

A large white circle is centered on a light blue background. The background is decorated with a network of white dotted lines connecting various digital technology icons. These icons include a smartphone, a laptop, a camera, a tablet, a hand cursor, a printer, a cloud with an upload arrow, a target, a headset, a mouse, and a document with a list. The central circle contains the main title text in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

**Supporting  
workforce  
digital skills  
in local  
government**

# Introduction

Scotland is already a digital nation. The pace of change has been accelerated over the past 24 months, but not for everyone. Around one in five adults in Scotland don't have **Essential Digital Skills for Life**. More than 30% of people don't have Essential Digital Skills for Work, such as being able to share documents by email, saving documents in the cloud or using the internet to solve problems.

A 2021 report from Audit Scotland (**Digital Progress in Local Government**) has highlighted that insufficient staff capacity and digital skills are the most significant barriers to progress. The report states that "councils do not have enough staff with the required digital skills to implement their digital plans successfully." The report recommends that councils need to carry out digital skills surveys to understand what skills staff have and where the gaps are, including the wider workforce: essential digital skills and awareness in online and remote working.

In partnership with the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, SCVO launched a new programme of work to support local authorities to develop a digital skills programme. This piece of work launched in March 2021, with the objective of supporting local authorities to consider how they might use a Digital Champion (DC) network to develop workforce digital skills.

This report is a reflection of some of the opportunities and challenges we have encountered through this work, with a summary of key lessons learnt to support similar initiatives in local government and beyond.



# Our approach



An open call to join the programme was advertised through the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, inviting local authorities to sign up. In total, 19 local authorities joined the programme. During the initial onboarding process it was clear that there were two distinct groups: those at the beginning of their journey; and those who already have established DC networks but felt that they would benefit from additional input and support. As such, we decided to split the group into two cohorts:



**Cohort A:** 18 participants from 13 local authorities at the beginning of their journey, undertaking a 10-month programme



**Cohort B:** 12 participants from 6 local authorities with established DC programmes, undertaking a 6-month programme

The majority of participants work in Organisation Development and/or Digital Transformation roles.

Each cohort attended an online session (3 hours) on Teams once a month for the duration of their programme. The content differed slightly between the two cohorts, to reflect the needs of the participants, but the broad themes covered included:

