Strategic Workforce Planning Priorities

2024 - 28

Bute • Helensburgh • Islay • Oban • Mull • Campbeltown • Iona • Dunoon • Tiree • Lochgilphead • Seil …

#abplace2b

Strategic Workforce Planning Priorities 2024 - 28

Introduction

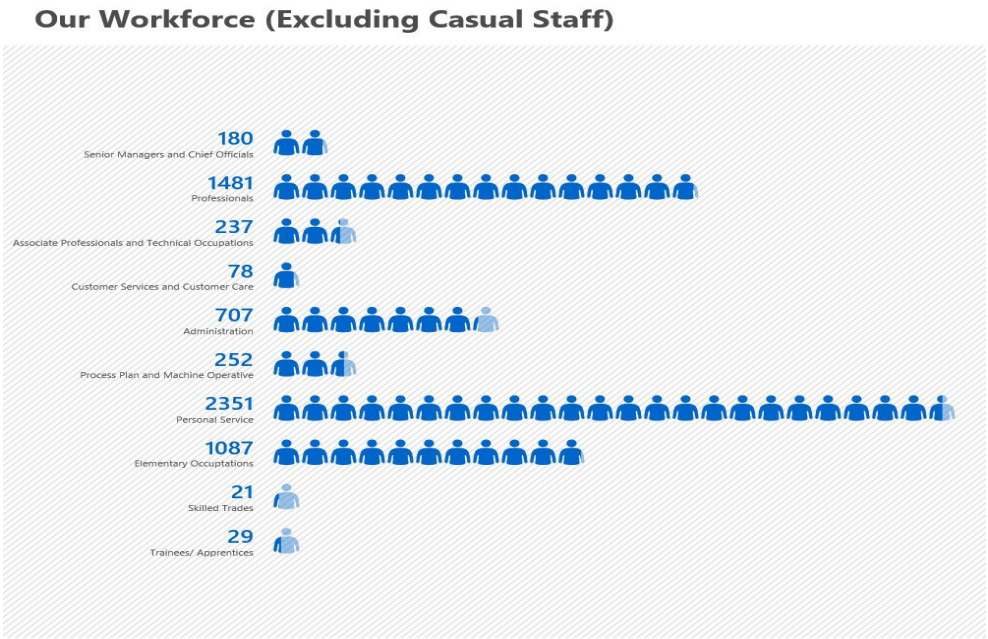
Attracting and retaining talented people is one of the main strategic objectives set out in our People Strategy. Strong workforce planning ensures we have the right people in the right roles, with the right skills at the right time, and for the right cost. This is crucial to delivering on our priorities in a way that meets our commitment to best value.

Risk based operational workforce planning conversations at team level help us to identify and deliver specific actions that support services ensure they have the people and structure in place to deliver on their objectives now and in the future.

This document outlines our strategic workforce planning priorities for the period to 2028. Annual budget setting creates challenges for longer term strategic workforce planning. Our strategic workforce planning priorities are based on a series of forecasting assumptions which will be reviewed and updated annually. Any specific actions arising from this review will be contained within our annual People Strategy Delivery Plan. The actions outlined in Table One, are included in the People Strategy Delivery plan.

About Our Workforce

Our employees work hard every day to deliver services across our substantial geography, including 14% who live and work on our 23 inhabited islands.



