

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: 19 January 2023



Workforce capacity in local government

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report summarises the LGA's policy and improvement activity to address workforce capacity challenges in local government and seeks the Board's feedback on priorities for future activity.

Is this report confidential? No

Recommendation

That the Safer and Stronger Communities Board feed back their views of the priority issues for future policy and improvement activity to address workforce capacity challenges and how the LGA delivers those priorities.

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Workforce capacity in local government



Introduction

1. Councils are experiencing workforce capacity challenges across many services. To enable policy boards to consider specific challenges relating to their terms of reference in the context of the challenges affecting the sector as a whole, all the policy boards will consider substantively the same report, prior to consideration of the issue in the round by Resources Board and Executive Advisory Board.
2. This report includes evidence of recruitment and retention challenges being experienced in local regulatory services and previous work on this issue to date.
3. The SSCB is therefore asked to consider previous work on this issue, the support, policy offers and asks being considered in relation to the local government workforce as a whole, and to advise on priorities for action in terms of its own responsibilities. As ever, the Board's experience of these issues within their own authorities would be extremely useful.

Issues specific to local regulatory services

4. At the Board's meeting in June 2022, members indicated that they would be keen to ensure a focus on recruitment and capacity issues in local regulatory services as part of the Board's work plan for 2023-24.
5. Regulatory services capacity is an issue the Board has had under consideration for a number of years. The LGA has consistently warned about pressures on the service due to a significant reduction in staffing capacity within environmental health and trading standards, combined with an ever-increasing number of statutory duties. Lead members have previously written to Ministers to highlight the uncoordinated creation of new enforcement duties placed on the service by a range of different Government departments, and the LGA has called for more cost recovery mechanisms so that businesses which benefit from regulation and/or create costs through compliance intervention play a greater role in funding this work.
6. During Covid, regulatory services capacity issues became both more pronounced, and more visible beyond the professions and the LGA. With a clear focus on the role of environmental health teams in infection control, test and trace and COVID-19 compliance/ enforcement work (to which trading standards teams also made a significant contribution), the redeployment of local capacity to COVID-19 work highlighted the extent to which the services were already stretched. This was compounded by the end of the UK-EU transition arrangements at the end of 2020, which created additional duties for regulatory teams required to support UK businesses with new paperwork for exports to the EU.
7. In summer and autumn 2020, the LGA lobbied Government to highlight the challenges and call for a cross-government review of the demands placed on local regulatory services, in the context of Covid and EU exit but also more generally.

8. One of the particular challenges for environmental health, trading standards and licensing services, unlike other services/professions such as social care, is that there is no one single responsible government department to take ownership and oversight of capacity and performance issues, with their functions supporting the objectives of a wide number of departments including Defra, BEIS, the Home Office, DLUHC and agencies such as the Food Standards Agency and Office for Product Safety and Standards.
9. As a result of the LGA's lobbying, assisted by an increased level of engagement by DLUHC in local regulatory services due to their role in Covid compliance and enforcement work, DLUHC convened an officials' cross government task and finish group to look at issues in local regulatory services. The group had five workstreams covering: prioritisation; dealing with backlogs created during Covid, workforce capacity, cost recovery in the services, and cross government coordination.
10. The LGA was closely involved in the constructive work of the task group, co-chairing the workforce capacity workstream and participating in others. This workstream identified a consistent set of issues linked to resources, capacity and qualifications in environmental health, trading standards and licensing¹, as follows:
 - An ageing workforce that is shrinking due to both retirement and retention issues, with the loss of officers to other sectors and agencies common and exacerbated by COVID-19.
 - Challenges in recruitment, with a limited pool of professional capacity available and an increasing gap between filled and advertised posts.
 - Difficulty in bringing in new officers through available routes such as apprenticeships, with a lack of funding for training posts meaning these roles taking up a post in core staffing teams; alongside this, councils reported challenges in ensuring available management and operational time for mentoring new officers. However, there is wide recognition of the impetus that new and younger officers can bring.
 - Concern about the loss of specialist expertise in a number of areas, with many officers now taking on generalist roles as councils are unable to carry specialist posts within their headcounts, and/or concern about the predominance of food work over other areas of regulation.
 - Mixed feedback on the varying entry and qualification routes for the different services, but a recognition that this was not the primary challenge facing the services.
11. Although it was clear from the outset that the group would not be able to make progress on cost recovery issues (for example, an increase in nationally set licence fees, or the creation of new cost recovery mechanisms in food regulation), there was cross-government agreement for a 2021 Spending Review bid for a dedicated fund for regulatory services apprenticeships at a cost of around £15m. There was also

¹ These issues are also present in other local government professions.

optimism that DLUHC would maintain some sort of coordinating role in regulatory services going forward.

12. Unfortunately, the apprenticeship fund was not taken forward by DLUHC as part of the Department's overall spending review bid; and since the end of the pandemic, the Department has generally stepped back from its work on regulatory services beyond the production of a quarterly forward look/horizon scan of developments and new duties relevant to regulatory services (although it has recently identified a dedicated role to engage with local regulatory officers in relation to building safety/construction product issues, as a policy area the department has responsibility for).
13. Officers at the LGA, Office for Product Safety and Standards and relevant professional bodies (Chartered Trading Standards Institute and Chartered Institute of Environmental Health) have sought to make progress on some of the other elements in the workforce capacity workstream, for example raising awareness of regulatory services and careers within it and developing and promoting a leadership development scheme within the existing workforce. However, these are ultimately likely to have less impact than the necessary investment required in the service.
14. We are also keeping in touch with a piece of work the Food Standards Agency have commissioned to look at resourcing in local environmental health and trading standards. Councils are a crucial delivery partner for the FSA, which is known to have concerns about current and future capacity and the extent to which this will enable the UK to deliver the controls expected to enable us to trade with international partners. The FSA have a key role in setting training and qualification requirements for food work (which accounts for around a third of local regulatory activity) through their food law code of practice.

