



# Fife Council

**Workforce Innovation – how councils are responding to workforce challenges**

**Best Value thematic work in councils 2023-24**

September 2024



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# Key messages

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

## **Auditor judgement**

Effective and appropriate arrangements are in place



Fife Council has a clear and comprehensive workforce strategy, Our People Matter (OPM), which is integrated with the Reform Agenda and the Digital Strategy, to deliver the Plan for Fife. There has been positive uptake and engagement with the current iteration of the OPM throughout the Council and with trade union representatives.

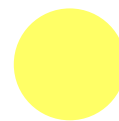
The Council is looking ahead towards preparations for development of the OPM 2025-2028. The refreshed OPM will include development of a Corporate People Plan to clearly set out the actions that are required to be taken at a corporate level to address the current and future gaps in workforce capacity and capability.

Planned engagement and consultation on the refreshed OPM 2025-2028 is due to begin in Autumn 2024.

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

### **Auditor judgement**

Risks exist to the achievement of operational objectives



Appropriate arrangements are in place to enable the delivery of the Council's digital strategy. However, work is still required in developing the leadership and culture of the organisation which will drive digital change and progress. A key challenge for the Council is the creation of capacity within its workforce to enable the review, exploration and development of digital opportunities.

The Council continues to develop and implement its use of digital technologies. Specific actions have been taken to address digital exclusion including, for example, use your own device policies and the roll out of digital champions.

**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?**

**Auditor judgement**

Risks exist to the achievement of operational objectives





Fife Council has a well-established blended working approach which 94% of eligible employees have chosen to opt into. However, the Council has recognised that only 13% of the workforce are eligible to opt in for their blended working approach and that the majority of services operate through front line workers.

Resource and capacity challenges are limiting progress being made for a number of flexible working initiatives including exploration of flexible working opportunities for front line working groups and development of productivity measures for each of the Council's workstyles.

The Council has recognised the challenges which a blended working approach can have on the wellbeing of its employees and has produced an appropriate range of guidance and tools to support the health and wellbeing of its employees. A strong culture and focus on support for employee wellbeing exists within services which has encouraged development of their own initiatives to meet the specific health and wellbeing needs of their teams.

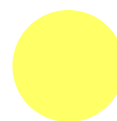
Maintaining a sense of team culture under the blended working approach is a challenge that does not impact solely on Fife Council. Services have implemented well established methods to mitigate the risk of this challenge including through requesting that all team members are working in the office on the same days to increase collaborative working alongside maintaining weekly virtual team huddles and weekly team emails.

<p><b>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?</b></p>	<p><b>Auditor judgement</b></p> <p>Risks exist to the achievement of operational objectives</p>  <p>The Council has appropriate arrangements in place for building future capacity and has developed a range of innovative schemes and initiatives used across services to produce a resilient workforce.</p> <p>The Revenue Budget 2024-27 approved by the Council in February 2024, however, reflects a much more challenging financial landscape over the next three years than in previous years. It is essential that the Council is well prepared for the impact of future budget challenges on the workforce.</p>
<p><b>What progress has the council made with sharing roles or functions across its services and/or with other councils and partners?</b></p>	<p><b>Auditor judgement</b></p> <p>Effective and appropriate arrangements are in place</p>  <p>The Council works collaboratively with its partners and continues to explore opportunities. Through collaborative working, the Council shares knowledge and learns from partners, leading to enhanced service delivery and outcomes.</p>

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

**Auditor judgement**

Risks exist to the achievement of operational objectives



The Council has received positive uptake and feedback on the two workforce planning data tools that they have offered to services, HR and OD practitioners. We are satisfied that performance information and workforce data is being used effectively by services to populate Service People Plans and to identify and respond to workforce challenges.

Annual reports on the OPM are presented to the Reform Board and the Cabinet Committee. The December 2023 report to the Cabinet Committee however was delayed meaning that performance against the OPM has not been presented or scrutinised at a Committee level in nearly two years. We recommend that the Council reviews the timeliness of workforce performance reporting to ensure it allows for effective challenge and scrutiny of workforce planning at a Committee level.