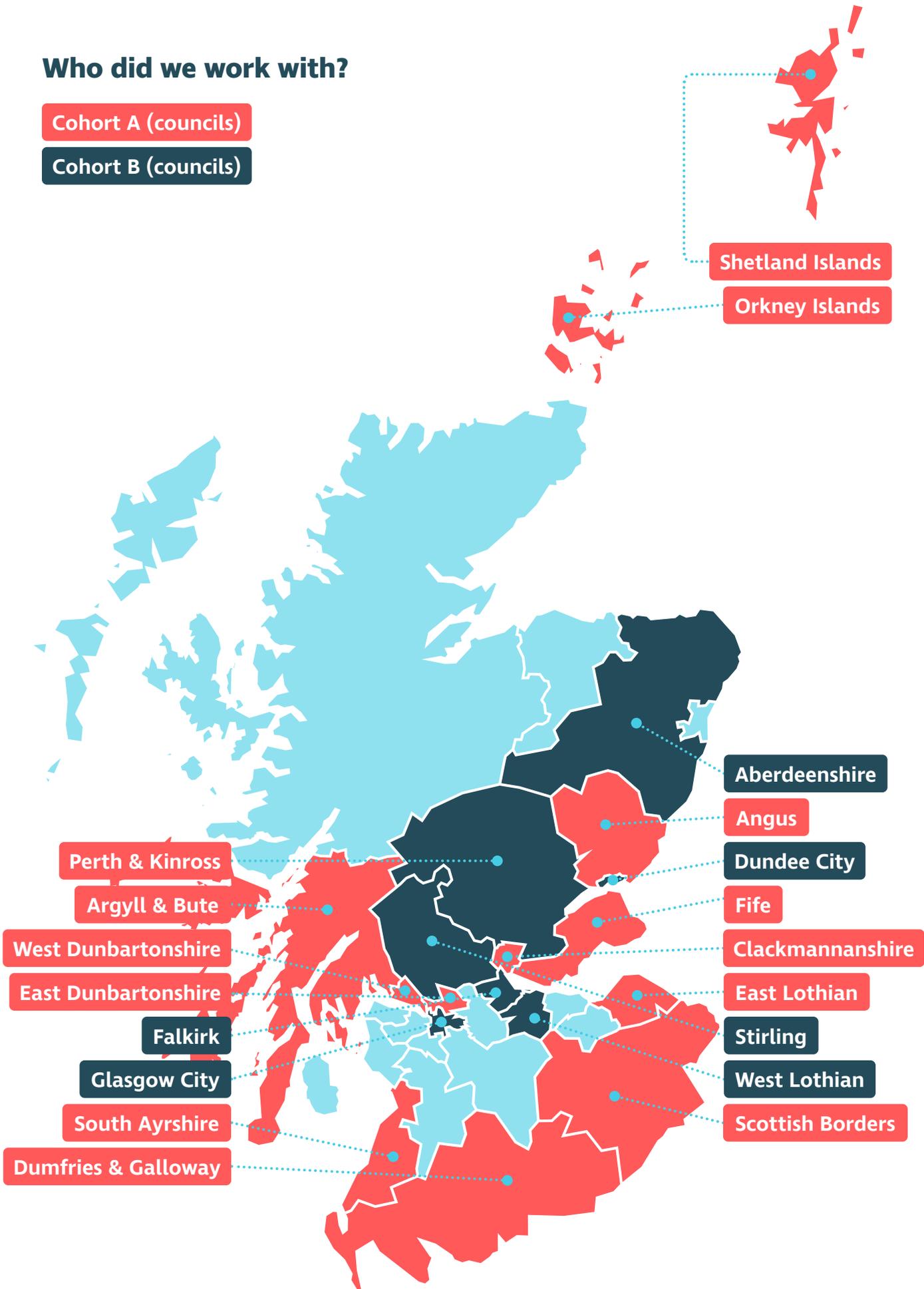
- **Understanding workforce digital skill**
- **Reflecting on changes to how we work post-pandemic**
- **Building on current buy-in and making change happen**
- **Identifying, recruiting and support Digital Champions**
- **Creating an EDS survey to baseline**
- **Project planning**
- **Scottish Approach to Service Design (SAatSD) thinking and agile working**
- **Measuring impact and evaluation**
- **Celebrating success and maintaining motivation**

Monthly sessions included a mix of facilitator input, guest speakers, group exercises and 'protected time' for doing some of the required work. Participants were also set 'homework' tasks to prepare for the next session. As the programme evolved, it became clear that participants really derived value from having conversations with each other, so an informal optional 'meet-up' was introduced once a month. This gave participants the chance to have less structured conversations about progress and blockers. The sessions and informal meet-ups were supported by a dedicated Teams Channel for participants to communicate, share insights and build their network.

# Who did we work with?

Cohort A (councils)

Cohort B (councils)



# Digital Champion network structure

The approach used in this programme to support a digital skills programme is the Digital Champion model. Work-based Digital Champions are people who tend to be more confident in navigating the different platforms being used in the workplace. They help colleagues with digital queries, however, they aren't the IT team. Digital Champions help the workforce make best use of the digital tools available to them. They are the agents of change in a digital skills programme.

Given that local authorities are large organisations with thousands of employees spread across a range of departments and locations, we suggested a structure to enable adoption across the organisation:



## Corporate Sponsor

With any large-scale change management process, the corporate sponsor ensures organisation-wide buy-in and support.

## Digital Lead

The Digital Lead is the person who is responsible for managing all the activity linked to a digital skills programme. Those on our cohort would be the 'Digital Lead' – responsible for leading the digital skills programme and reporting progress to the corporate sponsor.

## Digital Motivator

The Digital Motivator is a change-maker. They build support for digital skills development and recruit Digital Champions. Managers or team leaders across different

departments would be best suited to this role, having enough authority to support buy-in from their respective teams.

