

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR



CORPORATE WORKFORCE PLAN 2023-27

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Executive Summary

Workforce Planning Process

Guidance from Audit Scotland states that *‘workforce planning is the process that organisations use to make sure they have the right people with the right skills at the right time’*.

Effective workforce planning considers the current workforce in terms of numbers of employees, skills, turnover and diversity and then extends the analysis to identify and determine the future staffing requirements and associated skills and competencies.

Understanding the Organisation and its environment

- Post Covid-19
- constantly changing environment
- prolonged period of economic austerity and public sector funding constraints
- vision for a sustainable and empowered community is key

Analysis of the Current and Potential Workforce

Comhairle’s Current Workforce

- 1565 full-time employees including Teachers
- 126 employees have more than one post
- Leavers: 34%, within the age 55-64 category
21% within the over 65 category
- Gender: 78% female and 22% male
- Age: 26% of males and 24% of females are in the 55-64 years age bracket
4% of males and 3% of females are over 65
- Turnover rate: 10.1%, this rate excludes Reliefs and Apprentices
- Sickness absence rate of 14.7 days per employee.

Available Employment Pool

- In 2021 the average age of residents in the Outer Hebrides (50 years)
- In 2017 it was estimated that 58% of the population in the Outer Hebrides was of working age
- From July 2021 to June 2022, 82.4% of the population in the Outer Hebrides were employed.
- The 2011 Census showed 15% of people employed part time
- The greatest population loss is the 15-19 age group, however this has reduced in recent years.
- The current population estimate for the Outer Hebrides is 26,640 as at 30 June 2021; this is an estimated increase in the overall population of 140 persons (0.5%).
- In the Outer Hebrides the current 2018 based household projections identify a 2.3% decrease (295 households) in the number of households in the Outer Hebrides.

Hard to Fill Roles

- Care and Support Assistants, Social Care Workers, and Special Carers
- Gaelic essential posts
- Post requiring post specific qualifications/skills
- Professional Posts
- Some Teacher Posts

Determine Future Workforce Needs

Roles Requiring Skills Development and Investment

- Health and Social Care
- Gaelic Essential posts
- Professional posts
- STEM teaching

Organisational Change with a focus on

- Succession Planning
- Leadership Training
- Mentoring and Support
- Work Skills Training

Focus on Quality Offer of Employment

- Living Wage Employer
- Flexible Working
- Employee Wellbeing

Continue Internal Recruitment, Development Opportunities and Career Changes

Develop Apprenticeships and Career Grades

Develop Options to Leave

Action to Address Shortages

Each service is required to develop a Service Workforce Plan

1. Understanding the Organisation and its Environment

Introduction

Guidance from Audit Scotland states that *‘workforce planning is the process that organisations use to make sure they have the right people with the right skills at the right time’*.

Effective workforce planning considers the current workforce in terms of numbers of employees, skills, turnover and diversity and then extends the analysis to identify and determine the future staffing requirements and associated skills and competencies.

Workforce planning is informed and driven by the Outer Hebrides Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), the Comhairle’s Corporate Strategy and Budget Strategy. In turn, the Workforce Strategy will inform the Business Planning, Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement activity and individual employee performance appraisals and training plans.

The Comhairle’s Corporate Workforce Plan aims to align workforce planning with finance, business and people strategies and will be updated as required to reflect strategic changes within the Comhairle but also any external changes that have significant impact on how the Comhairle delivers services.

The Corporate Workforce Plan brings together a range of data from a variety of sources including:

- HR/Payroll Resourcelink System
- MyJobScotland Recruitment Portal
- Employee Survey data
- National and Local Equalities and Employment Data

Within the plan the data has been analysed with the aim of examining the current profile of the Comhairle but also to set recommendations for the changes required to ensure there is innovation, adaptability, and workforce agility to respond both reactively and proactively to the changes expected over the coming years.

The Comhairle’s Corporate Strategy runs from 2022-27 and the Corporate Workforce Plan fits within this timeframe, running from 2023-26. A revised workforce plan will be required when more detail is available on the proposals for a National Care Service.