## Definition

We use the following gradings to provide an overall assessment of the arrangements in place as they relate to best value. The text provides a guide to the key criteria we use in the assessment, although not all of the criteria may exist in every case.





# 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 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.

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.

# Workforce strategy and priorities

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.

## The Council's workforce strategy is clear, comprehensive and supports achievement of the Plan for Fife

Fife Council has a clear and comprehensive workforce strategy, Our People Matter (OPM), which was launched in April 2022. The OPM was created in response to the Council's recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic and is integrated with the Reform Agenda and the Digital Strategy, to deliver the Plan for Fife.

To support the Council's current and future workforce needs, the workforce strategy sets out five priority themes:

- Culture & behaviours
- Leadership & management
- Employee experience
- Employee development
- Safety & wellbeing

The development of the current iteration of the OPM was informed by extensive engagement to both help shape the direction and content of the workforce strategy and to engage on the proposed strategy once it was developed. The consultation process involved a range of stakeholder groups including:

- managers at a range of levels who were expected to lead on strategy implementation;
- CLT Organisational Development (OD) Group – consisting of key OD stakeholders and champions at Head of Service level;
- OD and HR professionals and;
- Trade union representatives.

A mid-term review of the OPM was held in November 2023 to help the Council assess whether the workforce strategy remained fit for purpose. Overall, feedback received from this exercise was positive and provided the Council with clear feedback on what was working well and improvement actions to implement within the content and delivery of the OPM.

The Council has developed a further tool to support its workforce planning approach through the requirement for services to produce Service People Plans (SPPs). These plans are linked to the OPM and support the Council's approach to change planning through services identifying solutions and opportunities from their workforce profile. SPPs are reviewed annually to identify common threads or needs across services which are more representative of the Council's workforce challenges as a whole.

## The Council is looking ahead towards preparations for the development of the OPM 2025-2028.

The Council is beginning to undergo preparations for the development of the OPM 2025-2028. A workforce insights report was presented to the Reform Board in May 2024 to inform the next cycle of workforce planning. A further report is due to be presented to the Cabinet Committee in September 2024. The report highlighted to members the Council's current workforce profile and key workforce challenges which included:

- Budgetary Pressures
- Ageing Profile
- Skills Funding
- Next Generation Workforce
- Recruitment Challenges
- Skills Shortage

Due to the positive uptake and engagement with the current iteration of the OPM, the Council is expecting that the OPM 2025-2028 will look very similar in structure and format to the current OPM. It will be updated to reflect current and future

organisational and people priorities, including emerging priorities identified from the refresh of the Plan for Fife.

Aligned with the refreshed OPM, and running over the same time period, the Council is looking to develop a Corporate People Plan for 2025 - 2028. This plan is aimed to build on the key insights from the Service People Plans to clearly set out the actions that are required to be taken at a corporate level to address the current and future gaps in workforce capacity and capability.

Planned engagement and consultation is due to begin in Autumn 2024 for development of a refreshed OPM 2025-2028. A report is due to be presented to the Cabinet Committee in September 2024 which focuses on organisational activity associated with the OPM and workforce planning including looking forward towards the development of the next iteration of the OPM.

# Digital technology and the workforce

The 2023 Local Government Overview report 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 services and more recently, 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.

Appropriate arrangements are in place to enable the delivery of the Council's digital strategy. However, work is still required in developing the leadership and culture of the organisation which will drive digital change and progress. A key challenge for the Council is the creation of capacity within its workforce to enable the review, exploration and development of digital opportunities.

The Council's Digital Strategy sets out its vision for a digital council delivering for Fife. The Digital Strategy is currently being reviewed and is expected to reflect the current and future challenges facing the Council as well as exploiting opportunities which new and emergent technologies can bring.

The Council has established a Digital Portfolio Board (DPB) responsible for setting and overseeing the digital strategy. It is responsible for providing leadership, direction and advocacy to maximise the benefits of its digital infrastructure and data assets both internally and externally with partners.

In 2022, a Digital Skills and Learning Team was established in HR. This team brings together staff from Business Technology Solutions (BTS) and HR. The team's work focusses on increasing the digital skills and confidence of the Council's workforce and digital leadership.