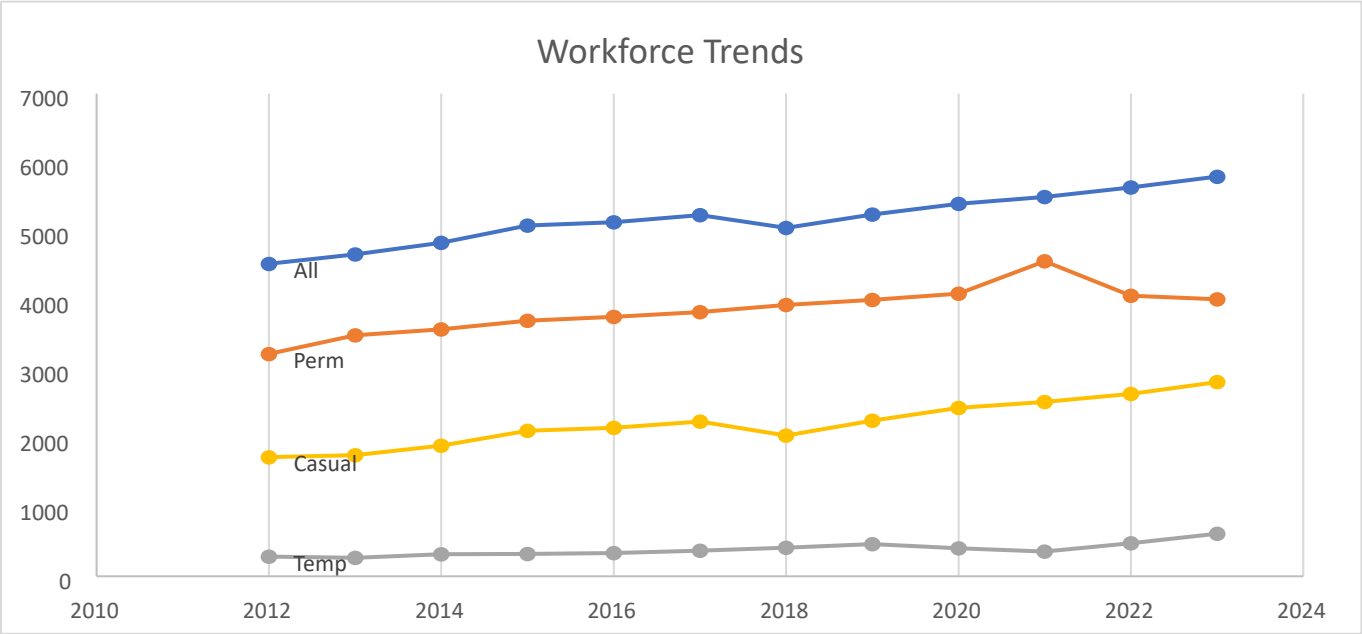
In the period since 2012 the council's overall headcount has increased by 27%. Figure two shows the annual trends since 2012 in each type of employment. Until the Covid 19 pandemic, temporary posts stayed largely consistent in terms of their proportion of the workforce with permanent and casual workers showing a steady increase.

Over the last three years, following a spike in 2021, there has been a decrease in the number of permanent staff to just below pre pandemic levels, and an increase in the number of temporary and casual staff. This can be largely attributed to temporary ringfenced funding for additional projects and specific activities associated with COVID19 recovery and council priorities such as refugee resettlement and the rural growth deal. A total of 15 Modern Apprentices across areas such as early years and digital are also included in the increase in the number of temporary posts since 2021.

The main reductions in permanent employees over the last three years have been in professional, personal service (includes roles such as Classroom and ASN Assistants) and elementary occupations (includes roles such as catering and cleaning staff). The main increases in temporary and casual employment have also been within these areas. With roles such as ASN assistants, social workers, catering and cleaning roles examples of those who have seen reductions in permanent numbers and a corresponding increase in temporary or casual arrangements.

Temporary employment can be attractive for those seeking a portfolio career; however, it provides less certainty for employees. Our data shows that turnover in our temporary posts is higher, as those approaching the end of temporary arrangements seek another assignment. The Verity House Agreement, a new partnership between the Scottish Government and COSLA, is expected to allow more flexibility in spend for councils, with less ring-fenced or directed funding. Having more flexibility in funding could reduce the requirement to have such a high number of temporary posts.

Figure Two: Workforce Trends



Workforce Forecasting

Budget

Despite a challenging financial context, the council's overall workforce numbers have not significantly reduced over the last 10 years. However, there has been a shift from permanent employment to more temporary, casual and agency arrangements in some areas of the workforce following the pandemic.

The council's financial outlook predicts the current challenging financial picture will continue, with an estimated mid-range budget gap of £24.7million over the period until 2028/29.

A significant percentage of the council's budget is allocated to staffing costs. A temporary reduction in employer pension contributions will reduce overall staffing costs for the next two years. Our strategic workforce planning priorities assume that reducing funds in real terms, will be available for workforce expenditure over the longer term.

