of a shared CFT include shared learning, freeing up internal audit resources, and being a single point of contact for employees and the community.

The Ayrshire Civil Contingencies Team and the Ayrshire Archives involve joint working arrangements between East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire Councils

81. The Ayrshire Civil Contingencies Team (ACCT) is a joint service for the three Ayrshire Councils, established in 2009. The team has four members of staff and there are an additional two officers employed in other areas of the council who volunteer for the on-call cover. Initially the team worked more with their original councils but over the years this has changed to the team having a lead officer with responsibility for specific areas of work and working with all three councils and HSCPs.

82. The team has developed a broad skillset due to varied risks across the three areas. There have been additional benefits for the three councils as the ACCT provides joint training and exercising for staff from all three councils and HSCPs. For example, staff from the three Ayrshire councils can attend training held in one of the councils where normally this training would have to be repeated across the three councils.

83. The Ayrshire Archives is a joint initiative between South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and North Ayrshire councils for the preservation and management of records transferred to them or created by them. South Ayrshire council is the lead authority with responsibility for the central repository and staff management, with additional public access points in North and East Ayrshire.

The council has created flexible roles that are likely to have created workforce benefits but these have not been formally captured

84. The Ayrshire Roads Alliance and the council's Greener Communities Service have created a flexible role involving employees conducting outdoor gardening and maintenance work during summer months for the council and then undertaking gritting and flooding work for Ayrshire Roads Alliance during the winter months. This has led to a reduction in the requirement for seasonal workers for both services. In a slightly different vein, the council's Housing Asset Service has developed its trade roles to ensure they included a multi skilled element. For example, a plumber is now able to carry out some basic joinery or electrical work.

85. The council has not captured the extent to which there have been workforce benefits resulting from the shared roles and the new flexible roles but recognises that capturing the learning from these would be beneficial. These might include reduced workforce, costs or service benefits.

86. The council has explored sharing roles in other services where recruitment is challenging but these did not work out for a number of reasons. For example, when sharing a role or a function, accommodating the different priorities of councils as well as the different systems used and the different ways of working

can be difficult. In some cases, when taking these difficulties into account, efficiencies and savings were not going to be made. The council has not explored the possibility of sharing any other roles or functions in the past few years.

Recommendation 5

The council should capture learning from its successful shared roles and functions and the establishment of flexible roles to apply when developing similar arrangements in the future

The council is taking steps to reduce its reliance on casual staff

87. The council has recognised that it relies heavily on bank and supply-registered staff to deliver its services. In July 2022 the council calculated the number of bank registered employees as being 2,508, 37 per cent of all of its employees. The implications of this analysis is that an additional 1,022 people are carrying out work on an ad-hoc basis for council services, with casual/bank staff making up an additional 13 per cent of the workforce. This staff group do not have the same terms and conditions as contracted staff and may not have access to the same training and support. The cost of casual staff may also be higher than other staff.

88. By April 2023 this figure had risen to 2,800. A number of actions have been taken to reduce this number including:

- reviewing the bank register to identify those who had not worked for more than six months and removing them
- the IJB agreeing to remove the internal bank for Care at Home workers.

89. By November 2023, the total number of bank and supply workers had reduced to 1,855. Further data is now being collated in relation to recent bank hours worked to ensure those working excessive bank hours are identified and appropriate adjustments are made. The bank register is now subject to continued monitoring to ensure anyone not working for more than six months will continue to be removed from the register. The council has set up a sub-group to identify and support alternative options such as temporary contracts and annualised hours.

90. The council has also been looking at the number of employees on temporary contracts. In October 2022 there were 405 temporary employees, of which 308 were employed less than two years, 73 were employed two to four years and 24 were employed for over four years. As a result of this, the 24 employees were issued with a letter confirming their permanent status as they had gained employment rights due to length of service. The 73 employees have redeployment rights and a review has been carried out to ensure this right is included in their contract of employment. The council will continue to monitor the number of employees on temporary contracts and has introduced an

additional status category of 'fixed term' as a number of temporary roles are based on limited funding arrangements.