Work is ongoing to develop the right leadership approaches to support change and innovation. Council policies on delivering systems in a re-designed way around People and Place mean a challenge to existing service-specific approaches and culture. Combined with shifts in the way technology is implemented and funded, the Council has recognised that leadership focus and culture will inevitably have to shift to a more holistic and joined-up approach.

Leadership teams within the Council are developing a greater awareness of digital opportunities as well as starting to address the leadership and cultural issues which drive digital change and progress. However, the Council recognises that more work needs to be done in this area. The current Digital Strategy references the organisational development work needed to achieve this. Joint work is underway with BTS and HR to progress this.

One key challenge, however, as identified by the Council, is over the engagement of services to support and trial innovation as digital opportunities arise. Capacity of staff and leadership is the main constraint. If the Council is to fully exploit and explore new opportunities, particularly in the emergence of data-driven approaches and AI and automation, this needs to be addressed.

## The Council continues to develop and implement its use of digital technologies. Specific actions have been taken to address digital exclusion.

Prior to the pandemic, the Council had commenced migration of users to Microsoft Office 365 (M365). The original business case was based on providing employees with more flexibility and introduced the concept of being able to access email and documents from any device, anywhere, including personal phones, laptops, or PCs, referred to as Use Your Own Device (UYOD). This gave the Council a secure, robust platform with which to continue doing business during the pandemic.

Having a Use Your Own Device policy and guidance in place before the pandemic enabled the Council to adopt appropriate arrangements for remote working using Teams. Online and blended meetings via Teams are now part of its workforce culture.

The Council continues to develop its use of digital technologies and since the pandemic has for example, developed:

- A M365 based intranet that is accessible from personal and council mobile devices and PCs.
- Added 'field workers' to M365 allowing employees that previously had no digital footprint access to their payslips and the Intranet.
- Implemented Viva Engage allowing every employee to join communities and discussions.



The Council recognises that people remain at the centre of the development of digital approaches. It actively captures and acts on feedback from its workforce, citizens, pupils, communities, and partners.

The Council has rolled out, on a phased basis, a Digital Champions programme. This is a network of trained ambassadors to encourage digital take up, provide peer support and signposting. BTS has enabled, through the network of Digital Champions, services to fully exploit new capabilities such as Power BI to deliver appropriate technical solutions for themselves. This has proved successful, and the Council is seeking to further extend and develop this model, further opening up opportunities to develop technology around specific service needs.

A baseline digital skills survey was distributed to staff within ten services. The results have been analysed and shared. As well as starting to provide corporate intelligence of digital skill levels and gaps, the findings gives a focus for work at a service level and enables plans to be developed.

A digital training calendar has been launched on the Council's Technology Hub, including virtual, face-to-face, and self-directed training opportunities. The short virtual sessions have been well-attended, and feedback collected from sessions and the plans allows the team to adapt offerings to employee needs.

### **Dive into Digital**

Dive into Digital 2023 marked the second year of the event for Fife Council. The event was a visible, highly promoted, and engaging week which revolved around three key principles:

- Enhancing digital literacy and encouraging the development of digital skills
- Raising awareness and celebrating digital transformations internally and externally
- Looking to the future of digital technology and how this might impact our working and personal lives

The event hosted a total of 32 sessions over five days. There were four in-person events, these sessions included the Digital Champions Networking Session, the Digital Champions and Leaders Gathering and 2 Device Set Up Sessions at Council Depots, one in Cupar and one in Dunfermline. This was in response to feedback from the event in 2022. This allowed the team to reach a wider audience and engage with individuals who may not have direct access to electronic devices.

Overall, feedback from both events was very positive with many generic and direct comments gathered during and after the events.

**Source: HR Digital Skills and Learning Team: Dive into Digital 2023 report**



Across council services there's a range of work to support digital inclusion for potential employees. As part of its community wealth building approach, for example, the Council is trying to remove digital barriers to recruitment. This has included, for example:

- testing simpler application processes for some roles
- providing digital support for applicants at our recent jobs fair

# Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment

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.

