

# Our workforce challenge



**SHETLAND**  
ISLANDS COUNCIL

Our Councillors are preparing to set budgets for next financial year. As well as the now familiar challenges around funding, perhaps a more significant issue is the Council's ongoing problems filling vacant positions – a situation that is likely to get progressively worse in the coming years.

As you'll no doubt be aware, this is a problem for every local business and organisation, with many having to change how they operate to fit their workforce.

Our latest statistics show that the Council is currently budgeting for 201 FTE (full time equivalent) vacant posts – that's around 10% of our total workforce.

The problem is more challenging in some areas of the Council, and some services are depending more and more on expensive agency workers. For example:

- We currently have around 90 full time equivalent (FTE) vacancies in Community Health and Social Care
- Last financial year, we spent £3.2 million on overtime and agency workers in Community Health and Social Care – the projection for 2023/24 is £3.7 million

The local authority areas with the highest rates of full time equivalent vacancies in care services at 31st December, 2022

	Orkney	East Lothian	Shetland
2021	9.9%	11.8%	10%
2022	15.1%	11.2%	11%

Shetland's population is getting older. In the coming years, there will be more older people in our community, and fewer people of working age. This is a trend across the whole country, but it is projected to be much worse in Shetland.

Projected percentage (%) change in population from 2018		2023	2033
<b>Children aged 0 to 5</b>	Scotland	<b>-1.4</b>	<b>-9.4</b>
	Shetland	<b>-3.9</b>	<b>-14.6</b>
<b>Working age</b>	Scotland	<b>+1.8</b>	<b>+1.8</b>
	Shetland	<b>-0.1</b>	<b>-3.9</b>
<b>Pensionable age and over</b>	Scotland	<b>+0.9</b>	<b>+14.2</b>
	Shetland	<b>+3.5</b>	<b>+14.4</b>
<b>Aged 75 and over</b>	Scotland	<b>+14.0</b>	<b>+37.8</b>
	Shetland	<b>+18.7</b>	<b>+47.8</b>

We have more jobs in Shetland than people able to do them – we have 1.12 jobs available for every worker; in Scotland, it's 0.8.

The profile of the Council's workforce is also getting older, with a high proportion approaching retirement, and fewer younger employees coming through. The trend is also for people to retire earlier than before.

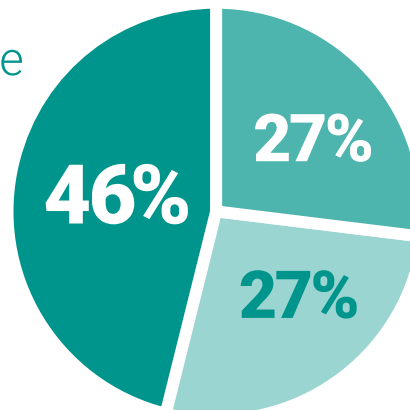
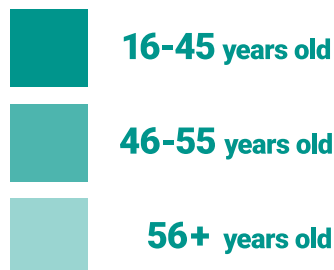
Post Title / Age	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-70
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Executive Manager	0	0	18	32	46	4
Head Teacher	0	4	22	48	26	0
Master	0	17	16	27	40	0
Social Care Worker	9	22	18	19	29	3
Social Worker	15	27	25	12	21	0
Teacher	3	21	25	30	20	1
Team Leader	0	7	24	36	33	0

## Our Staff

Executive Services	24
Children's Services	1506
Community Health & Social Care	715
Corporate Services	187
Development Services	215
Infrastructure Services	501
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3148</b>

As a rural island community we face additional problems attracting folk to live and work here. For example, the pay scale for teachers is set nationally; given the additional costs of living in Shetland, it's no surprise that a salary can buy more if you live on the mainland.

### Age profile of our workforce



We can't keep trying and failing to deliver the same services with a smaller workforce

## So what can we do?

Firstly, we need to take care of the staff we already have. If there are fewer people in a team doing the same work, they will be under much more pressure. This can have a serious impact on mental and physical health, which means we may see more people getting sick or leaving their job.

Our services will look carefully right across everything they do, how they do it, and how they might be able to change how they work to adapt to having less staff. This is likely to change how some services are delivered - but that will be discussed with users and the wider public if and when necessary.

For example, we have known for a long time that many of our care homes need to be upgraded. We also know that most older people would prefer to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. By creating clusters of individual properties – similar to the Bruce Hall housing project in Unst - with people getting support from care workers in their own homes rather than in a communal building, we could accommodate the same number of folk and reshape services around people's needs. This is also a better model from a staffing point of view, and we know residents appreciate this kind of increased supported accommodation.

We will develop our plans around recruitment, and supporting our workforce. We'll increase our focus on things like 'grow our own' programmes, training and reskilling, graduate and modern apprenticeships, and investment in individual career development for existing and new staff.



The next few months will be a challenging time for elected members, and for the Council as a whole, as we prepare to set our budget for the coming financial year. As usual, we face significant issues around balancing our books in the face of reducing income and increasing demand, but another challenge is emerging and becoming more pressing.

The profile of our existing workforce is getting older, and there are fewer people coming forward to fill vacancies and work for our community. In Shetland, there are additional problems when asking people to come to work here; our living costs are much

higher even at the best of times.

Every organisation and company in Shetland, and indeed the rest of the country, is facing a similar problem – how to recruit, retain and support enough staff to maintain service provision in the ways we've come to expect.

We need to plan and coordinate our services to take all this into account. If we can't recruit enough staff to support our model of services, we need to adapt those services accordingly. We need to look after our workforce, and to make it as easy as possible for folk to apply for vacant posts.

We are, quite rightly, proud of the quality of services we provide for the community. Our challenge now is to make sure that we can continue to do that, in the face of less funding and a shrinking workforce.

**Emma Macdonald**

Leader, Shetland Islands Council

January 2024



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