Strategic context

The environment in which the Comhairle works has been subject to significant change in recent years. While all organisations work to develop resilience, Covid demonstrated that public health outbreaks can bring about real challenges to how we all live, work, communicate and socialise. It changed everything.

The Comhairle and its employees demonstrated incredible agility during these times, continuing to provide care to the vulnerable in our community, delivering services while working from home and stepping up to support key local services where help was needed. It is important that these lessons are taken forward to ensure that this agility is harnessed by the Comhairle to ensure it is best prepared for the future.

While Covid has been at the forefront, it is important to note that the Comhairle has continued to operate in a prolonged period of economic austerity and public sector funding constraints. The budget in 2022/23 was £112.4 million, which includes the use of £0.5 million of reserves and savings assumptions of £1.4m.

The extremely tight budgets which have continued in 2023/24 and are anticipated to continue longer-term, represent a significant challenge for the Comhairle which has very limited options when compared to other Councils for raising revenue. The Comhairle has cut service budgets year on year to accommodate these reductions without cutting the quantity or quality of services being delivered. It has done this to date through service efficiencies, a voluntary early retirement exercise in 2022/23 and by having tight controls on recruitment. This means in effect, doing more with less.

To enable this level of service efficiency and recruitment controls to work, it is necessary to also manage change effectively. Change means that it becomes ever more important that employees and services work together to focus on priority areas and to avoid duplication of effort. While change is positive, it is important that the Comhairle continues to understand customer requirements and provides a dynamic learning environment for employees that enables them to develop the required skills.

The Comhairle acknowledges that, every day, high quality services are being delivered by hard working people, responding to changing demands and rising public expectation. The level of commitment shown by Comhairle employees to these islands and the delivery of public services is exceptional.

Within this corporate workforce plan the Comhairle aims to articulate how it will ensure it has the right number of people with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time to deliver on business goals, whilst also retaining the capacity and discipline to plan ahead both strategically and operationally.

Strategic Links

Local Outcome Improvement Plan

The OHCPP Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) has set out three priorities for the future which clearly sets their vision to promote and realise the full potential of the Outer Hebrides as a prosperous, well-educated and healthy community enjoying a good quality of life, fully realising the benefits of our natural environment and cultural traditions. The LOIP (2017-27) sets out three key priorities:

- The Outer Hebrides retains and attracts people to ensure a stable population
- The Outer Hebrides has sustainable economic growth and all our people have access to appropriate employment opportunities
- The Islands offer attractive opportunities that improve quality of life, wellbeing and health for all our people

Corporate Strategy 2022-27

The Comhairle's Corporate Strategy 2022-27 has set out four main strategic priorities, which also advises how the Comhairle will work towards achieving some of the objectives set out in the LOIP over the next four years.

The Corporate Strategy (2022-27) sets out four main strategic priorities:

- Strengthen the local economy
- Support children, families and young people
- Support resilient communities and quality of life
- Be a sustainable and inclusive Council

The Budget Strategy

The Local Government Settlement for 2023-24 was again a one-year Settlement but the Government's Resource Spending Review (RSR) has provided indicative overall funding figures for local government for the next three years, which gives some context for the development of the forward strategy. Overall local government funding is expected to remain at these levels for the next three financial years, which with the effects of inflation, means a real terms cash reduction of around 7%.

The Comhairle has set out a Financial Plan over the next ten years, which will now be updated to reflect the finding levels indicated by the RSR. Whilst the level of Government funding to individual authorities is not known, it is evident that the Comhairle will require substantial savings in the near and foreseeable future. The funding position has been exacerbated by the current high levels of inflation and utility price increases.

Effective forward planning and management means that the Comhairle has used some reserves in 2023-24 to address budget pressures in the short term, but this is not sustainable and decisive action will need to be taken to ensure financial stability going forward.

Organisational Change Management

Organisational Change Management is about developing the Comhairle's strategic management and culture to adapt to the political and financial environment.

The Comhairle must remain outward looking to drive improvement across the Islands. With financial austerity continuing to be forecast, the Comhairle must continue to seek funding opportunities that enable it to deliver new projects for the community to continue to thrive. It is recognised that this is may well increase the number of short-term contracts, bringing in expertise when and where it is required.

