

How one Scottish Council is developing Digital Champions in the workplace



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West Lothian Council joined Digital Unite's [Digital Champions Network](#) as part of the Lottery-funded [One Digital programme](#). Enabling and supporting their customers and staff with digital skills is a key part of their Digital Transformation Strategy and the unitary Council is developing a Digital Champion programme to achieve that strategic aim.

At the time of joining West Lothian Council had a handful of staff and volunteers who were helping others improve their digital skills but as a local authority serving over 175,000 citizens, they needed to do more to accelerate the shift to digital services. With budgets reducing and service delivery changing developing a peer to peer learning model is a key way of achieving sustainable digital transformation.



West Lothian
Council

Helping staff and residents thrive in the digital age

Karen Cawte, Digital Transformation Manager (pictured) explains the Council's approach to developing their Digital Champion support:

"The Council is committed to developing staff's learning and development and we knew we needed to do something more to help staff and residents thrive in the digital age. Having digital skills identified as a key part of Council's Digital Strategy enabled a firm commitment from our senior team which has been invaluable.

"Our starting point was an audit of digital skills amongst staff used [SCVO's Essential Digital Skills Framework](#) toolkit to help frame the questions. We have 8,000 staff and 6,000 of those live in the council area so they are both employees and customers.

"The survey received over 1,400 responses and highlighted the two key barriers people are facing which are understanding how to access information and being safe online. It was very interesting to see that people have different views about their digital skills and knowledge at work and at home. In their personal lives our staff feel very competent but that changes when using digital technology to support their work.



Learning more about our Digital Champions

"As part of the audit we invited staff to nominate themselves as Digital Champions. Over 100 people came forward and from that we ran an initial meeting in February for 50 staff members. Since then we have been working with them to scope out their own role which has helped with the way they are engaging. Many were anxious they didn't become an extension of our IT helpdesk.

"Our Champions are also creating their own digital profiles which covers who they are, their job and their level of digital skills and interest. This helps us understand what gaps we need to fill with the Digital Champion support. Once they have done this, they get access to the training and support on the Digital Champions Network.

"The staff Champions are based in specific service areas and, using the information from the audit which identified specific skills issues in each service area, the Champion support can be very targeted. The Council has also committed to giving an hour a week for Champions to enhance their own skills and training and to help colleagues.

Supporting learning and development

"We have 26 Champions registered with the Network so far and they're finding it very useful. The professional development aspect of the Network with its accredited courses, badges and certificates has really boosted the learning and development theme of our Digital Champion approach.

"As someone overseeing the project, I have limited resources available to me but through the Network I can easily keep track of our Champions' progress and impact across the Council. It's also meant I haven't had to reinvent the wheel or start gathering resources which has been brilliant.

Adapting as we go along

"Our challenge now is to develop our understanding of what the Champion role is in the Council. Until we start putting it into practice we don't fully know. I have been in touch with other councils in Scotland who are also running Digital Champion programmes to share learning and ideas which have been very helpful.

"The next step for us is to see how this initiative can reach and engage frontline staff such as bin collectors, school kitchen staff etc, many of whom work part time and are remote from the Council. These are the groups we need to support the most and will possibly need a different approach which we are currently working out.

"We are definitely still finding our way with this but recognise that it's something we can adapt as we go along. It is exciting to see where our Digital Champion support will take us and the signs are very positive so far."

The Digital Champion perspective

Helen Rennie is one of West Lothian's staff Digital Champions. She says: "I volunteered to become a Digital Champion as I'm a bit of a compulsory problem solver and enjoy helping people with digital queries. I'm definitely no IT expert but I try to assist where I can and, if I don't know the answer, the chances are I might know someone who will.

"It's early days yet but I'm enjoying this role as it offers me some time to help my colleagues and service users use the digital systems and e-Resources the Council has in place and in turn learn from people who have more experience with systems I am not so familiar with.

"I've completed a few of the courses on the Digital Unite site and have learned a lot, especially around providing assistance to people with additional needs. The information the site provides and signposting to other agencies is fantastic and I will be using these to help me prepare and present digital workshops in the future."

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