### Digital Champion

Digital Champions are usually frontline staff or volunteers who are confident in their own digital skills and have a passion for helping others. They are the vehicle for delivering digital skills support to other colleagues.

In-house Digital Champion training was provided for Cohort A, facilitated by **Mhor Collective**, with 244 people attending. Mhor Collective also provided 3 Digital Motivator training sessions, allowing staff from local authorities to choose which one they wanted to attend and network with staff from other local authorities. 99 people attended Digital Motivator training.





## What's working?

### Enthusiasm of Digital Champions

- ▄▄ The enthusiasm of Digital Champions to help others
- ▄▄ Champions are collaborating on creating resources
- ▄▄ Champions really supporting staff who were struggling at the beginning of working from home

### Visibility of Digital Champions

- ▄▄ Our Teams network has a presence in the organisation and is contacted on a regular basis for support
- ▄▄ Our Champions have profiles online for people to access

### Digital curiosity

- ▄▄ People are trying new things, are getting braver
- ▄▄ Level of digital curiosity within the service areas
- ▄▄ Use of Digital Champions as early adopters/testers

### Collaboration and use of MS Teams

- ▄▄ Staff using MS Teams – took COVID for it to happen
- ▄▄ Lots of MS Teams training happening across the council
- ▄▄ Our Digital Champions have a MS Teams group and have shared problems and issues

## What's kind of working?

### Relationship with ICT

- ▄▄ Relationship with IT – it's much improved but sometimes they see us as comms rather than skills development
- ▄▄ Relation with IT department

### Skills are improving, but the gap is widening

- ▄▄ Although some getting more tech savvy other are being left behind
- ▄▄ Pockets of council really progressing with tech. Other not so much.
- ▄▄ Skills increased during Covid but others left behind

### Digital Champion engagement

- ▄▄ Our DCs are helping, but only some of them
- ▄▄ Engagement from all Champions. Not aware that every Champion is engaging but we are trying to contact them all individually.
- ▄▄ Seems to be reactive vs. proactive

### Capacity

- ▄▄ Relying on volunteers only may have limitations
- ▄▄ Availability of Digital Champions. Some are struggling with their own workload.
- ▄▄ Teams calls taking up so much of everyone's time – struggle to free up time for our DC network

## What's not working?

### Culture

- ▄▄ Managers not having 'digital' as a standing item in team meetings
- ▄▄ Sponsorship by senior leaders
- ▄▄ A mindset of digital first within middle managers and employees

### Awareness of Digital Champion support

- ▄▄ Not all staff online, so how do they access Champions?
- ▄▄ Engaging non-PC-facing staff
- ▄▄ Awareness of our DCs – not working

### Resource

- ▄▄ Freeing up some specific resources
- ▄▄ DCs do not have the time/lack of resources
- ▄▄ Resources (time and finance)

### Rollout of tech and new platforms

- ▄▄ Some of the current technology does not measure up
- ▄▄ Speed, access and rollout of new devices and platforms
- ▄▄ Not being able to use certain systems – Zoom

For Cohort B, with established Digital Champion networks, there were common themes around enthusiasm and opportunities to harness a sense of digital curiosity, which could really help accelerate a digital skills programme of work. However, there was a concern that capacity and engagement was becoming an issue and that the digital skills gap was widening. The main blockers centred around a culture that doesn't fully grasp the resource and executive level buy-in required to make the most of these opportunities.



# What's the problem?



## Cohort A

When asked to define their 'problem statements' Cohort A provided a range of related statements, reflecting where each was on their journey. Although they all varied slightly, they can be easily summarised into a fairly consistent narrative:

**There is a digital skills gap. This skills gap impacts on the ability of our workforce to do their jobs. We don't understand the extent of this digital skills gap and there are currently no mechanisms to capture this. We don't know the best way to measure this gap and ensure we reach everyone in the organisation, especially staff who are not in office-based roles. When we understand the extent of the skills gap, we want to ensure we have the right response.**



## What do we know?

Participants identified that the one thing they were most certain about was inequitable access to technology in the workplace, presenting a major barrier to addressing the digital skills gap. The access issues raised included access to work devices, the ability to connect to Wi-Fi in some sites, and access to the council's own network. One participant highlighted that this would be particularly true for staff working in frontline social care roles. This is a significant infrastructure challenge for any organisation that wants to support the workforce to develop their digital skills and confidence.