Our health of the organisation reporting, and workforce planning conversations highlight that capacity is an issue in some areas. Our priority is therefore to manage reducing financial resources in a way that does not negatively impact on the health and wellbeing of our workforce.

To do this we will make the most of the technology available and use data and analytics to help us identify and prioritise activities that will have the biggest impact on our strategic and corporate objectives.

Making the most of the Technology available

Technology will play an important part in how the council operates in future. The introduction of Microsoft 365 is already transforming the way that teams work and collaborate. It is anticipated that the introduction of tools such as Artificial Intelligence and Robotic Programme Automation will help create capacity and opportunities for role redesign. This will be accompanied by a greater need for digital and programming skills within our workforce.

Skills (Digital, Data and Quality Conversations)

As more of our services make the most of the technology available, the requirement for our workforce to be digitally enabled will be paramount. Roles which historically didn't need digital or computer skills, will need a basic level of digital ability in future. A digital skills survey was recently conducted, and plans are in development to address the gaps that have been highlighted by this survey.

With resources in short supply, we want to make sure that our workforce is putting their efforts towards activities that will have the biggest impact on our corporate priorities. Our Connect for Success change programme supports the use of data and evidence to inform decision making.

With a project in place to create a data platform, it is expected there will be a requirement for increased skills in gathering, analysing, and reporting data to inform decision making through tools such as power BI.

A data maturity assessment has taken place across the organisation and actions to identify our data skills needs, will be taken forward with a corresponding update to our corporate training offering. This will ensure our workforce have the skills they need to gather and interpret the data we have. Actions contained within our Data Strategy will support us in this objective.

The tools we use to communicate have increased post pandemic, but quality conversations remain at the heart of everything we do as an organisation. We want to ensure that our workforce is skilled in having quality conversations with our customers, with each other, and with partners and other key stakeholders. We see quality conversations as the basis of developing trust and psychological safety, in turn making sure Argyll and Bute Council is a great place to work, and a great organisation to work with.

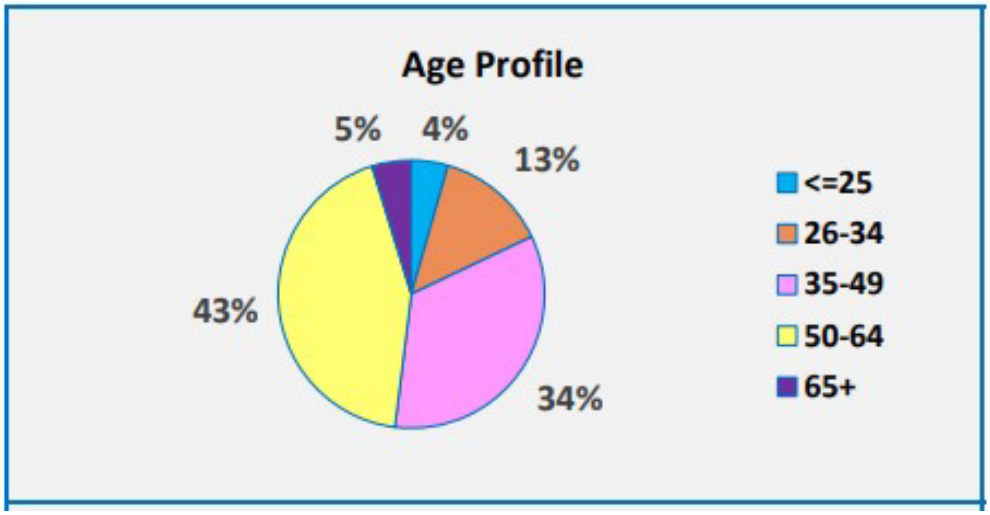
Hybrid and Remote Working

Post pandemic, many of our workforce who were previously office based, have chosen to continue working remotely some or all the time. We appreciate the value in teams coming together to collaborate and the benefits in allowing employees to work remotely. Our new Hybrid and Flexible working policy promotes choice and flexibility to find the right balance at team level.

Our Modern Workspace project is looking to redesign the council's office spaces to support post pandemic working practices creating spaces for face-to-face collaboration and hybrid meetings.