In April 2022, the Comhairle approved an interim structure however, it is acknowledged that there is a need to ensure that there is effective planning in place for the longer term as the structure will be reviewed again within three years.

From a workforce planning perspective, there requires to be a focus on service delivery, different ways of working, succession planning, new skills mix within teams, and new skills for employees. Organisational Change Management therefore has a significant influence on the Workforce Plan.

To aid innovation the Comhairle will:

Support employees to manage change
Develop Leadership
Develop e-technology
Support employee development

Outer Hebrides Profile*

When developing the Comhairle's Corporate Workforce Plan it is important to ensure it is placed in the wider context of the Outer Hebrides. The profile of the Outer Hebrides is unique and does not necessarily follow national trends with regard to population, economy, age profiles, housing or employment.

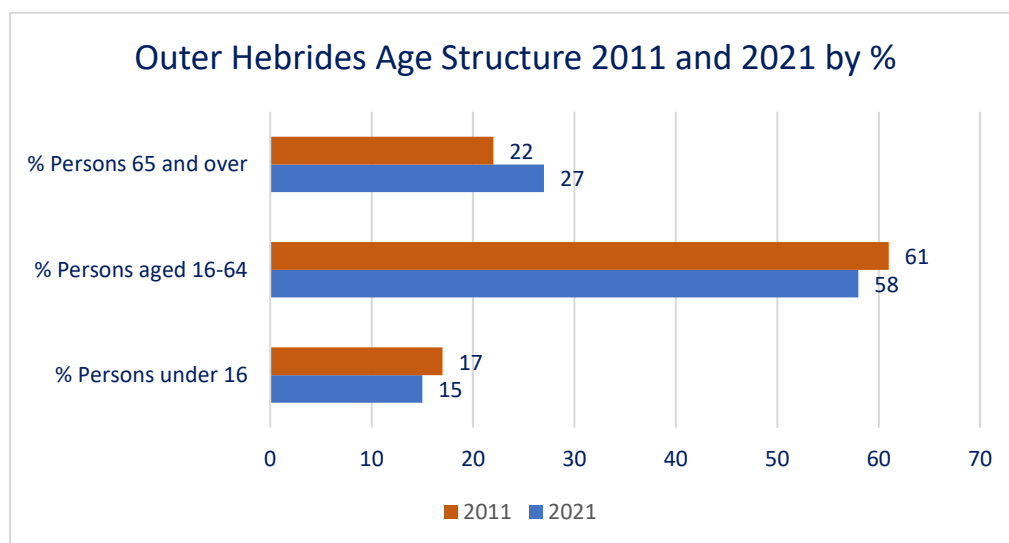
The Outer Hebrides Profile links closely to the Corporate Workforce Plan as Labour Market Intelligence data (LMI) and demographics clearly illustrate that for the Islands to remain vibrant, new working practices are required. For example, new approaches to recruitment, retention, and skills development to attract and retain people; apprenticeships and trainee schemes to try and reduce outward migration. Our ageing population and the challenge it will present with care needs highlights the requirement to have solutions.

The current population estimate for the Outer Hebrides is 26,640 as at 30 June 2021; this is an estimated increase in the overall population of 140 persons (0.5%). This is only the second year, since the 2011 Census that an increase has been estimated (increase estimated in 2017). The estimated increase in population from mid 2020 to mid 2021 is due to positive net migration, a total of 320 for the year. However, there was negative natural change of -190, due to 362 deaths and 172 births.

In 2021 the average age of residents in the Outer Hebrides (50.3 years) was eight years older than in Scotland (42.2 years). The greatest loss continues to be in the 15-19 age group, although the numbers have been decreasing steadily. The population continues to age, with over one in four people (27%) in the Outer Hebrides aged 65 and over (Scot. avg. 20%).

The pattern of Scotland's population change was different this year to previous years. The population of the largest cities fell, while many rural areas which previously had falling populations saw an increase in population over the latest year, as shown in the Outer Hebrides.