Background

15. Core government funding for councils was reduced by £15 billion in cash terms between 2010/11 and 2019/20. Overall, spending by local authorities in England has decreased by £3.4 billion (in real terms at 2020/21 prices). Most services have seen cuts in expenditure, such as planning (reduced by 35 per cent). The only exceptions were children's social care (increased by 28 per cent in real terms), and 'other services' (which in many cases is where councils accounted for the grants they received to deal with the pandemic response).
16. Against these reductions in spending, there have been increases in demand for most services. For example:
 - The number of looked after children increased by 25 per cent², those being assessed because they are believed to be at risk of significant harm increased by 99 per cent³, and Ofsted noted that the complexity of cases has increased since

² www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children#looked-after-children

³ https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=8915&mod-period=12&mod-area=E92000001&mod-group=AllRegions_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup

the pandemic began, meaning rising workloads even where the number of children on the caseloads has remained stable⁴;

- The number of requests for adult social care from new working age clients increased by 11 per cent⁵;
- The number of fly tipping incidents increased by 20 per cent⁶.

It has also been estimated that, due to demographic changes, an estimated 490,000 more people will need to be working across all providers of adult social care in England by 2035⁷.

17. As demands have increased, the size of the local government workforce has decreased. Between 2009 and 2022 the English local government staff headcount fell from 2,254,700 to 1,346,400 (full-time equivalent totals for the same periods falling from 1,584,200 to 1,022,000)⁸. This is only partly explained by academisation, as individual services have been demonstrably reduced: for example, the number of local government adult social services jobs in September 2021 was 115,100, a decrease from 159,400 in September 2011⁹.
18. The only area where staffing has clearly grown over the period is in children and families social workers, where staff levels were 25,515 in December 2011, increasing to 32,502 by September 2021¹⁰.
19. The picture of reducing staff numbers is worsened by problems with recruitment and retention for those posts which remain. The LGA's most recent research shows that 92 per cent of councils were experiencing recruitment difficulties in at least one occupation and 83 per cent were experiencing retention difficulties in at least one¹¹. Recruitment problems have affected all types of authority and all types of service. Figure 1 shows, as a proportion of all councils, the most difficult to recruit occupations/ roles:

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-2022-recovering-from-the-covid-19-pandemic/childrens-social-care-2022-recovering-from-the-covid-19-pandemic

⁵ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-social-care-activity-and-finance-report/2021-22>

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/env24-fly-tipping-incident-and-actions-taken-in-england

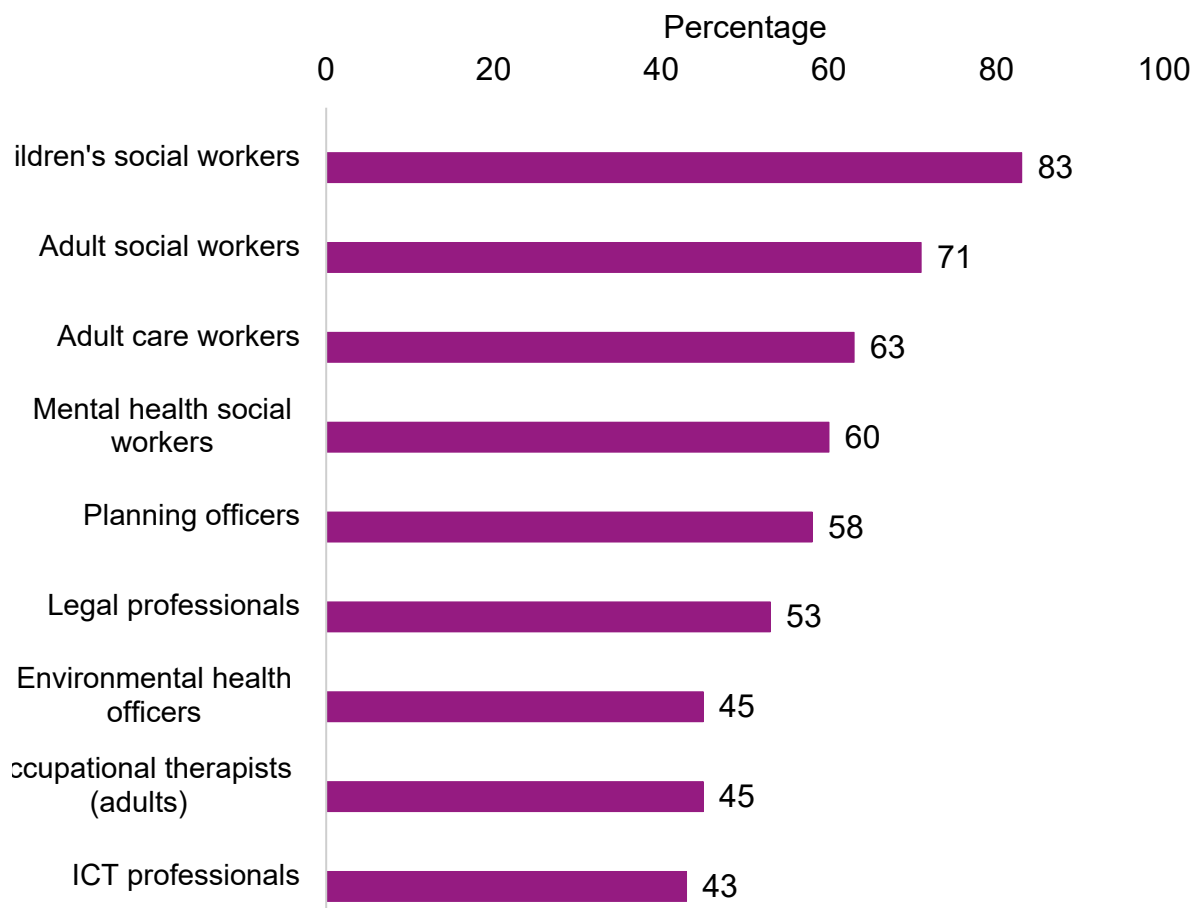
⁷ www.local.gov.uk/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/adult-social-care-workforce/asc-reform

