
To: Audit, Risk & Scrutiny Board

On: 23 September 2024

Report by: Director of Finance & Resources

Heading: Best Value thematic work – Workforce innovation

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 [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. 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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?

1.4 The report attached at Appendix 1 outlines the external auditors' (Azets) findings in relation to the above questions within Renfrewshire Council. The report outlines key messages, detailed findings and suggested areas for improvement. The report also includes an indication of planned management actions in response to the recommendations made by Azets.

2. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Board:

2.1 Note the report from the Council's external auditor in relation to workforce innovation and agree the accompanying action plan.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – none

2. **HR & Organisational Development** – as outlined in the report.

3. **Community/Council Planning** –
Working together to improve outcomes – the report outlines several examples of how the Council works in partnership with other stakeholders to ensure the workforce is supported and developed to remain healthy, well trained and able to deliver quality Council services.

4. **Legal** – none
5. **Property/Assets** – none.
6. **Information Technology** - none.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - the recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified.
8. **Health & Safety** - none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** - none
11. **Privacy Impact** - none
12. **Climate Risk** – not applicable
13. **Children's Rights** – none
14. **Cosla Policy Position** – not applicable

Author: Raymond Cree, Head of People and OD



Renfrewshire Council

Workforce Innovation – how councils are responding to workforce challenges

Best Value thematic work in councils 2023-24

September 2024



Table of Contents

Key messages	3
Scope of the audit	9
Workforce strategy and priorities	11
Digital technology and the workforce	14
Flexible working and other innovative staff deployment	21
Developing future skills and capacity	24
Joint workforce arrangements across services and partners	28
Measuring the impact of workforce planning	33
Appendix 1- Improvement Action Plan	35

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  Renfrewshire Council has a comprehensive high level workforce strategy and People Strategy supported by a number of other high level policies and strategies. The Council adopted a flexible approach to its strategy, by setting up clear priorities for the first two years and by delegating the responsibility and ownership for workforce management to the individual Services to better meet their needs. Therefore, the workforce risk assessment, operational priorities and implementation, and monitoring are done at service level though Service Improvement Plans.
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. The Council implemented a number of automatic processes to drive efficiency and innovation in its workforce. 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 offers a variety of digital training to its workforce. It also acknowledges that a more recent digital skills assessment is required to better understand any skill gaps. The Council actively engages with its communities to deliver services in more innovative way to tackle digital exclusion. The Council's work has been recognised as best practice example in Accounts Commission report on digital exclusion. There is

awareness of the need, and drive for continuous improvement in this area.

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

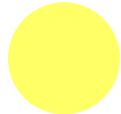
Risks exist to the achievement of operational objectives



The Council continuously reviews its approach to flexible working and provides staff with support and guidance.

Staff feedback is obtained in variety of ways and considers impact of flexible working on staff wellbeing.

The Council considers staff benefits and wider sociological changes when considering new ways of working. Evidence of measurable efficiencies tracking has been limited and the Council has not been able to demonstrate efficiencies from flexible working through, for example, an impact on productivity.

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?	Auditor judgement Risks exist to the achievement of operational objectives  The Council makes good use of its existing workforce and is developing the skills needed to deliver future services. The Council engages with the local education providers to develop and support its workforce skills. The Council has to yet develop comprehensive measurable performance indicators to demonstrate the benefits it provides through its work on developing workforce skills and capacity.
What progress has the council made with sharing roles or functions across its services and/or with other councils and partners?	Auditor judgement Effective and appropriate arrangements are in place  The Council works collaboratively with its partners and continues to explore opportunities for working together. Through collaborative working, the Council shares knowledge and learns from partners, leading to enhanced service delivery and outcomes. An example of a partnership working is where the Council works in collaboration with Inverclyde Council, East Renfrewshire Council, and West Dunbartonshire Council to deliver a civil contingencies service which supports business continuity and emergency planning across these Council areas.

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’s monitoring of progress in implementing its Workforce People Strategy could be improved in terms of its clarity over the status of individual objectives and the wider use of measurable performance indicators. Reporting in Service Improvement Plans currently provides limited information on progress against People Strategy objectives. Benefits tracking of the Council’s workforce approach is done only at a high 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 Audit Scotland 2023 Local Government Overview (LGO) Report 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 cost and resource pressure.

This report sets out how the council is responding to current workforce challenges through building capacity and 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 our Best Value audit requirements in relation to workforce. 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.