Measuring the impact of workforce planning

The council monitors the effectiveness of its workforce planning approach through its Workforce Strategy Action Plan. Workforce performance measures, reported quarterly through East Ayrshire Performs are to be expanded. The council has asked services to identify where long-term workforce reduction or movement could take place to address future financial constraints but services require further support to do this

91. 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 monitors the progress of its Workforce Strategy regularly through its Workforce Planning Board and Workforce Strategy Action Plan

92. The council's Workforce Strategy 2022-27 sets out that progress under each area of the action plan will be monitored and reviewed regularly at the Workforce Planning Board, through East Ayrshire Performs monitoring process and through regular updates to CMT and Cabinet.

93. The remit of the Workforce Planning Board, including the requirement to oversee delivery of the Workforce Strategy 2022-27, is set out in [Exhibit 5](#). An update on the Workforce Strategy was reported to the full council meeting in October 2023 as part of the Strategic Framework Update. At this meeting the council was asked to note the Workforce Strategy update and agree the Workforce Strategy Action Plan. Although the action plan was just agreed at the October 2023 council meeting, one year after the Workforce Strategy was approved, activity was taking place against the vast majority of actions over this period and good progress had been made. Progress was noted against each action, assigning a red, amber or green status. Of the 69 actions or sub-actions, 55 per cent were categorised as green, 23 per cent as amber and 22 per cent as red.

94. The update noted that good progress had been made against the priorities ([Exhibit 2](#)) and associated actions. The areas of progress included:

- embedding the work of the Future Skills Team across council services and local businesses

- working collaboratively with employability partners
- monitoring workforce movement
- skills gaps for individuals and teams being gathered via career conversations.
- developing an employee attitude survey.

95. Actions not progressed to any extent included:

- developing and embedding a mentoring framework for apprentices
- identifying and implementing an appropriate server to present workforce data in real time
- monitoring and reducing spending on recruitment
- scoping out and procuring a new Virtual Learning Platform
- creating a digital dashboard of absence information for managers.

The council has asked services to identify where long-term workforce reduction or movement could take place to address future financial constraints but services require further support to do this

96. The council's workforce has been rising steadily in recent years and over the last ten years it has risen by over ten per cent. National drivers have been a contributing factor to this such as:

- early years expansion
- the continued move and expansion to providing rehabilitation and care in a homely environment where possible
- catering – supporting early years and primary school meals expansion
- increases in both teaching and classroom assistant staff due to a range of Scottish Government funded projects such as the Pupil Equity Fund and the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

97. The council notes in its Workforce Strategy 2022-27 that it will need long term workforce reduction or workforce movement measures to ensure it has the right people in the right place at the right time in order to meet the £39 million Financial Gap identified within its Medium-term Financial Strategy 2022-27. It confirms in its 2023/24 budget paper that the majority of controllable council spending relates to staff costs

98. The survey completed by all Heads of Service, and appended to the Workforce Strategy 2022-27, took the first steps in establishing future expected workforce levels. In this survey the council asked for information on the extent to which services thought they would grow or reduce in size by 2027. No services predicted they would reduce in size. As a result, the council decided

that more detailed projection and analysis work was required to help address the council's budget gap.

99. Exhibit 2 sets out the projection and analysis work that took place after the strategy was published. This included questions for services on how financial constraints and budget gaps would impact on workforce as well as asking services to identify any areas of work that could stop or change as a result of the financial constraints.

100. As at January 2024, a small number of templates are still to be returned and full analysis is to be completed. In the sample of completed workforce profile templates seen by the audit team, the sections linking future workforce levels with budget gaps were not fully completed. After analysing the responses, HR members of staff intend to hold individual discussions with Heads of Service to discuss the completed profiles further with a view to developing specific actions in conjunction with each service.

101. Savings from workforce planning are captured as part of the annual revenue budget process. Templates are issued to services to enable them to detail options and then categorise them against specific headings, one of which is workforce planning. The revenue budget report submitted to council for approval in February each year sets out the level of savings against each heading. In February 2023, £1.4 million of workforce savings were put forward for the 2023/24 budget and were detailed in an appendix.

Exhibit 5

East Ayrshire Council's Workforce Planning Board

East Ayrshire Council has a Board with membership from across the council and HSCP to take forward the actions in the Workforce Strategy

The Workforce Planning Board was set up to ensure there was a strategic and integrated approach to workforce planning across the council. The Board's role is to oversee the delivery of the council's Workforce Strategy and ensure workforce planning across the council is robust and integrated across staff groups. It meets quarterly to monitor and discuss the workforce planning needs of the council.