Around 51% of our posts are fixed and require the post holder to be at a specific location to carry out their role. For those roles where flexibility over work location is limited, our policy supports a can-do approach to finding flexible solutions around when the post holder may be at work.

Ageing Workforce Figure Three: Age Profile



The average age of a council employee is 46 years.

Like the other Local Authorities in Scotland, we have an ageing workforce with around half our employees aged 50 or over, and only 4% aged 25 or under. In the last year that picture has remained largely static although there has been a slight increase in the number of employees aged 25 and under.

When split by post occupancy type our permanent workforce has a slightly higher average age than our casual workforce. The average age of our temporary employees is significantly lower at age 40.

Our strategic objectives in relation to our ageing workforce are:

- Managing workforce reductions
- Growing Our Own- creating a pipeline of talent in key areas of continued or increased demand
- Retaining older workers who may otherwise leave in areas of demand by increasing the flexibility available to them.

Managing Workforce Reductions

Our workforce planning assumptions are based on a reducing budget for the workforce in the longer term and an increasing utilisation of technology. In this regard, some of the turnover associated with planned retirements will provide an opportunity to reduce the workforce expenditure in a way that is planned and does not necessitate redeployment or redundancy. Our workforce planning categories allow us to identify categories of post and projected turnover against changes in requirements. This in turn, helps us identify areas of corporate risk.

Work will be done during the life of this document to improve the data and projections on corporate risk areas.

One area of identified risk is in our leadership roles. 56% of our chief officers are aged 55 and over. Therefore, leadership skills within our redesigned Argyll and Bute Manager programme will be a focus for delivery over the life of the people strategy. This will ensure we have a pool of talented managers with the appropriate leadership skills to step into senior roles over the next 5 to 10 years.

Growing Our Own (GOO)

GOO is the council's longstanding approach to developing our own talent. Providing opportunities for local school leavers and existing employees to gain qualifications and work experience related to their personal career aspirations and our workforce planning priorities. Our GOO framework includes, foundation and modern apprentices, student sponsorship, work experience and shadowing, graduate trainees, and professional qualifications as well as other bespoke learning.

In recent years the council has earmarked funding to support delivery of GOO opportunities linked to our high-risk workforce planning activities at service level. This is over and above the GOO funding allocated by individual teams to support their workforce planning actions.

As part of our operational workforce planning conversations, we will seek to quantify the activities taking place at team level to provide an overall picture of the GOO activity taking place across the organisation.

Retaining older workers

We value the wealth of experience and knowledge that our older workers have, and with many people choosing to continue working after the traditional retirement age, we want to make it easy for our older workforce to continue to contribute to the Council's success. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reports show that the most important consideration for older workers when deciding on work is flexibility. We will therefore focus on understanding what type of flexibility is important, for those considering or approaching retirement.

Recruitment

Following the pandemic, the council's overall risk rating in terms of recruitment has been a mixed picture. Six teams within the council have seen a reduction in their risk rating citing the remote working opportunities now available widening the pool of potential candidates. Managers have also highlighted the good work being undertaken by the communications team in promoting our vacancies on social media as having a positive impact on their ability to recruit.

Around 63% of our job applicants already live in Argyll and Bute. We see this as an opportunity to attract applications from out with our area supporting our ABplace2B aspirations.

Nine teams have seen an increase in their recruitment risk rating citing national skills shortages, pay and competition in the labour market, temporary funding for posts, Argyll and Bute's housing emergency and the make-up of our job descriptions/ approach to recruitment as factors contributing to this.

Agency workers are used to fill gaps where Council teams are unable to recruit to vacancies. Our Health of the Organisation reporting shows that spend on agency workers has significantly increased when compared to pre pandemic spend. The increase in agency spend has been mainly within Adult Care, and Development

and Economic Growth, both areas which are experiencing national shortages in the labour market. The HR and OD team are undertaking several activities, including a review of our approach to recruitment and relocation which are aimed to address or better understand these recruitment challenges.

Succession Planning

Our corporate plan sets out the priorities that our Elected Members aim to deliver over the coming years as well and the Chief Executive's desired operating model. This provides a clear direction on what the organisation will require in the coming years.