Coupled with the access challenges, there is a reality that digital change is happening regardless. Participants noted that there has been significant investment in IT to enable more digital ways of working, and these are being rolled out to frontline workers. The ability to support the workforce with new technology was flagged as a concern, both in terms of engagement and in terms of allocated resource:



**There will be some areas more ready than others and eager to engage.**

## What do we think we know? Assumptions

When prompted to provide input on what they think they know, or the assumptions they need to make, the answers predominantly centred around organisational culture. Buy-in from Senior Management for a digital skills programme was not assumed just

because the organisation has a Digital Board. Participants assumed that there would be a degree of resistance, given that this would be a large-scale change process:

**There will be buy-in from some areas and reluctance to engage from other areas.**

Despite suspected resistance, there was also cause for some optimism, with an assumption that parts of their organisation would embrace this work:

**There are people in services who just 'get it' and could be useful resources.**

These pockets of enthusiasm have the potential to be early adopters, supporting the change process and helping to build momentum.

### **What don't we know? What we need to know**

Exploring the unknown, a consistent narrative emerged around not having a baseline to understand the extent of the digital skills gap, and the requisite resource to address it:

**We don't know how many people need help or want help.**

**How will the skills gap be addressed: Who is responsible? How will it be funded? How will it be resourced?**

The absence of a baseline understanding of need can be assumed to be responsible for the lack of resources to support the work. It may be anticipated that there is a lack of resource to address a problem if the problem itself has not been quantified or fully understood. Linked to this, a third theme emerged around clarity anticipated outcomes:

**"We are rolling out O365 – so what? What are you wanting to achieve with this? What benefits do you expect it to bring?"**

### **In summary:**

- We know that there is a digital skills gap in the workplace, and this is compounded by inequitable access to technology. Despite this, digital transformation is moving at pace.
- We assume that there will be resistance to digital upskilling, however, there are opportunities to harness pockets of enthusiasm.
- However, we do not know the extent of the digital skills gap or have the resource needed to address it. We do not know what 'success' looks like.

## Cohort B

The problem statements from Cohort B fell into two categories: formalising their Digital Champion networks and evaluating impact.

**Digital Champions are loosely organised and levels of knowledge and engagement vary between services.**

**How do we clearly demonstrate the impact of the Champions Programme?**

A number of key themes emerged when participants started to explore their problem statements further. These themes are all consistent with DC networks that have started well but have encountered challenges, partly due to the changing remote working landscape, and now face obstacles in sustaining their efforts and maintaining motivation.

### Digital Champion engagement

All participants in Cohort B noted that they already have established networks of DCs who understand their roles and feel equipped to provide support. However, the level of engagement from these established networks was variable:

**Some champions helping lots of people, some helping a few, and some had no requests for help.**

**Some Digital Champions are not very active whilst others spend a significant amount of time per week assisting their peers.**

This indicates that there is still enthusiasm for providing digital skills support, but a DC network should be seen as cyclical. It would be expected to see a natural drop-off from some DCs over time, as they change roles or juggle competing priorities. Managing a DC network requires constant review and sustained efforts to continually recruit and train new volunteers. Key to this is tapping into what motivates a person to become a DC, and how this motivation is recognised and rewarded by the organisation.

### Evolving Digital Champion networks

It follows from the level of DC engagement that more formalised structures are required to help nurture these networks. There was broad recognition that more could be done to embed the DC approach across the organisation to help evolve this work:

**There is a desire for a more structured and consistent approach to digital skills training (particularly Microsoft 365).**

**There is further work to be done on maximising their role and abilities.**

Core to this is understanding that anyone who volunteers to be a DC will have their own motivations, whether that's a desire to help others, a passion and curiosity for digital, or an opportunity to develop their own skills and career prospects. Participants had a good grasp on this but labelled this as this 'What don't we know' in their knowledge boards:

**What is the most effective way to use them?  
What we need to progress their roles?  
What is the motivation of the champions?**

The answer to these questions can be found throughout the DC lifecycle, from capturing individual motivations as part of the recruitment process, to having a plan to celebrate their successes and recognise achievements. These approaches will require a greater level of organisational buy-in and having DC networks recognised within organisational development and personal development planning.