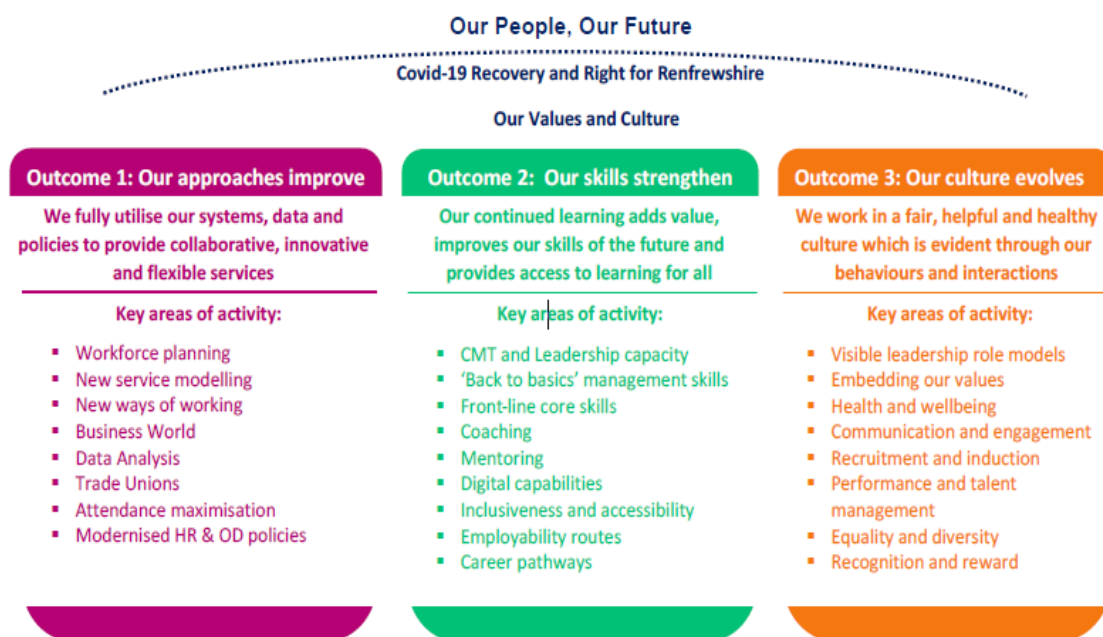
A council focused on achieving Best Value will have a workforce strategy that sets out expectations on how the local authority's staff will deliver its vision, priorities and values.

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.

Renfrewshire Council has a workforce of 8,500 people across its five services and people costs represent a significant proportion of overall Council expenditure..

Renfrewshire council has a comprehensive high level People Strategy, supported by a flexible approach to priorities with ownership of workforce objectives set at the service line level.

This Strategy was approved in 2021 by the Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board and its themes were aligned to the new Council Plan strategic priorities during its first review in 2023. The Strategy contains three strategic outcomes as shown below.



Source: The People Strategy 2021-26

During the development of the Strategy the Council engaged with its service departments, employees and trade unions. There has been training on virtual working and a set of new and revised policies created to support new ways of working.

The Council adopted a flexible approach to its strategy, by setting up clear priorities for the first two years and by delegating the responsibility and ownership for managing of the workforce to the individual Services to better meet their needs. Therefore, the workforce risk assessment, operational priorities and implementation, and monitoring are done at this level though Service Improvement Plans.

The first two years of the strategy were focused on tackling COVID-19 related challenges:

1. The health and wellbeing of the staff
2. Exploring new ways of working post COVID-19
3. Building on staff communication and engagement.

In addition to the main workforce strategy and Service Improvement Plans, the Council has in place a number of other documents to support its workforce planning. These additional documents include:

- Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Equality 2021-2025 which provides a statutory biannual update on our equality progress and outlines new equality outcomes, including a range of workforce planning and organisational development activity.

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan which outlines the plan to deliver inclusion, enhancing the staff experience and become the best place for people to work.
- 'Your Health Matters' – Health and Wellbeing Plan 2024 – 2029 which sets out our vision for employee health and wellbeing.
- Renfrewshire Health & Social Care partnership – Shaping our workforce' Workforce Plan 2022-2025 which aim to make sure they have a workforce which is fit for purpose and is enabled to deliver to meet the current and future needs of those who rely upon their services.

The focus of the strategy is currently shifting from post COVID reaction to different objectives in line with the changing needs of the workplace. The priorities for the next two years were set as follows:

- Improve employee experience to evolve the Council's culture.
- Workforce Planning to support service redesigns.
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

At the beginning of 2024 the Council established the Corporate Workforce Planning Group, consisting of heads of services and with the main aim to drive and monitor the Council's People Strategy priorities and outcomes. The first task will be to focus on the objectives for the next two years.

In September 2023 a progress report on the People Strategy was provided to Trade Unions and Elected Members. The report to Elected Members outlined discussions with the Trade Unions to reset the Council's People Strategy priorities for the next 2 years. The recommendations contained within the progress report were approved by Elected Members. It was agreed that the next progress report would be provided to Elected Members on 31st March 2025, however plans are in place to bring this progress report forward to the November Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board. This report will contain progress across the key themes outlined above and work undertaken by officers to refresh the People Strategy with a new future framework and vision, looking beyond 2026.

All service reviews are carried out in consultation with staff. Trade unions are involved throughout the process and agree to the workforce changes. Any new operating model proposed within services will consider future skills requirements of the workforce. On occasion, the Council may seek to transfer staff in or out of the organisation using TUPE regulations, which would include statutory consultation with trade unions and staff impacted by the transfer.

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. The Council implemented a number of automatic processes to drive efficiency and innovation in its workforce. A key challenge for the Council is the creation of capacity within its workforce to enable the review, exploration and development of digital opportunities.

Implementing new ways of working post pandemic is one of the key priorities of the People Strategy. Closely aligned to this are priorities, agreed in the council's Digital Strategy to equip staff to work smarter, understanding where to invest in skills and training, closing current and future digital skills gaps and reducing digital barriers/exclusion.