⁸ www.local.gov.uk/publications/ons-quarterly-public-sector-employment-survey

⁹ www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Data-and-publications.aspx

¹⁰ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-s-social-work-workforce>

¹¹ LGA Workforce Survey 2022 (publication imminent)



Base: all councils (119 overall, but number varies by occupation/role as the results are calculated for the type of council that holds responsibility for them).

Source: LGA Workforce Survey 2022

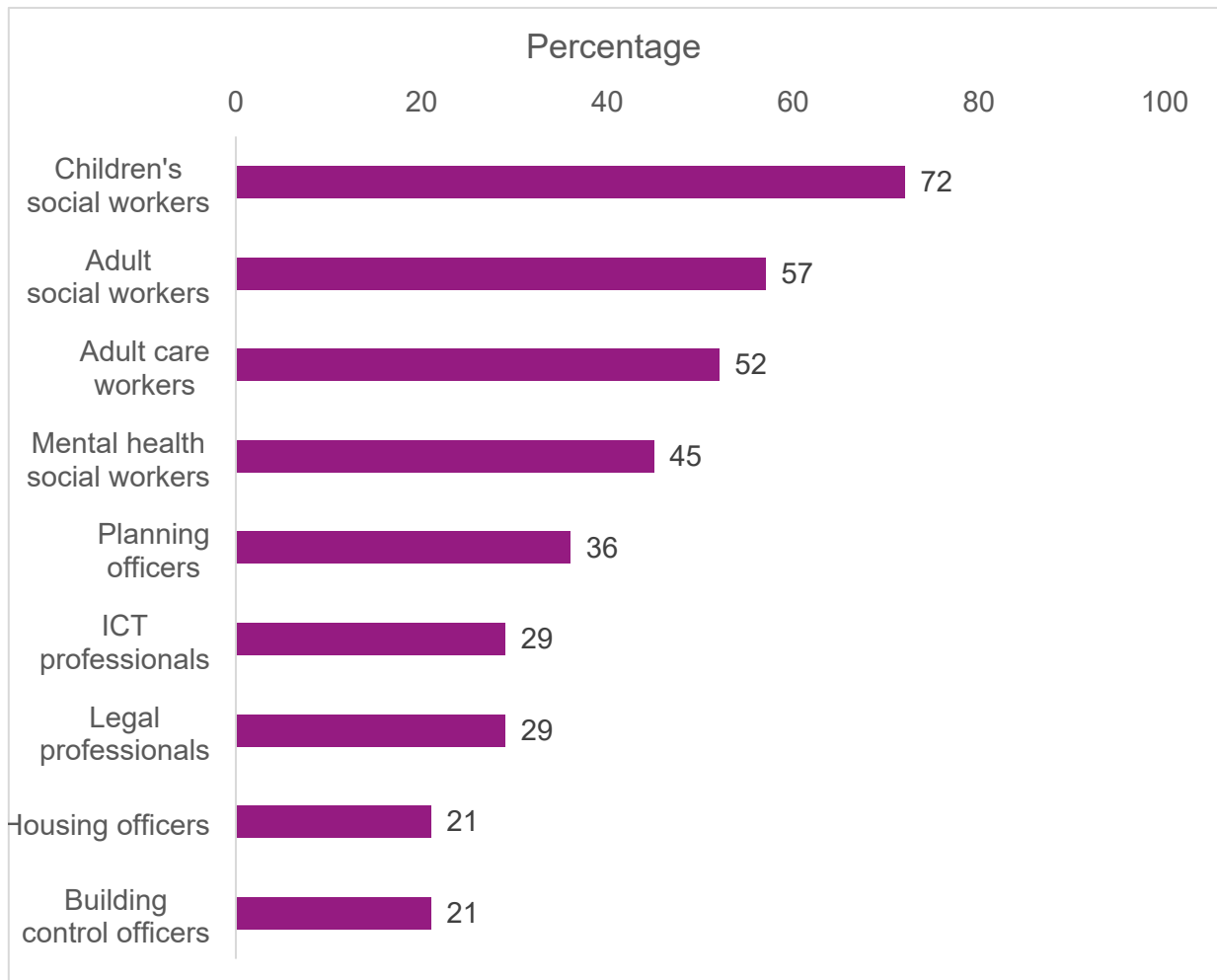
20. A further survey showed that 63 per cent of councils had experienced difficulties recruiting or retaining LGV/ HGV drivers over the past year or anticipated such difficulties¹². From our discussions with the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers, it is also clear that trading standards services are experiencing challenges in recruitment.
21. The vacancy rate for children and family social workers was 16.7 per cent in September 2021¹³, and 94 per cent of local authorities in early 2022 found it difficult or very difficult to fill vacancies for experienced children's social workers¹⁴. The number of vacancies across all providers of adult social care increased by 52 per cent in 2021/22, by 55,000 to 165,000¹⁵.
22. Figure 2 shows that, as a proportion of all councils which run the service, the most difficult to retain occupations/ roles are often those which are challenging to recruit:

¹² www.local.gov.uk/publications/local-highways-weather-resilience-survey-2022

¹³ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-s-social-work-workforce>

¹⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1123954/Childrens_services_Survey_Wave_6_Dec22.pdf

¹⁵ www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-2022.pdf



Base: all councils (119 overall, but number varies by occupation/role as the results are calculated for the type of council that holds responsibility for them).

Source: LGA Workforce Survey 2022

23. Analysis of insights and research from services experiencing capacity challenges has identified the following causes (this is not a comprehensive list):

- i) **Low pay:** this is a factor in all service areas. In some areas of the country, the affordability of housing and availability of public transport impacts on the ability of councils to recruit.
- ii) **Better hours and working conditions elsewhere:** this is a motivation for social care and public health workers, for example, who have also reported feeling burnt out and stressed. There is a perception of a lack of parity of esteem compared to the NHS workforce. Post COVID-19, planners and environmental health officers are also reported to be taking early retirement and leaving the profession and can find work in the private sector. There are also recruitment and retention challenges in housing and homelessness services where officers now have increased workloads due to Homes for Ukraine and other resettlement schemes. Some planners choose to work for agencies where they feel less personally visible in the context of politically charged decision-making and children's social workers value the flexibility provided by agency work.
- iii) **Reductions in staffing and other budgets** have led to reductions in supervision, support, learning and development as well as increased workloads. While some

measures (such as moratoriums on training and recruitment freezes) were intended to be temporary in the early years of austerity, these have become permanent with long-term consequences. These can all impact on staff retention and the ability for professionals to develop additional expertise. Similarly, pressure on manager time is sometimes seen as a disincentive to taking on apprentices or other more junior roles.

- iv) **Local government is not perceived as an attractive career.** Other sectors are perceived as providing more attractive career options in light of the above, with a perceived lack of appreciation and recognition and either low public profile or negative perceptions arising from financial challenges and service failures in the sector generally. Some planners and children's social workers are exposed to significant public criticism, including via social media without right of reply.

24. Recruitment and retention challenges are leading to the following further impacts and consequences:

- i) Because councils are seeking to recruit from an increasingly limited pool of officers, they are **using market supplement payments** (which were not necessarily budgeted for) to support recruitment and retention. Eighty-one per cent of councils pay them for some occupations¹⁶;
- ii) Councils are increasingly **relying on agency staff** to fill gaps:
- Sixteen per cent of children's social workers are agency staff and proportions in some councils are at 48 per cent¹⁷ (this does not include where agencies provide entire 'project teams');
 - The Planning Advisory Service has found that some planning services have up to 80 per cent of their staff provided by agencies;
 - Twenty per cent of London authorities reported routinely using agency staff to meet capacity needs in place-shaping services¹⁸.

High turnover of social workers and residential workers and reliance on agency staff can lead to a lack of stability in relationships for children and their families¹⁹. Recent analysis for the DfE estimated that the additional cost of employing agency staff means that there is a loss of over £100 million per year that could be better spent on front-line activity to support children and families²⁰.

- iii) It can be **difficult to recruit managers** with the required skills and experience; and pay restraint is acting as a disincentive for people to seek promotion to supervisory roles. The reduction in staff numbers can lead to bigger portfolios for managers, making it difficult for them to find time to use their skills effectively.

¹⁶ LGA Workforce Survey 2021/22 (publication imminent)

¹⁷ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/454afee-eb35-4226-5de6-08dad5210ff4>

¹⁸ www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/advice-and-guidance/helping-london-authorities-deliver-placeshaping-capacity-survey

¹⁹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202122-education-childrens-services-and-skills

²⁰ <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/>

Newly qualified staff now make up a greater proportion of posts in children's social care²¹: since newly qualified staff require more oversight and support, this places additional work on managers and may introduce risk when expertise and practical experience is needed to make effective decisions about children and their families²².

Ninety per cent of councils reported at least one capability gap in their management team and 83 per cent reported at least one capacity issue²³.

- iv) Around 40 to 50 per cent of councils have consistently reported minor **disruption to their services** as a result of not having the right staff (in numbers or skills to meet demand) to run normal services. Around 10 to 20 per cent reported moderate or severe disruption for the same reason²⁴.

Disruption due to staffing issues has tended to affect key services, most notably those that require professional qualifications. The most recent research showed that the most disrupted services for single tier and county councils were:

- Directly employed adult social care (74 per cent)
- Schools (70 per cent)
- Children's services (58 per cent)
- Public health (52 per cent)

For district and single tier councils, the most disrupted services were:

- Doorstep collection of household waste (45 per cent)
- Environmental health (33 per cent)
- Planning (31 per cent)

- v) There are also **direct negative consequences** both for staff as individuals and for councils' ability to deliver services and/or introduce new operating models:
- Two-fifths of Heads of Human Resources (HR) said that there was a moderate and 11 per cent said there was a high risk that workforce capacity may negatively affect their council's ability to deliver services²⁵;

²¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-2022-recovering-from-the-covid-19-pandemic/childrens-social-care-2022-recovering-from-the-covid-19-pandemic

²² www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-review-into-the-murders-of-arthur-labinjo-hughes-and-star-hobson

²³ LGA Workforce Survey 2022 (publication imminent). A capability gap was defined as 'the council has managers, but they require additional training and development/support to close their skills gap'. A capacity gap was defined as 'the council has managers with these skills, but they have no capacity to utilise them effectively'.