### **Visibility of and access to Digital Champions**

All Cohort B participants have DC networks pre-dating the 2020 lockdown, initially setup to be visible and provide support in physical spaces. The impact of the pandemic and remote working has undoubtedly caused some challenges on how this support is pivoted to remote delivery, and how it is visible and accessible to those with no/low digital skills who could benefit most from support.

**People who are in most need of help don't seek it out.**

A common issue was a lack of clarity on the pathway to support:

**Access to champions may be confusing.**

**Many people don't know where or how to access champions (or don't know they exist).**

One avenue that did appear to help increase the visibility of DCs was through MS Teams:

**Some DCs are being used and questions are coming through MS Teams site.**

Some participants have adapted well to remote delivery, undertaking work to make DCs visible in the digital space:

**DC have profiles on the intranet for people to contact them.**

**We think that services are promoting who their Digital Champions are and that if people are not sure, they are able to find this out through the intranet or seeing the DC “badge” in email signatures.**

### **Culture and buy-in**

While Cohort A, at the beginning of their journey, were struggling with corporate buy-in, Cohort B largely felt that they had this in place:

**Senior Managers buy into Champs programme and are supportive of this.**

Where they did encounter problems, however, was around middle manager buy-in and broader culture issues. In organisations as large as local authorities, this is to be expected as this is a large-scale change management process.

**We don't know managers' appetite for a more formalised commitment of time to allow Digital Champions to provide support and undertake training.**

**Some blockages at middle management level – lack of support: for appropriate devices for their teams – for culture change – for champs time.**

In order to achieve the level of change these programmes aspire towards, it's vital that Digital Leads secure buy-in at management level across the organisation to enable the work to cascade to all departments and teams.

### **Measuring impact**

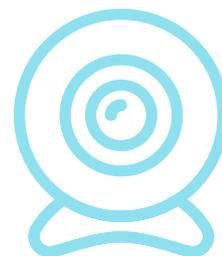
As a possible 'unblocker' for securing organisational buy-in, participants reported that one of their main issues was being able to demonstrate the impact and value of their DC networks, or what 'success' should look like:

- We have no way to measure the champions effectiveness (or what effective means)
- We do not currently measure outcomes or evaluate the Digital Champions network
- We don't know how much time overall is spent by Digital Champions delivering support, or record the activities undertaken (e.g. training / presentations / 1:1 support)
- We don't collate customer feedback on Digital Champions

- How many people have been helped by champions?
- How this help has improved their skills and confidence?
- How this has helped with service delivery?
- How this has contributed to culture change?
- How often and how are they being used?
- What type of enquiries are they helping with?
- Do services value them?
- What data do we have to show their benefit?

Participants knew the questions they needed answered in order to demonstrate impact, but the processes to gather this data were unclear. Being able to demonstrate impact is critical in making the business case to continue running DC networks, secure buy-in from managers, expand the reach and scope of the support being offered, encourage more staff to become DCs, and to celebrate the successes of what current DCs have achieved.





## Digital Champion Insights

### What kind of 'hooks' might encourage your colleagues to use the internet in their working lives?

- More training opportunities
- Training resources
- Ability to self-serve training resources
- Short one-to-one training on apps they are interested in
- Making a task easier to tackle
- Simple instructions, training guides with screenshots, 1-2-1 training
- The ability to speed up tasks
- We started a Teams quiz and it helped people develop their skills before formal Teams training
- Hyperlinks to common documents
- Avoid having to make unnecessary journeys into the office just to get hold of a form/submit something to their line manager
- Able to manage things like leave bookings, mileage claims, stuff they need to manage their work/life balance
- Freedom to spend time self-training on packages they're unfamiliar with and give them support when 'stumped'
- Able to Google solutions to work problems
- Try to make it interesting! A hobby perhaps to get them engaged
- Show them how skills may also help outside of work
- Ways to remove duplication of work