The council was prepared well for the pandemic by having the IT infrastructure in place before we were forced to work from home and:

- ICT infrastructure was already configured to accommodate secure home working, and was quickly upscaled to meet the significantly increased requirement when the pandemic started.
- It allowed the Council to continue to deliver services when everyone was required to work from home during lockdown. This readiness was not common across the whole of Scotland.

The Council established the Digital Board three years ago to oversee all the projects within the digital portfolio, understand and prioritise resource requirements within the existing constraints, and to support successful delivery, helping to overcome challenges and barriers that may impede progress. The Digital Board has a broad remit to support the project owner in providing overall direction and management for the portfolio, embracing a corporate approach to delivering on digital outcomes and in turn Council outcomes. This Board sits in the governance structure at the strategic level, is chaired by the head of Digital, Transformation and Customer Services, with a councillor as a digital champion, and a number of specialists from other services, including HR and Finance. In practical terms the board prioritises and supports project deliverables, signs off business cases, monitors the progress and provides support and expertise. Reporting to the Digital Board there are two layers of digital programme delivery:

1. Programme managers and the Programme Management Office responsible for identification and tracking of the benefits.
2. Project delivery teams resourced from service teams.

The Council has an internal digital programme in place to support its objectives and split into seven individual projects that focus on improving customer experience and making work of the council more efficient and innovative. The key initiatives relating to the workforce include:

- Promoting digital leaders as role models to lead by example and change the appetite for digital working.
- Issued a Digital Strategy Questionnaire to its leaders to understand current digital capabilities and challenges to inform on the digital strategy and roadmap.
- Introduced Digital Champions to provide peer support and build digital confidence and capacity across the workforce. Digital Champions are employees with an interest in technology, systems or new ways of working and are passionate about helping colleagues grow their digital skills. Digital Champions will often already be a go to for digital questions within their team. They provide peer-to-peer support within their services and teams to support digital enablement.
- Introduced online safety ambassadors who are volunteers who have been trained to help their colleagues and friends stay safe online. Over 140 Online Safety Ambassadors have been trained so far with more training sessions lined up.

The Council introduced a number of internal digital tools to support better workforce:

1. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) with multi-business functionality. It is predominantly a people and organisational development and management

system containing people data, with a reporting capability on people metrics, absence, ethnicity, establishment/FTEs, leavers, etc. This system has been integrated with the iLearn so managers have live visibility of training undertaken by every staff member and can monitor uptake, progress and completion of mandatory training.

2. Electronic payslips for most of its workforce, with the target of providing it to all employees by 2025. It generates savings and supports the green agenda.
3. MS Teams is widely used for virtual meetings, collaboration and calls, recently replacing desk phones.
4. Absence statistics are now generated from our Business World ERP system, eliminating the need for lots of manual interventions across several teams to generate information.
5. P2P is a new strategic council project, which is improving the set of processes that covers the activities of requesting, purchasing, receiving, paying, and accounting for goods, services and works.

Recruitment automation and digital improvements

A Robotic Process Automation capability was utilised to automate the indexing of references to NEC Document Management, which is the electronic document management system, significantly reducing processing times for obtaining references and enabling managers to review references on the same day they were received. This automation minimised manual interventions and accelerated the overall recruitment process.

The use of 'Dash', an online form capability, for requesting candidates ID documents, which are automatically uploaded by the robotics team, along with sending references and automated chasers to referees every 48 hours, greatly improved the efficiency of obtaining references and ensured timely follow-ups. The reduction in the average number of days to complete a recruitment pack from 79 in 2022 to 19 in 2023 is a clear indicator of the efficiency gains from utilising Dash and robotics.

Leveraging NECDM to pre-populate employment contracts reduced manual entry errors and expedited the contract creation process, enhancing overall recruitment efficiency.

Processing advert requests through Business World ERP via the vacant position form function allowed for seamless updates on advert status and streamlined workflows from managers, to HR, and back to the recruitment team, ensuring smoother communication and quicker processing times.

More efficient processes that reduced and mitigated delays through implementing an internal 'MyJobScotland' (MJS) online recruitment portal, which sends

automated emails to managers when a job is posted and closed, improved communication and ensured all stakeholders are promptly informed, reducing the risk of delays.

The Council offers a variety of digital training to its workforce. It also acknowledges that a more recent digital skills assessment is required to better understand any skill gaps.

The Council relaunched iLearn in Summer 2024 which is an online staff learning management system that helps the Council to deliver on its values and aligns to People Strategy 'Our skills strengthen' objective. It includes mandatory training modules and reporting functionality and a wide range of accessible employment-related courses, including corporate induction and a comprehensive information resource for all people joining the Council. Training on various mandatory and non-mandatory modules can be accessed on a range of different devices (work and personal), such as a laptop, desktop, tablet or even handheld devices such as smartphones. Recent data shows that 37% of total workforce have accessed training.

Using the Government's Flexible Workforce Development Fund and funding secured from the trade union Unison, the Council partnered with West College Scotland to deliver courses on basic digital skills for frontline workforce.

In 2018 the Council assessed the digital training needs of its workforce through an internal survey. The results were formally considered by the Council's Leader's Forum during an interactive session on 'A Skilled Workforce' which enabled feedback on Digital and ICT areas such as Business World ERP, MS Office, specialised systems such as Building Information Modelling and GIS, social media and infographics.