## The Council promotes a blended work approach as a staff benefit

Fife Council, in line with other Councils and organisations, had to change workstyles and work locations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council offers a blended working approach which allows eligible employees to work from a combination of home and office work, in line with the requirements of their specific team.

The Council worked closely with trade union representatives to develop and update its flexible working policies including the blended working approach.

As part of the Council's blended working approach, employees can opt in to spend up to 50% of their contracted hours in the office. Of the Council's eligible employees, 94% of those chose to opt into the blended workstyle.

The Council has carried out employee surveys in both 2022 and 2024 which focus on blended working issues. The results from both surveys present positive feedback on the blended approach to working, specifically in relation to work life balance.

The Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022 notes that hybrid working can allow a more flexible and adaptable workforce and for it to work well Councils need to provide staff with a wide range of support, including health and wellbeing support. The Council has recognised the challenges which a blended working approach can have on the wellbeing of its employees and in response, has produced a range of guidance and tools to support the health and wellbeing of its employees. The work undertaken during 2023/24 includes:

- Support Services: Access to physiotherapy, counselling (self-referral option), occupational health and a network of around 90 Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA).

- **Mental Health Training:** Network of in-house trainers delivering Mentally Healthy Workplace full day training for managers and supervisors with 750 completed training to date.
- **Financial Wellbeing:** Promote financial awareness and education sessions led by HR colleagues and delivered by employee benefits providers.
- **Wellbeing Training:** Wellbeing Information Adviser in post who has developed mental health awareness and self-care training which has been delivered 30 times in total to 285 people.

The results from the Council's 2024 Health, Safety & Wellbeing Matters survey highlighted a 11% increase in employee awareness of the internal support services available (counselling, physiotherapy, and mental health first aid) compared to previous years.

Services within the Council have also developed their own initiatives to meet the specific health and wellbeing needs of their teams. Positive feedback and uptake has been received from employees in relation to the introduction of Wellbeing Wednesdays in the Facilities Management service. These occur every second Wednesday and provide an opportunity for teams to come together through a combination of remote and in person attendance, to discuss wellbeing issues and concerns.

Maintaining a sense of team culture under the blended working approach is a challenge that does not impact solely on Fife Council. Services have implemented well established methods to mitigate the risk of this challenge including through requesting that all team members are working in the office on the same days to increase collaborative working alongside maintaining weekly virtual team huddles and weekly team emails.

## The Council has committed to consider increased flexibility for all workstyles

The Council has recognised that only 13% of the workforce are eligible to opt in for their blended working approach and that the majority of services operate through front line workers.

In response to this workforce challenge, the Council has committed to consider degrees of flexibility for all workstyles. Extensive work has been carried out in recent years to understand the different workstyles which make up the Council's workforce. The Council identified six workstyles:

- A- Principal Customer Contact
- B- Principal Customer Contact and Service Facility Role
- C- Direct Care/Service Role

- D- Caseworkers; Fieldwork; Supervision, or Inspection Role
- E1 & E2- Support and Organisation Role

The Council worked with Flexibility Works to explore the impact of current working patterns and explore potential flexibility opportunities with a group of frontline workers in Adult Services, as detailed in the exhibit below.

#### **Fife Council Adult Services working patterns review**

In July 2023, Flexibility Works undertook a survey of Fife Council employees working within Adult Services to explore their views and experiences on their current working patterns as frontline workers.

The survey looked at the current working arrangements for this group of staff and what key things could make the most difference to support their wellbeing.

Recommendations from this work to be implemented by the Council include:

- Being clearer about flexible working opportunities during the recruitment process.
- Reviewing current staff needs at regular one-to-one meetings
- Reviewing shift patterns to ensure these balance staff preferences and need.

**Source: Fife Council Adult Services Front-Line Workers Survey Findings Report and Fife Council response to Best Value Thematic Review**

Based on the results of the pilot work with Adult Services, the Council is keen to roll out similar exercises to explore flexible working opportunities in more groups of front line workers. The Council's HR team currently faces resource and capacity challenges which has however delayed further development of work in this area.