Membership includes members of staff from the People and Culture service along with the Head of Corporate Support, the Corporate Finance Manager and representatives from other services as required. Representatives from the Health and Social Care Partnership are also members.

Activities to date include the development of the Workforce Strategy, the workforce survey and the workforce profile form. It also regularly reviews the action plan and is currently working to ensure there are detailed actions against each of the six priorities in the strategy.

Source: East Ayrshire Council

Performance against people indicators is reported quarterly through the East Ayrshire Performs performance monitoring system and is contained in annual performance reporting of SPIs and LGBF

102. A quarterly performance report is presented to Cabinet and the Governance and Scrutiny Committee drawing on information from the East Ayrshire Performs performance monitoring system. This report includes areas of interest to elected members, one of which is a section on 'People'. Key figures are drawn out along with an accompanying narrative. Examples of the areas included, along with the most recent data from the November 2023 report, relating to the first half of 2023, are:

- **Absence levels** and reasons for absence. Across the council 6.24 working days have been lost per employee in the first half of 2023, totalling 35,947 working days. This is slightly lower than the same time last year. The most prominent reason for being absent is stress, accounting for nearly 8,000 days (one in five days absent).
- **Split between permanent and temporary members of staff** - In the last year the headcount for the council overall has increased by 152 people, rising from 6,599 to 6,751. During this same period the number of temporary staff has reduced by over eight per cent, from 681 to 624.
- **Developing a young workforce** - The number of young people under 25 working within the council at 30 September 2023 was 401, with 29 per cent (116) of these young people being in apprenticeships. This is an increase on the same time the previous year when 380 young people were working for the council including 82 apprentices.
- **Recruitment - vacancies** - The total number of posts advertised between July and September 2023 was 334 compared to 281 in the same period last year. This is an increase of 19 per cent (53). The number of both frontline and non-frontline posts advertised increased.

This report has made a number of findings and recommendations related to how the council is measuring the impact of its workforce planning

103. A number of recommendations have been made in relation to how the council measures the impact of its workforce planning approach throughout this report:

- The council should expand the range of workforce planning information it collects and reports. It should progress the development of real-time workforce planning data reporting for managers to aid decision-making.
- The council should demonstrate what workforce benefits and productivity gains have been made through its use of digital technology
- The council should measure the full impact of changes to working arrangements of staff. This could include productivity, service quality, costs and other measures. The council should then use these findings,

alongside existing monitoring, to inform improvements to maximise job satisfaction and productivity.

The council is working to develop more measures to capture the effectiveness of its workforce planning

104. The council acknowledges that monitoring the effectiveness of all elements of its workforce planning is complex with some areas easier to monitor than others. For example, it is straightforward where there is a quantifiable measure of progress such as the indicator of success to increase the young workforce by ten per cent by 2027. The council is working to develop clear indicators for each of its workforce planning priorities to facilitate how it monitors progress.

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

Recommendation 6

The council should consider using tools developed by the Improvement Service as part of its plans to expand its reporting on workforce information.

Appendix 1

Improvement Action plan

Issue/risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action/timing
<p>1. Reflecting workforce planning actions in service improvement plans</p> <p>The council updated its service improvement plans before the Workforce Strategy Action Plan was finalised and so they do not reflect its actions.</p> <p>Risk – Workforce planning actions that could be taken forward by services are overlooked</p>	<p>The council should ensure that actions from the Workforce Strategy Action Plan are reflected in the new service improvement plans being developed in 2024.</p> <p>Paragraphs 16 to 18</p>	<p>Management response</p> <p>The Service Improvement Plans being developed for 2024 will include consideration of Workforce Planning priorities within each services action plan.</p> <p>Responsible officer</p> <p>Amanda Lowe, Head of People and Culture</p> <p>Actioned by</p> <p>30 September 2024</p>
<p>2. Expanding the range of workforce planning information used to make decisions</p> <p>Work by the council to capture the skills and development needs of its workforce and work to identify skills gaps is at an early stage. Real-time workforce data cannot be accessed by managers with ease.</p> <p>Risk – Workforce planning decisions are made based on incomplete information</p>	<p>The council should expand the range of workforce planning information it collects and reports to include the skills, learning and development needs of its staff. It should progress the development of real-time workforce planning data reporting for managers to aid decision-making.</p> <p>Paragraphs 23 to 28</p>	<p>Management response</p> <p>Digital Solutions are being progressed to track and monitor skills, learning & development needs and these will be incorporated into future reviews of the workforce plan. Real-time Workforce Planning data is being progressed and we would hope to have this established by early 2025.</p> <p>Responsible officer</p> <p>Donna Neilson, People and Culture Manager [Workforce & Future Skills] and Kathlyne Hewitson, People and Culture Manager [Organisational Development]</p> <p>Actioned by</p> <p>June 2025</p>