Figure 1: Outer Hebrides Age Profile 2011 to 2021



In the Outer Hebrides the current 2018 based household projections identify a 2.3% decrease (295 households) in the number of households in the Outer Hebrides from 12,773 in 2018 to 12,478 in 2028. Over the same period the population is projected to decrease by -6.1%.

The only large town in the Outer Hebrides is Stornoway with approximately 7,280 people. The remaining population is scattered throughout the Outer Hebrides over 280 townships.

Economic activity has grown more diverse in recent years, with new sectors including renewable energy joining more established ones such as creative industries, life sciences, textiles and tourism. While there are a growing number of industries across the Outer Hebrides, the public sector remains the largest employer.

From July 2021 to June 2022, 82.4% of the population in the Outer Hebrides were employed. The Outer Hebrides is the 6th highest in Scotland for job density at 0.91, meaning that there is a 0.91 job for every resident aged 16-64 in the Outer Hebrides.

The employment rates in the Outer Hebrides remain stable. The employment rate in the Outer Hebrides was 82.4% from July 2021 to June 2022 while Scotland was 77.1%. The self-employment rate in the islands is 12.6%; this is higher than the rate in Scotland at 7.7%.

The 2011 Census showed that there were also more people employed part time, 15% in comparison to 13% in Scotland. The majority of males are employed in the 'skilled trades occupations', while the majority of females are employed in the 'Caring, leisure and other service occupations'.

Economic inactivity is now at 17.6% (Scot.avg. 22.9).

Although the Job Seekers Allowance rate remains low (at November 2022, Scotland 3.1%, Outer Hebrides 1.9%) it varies greatly between men and women. The rate for men is 2.4% while the rate for women is 1.5%. The JSA rates continue to remain low in all areas.

Weekly earnings in the Outer Hebrides in 2022 were the lowest in Scotland as per resident analysis from the Office of National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. .

<u>Earnings by residence 2022</u>	
Gross Weekly Pay (£)	
Outer Hebrides	560.90
Scotland	640.30
Great Britain	642.20
Orkney Islands	660.50
Shetland Islands	671.60

The 2011 Census shows that the percentage of residents in the Outer Hebrides holding higher-level qualifications (HND, degree, professional qualification) remains at 26% as in 2001, the same as in Scotland overall. 30% have no educational qualifications, greater than the 27% across Scotland.

In 2018/19 98.4% of school leavers in the Outer Hebrides are in positive sustained destinations with the national average being 95%.

2. Analysis of the Current Workforce

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Workforce Profile

To flexibly deliver a wide range of services, the Comhairle requires a diverse workforce consisting of full-time, part-time, permanent, temporary and casual employees.

The Comhairle's Resourcelink HR/Payroll system and MyJobScotland recruitment portal contains considerable employee data considering the breadth of contracts, job types, working patterns and pay rates. However, data is largely held at Department level and there is further work to be undertaken to analyse data at job family level.

Summary of Key Data

The Comhairle's FTE for 2021/22 was 1565.

The headcount for 2021/22 was 2079.

In 2021/22 there were 333 FTE Teachers.

The number of permanent contracts is high at 86%. The Comhairle has reduced the level of Relief Staff by providing more Health and Social Care employees with permanent contracts.

The turnover rate for 2021/22 (excluding Reliefs and Apprentices) was 10.1%; an increase from 5.8% in 2020/21

The highest proportion of leavers, 34%, fell within the age 55-64 category, a further 21% within the over 65 category. This remains an age range where traditionally people look to retire. Proportionately less employees left Comhairle employment in each of the other age categories.

The gender split of the Comhairle is 78% female and 22% male. 26% of males are in the 55-64 years age bracket and 4% are over 65. 24% of females are in the 55-64 years age bracket and 3% are over 65.

126 employees have more than 1 contracted post: 113 have 2 posts; 13 have more than 2 posts.

The most populated age-bracket in 2021 is 55-64 years with 511 employees. This has not shown movement since 2017 where the 45-54 age range was the most populated.

The average retirement age for non-teaching employees is 61 years and for teaching staff this is 62 years.