In 2021 the Council performed a Digital Maturity Assessment which acknowledges the priority need for a digital skills assessment to be carried out on the wider workforce, which will be enabled through workforce plans and utilising Digital Champions networks to better understand the skills gaps across the workforce. The Digital Champions group was set up as a result of the insights gained from this assessment.

The recruitment team recognised a need for creating more efficiency through reducing the time taken from advertising to filling vacant positions across the Council. They identified a barrier to this reduction was in obtaining references from candidates' nominated referees. This resulted in a number of new digital solutions being implemented to address this identified obstacle to efficient recruitment.

The Council actively engages with its communities to deliver services in more innovative way to tackle digital exclusion. The

Council's work has been recognised as best practice example in Accounts Commission report on digital exclusion. There is awareness of the need, and drive for continuous improvement in this area.

The Customer Strategy for the Council was developed following consultation with customers and senior staff across the Council. The strategy aims to build on the successes of the previous Customer Strategy and is developed across four key themes of Customer Contact, Technology and Innovation, Service Design and Culture and Skills. This aligns to People Strategy 'Our Skills Strengthen' outcome, combining 2 areas of activity - digital skills and front-line core skills, developing the skills of our Customer Services staff to support customers who need more complex, sensitive or urgent assistance. A number of initiatives and projects in this area is outlined below.

The Chief Executives Service have been working collaboratively, using **Co-Design methodologies** to shape Council services with residents. This involves gaining insights from residents for each iteration of a new design to ensure it meets their needs. Organised in partnership by between Renfrewshire Council and the Third Sector Interface "Engage Renfrewshire" employees, the DigiRen network collaborates across multiple sectors, including closely with residence, public sector, third sector, social housing sector, academia and local business. The goal is to aid individuals in navigating online, acquiring essential digital skills, and promoting internet safety.

Enabling Digital Inclusion in Renfrewshire through #DigiRen was highlighted in the recently published Audit Scotland report on "Tacking Digital Exclusion" as a Case Study.

Citizens Voice Forum was established by Renfrewshire Council and seeks to co-design digital inclusion solutions by taking a person-centred and place-based approach and by working with organisations involved in delivering digital inclusion as well as those impacted by digital exclusion.

The Forum brings together Public and Third Sector organisations and is progressing the following priorities:

- Building Confidence, Capability and Capacity through Digital Champions and a Digital Champions Network
- Develop and implement Digizones – a place where people can Connect, Learn & Explore through having online access and offers a variety of services to enhance a person's digital experience – these are being rolled out from October 2024.
- Linked to employability, establish a community-led secure device recycling initiative – in progress.

Get Safe Online works with the police force and local communities to provide up-to-date online safety advice. Provider of Renfrewshire's Online Safety Ambassador programme "RenSafeOnline" training helps volunteers from the community as well as the workforce support friends and colleagues with online safety advice. This also supports New Ways of Working objective of the People Strategy with employees who work within the hybrid working model and other remote locations.

Digital Operations is a project encourages residents in the community to interact with the Council digitally when accessing council services.

These changes and initiatives have led to a considerable shift towards digital self-service, creating capacity and resulting in significantly fewer calls and requests for face-to-face appointments with customer service staff.

The Council has also created a community of volunteers to support those who are digitally excluded by providing help with upskilling residents/service users. Since May 2023, the Digital Champions programme has:

- Supported 619 Learners across 6 libraries.
- Issued 121 pre-loaded data SIMs to families from a low-income household.
- Built a team of 17 Committed Digital Champion volunteers.
- Collectively delivered 864.5 Vol hours. 739 this year alone.

A Digital Champions Network has now launched, and is available to all Digital Champions, or organisations hosting Digital Champions across Renfrewshire.

The space aims to:

- Connect Digital Champions with other Digital Champions and provide a space for Peer-to-Peer support and networking.
- Provide up to date information to all Digital Champions or local third sector groups and training offers.
- Provide space for organisations to request the support of other Digital Champions in the area.

The Council aims to improve its digital systems further. Renfrewshire.gov.uk, MyAccount, the intranet, and the emails can be improved by several changes it wants to make based on the communities feedback on the user experience, information access, clarity and variety of sources being available. As part of the council's Digital Experience programme, which has been identified by Elected Members, citizens, and the Council Management Team as a priority, the Council is looking to fix these challenges and go further with a more innovative digital experience for our users.

Robotic Process Automation

As part of the Council's Customer Strategy approved in November 2023, the Council has been exploring Integrated Robotic Process Automation (RPA). This will enhance the choice the council offers to its customers via Customer Service Centre, expanding some services to a 24/7 operation for certain routine transactional services. RPA is running 52 processes mostly within the Business Services area and now branching out to the rest of the council. The automated assistant will support further reduction in telephone demand to the Council and has the potential to release recurring savings from the Customer Operations team.

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 continuously reviews its approach to flexible working and provides staff with support and guidance.

Renfrewshire 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 service and role.

The council has a wide range of flexible working arrangements across the teams, using non-standard working hours, compressed working hours and developing a supportive, people-centred team, support colleagues returning from long-term sick or managing significant health concerns. The Council also operates a flexi time scheme for staff to provide flexibility with start and finish times out with the Council's core working hours.