²⁴ www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-workforce-survey-research-reports. These regular surveys were conducted fortnightly during the pandemic in 2020, then monthly until January 2022.

²⁵ www.local.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-workforce-survey-week-ending-14-january-2022

- Two-thirds of adults and children’s social workers in January 2022 said they were experiencing deteriorating mental health because of their roles²⁶;
- Ofsted has noted that children’s social care workloads are high and the demands of an already challenging job can be unsustainable. In the year leading up to September 2021, 9 per cent of all local authority children’s social workers left local authority social work, an increase from 7 per cent the previous year²⁷;
- Thirty-one per cent of Heads of Environmental Services said that some services had been stopped in their authority over the last six years, with many reducing services to the statutory minimum²⁸;
- There is a loss of specialist expertise in a number of areas of local regulatory services, with many officers now taking on generalist roles as councils are unable to carry specialist posts within their headcounts: in some places there is concern about the predominance of food work over other areas of regulation²⁹;
- Given the responses given to the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health workforce survey³⁰, it may be expected that work currently underway to review housing conditions (particularly in the private rented sector) will place further pressure on already-strained capacity in environmental health, with both environmental health and trading standards facing challenges to effectively deliver their broad range of responsibilities, and concern about the future pipeline of officers in each service
- The King’s Fund argues that COVID-19 has made enormous demands on Directors of Public Health and their (usually small) teams and many are exhausted³¹. This has implications for the full range of public health systems and functions, including emergency planning³²;
- Seventy per cent of local planning authorities surveyed by the Royal Town Planning Institute said that they had had difficulty recruiting enforcement officers over the past five years³³;
- Thirty-eight per cent of local planning authorities reported that they could not administer and deliver new ‘No Net Loss/ Net Gain’ and Biodiversity Offsetting policies and, of these, 62 per cent identified lack of staffing resource as the reason³⁴. A lack of in-house ecological expertise is cited as a major obstacle.
- Heads of library services at a Libraries Connected basecamp reported that libraries have limited ability to respond to corporate priorities such as climate

²⁶ <https://campaigncollective.org/2022/01/25/social-workers-case-loads-putting-vulnerable-at-risk/>

²⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202122-education-childrens-services-and-skills

²⁸ www.cieh.org/policy/campaigns/workforce-survey-england/

²⁹ Identified by a cross-government task and finish group convened by DLUHC post-pandemic looking at issues in local regulatory services

³⁰ www.cieh.org/policy/campaigns/workforce-survey-england/

³¹ www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2021/08/public-health-workforce

³² www.fph.org.uk/media/3031/fph_systems_and_function-final-v2.pdf

³³ www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2022/november/planning-enforcement-resourcing/

³⁴ <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/LPA-Survey-Full-Report-Aug-23-2021-FINAL.pdf>

change and the cost of living, despite councils increasingly seeing libraries as a trusted core delivery vehicle for providing community support and engagement.

- The Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association advises that leisure centres have typically covered their own running costs and generated a surplus for councils, but staff shortages, particularly for lifeguards (reported by 73 per cent of employers), are forcing them to move to shorter opening hours or close (50 per cent of employers with shortages)³⁵. This is compromising a business model that is already under pressure from reduced footfall post-COVID-19. Libraries are similarly affected: individual staff sickness now often leads to branch closures as there is no replacement pool of staff to redeploy. This is affecting public opinion of the stability and reliability of these universal and very visible council services.
- The Grenfell Tower disaster and subsequent revelations about the state of the built environment dramatically illustrated the important role of effective building control regulation. Local Authority Building Control (LABC) reports that there are very few council building control departments which have a full complement of staff. Those who do are likely to be operating a reduced establishment than in previous years because of pressure on budgets. As a result, councils regularly have to resort to agency staff: LABC estimate that 50 per cent of London Boroughs have used an agency surveyor at some point over the last twelve months³⁶. LABC and Government funding has provided training to improve competence, but the advent of the new post-Grenfell regulatory system will put additional – as yet unquantified – stress on council teams with oversight from what will in effect be a new inspectorate (HSE). HSE has noted under-resourcing of teams as a key risk to good practice, and therefore good outcomes, following research into current operation and practices of the profession³⁷.
- Revenues and Benefits services have faced considerable change and uncertainty throughout the implementation of wide-ranging welfare reforms and the administration of vital support throughout the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis – often and very short notice and with evolving funding, policy and partnership arrangements. The LGA has heard, through attendance at DWP engagement forums with Revenues and Benefits practitioners, that this has impacted on recruitment, retention, morale and capacity and placed considerable pressure on these services.

25. The cost of living crisis is increasing the scale of the challenge. Nearly all (95 per cent) of the respondents to a Homecare Association Survey said that their staff had expressed anxiety about the rising cost of living and 21 per cent reported that staff were looking for work elsewhere because they cannot afford fuel and other costs: this may impact on councils' ability to commission services from social care providers.