Figure 7: Recruitment Ratios

Year	No of posts advertised	No of applications received	Average Ratio
2021/22	742	2017	2.7 applications per post
2020/21	296	1580	5.4 applications per post
2019/20	366	1835	5.2 applications per post
2018/19	389	1926	5.0 applications per post
2017/18	380	2269	6.0 applications per post

In 2021/22 there were 761 posts advertised and 2129 applications received. This is an average ratio of 2.7 applications per posts. Of these posts 394 were not appointed to. 161 posts received no applications and 171 received only one applicant. For comparison in 2020/21 of 296 posts only 26 received no applications and 32 posts only received 1 applicant.

Some of the posts that were more challenging to fill were:

- Care at Home service posts, Social Care Assistants, Social Care Workers, and Special Carers
- Gaelic essential posts
- Qualified Nursery Key Workers
- Relief posts
- Support for Learning Assistants

Analysis demonstrates that there was a high level of interest in Administration posts, Apprenticeships, Cleansing Labourer posts and both Unqualified and Qualified Museum posts.

Sickness Absence

Sickness absence rates, while still above the Scottish average for local authorities had improved in recent years but they increased again in 2021/22 where Teachers' absence was at 7.6 days per FTE and non-teaching absence was at 16.5 days per FTE. This may be a short-term post-covid effect, but this will require continued monitoring.

A reduction in sickness absence could have a significant impact on Comhairle productivity and is a workforce priority.

The Employee Assistance programme, Health Assured aims to promote good mental health and wellbeing and to reduce absences related to depression, stress and anxiety.

3. Risk and Situational Analysis

PESTLE Analysis

POLITICAL	<p>Islands Act</p> <p>Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015</p> <p>Locality Focus</p> <p>National Care Service Bill 2022</p>
ECONOMIC	<p>Islands Act</p> <p>Financial Constraints</p> <p>Income Generation</p> <p>Short-Term Project Funding</p>
SOCIAL	<p>Ageing Population</p> <p>Outward Migration</p> <p>Rurality</p> <p>Transport Links</p>
TECHNOLOGICAL	<p>Home and Hybrid Working</p> <p>Online Services and Programme of Digitalisation</p> <p>'Buy not Build' Cloud Hosting</p> <p>Data Demands both Internally and Externally</p> <p>Telecare</p>
LEGISLATIVE	<p>GDPR</p> <p>Equality Act (Scotland) 2010</p> <p>Fairer Scotland Duty</p> <p>Scottish Living Wage</p> <p>Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014</p> <p>Head Teacher Charter</p> <p>Health and Care Staffing Bill (Scotland) 2019</p> <p>Public Bodies (joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014</p> <p>Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010</p>
ENVIRONMENTAL	<p>Post Covid</p> <p>Climate Change</p> <p>Assets</p> <p>Travel Costs</p> <p>Tourism and Infrastructure</p>

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESS
Employee Loyalty Sector Specific Training Apprenticeships and Employability Training Plans Low Turnover Rates	Ageing Workforce Sickness Absence Rates
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
E-Learning Digitalisation Changes to Terms and Conditions Mentoring Programmes	Increased Costs and Reduced Budgets Inability to adapt to Change Outward Migration Recruitment Challenges Performance Problems

Risk Assessment

Risk Cause	Risk Event	Risk Effect
Reduced Funding	Increased Costs and Reduced Budgets	Pressure to reduce workforce to meet budget constraints
Not prepared for change or a lack of flexibility within services	Comhairle or employees unable to make the changes needed to meet service change and budget constraints	Employee stress and increased sickness absence Poor service delivery and increased customer complaints
Recruitment Challenges	Unable to recruit suitably qualified employees	Employee stress and increased sickness absence Poor service delivery and increased customer complaints
Lack of training and planning	Employees unable to meet new service requirements	Employee stress and increased sickness absence Poor service delivery and increased customer complaints

4. Future Workforce Needs

Roles Requiring Skills Development and Investment

Recruitment for hard to fill posts remains a priority and the Comhairle has identified challenge with recruitment in some key sectors: STEM teaching, Health and Social Care and Gaelic essential posts.