### **The Council has not been able to demonstrate efficiencies through the impact on productivity**

Services within the Council are facing the challenge of being able to measure productivity of workers that have opted into the blended working approach and to be able to conclude on whether employees are more or less productive under this style of working.

The Council's HR team is currently exploring productivity measures for each of the Council's six identified workstyles. A set of productivity principles have been drafted but the Council recognises that there is further work required in this area before an output to allow productivity of flexible working to be measured is available to be implemented across services. In line with the work on flexible working opportunities, resource and capacity challenges are cited as the main factor preventing further progress being made in this area of workforce planning.

# Developing future skills and capacity

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.

## The Council makes good use of its existing workforce and is developing the skills needed to deliver future services

The Council has effective and appropriate arrangements in place for building future capacity through schemes including:

- Life chances approach to recruitment
- Employability initiatives
- Workforce Youth Investment
- Foundation/Modern Apprenticeships
- Princes Trust
- Career Ready

In this section of our report, we have highlighted specific examples which demonstrate the innovative schemes and initiatives produced by the Council to develop a resilient workforce.

### Life Chances Model

The Council's Life Chances approach to employability and recruitment was introduced in June 2023 as part of the Council's commitment to Community Wealth Building. The aim of the model is to provide employment opportunities and reduce poverty in difficult to reach areas of Fife.

The first phase of the approach has been completed which saw 20 life chances opportunities hosted across several services including, waste operations, grounds maintenance, contact centres, matrix fife, home care and housing. The

implementation of phase two of the model was approved by the Reform Board in April 2024 and evolves the first phase model beyond the current offer of a guaranteed interview to participants who successfully complete their programme to offering a ringfenced or guaranteed job.

The Council is expecting to continue to develop and realise the benefits of this programme over the next few years.

### **Apprenticeships**

Fife Council has robust arrangements in place for delivering employability programmes including foundation and modern apprenticeships. The Council's employability team co-ordinate the Modern Apprentice contract for Fife Council, ensuring apprenticeships are available as a way to "Learn and Earn". The Council's Building Services has undertaken extensive work which looks at attracting potential apprentice applicants from early stages within their education, as detailed in the exhibit below.

#### **Building Services Training Unit and approach to apprenticeships**

The Council's Building Services Training Unit has been working closely with schools and colleges for the past two years to attract pupils who are keen to enter a trade.

As well as attending careers fairs, they organise apprentice workshops and carry out targeted work with S2 pupils to help them make subject choices for S3 and S4 for pathways into employment.

The number of successful trade apprenticeship candidates direct from school in 2023/24 has increased by 1.2% to 39.4%. Three years before starting this programme the percentage of pupils coming straight from school to be an apprentice was between 12-18%.

**Source: Fife Council response to Best Value Thematic Review and meetings with service managers.**

### **Grow your own**

Grow your own schemes to develop new and existing employees is one of the most used methods by Council services for developing future skills and succession planning. The Council's Environmental Services has a high vacancy rate and is currently using grow your own schemes through working with the National Food Standards Scotland to grow its own and train existing staff, as detailed in the exhibit below.

#### **Environmental Service and grow your own**

The Environmental Health (Food & Workplace Safety) Team has a vacancy rate of approximately 23% for its current establishment. SPPs identified gaps in the team to be able to effectively carry out all activities.

During 2023, two Trainee Environmental Health Officers obtained their professional qualifications, and both took up Environmental Health Officer

positions. Despite this the Environmental Health (Food & Workplace Safety) Team has continued to experience difficulty in recruiting Environmental Health Officers as well as ongoing vacancies.

In recognition of the difficulty in recruiting, consideration was given to working on a proposal for an Alternative Delivery Model through upskilling and utilising other roles within the Environmental Health (Food & Workplace Safety) Team such as Environmental Health Technicians and Enforcement Officers to carry out food law activities. This has led to positive engagement with Food Standards Scotland, who are welcoming the opportunity to work with the Environmental Health (Food & Workplace Safety) Team, in developing a new route to authorisation for food law activities as a pilot, with the intention of providing updated guidelines for the training and authorisation of officers via an updated Food Law Code of Practice and Competency Matrix.