The flexible working policy is seeking to:

- Embrace new ways of working which can support improved work-life balance and maintain health and wellbeing.
- Help attract and retain a skilled and diverse workforce.
- Embed a culture across the Council where flexible working is seen by all levels as a benefit with positive outcomes and can support the needs of modern families and lifestyles.
- Provide consistency for managing flexible working requests equally, fairly, reasonably and without undue delay in accordance with legislation.

- Support the Council with organisational change to ensure future, sustainable service delivery.

The Council operates a hybrid working model which is an informal flexible working arrangement within the flexible working policy. This model was first adopted in response to COVID19 challenges and has been positive, benefiting colleagues, communities, and the Council, helping to maintain an agile and sustainable working environment and supporting a positive work-life balance.

The Council has invested significantly in future-proofing its infrastructure through its Connectivity as a Service Framework. This provision has enabled its workforce to work from any Council venue across Renfrewshire and once fully rolled out will broadcast free secure public access Wi-Fi from up to 180 council venues, including in 3 of its town centres, further enabling digital inclusion opportunities to Renfrewshire citizens and communities.

The Council has committed to continue with these arrangements, allowing ongoing flexibility, without the need to formally apply for hybrid working. Guidance on managing hybrid working issued in June 2022 for managers consideration, outlining the key factors in applying hybrid working and best practice from the past experiences.

Following that period the Council has also reflected on the current practices and the Head of HR together with other leaders considered the post pandemic ways of working, the types of the tasks and roles, facilities available including collaboration space and key factors influencing creating culture of flexible workforce. Remote/Fixed/Hybrid positions have been verified with heads of services.

The Supporting Menopause at Work Policy

The Supporting Menopause at Work Policy was approved by elected members in August 2022 as part of the ongoing HR&OD Policy Review, was a proactive approach taken by the council for supporting colleagues' wellbeing at every stage of life. Almost three quarters of our workforce are female and therefore we recognise that many female colleagues will be working through the perimenopause and menopause transition and managing the symptoms at work. We know that many people feel uncomfortable talking about the perimenopause and menopause, which means that some women suffer in silence while experiencing a wide range of symptoms that can affect their physical as well as mental health.

The Council obtains staff feedback in variety of ways and considers impact of flexible working on staff wellbeing.

A staff survey was carried out in June 2021 to capture how staff were feeling and coping coming out of covid restrictions. Analysis of the data helped to inform the New Ways of Working Board on actions to be implemented, to help a return to the office work environment post-pandemic.

A new staff engagement survey is planned to be undertaken during the month of September 2024, to capture staff feedback on the following themes: 'The Council as my employer', 'Me and my job', 'My performance', 'development and recognition', 'My working environment and my well-being at work', 'Hybrid working', 'Communications across the council', 'team meetings', 'Our internet and online presence', 'My supervisor/manager and me' and 'workplace policies and procedures'.

New staff engagement forums are in the process of being established in all services with a view to engaging with staff to help the council effect decision making and drive positive change through sharing views and ideas, encouraging fairness and inclusion.

The Health and Well-Being Plan's key areas of focus in the plan arose directly from the smarter ways of working survey. The trade unions were engaged with and given a presentation of the council's plans for new ways of working post Covid.

Maintaining a sense of team culture under the blended working approach is a challenge that does not impact solely on Renfrewshire 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 creation of village area on of the floors in the main council building, repurposing desks and low budget decorations to make more welcoming environment.

The Council considers staff benefits and wider sociological changes when considering new ways of working. Evidence of measurable efficiencies tracking has been limited and the Council has not been able to demonstrate efficiencies from flexible working through, for example, an impact on productivity.

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

While the Council is able to present the overall results of the voluntary schemes and how it impacts the workforce and savings it provides this is not specifically linked to innovation or flexible working arrangements. We have not seen evidence of direct productivity measures and there is further work required in this area before an output to allow productivity of new ways of working to be measured is available to be implemented across services. The resource and capacity challenges are the main factor preventing further progress being made in this area of workforce planning.

Recommendation 1

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 Corporate Workforce Planning Group works closely with services to identify skills gaps and equip managers with tools to enable the up-skilling of staff supporting new and innovative ways of working and addressing recruitment challenges.

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

- Workforce Development Plan - Economic Development.
- International Recruitment Pilot.
- DFN Project SEARCH.
- Keeping the Promise.
- Developing the Young Workforce.
- Apprenticeships programme.
- Various management and leadership training.

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.

Workforce Development Plan - Economic Development

The Council has a designated team of 9 people within its Economic Development department responsible for promoting “Council Employer” role in employability with a much larger team offering employability support to around 2000 unemployed people per year across Renfrewshire. The Council is one of the largest employers in the area and plays a significant role in its local community and has been involved in number of activities in the area in the last decade:

Providing **apprenticeship opportunities** for local people to gain both skills and qualifications at Renfrewshire Council with the aim of sustained future employment (around 25 new posts per year, 80 at any point of time due to apprenticeships being from 1-4 years duration).

Providing **fully paid trainees with opportunities** (paid work experience) in entry level job roles in Council departments with a high turnover of staff / level of staff vacancies to allow longer term unemployed people lacking skills and experience (or people with a specific disadvantage) to gain these with Renfrewshire Council. The posts work alongside existing staff in key job roles, developing new skills. The participant to secure entry level positions on completion and provide a ready pool of new recruits (already employed by the council and so internal applicants) for vacancies (currently around 80 per year but this has previously been up to 250 during economic downturns).