- **Health and Social Care**

Recruitment into Health and Social Care posts continue to provide challenges for the Comhairle. To help promote the job opportunities available, in 2022, with public events again permitted, recruitment fairs to support Health and Social Care recruitment were organised and widely promoted through social media. These recruitment events which provide recruitment information, support and question and answer sessions have demonstrated that it can lead to an increase in applications for posts. Given the positive response to this initiative, further recruitment fairs will be promoted in future.

The Foundation Apprenticeship in Health and Social Care enables senior pupils to undertake a qualification with work placements in social care. This Foundation Apprenticeship, which is a progression route to the Modern Apprenticeship, commenced in June 2019 and over the three-year period there has been a steady increase in demand for the Foundation Apprenticeship qualification.

In addition to increasing the apprenticeships available in Health and Social Care, the Comhairle acknowledges that further work is required to address both the current employee recruitment challenges within the service, the ageing workforce within Health and Social Care and the increased demands on the service that is expected in future years through the changing demographics of the Western Isles. The Comhairle undertook a survey with Health and Social Care employees in December 2021, and following the results agreed to implement a retention bonus to eligible employees for a maximum period of twelve months to allow the service to undertake a detailed review.

- **Gaelic Essential**

Gaelic essential posts continue to be challenging to fill. The Comhairle continues to work with schools to promote Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and there continues to be an increase in the numbers of young people going through GME. In 2021/22, 43% of primary school pupils were in Gaelic Medium Education; this is a 4% increase from 2018/19.

In 2022/23, a Gaelic Language Acquisition Practitioner apprenticeship route was implemented within our schools to support Gaelic Language Acquisition and strengthen the implementation of the 'Gaelic First' policy. This new apprenticeship route, supports pupils, parents, and teachers to promote the acquisition of the Gaelic language to children in immersion settings.

To support the ambitions within the Faster Rate of Progress policy, and the Comhairle as a bilingual authority, this apprenticeship route is set to be replicated to support the development and succession planning needs of services. Pathways will be developed to enable progression into skilled posts which will include Gaelic acquisition through immersion. In addition, the Comhairle supports Gaelic Education for employees with a wide range of Gaelic classes offered for the full range of learner –

beginners, intermediate, advanced. These classes are offered across the Isles, and are offered in co-operation between Accredited Training, UHI Outer Hebrides, the Learning Shop and e-Sgoil.

Gaelic Essential posts will continue to be a requirement however it is anticipated that programmes the Comhairle has in place: the PGDE programme; the continued GME education in schools; Gaelic Education programmes for employees and apprentices will continue to support the Comhairle's aims and objectives for Gaelic.

- Professional Qualifications Post requiring post specific qualifications/skills

Some posts that require a professional qualification or specific qualifications/skills can be difficult to fill. Where posts have been challenging to recruit to, the Comhairle has offered career grade developments and/or apprenticeships to support recruits gain the qualifications for professional registration. Service level workforce planning will aid the effective planning of career grades and/or apprenticeships and this is encouraged.

- STEM Teaching

The Comhairle set up a bespoke PDGE programme in 2016/17 to address teacher shortages in key areas and since commencement the programme has provided a number of STEM teaching posts into the secondary school system in the Outer Hebrides. Across Scotland, STEM subjects are notoriously challenging to fill, yet the PDGE and e-Sgoil initiatives have reduced the challenges the Comhairle faces.

This programme has addressed some of the pressure points in the recruitment of Teachers and will continue to be used as a vehicle to reduce unfilled vacancies.

Organisational Change

The Organisational Change agenda aims to manage the change process whilst ensuring that the Comhairle develops and retains the skills base for anticipated future need.

- Leadership Structure during the transitional period.

The priority for workforce planning is supporting those managing change to achieve savings targets and efficiencies whilst continuing to ensure high quality service delivery through Leadership Training.

An important feature of the change programme is the development of leadership capacity within the workforce and the planning for leaders of the future.

The target is to develop a programme of training on leadership, team working and decision making designed for each level of management.

- Succession Planning

It is important that the Comhairle continues to develop a programme of training that ensures there is effective succession planning in place. It is recognised that recruitment is becoming more challenging,

with the number of applicants for roles halving over the past five years. Effective training, upskilling, apprenticeships and mentoring is necessary to ensure that essential roles can be filled as vacancies arise. Each service must have an effective workforce plan in place, which recognises the key skills necessary and has training plans in place to address service vulnerabilities.