**Source: Fife Council response to Best Value Thematic Review and meetings with service managers.**

## Partnerships with Education Bodies

Fife College, St Andrews University and the Department of Work and Pensions are all represented on the Fife Partnership Board and input to the Plan for Fife. The Council has relationships with universities for a range of its professional roles including Education, Social Work and Planning. In response to vacancies and retention challenges within health social care jobs, Fife Health and Social Care Partnership has developed a Care Academy with Fife College to look at innovative ways to support the social care workforce, as detailed in the exhibit below.

### Fife Health and Social Care Partnership Care Academy

HR's Workforce Development Team (WDT) has engaged with Fife College Care Academy to facilitate further workforce development opportunities for the Health and Social Care Partnership workforce. This is funded externally and incurs no cost for Fife Council.

The Care Academy model delivers qualifications and training programmes aligned to the Health and Social Care sector needs. This arrangement facilitates council staff access to the Care Academy's programmes including:

- Funded provision of vocational learning programmes for relief staff and staff who are self-funded who do not meet eligibility criteria via the assessment centre
- Funded programmes at higher national level and not available via the assessment centre to support workforce retention and progression.

**Source: Fife Council response to Best Value Thematic Review and meetings with service managers.**



## Premature Retirement

Directorates use SPPs to consider where they need to consider increasing skills and capacity in the workforce. The Council's Education service identified challenges through a lack opportunities for newly qualified teachers due to an ageing workforce. The Council developed a scheme for premature retirement in response to these workforce challenges, as detailed in the exhibit below.

### Education and premature retirement

Through the SPP process, the Council's Education service identified that teacher staffing levels in the primary school sector were saturated, meaning a lack of vacancies for newly qualified teachers. From the Council's workforce profile it was also identified that a considerable number of teachers were approaching normal retirement age, presenting a risk for the future.

Normally teachers retiring early would lose pension benefits through actuarial reduction, making it unattractive for staff. The Council therefore developed a scheme to fund the cost of the actuarial reduction so that eligible primary teachers could leave early without reduced benefits.

To date, payroll and finance have preliminarily assessed around 120 applications to check if costs of funding premature retirement in this way would be met by the salary saving from appointing newly qualified teachers at the lower of the main grade teaching scale.

This exercise is in its final stages, and the Council expects that 28 permanent primary teaching opportunities will be made available through this scheme, which will be built into Education's workforce planning process going forward.

**Source: Fife Council response to Best Value Thematic Review and meetings with service managers.**

In recent years Fife Council has managed its budget without the need to make any reductions to its workforce. It is important that the Council is prepared for future budget challenges.

Fife Council has managed its budget without needing to make workforce reductions in recent years. However, the Revenue Budget 2024-27 approved by the Council in February 2024 reflects a much more challenging financial landscape over the next 3 years. This presents the risk that options to close budget gaps will impact on the current workforce.

Change plans were re-introduced by the Council during 2022/23 with a shift of focus to a three-year planning horizon to ensure initiatives move away from 'salami slicing' and focus on service redesign and transformation. This process is still in development with finalised change plans expected to be in place by the end of March 2025. The Council has recognised that through the development of change



proposals, further workforce challenges will emerge. It is essential that the Council is well prepared for the impact of future budget challenges on its workforce.

The Council has appropriate arrangements in place for when workforce reductions are required. Any reductions are required to be actioned by services in accordance with the Council's Managing Change Procedure. This has been negotiated with recognised Trade Unions and reflects good practice and legislative requirements. The Council also has a robust redeployment procedure to support managers when considering appropriate alternatives to redundancy. To ensure transparent reporting of redundancies, the Council reports quarterly to its elected members on any redundancies across the workforce to ensure appropriate levels of monitoring and scrutiny.

# Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners

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 between councils, and services delivered through empowered communities.

The Council works collaboratively with its partners and continues to explore opportunities. Through collaborative working, the Council shares knowledge and learns from partners, leading to enhanced service delivery and outcomes.

The Council recognises the benefits from working collaboratively with partners. Such workforce benefits include, for example:

- Resource savings particularly in respect of duplication of effort.
- Consistent approaches.
- Building communities of practice.
- Knowledge transfer, sharing, learning and supporting each other.