Supporting those with additional learning needs to enter employment. The Council has been delivering **Project Search** for 10 years, facilitating 10-12 young people with a learning disability or autism to undertake work experience across three council services (each) for up to 9 months. The majority of Project Search trainees go on to future employment, many with the Council.

Internship opportunities for unemployed or underemployed local graduates to gain work experience relating to their degree and to allow them to progress in their chosen career. Currently only supporting a few graduates due to the buoyancy of the labour market but previously 60 per year during economic downturns.

In addition, various recruiting departments work with the wider council employability service for local recruitment drives, support with council application forms and supporting local job fairs and recruitment events supporting unemployed people finding local employment.

DFN Project SEARCH

The Council works in partnership with Glasgow Clyde College to deliver specific DFN Project Search training to those in the DFN project. The Project provides a structured traineeship programme to better prepare people for the world of work, providing on job training and mentoring and identifying workplace adjustments required which will lead to trainees becoming job ready and able to fulfil their employment prospects. For entry level job roles, the Council is currently considering guaranteeing an

interview to those who meet the essential criteria, to help remove barriers into employment.

Keeping the promise

The Council along with its partners have committed to delivering on the Scottish Government's Keeping the promise commitment. The Promise is the outcome of Scotland's three-year Independent Care Review, where more than 5,500 care experienced children and adults took part, to transform the wellbeing of infants, children, young people, and adults. It is one of seven concluding reports published in 2020 and organisations, communities, and groups across the country have all pledged to #KeepThePromise.

The Council has appointed a Promise Lead Officer and established a Promise Oversight group involving representatives from the council and its partners. Through this initiative, the Promise remains at the forefront of our service delivery and design. For entry level job roles, the council is currently considering guaranteeing an interview to those who meet the essential criteria, to help remove barriers into employment. This is one way the Council is demonstrating our commitment to supporting care experienced people into work.

Developing Young Workforce

Developing the Young Workforce West (DYW West) regional group has been established to help employers to shape their future workforce, covering Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and West Dunbartonshire. The Council has school's transitions group who meet regularly with a robust focus on supporting vulnerable learners into positive destinations.

Apprenticeships

The Council has arrangements in place for delivering employability programmes including foundation and modern apprenticeships. The Council's employability team 'Invest in Renfrewshire' provide lots of different support to help young people prepare for work, learn new skills and get a job. The Council has tailored programmes to support everyone, including people who are care experienced, people with a disability or health condition, school leavers, working parents and people with criminal convictions. The evidence attached provides details on the various types of apprenticeships and traineeships available at the Council, including foundation, modern, graduate and trades and traineeships.

The Council engages with the local education providers to develop and support its workforce skills.

The Council had a number of initiatives where it works with the education providers:

- Partnerships with West College Scotland for digital training provisions for basic digital skills needs, and to provide accredited Mental Health First Aider training.

- The Chief Executive's service is working with UWS on the new pathways programme. Showing people the range of roles available within a sector, for example, in a theatre for a variety of roles.
- The Council worked collaboratively with University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and Glasgow City Region to develop training specifically for planners to help develop and recruit talent into these hard to fill roles. The Council will create a trainee planner role for participation in the 2025 intake.

The Council has a partnership with the UWS and Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) to deliver the Graduate Apprenticeship programme.

Graduate Apprenticeship

This programme offers staff access to graduate level apprenticeships (degree and masters level courses) providing learning and upskilling opportunities in the areas of business management, accountancy, AI and data science, project management quantity surveying, early learning and childcare. The Council have also recently committed to working with GCU on a new pain research project, which will result in enhanced support provision for people who are in work but within pain thresholds.

Castlehead High School

Castlehead High School in Paisley has been in the limelight since it joined forces with The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) back in 2017, becoming Scotland's first 'School of Creativity'. The partnership was part of a unique collaboration between GSA and Renfrewshire Council, designed to unlock potential in pupils, encourage innovative thinking, increase attainment and develop skills needed to thrive not just at school and work but in broader society.

The Council has to yet develop comprehensive measurable performance indicators to demonstrate benefits it provides through its work on developing its skills and capacity.

Currently the Council has limited number of examples where it clearly tracks benefits realised or expected from the above initiatives. It is at the stage of considering introducing key performance indicators in this area to monitor the effectiveness of its workforce programmes.

Recommendation 2

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 for working together. 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 and information sharing protocols 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

An example of a partnership working is where the Council works in collaboration with Inverclyde Council, East Renfrewshire Council, and West Dunbartonshire Council to deliver a civil contingencies service which supports business continuity and emergency planning across these Council areas.

This joint service approach ensures that civil contingencies functions are made more resilient and improve local co-operation and coordination between the four councils, emergency response partners such as Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde through the West of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership (WoS RRP). The Civil Contingencies Service works closely with multi-agency partners and bases activities on meeting the duties under the Civil Contingencies Act, as follows:

Risk Assessment - working in partnership with other local authorities, and with the other Category 1 and 2 responders, a Community Risk Register covering the west area of the WoSRRP has been produced and can be viewed at the following web address: www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/community-risk-register.aspx

Emergency Planning - the Council's functional and specific plans are continually being revised and developed in cooperation with our multi-agency partners. Familiarisation with all of the plans is essential. Training and exercising takes place at regional and local levels. Multi-agency and cross-boundary exercises ensure that those with a duty to respond to incidents are fully aware of the roles and responsibilities of each partner agency.