- **Work Skills Training**

Work skills training relates to acquiring the skills necessary to deliver the outcomes of the business plans. This includes occupational groups from teaching staff, health and care employees through to a range of professional and support staff.

At the present time funding is retained by each department and spend is allocated according to each service business plan.

It is important that services continue to develop and implement annual, costed training plans closely linked to the business plan. This helps to ensure that managers are closely matching the skills of employees with the business plan requirements and prioritising training on this basis.

Developing a culture of support and mentoring for apprentices, new employees and those upskilling is a crucial aspect of work skills training to build both skills and confidence.

The IJB is required to publish a Workforce Plan and the Education Authority has set requirements for the training needs of teaching staff.

- **Fixed-Term Contracts**

With the changing nature of funding, including ring-fenced funding, it is likely that there will be more fixed-term contracts. This is a change to how local government used to operate, and part of the attraction to work in the public sector was the security offered by permanent contracts. However, with financial constraints and the increase in short-term funding opportunities, there is an acknowledgement that there is likely to be an increase in fixed term contracts offered.

Research demonstrates that fixed term contracts can be attractive to people who wish to gain experience in various roles, and who do not envision themselves in 'jobs for life'. It is also of benefit to those who wish to offer specialist services for a limited time period.

The Comhairle must adapt to these new methods of working with services being open to allowing employees to undertake secondments and to moving employees flexibly across a range of roles.

In addition, the Comhairle is also likely to be required to buy-in specialism for fixed-term periods when it is required, rather than recruiting to specialist roles that may not be required longer-term.

Quality Offer of Employment

The Comhairle is keen that it remains an employer of choice; and it works closely with the Recognised Trade Unions to ensure its terms and conditions balance the needs of the business with the needs of employees. The Comhairle undertakes Employee Surveys every three to four years to gain employee

feedback and has also recently undertaken an exercise to benchmark pay and terms and conditions of employment. Benchmarking exercises demonstrate that the Comhairle must maintain its focus on the quality of the offer of employment to remain competitive in the local and national employment market now and in the future. The Comhairle is focused on development in the following areas:

- Living Wage Employer

The Comhairle has achieved Scottish Living Wage Accreditation and has ensured that its employees now receive the Scottish Local Government Living Wage as a minimum in line with national agreements.

- Flexible Working

Covid-19 and the requirement to work from home changed our understanding of flexible working. It provided opportunity for home and hybrid working that had previously not been considered possible. While many services continue to require employees to be available for customer-facing contact, for some employee's new options have been made available. It is important that the Comhairle determines the needs of the service and customers alongside consideration of the wishes of employees who may want greater flexibility in how they work.

The Comhairle will balance what we can offer as part of the offer of employment to employees with the Comhairle's commitment to the Islands and to ensuring a sustainable population. Employees therefore will be expected to have a home base within the Western Isles and to be living primarily on Island.

The Comhairle is also working towards Carer Positive Status and recognises that employee's may at times in their working lives, for caring responsibilities or otherwise, require flexible working. The Comhairle receives approximately 40 requests for flexible working each year and the majority of these requests are approved.

- Communication with Employees

It is important that employees feel that they are kept informed about their workplace.

It is a priority that employee communication continues to be developed over the period of this Workforce Plan.

- Employee Wellbeing

The Comhairle recognises the importance of employee health and safety and wellbeing, and work continues to be undertaken to develop policies that support the changing needs of the workforce. Examples of this include: the Employee Health and Wellbeing Strategy; Stress Prevention Policy; the Employee Assistance Scheme; and a Volunteering Policy.

Analysis of sickness absence demonstrates that although sickness absence had reduced in recent years, in 2021/22 it increased again. The management of sickness absence therefore continues to be

a priority for the Comhairle. The Comhairle has an Occupational Health service which provides support to employees and a referral system to Occupational Health Physicians, if required. In addition, the Comhairle has invested in the Health Assured, Employee Assistance Programme which provides 24-hour access to confidential help and support.