Systems are a key barrier to shared working. Where barriers can't be overcome easily, creative solutions are developed to overcome the barriers.

## Examples of collaborative working

The Opportunities Fife Partnership has developed a commissioning framework which sets out the partnership's intentions, principles and priorities which underpin local commissioning of employability and skills provision over the period 2023 – 2025. The framework was developed from collaborative conversations under the banner of No One Left Behind. The partnership organisations are Fife Council, Fife College, Fife Health and Social Care Partnership, NHS Fife, Department of Work and Pensions, Skills Development Scotland, Fife Voluntary Action, Developing the Young Workforce and Fife Chambers of Commerce.

The Community Wealth Building Partnership Board works collaboratively with partners in Fife to support the development and delivery of community wealth building activities. This includes initiatives such as the Life Chances model, an approach which opens up pathways for those who have found it difficult to gain employment. Opportunities are focussed on our entry levels posts, some of which can be hard to fill and this in turn creates a pool of candidates for jobs, supporting our workforce planning needs.

**Source: Fife Council response to Best Value Thematic Review**

Fife Council's Digital Skills and Learning collaboration work encompasses a variety of initiatives aimed at enhancing digital skills and fostering collaboration across different sectors and organisations. Examples include:

**Tay Cities Deal Digital Leadership Programme:** This initiative seeks funding from the Tay Cities Deal to establish a Digital Leadership Programme for public sector leaders in the Tay Cities Region, which includes Fife, Perth & Kinross, Angus, and Dundee. The proposed programme will focus on modernising local government services, enhancing efficiency, and fostering innovation through collaboration, sharing resources, knowledge, and best practice. Running over 24 months with flexible engagement levels, the programme includes a 6-month virtual mentorship program to match senior leaders with emerging digital talent within the councils for knowledge transfer and upskilling. This programme aims to facilitate digital evolution and provide specific support for senior managers who are facing similar challenges. It represents a concerted effort to tackle a gap in the public sector, where existing provisions cannot strategically target the distinct demands of the region's digital ecosystem.

**SDPS Digital Portfolio Group:** This is one of several Portfolio Groups set up by the Society of Personal and Development Scotland. The group's terms of reference focus on digital transformation and digital development of the local government workforce within Scotland. Members are HR and OD Professionals from across Scottish Councils. The SPDS Digital group holds meetings to discuss various aspects of digital development aligned with workforce strategy. A representative from HR (Digital Skills and Learning Team) is an active member of the group. As well as contributing to discussions on digital transformation within the workforce of Scotland, the group works with the Scottish Local Digital Office sharing experience with AI tools and their potential impact on different roles and sectors as well as the ethical considerations.

**NES Digital and Data Skills Hub:** The NES (NHS Education for Scotland) Digital and Data Skills Resource Hub has been launched to provide health and social care workers, including those in local authorities, charities, and the third sector, with access to over 200 free resources to enhance their digital and data skills. Working with NES and the Society for Personnel and Development Scotland (SPDS) Fife Council has signed up for full access to the hub and aims to roll it out

to Digital Champions and Leaders first and then to all Fife Council employees. A representative from HR (Digital Skills and Learning Team) is also part of the NES Digital Leader's Programme.

**Source: Fife Council response to Best Value Thematic Review**

In 2024 following a pilot programme, the Council was appointed as the host authority on the creation of a permanent Building Standards Hub.

### **Scottish Building Standards Hub (SBSH)**

The SBSH is an independent stand-alone specialist unit hosted within Fife Council supporting local authority building standards services across all 32 Scottish local authorities and wider industry. The vision of the SBSH is to support transformation and improvement in building standards.

The service provided by the SBSH to local authority building standards services and wider industry is delivered across three areas:

- By delivering a range of building standards system services
- By supporting hubs of expertise and operational partnerships
- By supporting learning and development.

The SBSH operates and manages a web-based Learning Management System (LMS) containing digitised learning and training material specifically for building standards practitioners working for local authority building standards services in Scotland. It supports the provision of CPD and training either provided directly or in conjunction with industry partners and stakeholders.