### What are our biggest concerns about helping others to use the internet?

- The fear they have of losing information or 'breaking' something
- Not having enough knowledge myself
- Time to do it
- Distrust of systems due to previous bad experiences
- Persuading people that we are not here to judge their skills
- Not knowing enough – showing people the wrong thing and putting them off
- Knowing where the right resources are if I'm unable to help
- Resistance to change
- Don't want to lead someone down the wrong route
- Time – do they have time to learn, do I have time to teach?
- Can require patience

- Varying levels of abilities and knowledge
- Individuals not having time or space to learn
- You can teach them a particular task, but without the wider understanding when things go wrong it can be frustrating.
- Inconsistency between ways of working across different services/departments.
- Helping people understand that digital is part of their job
- We can't keep up with demand/pace of change

## Digital Motivator Insights

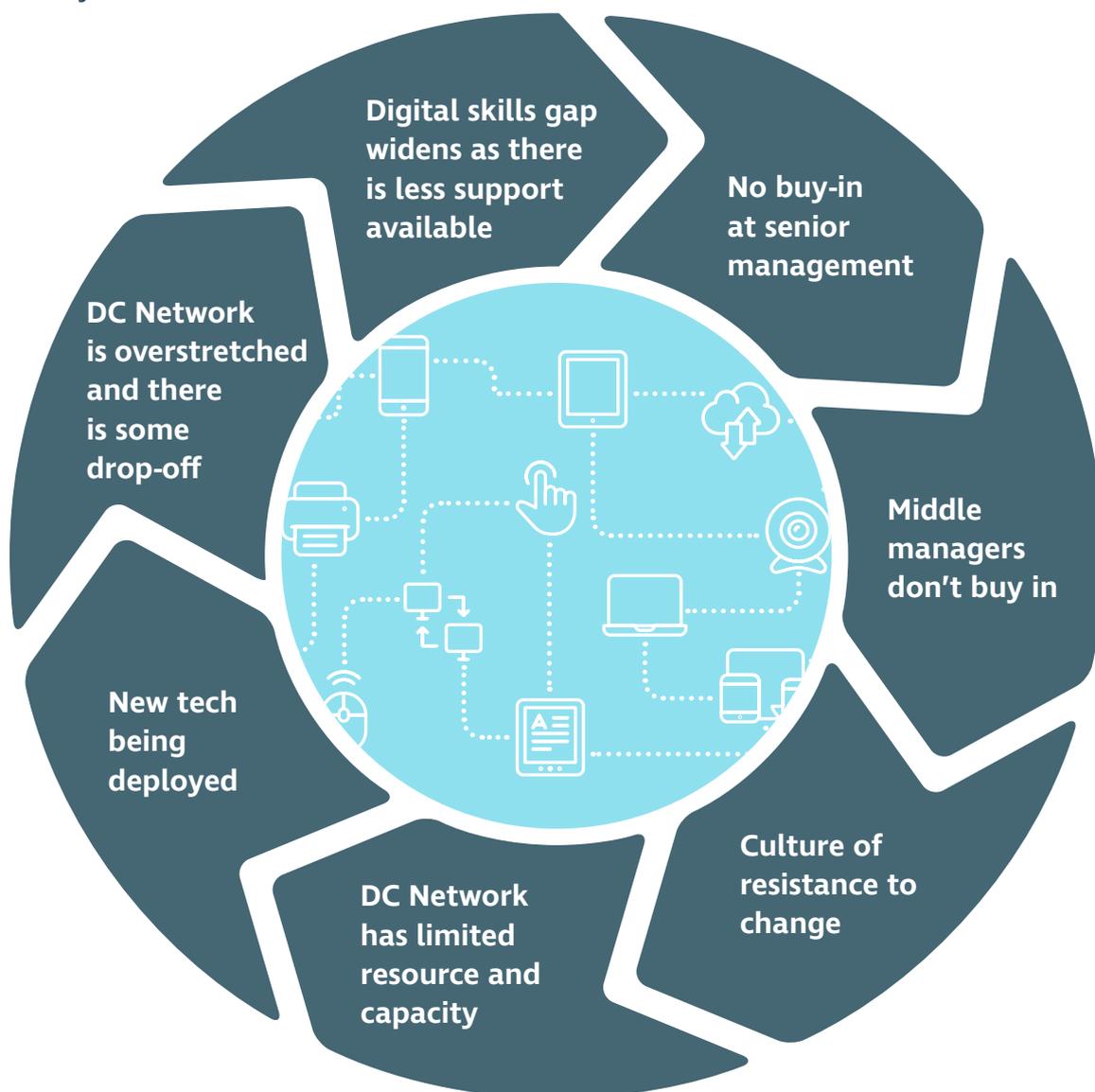
### Who do you think will volunteer as Digital Champions, and why?