With leaner structures, reducing budgets and changes in technology likely to transform the types of jobs on offer, we appreciate that a job for life is probably not a realistic prospect in modern Local Government. However, providing opportunities for employees to grow a career in the council is something we are keen to ensure remains a positive feature of the Council's employment deal.

The Verity House Agreement is expected to provide more flexibility for Local Government with less ring-fenced or directed funding. Our aim is to be an employer for life by creating permanent agile employment opportunities for our workforce to develop skills and knowledge and move around between roles within the organisation.

Our workforce planning conversations indicate that where capacity is an issue due to recruitment shortages etc., the focus on immediate short term service requirements often takes priority over longer term development of employees and trainee posts.

Finding new ways to support informal shadowing and knowledge building and on boarding in a hybrid and remote environment are important deliverables that will be considered as part of our wider review of our GOO framework.

Wellbeing and Sickness Absence

We care about our employees and their wellbeing. We know that when our employees can bring their best selves to work, our council and our communities benefit from their contributions. High levels of sickness absence contribute to capacity issues in some teams and limit what we can achieve in terms of performance. The graphs below show the Council's workdays lost to sickness absence per FTE against a comparison family group of councils and the Scottish council average for teachers and non-teaching staff.

Figure Four: Teachers Workdays Lost

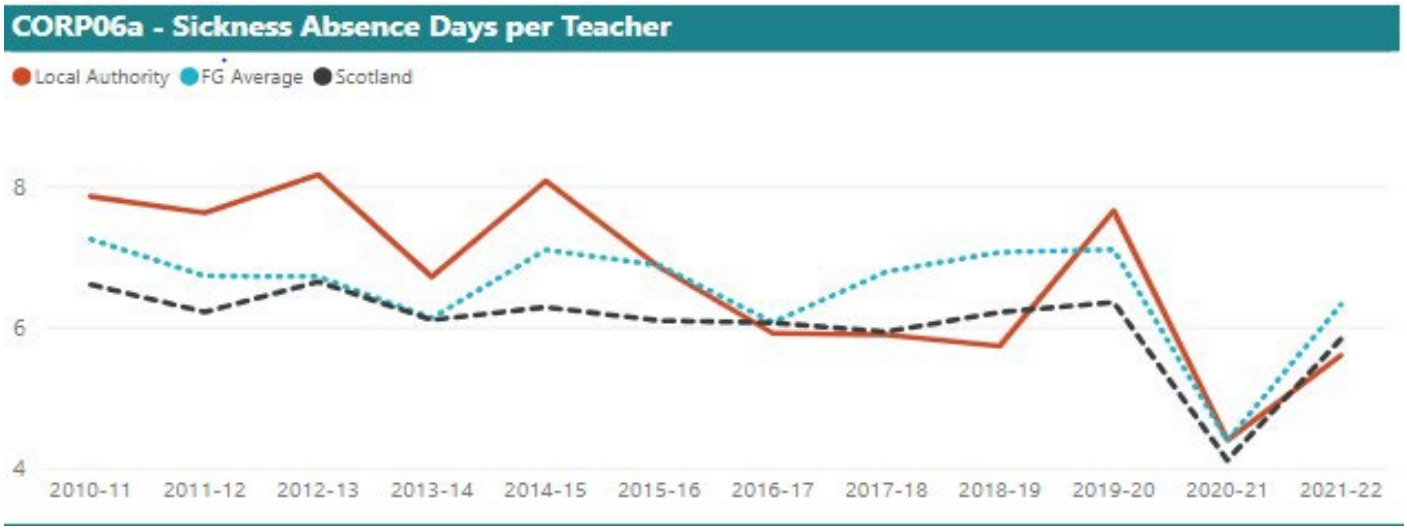
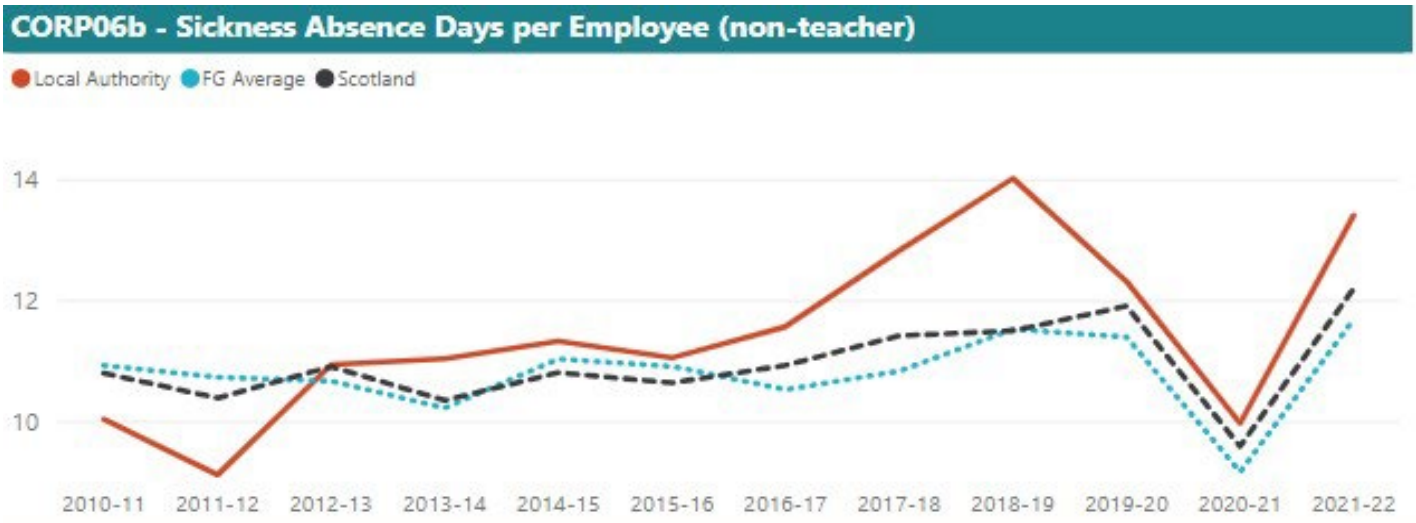