The SBSH supports national workforce development and strategy, including LABSS ambassador's networks, modern and graduate apprenticeship schemes and delivering lectures.

The SBSH operates and manages a web-based validation of skills system specifically for building standards practitioners working for local authority building standards services in Scotland.

**Source: Fife Council response to Best Value Thematic Review / Building Standards Hub SBSH Business Plan Draft**

# Measuring the impact of workforce planning

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 actively monitors progress in implementing its workforce strategy and plans but timeliness of reporting to Committee could be improved**

Annual reports on the OPM are presented to the Reform Board and the Cabinet Committee. The reports include an update on the Council's progress against the success measures and progress against both corporate and directorate actions set out within the OPM.

The Success Measures within the OPM are:

- Employee voice
- Recruitment and retention
- Personal performance
- Attendance and wellbeing
- Learning and development
- Equalities
- Health and safety
- Workforce flexibility

The Council has developed a suite of performance indicators which directly link to the success measures within the OPM. The indicators are included in the OPM annual reports and support capturing measurable progress of performance against each success measure.

Annual reports have been presented to the Reform Board in May 2023 and 2024. However, the latest report to Cabinet Committee was due to be presented in December 2023 and has been delayed to September 2024. The main reason for the delay in reporting is that in December 2023 the Council had not yet developed its

workforce insight and the date of reporting did not align with the directorates OPM self-assessment exercise, meaning that the full workforce picture for the Council could not be accurately presented at that point in time. We acknowledge that this is an appropriate reason for delaying performance reporting, however, this has meant that performance against the OPM has not been presented or scrutinised by the at a Committee level in nearly two years.

### **Improvement Action 1**

We also raised concerns around the timeliness of the Council's performance reporting as part of our 2022/23 Annual Audit Report. The Council is currently working through our recommendations with a revised approach to performance reporting and service plans expected to be introduced in 2025. The Council is looking to integrate service workforce planning priorities and metrics as part of this process.

## **Services have access to a wide range of robust workforce data to aid in decision making**

The Council has developed two key workforce planning data and analysis tools to support leaders at all levels, HR and OD practitioners. The tools are a specialist Oracle reporting functionality and a PowerBI dashboard. These are used to inform workforce planning considerations, monitor the effectiveness of SPPs and drive forward strategic initiatives.

Both tools are user friendly, interactive and searchable allowing users to filter and analyse data, for example by directorate, service, budget head, age, grade, gender, contract type and person status, in order to understand their current and future workforce profile. The Oracle reporting functionality also produces live data for users to analyse as part of this process.

The Council has received positive uptake and feedback on both of these workforce planning data tools. Work is ongoing to develop the functionality of the tools based on feedback received from services, to ensure that all workforce data needs are available to users in a timely manner.

A number of key staff surveys are issued by the HR team including a Heartbeat Survey, optional follow-up Pulse Surveys, Health, Safety & Wellbeing survey, iMatters within the HSCP and Staffwise within Education. These are regularly reviewed by HR to understand what is going well and areas of improvement against the Council's current workforce planning arrangements. Services also use the results of the surveys to inform the production of their SPPs and to allow them to identify and respond to workforce challenges.

# Appendix 1- Improvement Action Plan

Issue / risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action / timing
<p><b>1. Timeliness of performance reporting against the OPM</b></p> <p>Annual reports on the OPM are presented to the Reform Board and the Cabinet Committee.</p> <p>The latest annual report was due to be presented to the Cabinet Committee in December 2023. This was delayed and is now expected to be considered in September 2024.</p> <p>There is a risk that the Council's performance against its workforce strategy is not appropriately scrutinised on a timely basis.</p>	<p>We recommend that the Council reviews the timeliness of workforce performance reporting to ensure it allows for effective challenge and scrutiny of workforce planning at a Committee level.</p>	<p>A workforce strategy performance report will be considered by the Cabinet Committee at their meeting on 12th September 2024. Annual reports will be submitted to Committee going forward.</p> <p>Responsible officer: Head of HR</p> <p>Implementation date: September 2024</p>

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