- Problem-solvers who want to help others
- Some people really want to embrace change
- Frontline workers – they know what it's like to learn new tech
- Pandemic has changed the way people think
- Confident people, those interested in new tech, those willing to help or with a vested interest
- Different motivations for different people; personal interests, personal development – either through choice or with encouragement
- Younger people who are generally more comfortable with tech
- Curious, confident, good listener, enthusiastic, 'usual suspects' (good and bad thing!), people who want to progress, modern apprentices
- People with the confidence to help others digitally because they want to be able to show people the benefits of tech and digital applications
- The people who are already helping their workmates, and are happy to do so for others
- Those who love new digital tech and want to share
- Those who are already to 'go-to' people for staff if they need help
- Apprentices/trainees that are digitally savvy
- 'People' people
- Folk who feel they have some capacity
- People who want to learn more about digital
- Motivated and can see the benefit of taking people on the journey
- People with vision of new ways of delivering services



# Lessons learnt

The single biggest barrier to making progress across both cohorts was the level of buy-in, which starts at corporate level. Without a corporate sponsor or an organisational commitment to addressing workforce digital skills every other part of the programme encounters blockers. A lack of strategic direction and desired outcomes makes project planning incredibly difficult. A culture of resistance persists, supported by some middle managers who do not understand the necessity of a digitally confident workforce. Inadequate resources are allocated, placing increased pressure on those who are balancing digital skills with competing priorities in their portfolio of work. New technology is deployed without the human resource required to support successful adoption, resulting in increased frustration for DCs and a widening digital skills gap for those who do not have the support to keep pace. DCs become disenfranchised and withdraw from their roles, leaving fewer people to do more work. This is avoidable, but there needs to be a commitment from senior management, backed-up by the necessary resource.



Key reflections from both cohorts:

### **Digital Champions**

- Involve Digital Champions in the design of new digital services and strategies.
- Support DC networks to collaborate through dedicated digital platforms like Teams or Yammer.
- DCs should be recognised for the work they do, and there should be formal agreement about how this is achieved e.g. personal development plans, early access to test new systems, celebratory events, learning and development opportunities.
- DCs don't just provide support, they are also a valuable resource for user testing to support new deployments successfully.
- DCs can have different 'specialities' to match the needs of the service area they work in.
- Self-service support and resources can help address capacity issues, but investment is still needed for one-to-one interactions

### **Collaboration**

- IT and the DC programme need to work collaboratively so that access to platforms does not slow down or hamper progress.
- A clear distinction needs to be made between the offer from IT support and DC support, and this needs to be widely communicated across the organisation. There should be a clear and visible pathway to DC support.
- Deploying new technology, platforms or systems should be considered alongside the human resource and capacity to support successful adoption.
- A structure or framework is helpful to understand how every part of the organisation contributes to, and benefits from, this work.

### **Resource**

- Running a DC programme is a continuous process and requires sustained resource. Technology will continue to evolve, and the workforce will continue to need support to adapt.
- Senior management need to buy-in to a DC programme and adequately support and resource these endeavours. This is also necessary to help unblock resistance from middle management so that the work can cascade.
- A major barrier to progress has been time, capacity and resource to take this work forward. Workforce digital skills needs to be adequately resourced and prioritised in order for it to succeed.
- Access to technology for work purposes can impact on the ability to upskill the workforce.