³⁵ Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity Employer Pulse Check 2021 (unpublished)

³⁶ Views supplied to the LGA by LABC

³⁷ www.hse.gov.uk/research/insight/building-control-pubn-summary.pdf

Increasing pay rates for tradespeople lead to consequences not only for councils' ability to let contracts for maintenance and construction work but also contracts being handed back prior to completion.

26. This in turn will put pressure on national negotiations for the annual pay awards for local government workers, compounding a pre-existing issue for the sector from a rapidly escalating National Living Wage (NLW). Last year the NLW increased by 9.7 per cent to take effect on 1 April 2023: forecasts from the Low Pay Commission (who recommend the NLW level to Government) suggest that for April 2024 the NLW could increase a further 8.8 per cent to £11.35. The high proportion of local government staff who are at or near this point means that a significant proportion of any pay award has and will continue to be consumed by legal compliance with the NLW. Without additional funding to meet this cost there will be no capacity to meet the pay-related challenges of those further up the pay scale – the specialists and professionals referenced in this paper. In fact, their pay position is likely to worsen in comparison with the wider public sector and private sector.

Progress to date

27. The LGA and our partners have had some success in highlighting the scale and nature of workforce capacity issues in the sector. For example:
- i) The National Employers for local government took the unprecedented step in 2022 of writing to the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) when they made their final pay offer to the trade unions, highlighting the need for additional funding to meet the NLW cost. Government declined to recognise the issue and the particular position of local government within the public sector in relation to the NLW. The additional funding made available from 2023/24 may assist with the challenge of meeting the NLW cost in 2023/4 but leaves the cumulative cost highlighted in 2022 unmet: it is therefore unlikely that this will provide much support for councils in meeting their workforce capacity challenges. While the 9.2 per cent increase in local government core spending power announced in the 2023/24 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement will help councils deal with inflationary and other cost pressures, the LGA will continue to make the case for the underlying and existing pressures that remain. Many councils will also see much lower increases in Core Spending Power in the next financial year;
 - ii) In its December 2021 white paper on adult social care, the Government announced £500 million for measures to support the adult social care workforce. The LGA continues to make the case that more detail is needed on this funding to ensure that the Government joins up its various workforce commitments and is keen to work with Government and partners to achieve this;
 - iii) In the November 2022 Autumn Statement, the Government announced its intention to publish a comprehensive workforce plan for the NHS. In response, the LGA has stressed the need to expand the scope of the plan to include the adult social care workforce;

- iv) In the Autumn Statement, the Government also announced it would delay the rollout of adult social care charging reform in light of concerns from the sector that underfunded reforms would have exacerbated significant ongoing financial and workforce pressures;
 - v) The Government has announced its intention to consult on increases to planning fees to improve capacity in the local planning system;
 - vi) In its August 2020 'Planning for the Future' white paper the Government announced its commitment to developing a comprehensive resources and skills strategy for the sector;
 - vii) New Government strategies on libraries and sport are being developed. The Government has committed that these will include actions on workforce issues, while the LGA has been commissioned to deliver a workforce mapping survey on the library, archives, records, information and knowledge sector to inform these.
28. The experience of the regulatory services task and finish group, in 2021, however, offers some indication of the possible challenges. The LGA was successful during COVID-19 in highlighting the demands on regulatory services and implications for the future pipeline of officers, leading to the creation of the task and finish group and cross-Whitehall engagement with a proposal for a £15 million regulatory services apprenticeship fund, which achieved some support. The proposal was not subsequently approved and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has subsequently stepped back from the role it was playing on regulatory services. While the Food Standards Agency is continuing to look at this issue, there are challenges linked to the split interest in environmental health and trading standards across different Government departments.
29. The LGA continues to work with professional and regional bodies and to meet with relevant Government departments, to discuss relevant issues and possible solutions.
30. However, in comparison to significant Government investment in recruitment campaigns for professions such as teaching and defence, there has been minimal investment in local government as a 'brand'. Successive years of reductions in Government funding and significant challenges have diminished the attractiveness of the sector as an employer. Given the wide variety of professions employed in local government, the potential to make a difference to local communities and places, and the pride experienced by many working in the sector, there is potential to promote the value and benefits of a career in local government sector, with the aim of appealing both to those entering their professions and to those seeking a career change.

Policy offers and asks

31. Local government has a number of workforce capacity policy offers and asks, which are relevant to the priorities in the [LGA business plan 2022-25](#), as set out below.

A sustainable financial future – continue to highlight the cost pressures on all council services and press for longer term funding that reflects current and future demand for services.

32. Councils need more resources to undertake workforce planning so they can make better use of public resources and engage effectively with the skills system in the UK in the future

The reduction in funding to local government for over a decade has prevented long-term investment in the workforce, with funds reprioritised to solve immediate challenges. Due to high attrition rates and scarcity of skills in key occupational areas councils are now facing a perfect storm of a lack of supply (from the UK skills system) and a lack of long-term investment. Working with further and higher education sectors, learning and training routes can be built back in skill shortage areas for local government. This can only be done effectively if councils can project their workforce needs through effective workforce planning over a one to five year period.

As large employers covering the entire country, councils are strategically placed to create local employment opportunities where they have skills needs: targeted investment would enable councils to help level up skills gaps through their own employment and training pathways, boosting their local economy and therefore building back capacity. This starts with better workforce planning across each place, working in partnership with employers and training providers.