3. Using digital technology to increase workforce productivity and benefits

The council could be clearer about how it plans to use digital technology to shape its workforce of the future.

Risk – Benefits from the use of digital technology are not fully realised

The council should clearly outline how it plans to use digital technology to shape its workforce of the future and demonstrate what workforce benefits and productivity gains have been made through its use of digital technology.

Paragraph 48

Management response

Work to embed digital efficiencies has already begun within Service and this will continue having regard to the financial and workforce challenges. Presentations have been made to the Council Management Team on how the use of digital technology can support effective service delivery while also producing financial savings. Similar presentations and reports have been made to Elected Members and Council. The Digital Management Board (DMB), will liaise with Heads of Service to support digital change and build upon the successful work of the earlier projects.

The DMB will produce digital workplans and will help services resource the digital change to deliver service based digital efficiencies. These will be linked to the Council's Workforce Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to ensure that efficiencies can be demonstrated and quantified.

Responsible officer

Depute Head of ICT and Digital

Depute Head of Finance

Supported by the Head of People and Culture in respect of workforce matters

Actioned by

May 2024 with efficiencies demonstrated as part of the 2025/26 revenue budget process.

4. Measuring the impact of changes to working arrangements on staff

The council has introduced a new flexible working policy to promote improvements in work-life balance but has not yet captured the full impact of these new arrangements.

Risk – Benefits from changes to working arrangements of staff are not optimised

The council should measure the full impact of changes to working arrangements of staff. This could include productivity, service quality, costs and other measures. The council should then use these findings, alongside existing monitoring, to inform improvements to maximise job satisfaction and productivity.

[Paragraph 58-59](#)

Management response

Current flexible workstyle arrangements are kept under review, with a full review of the policy due in April 2025 in line with the Policy Review Schedule. Appropriate measures will be identified such as ensuring customer response times remain unaffected, where less buildings has led to a reduction in costs etc.

Responsible officer

Amanda Lowe, Head of People and Culture and Lynn Mitchell, People and Culture Manager [HR & Payroll]

Actioned by

April 2025

5. Capturing the learning from shared roles and functions

The council is the lead authority for the Ayrshire Roads Alliance with South Ayrshire council. It also shares a small number of other teams and has introduced innovative flexible roles but has not captured the benefits of these.

Risk – Learning from sharing roles and functions will not be applied when developing similar arrangements in the future

The council should capture learning from its shared roles and functions and the establishment of flexible roles to apply when developing similar arrangements in the future.

[Paragraph 86](#)

Management response

A review of the current flexible role model is underway and output from this will be used to increase and develop good practice, expand where appropriate and future consideration of this mechanism.

Responsible officer

Amanda Lowe, Head of People and Culture

Actioned by

September 2024

6. Monitoring the impact of workforce planning

The council is working to develop more measures to capture the effectiveness of its workforce planning.

Risk – The council does not know whether its workforce

The council should consider using tools developed by the Improvement Service help measure impact and identify workforce planning improvements.

[Paragraph 105](#)

Management response

The Council will review the tools developed by the Improvement Service for measuring impact of the workforce plan and will incorporate into our current measurements where appropriate.

**planning approach is making
a difference**

Responsible officer

Amanda Lowe, Head of
People and Culture and
Donna Neilson, People and
Culture Manager [Workforce
& Future Skills]

Actioned by

March 2025

Workforce innovation - how councils are responding to workforce challenges

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