Figure 5: Scottish Local Government Employee Workdays Lost



As well as supporting people when they are unwell, the focus of our wellbeing strategy is on prevention. We do this by supporting our workforce to make healthy choices that improve their physical, mental, and financial wellbeing.

We also set out in our people strategy our objective to provide fair work. We regularly survey our workforce on the issues that impact their wellbeing. A survey is planned for 2024 and actions arising from that will form part of our delivery plan for future years. In addition, we plan to include sickness absence as a category in our workforce planning risk matrix and bring this data into our operational workforce planning conversations.

Equalities and Equal Pay

The Council's diversity equality and inclusion policy sets out our intention to ensure equality fairness and inclusion for all those in the Council's employment. We have a segregated workforce in some roles. For example, people working in home care are 99% female. By contrast, employees in Roads and Amenities and IT are predominantly male. The prevalence of females is particularly noticeable within our education service.

We aim to widen opportunity for people in job roles that they may not have considered otherwise and create opportunity for all.

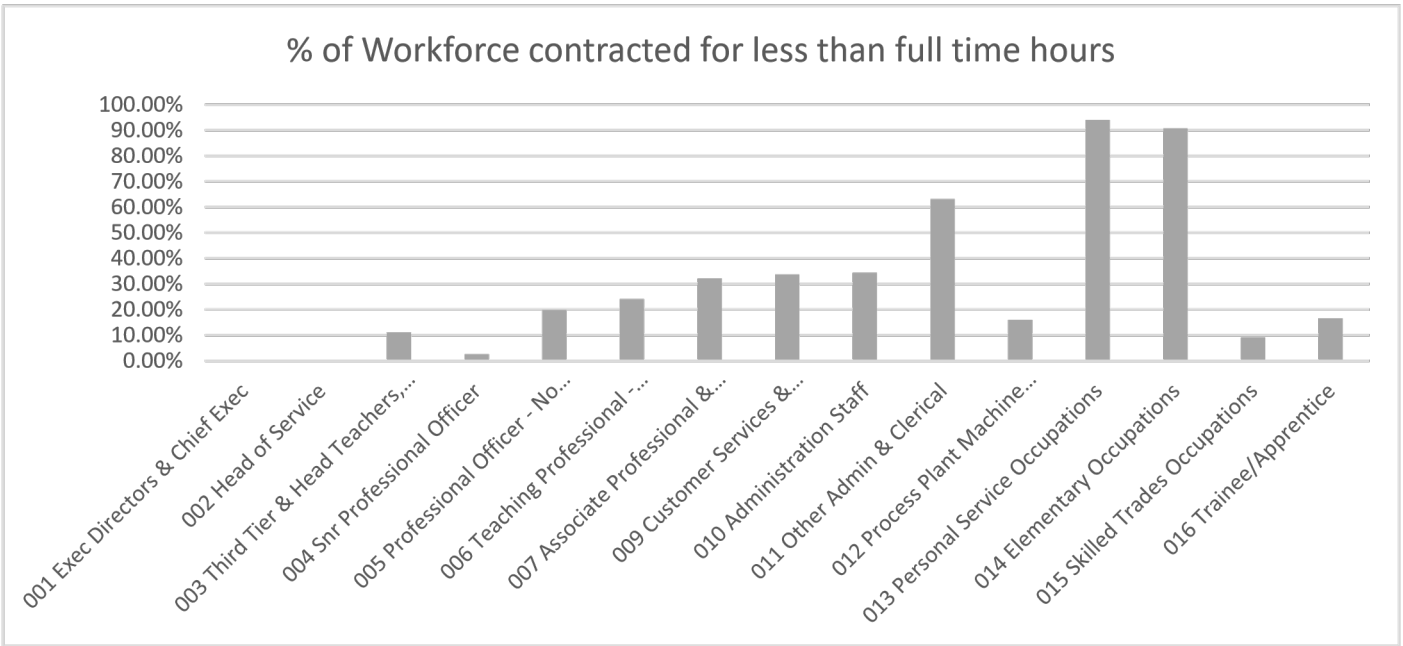
It is hard to make comparisons between 2011 Census data and our workforce data regarding sex, disability and religion because of the high proportion of missing data and 'prefer not to say' within the workforce data. This is a position shared with other Councils in Scotland. Our aim is to increase the proportion of our workforce who share equalities data to allow of meaningful comparisons.

The council regularly conducts an equal pay audit. The audit explores gender pay gaps, where these manifest within the organisation, and why. The most recent equal pay audit findings provide assurances that our processes and practices around pay, and grading are robust with pay gaps arising from structural factors within the wider labour market. Despite these assurances, the audit has made some recommendations including:

- Reviewing what actions can be taken to enable a wider range of employees to progress to roles in higher grades.
- Ensuring decision on Market Supplements are evidence based, apply to all relevant areas of the workforce, and are monitored regularly.
- Reviewing casual appointments

Despite the fact around 52% of our workforce are part time, the prevalence of part time working is not spread evenly across our grading structure as outlined in the Figure Six below.

Figure Six: Part time workforce by category.



We will review the impact of our newly launched hybrid and flexible working policy to monitor its uptake across the workforce and will undertake work to identify what prevents greater opportunities for part time working throughout the grading structure. We will also review our approach to the identification, authorisation, and monitoring of market supplements.

Strategic Workforce Planning Actions

The actions outlined in Table One below are specific strategic workforce planning actions identified because of our strategic workforce planning priorities. These will be included and monitored as part of our wider people strategy delivery plan.

Table One: Strategic Workforce Planning Actions

Action	**Timescale**
Assess impact of technology (RPA AI etc.) on roles across the organisation by covering in January 2024 WFP forecasting conversations	January 2024
Develop Digital Skills action plan	Plan approved by January 2024
Collate Growing Our Own activity and spend across the organisation via WFP conversations	February 2024
Engage with employees aged 55 and over to better understand the type of flexibility they would value.	Findings reported April 2024
Include data on sickness absence by workforce planning category in workforce planning risk matrix	September 2024
Undertake research into the barriers to part time work in some parts of our grading structure	September 2024
Promote completion of equalities information by employees to ensure we have accurate reporting	May 2024
Research barriers to part time work across the grading structure	September 2024
Develop Council's approach to Market Pluss age where labour market forces negatively impact recruitment and/or retention	October 2024