Internal Recruitment, Development Opportunities and Career Changes

It is likely that as priorities across Comhairle services shift, there will be increased work demand in some areas and reduced demand in others.

The Comhairle has had a Corporate Workforce Panel in place since 2015 to monitor and control recruitment. This has ensured that recruitment is controlled where necessary, but it has also helped ensure internal and ring-fenced recruitment and secondments where appropriate to support employee development and promotion.

The Comhairle also offers career change options to employees through its Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) qualification programme. This programme seeks expressions of interest to undertake a one-year PGDE if the employee holds a graduate qualification in a relevant subject. They are then guaranteed a place on the probation programme on successful completion of the PGDE. Widening the scope of this programme to enable employee's opportunity to retrain in areas of high job demand will be explored.

Apprenticeships and Career Grades

The Comhairle has, for many years, been innovative in addressing hard to fill posts. It has offered career grade posts for graduates with a relevant qualification to gain additional qualifications and professional accreditation in fields such as Planning, Environmental Health and Social Work.

In addition to this, the Comhairle has invested in apprenticeships; both SDS funded Modern Apprenticeships and bespoke Apprenticeships (in areas such as Social Work, HR, IT and Engineering) where no programme is in place.

All candidates are supported to gain an industry appropriate qualification be that a Degree in Social Work or an SVQ in childcare. This work helps to address workforce shortages and can improve succession planning within service areas.

Apprenticeships provide young people and adults with the opportunity to remain on Island while gaining a relevant qualification and working whilst doing so. With the living costs associated with mainland University and College places growing, apprenticeships provide an affordable route to gaining a qualification and this has widened the opportunities available to many young people who wish to remain on the islands.

The Comhairle is an Accredited Training Centre for Foundation Apprenticeships (over 100 candidates expected in 2022/23) as well as for Employability Fund and Modern Apprenticeships. The Comhairle will continue to support the apprenticeship scheme and the career grade programme, which can be

particularly appealing to those who have gained a degree at a university or college and wish to return/continue to live on island.

Options to Leave

The Comhairle will examine its current offer to employees to leave the organisation and ensure that it provides employees with alternative options wherever possible and fair terms if they decide to leave.

With no set retirement age, a small number of employees choose to work beyond pensionable age. It is essential that managers are in discussions with employees to enable effective workforce planning at a service level and to anticipate changeover of employees.

Putting in place Apprenticeships and Career Grade training options can assist in retaining skills and knowledge built up over many years and reduce the gap left by employees leaving with little or no hand-over.

5. Action Plan

Priority	Outcomes	Action	Lead	Timescale
Support Organisational Change	Senior officers able to lead and support change within their services	Develop hybrid working policy	HR	December 2023
		Departmental workforce planning to be completed	Services	December 2023
	New working practices embedded within the Comhairle Succession plans in place	Leadership training and mentoring to be developed	HR	December 2024
		Stress audits undertaken with services and action plans developed	HR/H&S	March 2026
Develop HR systems	Improved processes access to data and analysis by both HR and services	Develop HR Case Management System	HR	March 2026
		Develop analysis by Job Families	HR	March 2025
	Improved level of applicants for posts	Develop communication plan for recruitment	HR	December 2024
Examine the Offer of Employment	Succession plans in place leading to reductions in skills gaps	Undertake skills development within and across services	Services	June 2025
	Increased number of applications for posts	Continued investment in apprenticeships and career development	HR	ongoing

Priority	Outcomes	Action	Lead	Timescale
	Reduced number of posts requiring re-advertisement	Explore widening the scope of career change	HR	March 2026
		Explore options to widen Recruitment communication through social and local media	HR	December 2024
		Develop programme of recruitment fairs with DYW colleagues	HR and Services	March 2024
Prioritise Employee Communication	Prioritised development using employee feedback through established channels	Review and undertake Employee Survey	HR	December 2023
	Improved employee experience when using HR webpages	Develop HR webpages to improve communication with employees	HR	December 2024
Options to leave	Option to leave policies reflect the current position of the Comhairle	Review current policies to ensure they remain relevant	HR	March 2026