33. Councils need extra funding to enable provision of placements, supervision, apprenticeships and training for professions and service areas experiencing capacity challenges

In light of the challenge to recruit specialist and technical roles, many councils are looking to develop their existing staff to close their immediate skills gaps, i.e. to 'grow their own' talent. In the context of significant budget reductions, there is little funding or capacity to support this. The LGA is pressing Government to provide similar investment in training and development programmes to that provided in other parts of the public sector, to address specific skill shortages now in children's services, regulatory services and waste management.

34. Councils need funding for professional bursary schemes to boost capacity in skill shortage areas and to attract and retain professional talent

Many of the local government skill shortage areas (including those in statutory services) require graduate or professional qualifications to enter and progress in that career. Investment in bursary schemes such as [the NHS](#) and those for schools ([Teach First](#)) delivers much needed skills to those sectors. The LGA is working with the Government and professional bodies to identify the key success factors and support required and press for short term targeted funding in the system to boost supply of much needed undergraduate, postgraduate and professional bursary schemes designed specifically for local government.

35. Councils can improve the responsiveness of the national employment and skills system

[Work Local](#) is the LGA's longstanding, ambitious yet realistic vision for progressive devolution and integration of employment and skills services. The campaign sets out:

- how a centrally driven and fragmented approach is suboptimal and costly;

- how a place-based system, coordinated by local government has the potential to support more people into work and result in increases in residents' skills and employment outcomes at less cost.

36. Councils need flexibilities in implementing apprenticeships

Councils employ approximately 27,000 apprentices across all levels of the workforce from new starters to individuals on graduate apprentice schemes into skill shortage areas. The apprenticeship route offers councils the ability to create development and training pathways into roles at all levels but more flexibility is needed in how the apprenticeship levy can be spent. Since the introduction of the levy in 2019 (£150 million per annum for councils in England), councils have transferred £3.25 million per month unspent to HMRC and this figure is increasing. The LGA has operated an apprenticeship support programme to help councils maximise their levy spend, transfer their levy to other employers and build capacity to grow more apprentice schemes and create more apprentice standards that are needed by councils.

The LGA is seeking increased flexibilities in how the apprenticeship levy can be spent: currently the levy can only be used to pay for training. Councils report they would use levy to fund extra capacity in their council to better manage the levy process and to backfill wages when staff on apprenticeships attend training.

Council-maintained schools have been disproportionately affected by the levy as they were unable to spend it effectively since the relevant standards did not exist. The LGA has supported the development of apprenticeship standards in schools but much more needs to be done to use the levy to create new apprenticeship routes for higher teaching assistants, teachers and SEND roles.

37. Councils need investment to support economic development

Councils' economic development (ED) teams promote prosperity amongst communities, residents, and businesses, and have latterly been entrusted as 'lead authority' to work with Government to determine how multiple economic growth-related funding streams, are targeted in local areas. The Chief Economic Development Officers Society (CEDOS) published a report³⁸ earlier this year which identified recruitment challenges and skills gaps in light of changing demands on the service.

The LGA has commissioned Shared Intelligence (Si) to build on CEDOS' research and engage different parts of local government through our partner organisations. Si's report, due in March 2023, will capture skills and capacity challenges ED teams face in delivering local and national priorities and suggestions for further support to enable ED teams to deliver more. Interim findings will be presented to the City Regions and People and Places Boards in January, and we will explore links with the EEHT Board. Based on the outcome of this project, more detailed support may be required.

³⁸ www.cedos.org/future-of-economic-development-research/

We are currently also planning to commission research into capacity and priorities, and to develop recommendations for the future of revenues and benefits services, to ensure the right support and safety net underpins inclusive local economies.

Putting people first – the reform of adult social care gives councils the resources to address their funding pressures.

38. Councils need a ten-year workforce strategy for health and adult social care

The Autumn Statement included a commitment for the publication of a comprehensive workforce plan for the NHS in 2023, including independently verified forecasts for categories of professionals required. In response, we have called for this plan to be extended to include the non-NHS health workforce commissioned or directly employed by councils, the adult social care workforce and those in the community and voluntary sector without whose support the NHS would not be able to operate. We are willing to work with the Government to achieve this, alongside ADASS and other representatives of care and support service users, employers, workers, inspectors and commissioners. This plan should include investment in training, qualifications and support; career pathways and development; effective workforce planning across the whole social care workforce and staff recognition, value and reward. This would enable a holistic view of the needs of the whole workforce, for example enabling social care workers to access resources to aid retention such as NHS Wellbeing Hubs.

39. Councils need an independent review of care worker pay

The social care workforce must be developed in a manner equivalent to the NHS as part of a stable, sustainable solution to long-term funding problems. This must involve 'parity of esteem' for social care staff with their NHS colleagues. Research and deliberation is needed on the coordination of terms and conditions and the introduction of an effective mechanism for implementation and uprating pay. To achieve those aims with a reasonable degree of consensus across the sector, we continue to urge Government to commission an independent review to promptly review the existing pay levels in the sector and the mechanism for ensuring they support the recruitment and retention of the high-quality workforce the public requires.

40. Councils need financial support to address significant challenges in adult social care recruitment and retention

The LGA argues that, although additional funding for adult social care announced in the Autumn Statement is welcome, it falls significantly short of the £13 billion we have called for to address the severity of the pressure facing the service: this includes £3 billion towards tackling significant recruitment and retention problems by increasing care worker pay. While we have produced [guidance to support social care providers to maximise opportunities from overseas recruitment](#), financial support is also required to meet additional costs associated with this route (approximately £6,000 per person).