Arrangements to Warn and Inform the Public - in the event of an emergency, the Council's Communications Team will work with multi-agency partners to give information to the public using social media, the Council website, call centres etc and through the use of local broadcast media and press. Depending on the circumstances, Council employees may attend at the perimeter of the scene and assist in providing advice and directions to the public where they can shelter. Local notices and posters may also be displayed. The Scottish Government's Ready Scotland website provides general advice to the public on steps they can take to protect themselves, family and property when considering some of the risks facing Scotland.

Information Sharing and Co-operation with other local Responders - the West of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership (WoS RRP) is chaired by Police Scotland and good partnership relationships continue to be developed with local responders, and key stakeholders. Members of the WoS RRP participate in and deliver multi-agency tabletop exercises and emergency preparedness training events.

Business Continuity - each council has a duty to continue to deliver their essential services during an emergency. To help prepare for this, and because it is good business practice, the Council has put in place a business continuity planning process, which includes testing arrangements.

Provision of Advice and Assistance to Businesses and Voluntary Agencies - this duty came into force in May 2006 and is continually being developed to address current needs. Guidance to businesses and voluntary organisations is discussed at the WoS Business & Community Resilience Sub-Group.

There are also examples of collaborative work with other local authorities and Scottish Government.

The Glasgow City Region City Deal: is an agreement between the UK Government, the Scottish Government and eight local authorities across the Glasgow City Region. The City Deal is expected to bring tens of thousands of jobs to the Glasgow City Region through major infrastructure projects, drive innovation and growth through the support of key sectors such as life sciences and address challenges in the region's labour market.

The Council works in collaboration with neighbouring councils to provide context on the regional labour market and impact of the Scottish Government's Fair Work First principles. The group identify specific actions for joint working that will seek to address issues such as hard to fill posts in local government, retention challenges, career pathways apprenticeship opportunities and strengthening the connection between HR Services and Employability services, promoting local authorities as employer of choice.

The Council has drafted a Fair Work First Statement which is being currently consulted with our recognised trade unions.

The Council has senior representation on several national working groups (for example SPDS Executive Group) which exist to provide specialist professional knowledge and focus on key national workforce planning challenges. These groups provide joint approaches to be rolled out across local authority organisations in Scotland.

The Council participated in Scottish Government feasibility study with 5 other care providers to establish a model for recruiting to healthcare roles that are increasingly difficult to fill from the UK Labour Market using international recruitment processes.

The Council worked in partnership with Inclusive Employers to deliver its equality, diversity and inclusion agenda.

Inclusive Employers

The Council recognised they needed to make this more of a priority and it was therefore important we asked our staff how they felt about Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion at Renfrewshire Council. As a result, the Council partnered with subject matter experts in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, Inclusive Employers in 2023, who helped us seek views from our staff and helped us analyse the feedback given.

This work included conducting a cross-organisational culture review to better understand staff experiences at Renfrewshire Council. The review found pockets of good practice across Renfrewshire Council as well as clear areas for improvement and has provided the Council with a path forward as we aim to become the best place for people to work. The findings from this review have now been analysed and form the basis of our refreshed approach to inclusion at Renfrewshire Council found within this five-year Inclusion Plan.

The Council has also services delivered through its partners. include delivery of:

- Occupational health service and employee assistance programme (counselling service) through procured 3rd party providers.
- Digital skills basics training, mental health first aiders training as well as trade apprenticeships with WCS, Digital Champions Programme.
- A range of services that contribute towards improving the health and wellbeing of our employees and the wider Renfrewshire Communities through its partnership with OneRen. These services include use of Paisley Town Hall for events and functions, Paisley Central Library , Paisley Arts Centre and Paisley Museum for delivery of cultural heritage and local knowledge/information. A range of sports and leisure facilities across Renfrewshire are available for our employees to use. OneRen staff have assisted the Council with operations related to Covid Testing Station staffing, vaccination queue marshalling, etc.
- Carrying out the valuation functions of Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Councils by the Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board.
- Using Scotland Excel, which is a centre of procurement expertise, to deliver procurement services on behalf of the Council.

Future Paisley

Future Paisley: is a programme of cultural events and activity based around Paisley and Renfrewshire's unique and internationally significant story which uses targeted investment to deliver positive change.

The programme is putting culture at the heart of Paisley and Renfrewshire's regeneration and harnessing the power of culture to support people's lives for the better, by integrating its benefits through key public services such as health and social care, education and housing. The programme is led by the council and OneRen, in partnership with a wide range of organisations, including Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership, the University of the West of Scotland, Engage Renfrewshire and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

It is governed by a partnership board which features representatives from the above, as well as organisations including the STAR Project, Paisley First, Creative Scotland, Arts & Business Scotland, Scottish Future Trust, Skills Development Scotland, Visit Scotland, EventScotland, Glasgow School of Art, Scottish Enterprise, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce, Police Scotland, Glasgow Airport, West College Scotland and University of Glasgow.

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 monitoring against progress in implementing its Workforce People Strategy could be improved in terms of its clarity over the status of individual objectives and wider use of measurable performance indicators.