## Culture

- Organisational culture is a significant barrier to advancing digital skills. A DC programme should sit within a change management framework.
- Make the link between digital workforce skills and digitally confident citizens who use local government services.
- 'Digital' should not be seen as having something else to do, rather, it's now how things are done.

Although our programme has come to an end, local authorities are still on their journey to create and sustain their Digital Champion networks.

# Case Studies

## West Dunbartonshire Council

Prior to attending the SCVO Digital Champions programme, as a Council we had already been exploring our digital skills demographic through both a Digital Maturity assessment, and the Digital Skills survey across the full workforce. We had a really good response to this and the survey results were shared with all Chief Officers and Service Managers, broken down into results for their service and coupled with suggested interventions which could be useful for their employees, tailored for each service. We offered full support for them to cascade and offer this.

Following this we developed our own 23 Digital Things on our Ilearn platform, based on the 23 areas of the survey that scored lower, and set up a dedicated intranet page with digital skills resources.

The opportunity to attend the SCVO DC programme came after this and was a great opportunity for us to expand the work we were already doing, sharing and learning with other local authorities along the way.

Since participating in the programme, we have now developed a full approach which we have titled our Digital Skills Support Framework and much of this has been informed by content of the sessions and sharing from other colleagues. We chose to document this through a series of infographics, rather than a wordy document and this will be presented shortly to both our senior leadership team and the Digital Transformation board, prior to implementation.



The key message we have embedded through our development is that digital is no longer optional or additional. It is integral to the way we work now, and more importantly for the future. For us to remain as a viable, contributing and successful authority we must fully engage in supporting our workforce to develop, maintain and progress their digital skills to enable and empower them to deliver fit for purpose services for a sustainable future. This mindset and the digital skillset will benefit everyone both in and out of the workplace, as an employee and as a citizen of Scotland. As referenced in the Scottish Government paper, we aim to ensure that ‘no-one is left behind’.

## Argyll & Bute Council

To gain buy in to adopt a digital champion’s programme, we developed a business case outlining our whole approach to digital skills and why digital skills are essential to our organisation. The business case was linked to our digital priorities and was titled Investing in our digital first future, emphasising the importance of the programme in achieving our digital ambitions set out within our ICT and Digital Strategy 2021-2024. It covered our whole approach to digital skills, the plan to undertake a digital skills survey, the digital champions and motivator programme and our plan to provide digital skills training.

Our digital skills survey will be issued to our workforce in the coming months. We have decided to adapt the survey and built it on MS Forms. This will allow us to gather some additional information which is relevant for our organisation and have learnt best practice from other local authorities through the SCVO programme. Alongside the link being circulated via email, we are going to produce a QR code in a hope that some non-office based staff will be able to access the form, using their own devices, given they are used to using QR codes for track and trace. We will work with our digital champions, to encourage uptake. Following the survey, we will analyse the results and put in place a programme of digital skills training to meet the needs identified through the survey.

Our digital champions programme is being used initially to support the roll out of Microsoft 365 within Argyll and Bute Council. The focus of which is to get the most of the tools available to the organisation and adapt the way which we work to work smarter not harder. At Argyll and Bute Council, we have decided to undertake our champions programme as a pilot initially for 6 months. This will enable us to determine the success of the programme in its current format but also enable us to



gather feedback and data to demonstrate if it is having the desired impact. Following suggestions from the programme, we will use a snapshot week to provide data to determine the success of the programme.

To recruit our digital champions we created a short video to explain the programme and the roll of the champions. This was placed on our staff website alongside additional supporting information and a role descriptor. Our chief executive promoted the programme through her weekly update. The recruitment focused heavily on the benefits champions would get from the programme. The recruitment was heavily influenced by the best practice and experiences we have heard about and discussed within the group.

The discussions which we have had in the group and the speakers which we have heard from, have played an integral part in the design and development of the programme. We do not have enough resource to fully support our employees' gain the digital skills required, however every local authority is in the same position. This programme has enabled us to share best practice and resources to prevent duplication. Digital skills is a massive problem which we are all facing and we need to work together to ensure that we can provide our employees with the skills they need.



## Contact

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