

D.4 BEST VALUE – THEMATIC REVIEW 2023/24 – WORKFORCE INNOVATION

The thematic work for 2023/24 required auditors to carry out a review of workforce innovation in councils to establish how councils are responding to workforce challenges.

Within their report the Auditor notes the key messages as follows:

- the council approved its People Strategy 2023-2028 in 2023, which is one of six strategies that support delivery of the corporate plan, noting that the council also has a Strategic People Plan 2023-2028, which sets out the council's current workforce profile, future workforce requirements, how it will manage change and communicate with its workforce.
- the council has introduced several Information Technology (IT) systems and digital developments that have delivered workforce benefits and increased productivity which have automated repetitive tasks, streamlined workflows leading to improved processing times, increased productivity and reduced administrative tasks for council staff.
- the council recognises the benefits of agile working and accommodates flexible working arrangements having updated its flexible working policy in February 2024, and to support its approach each council post has been categorised as being suitable for one of the following work styles, fixed working, hybrid working, homeworking and mobile working.
- the council continues to face recruitment and retention challenges with staff, and finds it difficult to compete with private organisations to attract and recruit professional staff. The council has developed several solutions to deal with gaps in resources and difficulties in recruiting for posts.
- the council has set targets to monitor and report on progress against the four outcomes in its People Strategy 2023-2028 which are progressed under the direction of the HR Programme Board. Also noting that an annual update on progress will be reported to the Corporate Policy and Resources Policy Development Panel and published on the council website.

The Auditor has identified two areas in the Improvement Action Plan in relation to the Best Value Report:

- The council should progress the recommendations of its digital skills audit to better understand what digital skills it will need for the future.
- The council should continue to take steps to improve participation rates for the 2024 employee survey.

The Controller of Audit also reports to the Accounts Commission on each council's performance in meeting its Best Value duties at least once over the five-year audit appointment. Based on the current provisional timetable, the Controller of Audit will report on the West Lothian Council's performance in meeting its Best Value duties in financial year 2025/26.