Reporting in Service Improvement Plans gives limited information on progress against People Strategy objectives' progress.

The first report on the People Strategy progress was presented to the Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board in September 2023, two years after the Strategy has been approved. The purpose of this report was to provide the members with an update on the progress made, and to set the key workforce planning priorities over the next 2 years.

In March 2023 the council performed a mid-review of the People Strategy and re-aligned it to the new Council Plan 2022-27 strategic priorities. The Council made good progress against the Strategy priorities (Health and Wellbeing, New Ways of Working Post Pandemic and Staff Communication and Engagement).

The Council reported the progress against its priorities as at 50% during the interim review and reported on a number of actions undertaken in line with its 2 year period priorities. The reports had no specific reporting on what actions are still outstanding, which are delayed or specifically replaced. This should be improved to allow appropriate scrutiny.

Recommendation 3

Going forward more frequent (annual) reviews and monitoring reports on People Strategy are planned to be presented to the relevant Board. The next one is expected in November 2024.

As mentioned at the beginning of this report workforce risk assessment, operational priorities and implementation, and monitoring are done at the service level through Service Improvement Plans. We have reviewed the progress update reports for a sample of services, and while services highlight different areas in those (as expected for such flexible reporting), none of them had clear performance measures reported beyond the rate of sickness absence. There is a scope to develop and report a set of performance indicators to support scrutiny on the progress against People Strategy.

Recommendation 3

The Council tracks benefits of its workforce approach at a high level.

The Council realised savings from its service redesign, service integration and resulting roles reviews. Staff in these situations may be offered a severance package in terms of their eligibility for early retirement or redundancy. Voluntary Redundancy/Early Retirements Scheme have generated annual savings of £5.5 million in the last three years with 139 employees leaving the council as a result.

The evolution of hybrid working practices has created more flexibility for staff to work when and where they choose to, realising benefits such as reduced parking, travel time and commuting costs. Hybrid working has also supported the Council to reconfigure its office and wider estates plan resulting in more efficient use of office space and resources. It has allowed the Council to maximise its digital capabilities through online public Council meetings and corporate training delivery, via MS Teams. The Council is currently in negotiation with the recognised trade unions to review the terms and conditions of employment for approximately 6,500 staff. The review focuses on implementing a modernised and fit for purpose package of conditions, supporting the council to be an employer of choice whilst making savings from legacy conditions with a view to being implemented during 2025.

Harmonisation of Craft Workers Conditions of Service

As part of its People Strategy and Workforce Planning approaches, the Council harmonised the pay and conditions of service of approximately 230 Craft Workers (Trades) thus aligning this group of staff with 6,500 staff on Local Government Conditions of Service. Harmonisation eradicated previous legacy arrangements for pay and grading and terms and conditions of employment for Craft employees which had been in place since 2006, and now enables this group of staff being able to take advantage of incremental pay progression and the same annual leave provisions alongside thousands of other local government employees. Additionally, harmonisation mitigates the likelihood of any employee relations issues that may be caused by applying differences in pay and conditions of service whilst working alongside each other. This also reduced the number of collective bargaining groups that the Council has to consult and negotiate on, from 4 to 3 groups.

Appendix 1- Improvement Action Plan

Issue / risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action / timing
1. Efficiencies and impact on productivity. We have not seen evidence of direct productivity measures and there is further work required in this area before an output to enable the productivity of flexible working to be measured is available to be implemented across services. There is a risk that the Council is unable to demonstrate clearly impact on the productivity from its efficiencies implemented.	We recommend that the Council implements clear productivity measures.	The Council will investigate what measures may be relevant in order to inform a consistent and robust understanding of productivity in a local government context, recognising that services are delivered from a range of workplaces and that specific measures may not be appropriate given the Council's objective of creating a Fairer Renfrewshire. March 2025

Issue / risk	Recommendation	Agreed management action / timing
2. Performance indicators for skills and development. Currently the Council has limited number of examples where it clearly tracks benefits realised or expected from the skills development initiatives. It is at the stage of considering introducing key performance indicators in this area to monitor the effectiveness of its workforce programmes.	We recommend that the Council tracks its impact of the skills and development measures with a set of performance indicators.	The Council will develop a range of suitable people metrics which will provide a more empirical evidence base against which the success of training and skills development will be measured. March 2025
3. People Strategy monitoring. The Council reported its progress against its people strategy priorities as at 50% during the interim review and reported on a number of actions undertaken in line with its 2 year period priorities. The reports had no specific reporting on what actions are still outstanding, which are delayed or specifically replaced. Reporting on workforce related performance in Service Improvement Plans (SIP) is limited.	We recommend that the Council improves the quality of the reporting presented to the relevant Board and members. This should include considering how the Council is reporting those at a service level in SIPs.	The Council has been developing a suite of people metrics information which will be the base data used to inform update reports to elected members. This data will support the move to standardised annual reporting of progress against the People Strategy. March 2025



© Azets 2024. All rights reserved. Azets refers to Azets Audit Services Limited. Registered in England & Wales Registered No. 09652677. VAT Registration No. 219 0608 22. Registered to carry on audit work in the UK and regulated for a range of investment business activities by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

We are an accounting, tax, audit, advisory and business services group that delivers a personal experience both digitally and at your door.

Accounting | Tax | Audit | Advisory | Technology