41. Councils need a knowledge and skills framework for adult social care

The LGA welcomed the commitment in 'People at the Heart of Care', the adult social care reform white paper, to a knowledge and skills framework to support career structure and progression and now calls for its implementation. This framework should

be across health and care to enable people to maximise opportunities and build knowledge and understanding of different roles (subject to the current pay differential between health and care being addressed so that the current one-way flow of staff from social care to health is ceased).

42. Councils need the removal of barriers to swift ‘onboarding’ of new staff

Capacity gaps in adult social care are being exacerbated by lengthy Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) processes and a lack of portability of existing checks. It is proposed to seek the support of DLUHC to convene relevant Government departments and professional bodies to consider revisions to processes to reduce lengthy recruitment periods and additional costs.

Putting people first – councils have the powers and funding to meet the needs of all local children and people.

43. Councils can support Government to review national rules on agency usage in children’s social care

We are already supporting councils to reduce the use of agency social work, which is costly and works against providing stable professional relationships for children and families. We are recommending that Government takes consistent action to control the agency market and malpractice, particularly in relation to the growing prevalence of managed teams in the market which is leading to concerns about a lack of vetting assurance associated with these teams, and a reduction in the availability of agency social workers for ‘standard’ appointments.

44. Councils need a holistic workforce strategy for children and family services

The scale of the challenge, and the interrelationships across all elements of children and family services, requires a holistic strategy. We are calling on the Department for Education, in consultation with the sector, to develop a shared 10-year workforce strategy and a sustainable approach to pay with clear actions at national, system, place and provider level. This will help the sector plan for and attract the right people we need to meet demand, create new entry routes into social work, focus on prevention rather than crisis, enable us to reward people appropriately and set out explicit skills and competency frameworks.

Championing climate change and local environments – deliver a waste and resource system that meets local needs

45. Councils need long-term policy and funding certainty to invest in climate change response and a national technical assistance strategy

Councils have some influence over 80 per cent of local greenhouse gas emissions, through housing, transport and energy solutions. All private and public sector partners are learning and growing experience around climate change mitigation and adaptation. Councils are no different, but messy and uncertain funding and policy environment can make it difficult for councils to invest in the technical, financial and managerial experience to lead the local long-term effort, and support from Local Net Zero Hubs is patchy at best. Councils need clarity so they can invest in their capacity,

and a strategy to pool to technical assistance locally, sub-nationally and nationally which councils can draw on.

46. Councils need a resources and skills strategy for planning and place-making

The LGA welcomes the commitment in 'Planning for the Future, the planning white paper, to a comprehensive resource and skills strategy for the planning sector and now calls for its urgent implementation. As outlined earlier in this report there is considerable concern from councils about their already stretched capacity and recruitment and retention challenges. Councils will need the necessary resources to upskill officers to implement reforms to the planning system to ensure they are equipped to create great communities through community engagement and proactive place-making.

47. Councils want to work with government and industry to grow the environmental skills to deliver the Environment Act

Public concern with environmental quality will grow and the Environment Act introduces a range of ambitious policy reforms that councils want to help succeed. Councils are encountering real challenges in finding and recruiting the skills in preparing for their duties around Bio-Diversity Net Gain, the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, wider nature recovery, and wider waste and recycling policy reforms. In particular, the government, industry and councils should work together grow the number of ecologists across all partners and ensure that local government is an attractive to new ecologists.

48. Councils need the removal of barriers to recruitment and retention of HGV drivers

Forty-one per cent of councils state that allowing renewal of the certificate of professional competence (CPC) at no cost to drivers would help to alleviate HGV driver shortages³⁹. We therefore propose to call on the Department for Transport to remove CPC renewal costs to aid recruitment and retention of workers in the sector.

Improvement and support offers

49. The LGA currently provides the following advice and support to councils which can assist with recruitment and retention challenges:

- i) Resources to help local government employers to address recruitment and retention challenges, accessed via the [LGA website](#).
- ii) Information and best practice sharing (including new ways of working) with local authorities' HR professionals;
- iii) Targeted 'employee healthcheck' surveys for qualified social workers, occupational therapists and non-registered social care practitioners supporting the delivery of social care to inform workforce planning and support;

³⁹ www.local.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-workforce-survey-week-ending-14-january-2022

- iv) Tools and consultancy to support councils to make efficient use of staffing resources and workforce planning;
 - v) Training to support new managers and aspiring leaders in arts, culture, libraries, sport and physical activity, funded on a rolling basis by Arts Council England and Sport England.
50. The LGA has identified a number of additional support offers that it could provide to councils, subject to the identification of funding. These could include:
- i) developing a recruitment campaign for local government
 - ii) research into career pathways to inform planning of qualifications and training provision
 - iii) development of apprenticeship pathways into skills shortage areas
 - iv) development of returners programmes and support for early careers
 - vi) further collation and promotion of best practice to the sector.

LGA political governance

51. The Resources Board has the overall lead for workforce support as well as the policy lead for financial sustainability in the sector and the capacity and capability of the finance workforce. Each LGA policy board considers workforce issues as relevant to their terms of reference and in particular:

- Children and Young People Board: children's social care;
- Community Wellbeing Board: adult social care;
- Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board: waste, climate change, housing, planning;
- Safer and Stronger Communities: regulatory services such as environmental health and trading standards (these services also support the objectives of other boards);
- Culture, Tourism and Sport: Libraries, leisure centres and parks;
- City Regions Board: economic development, employment and skills;
- People and Places Board: economic development, employment and skills.

The Improvement and Innovation Board also has a role in overseeing the delivery of workforce improvement support activity funded by DLUHC.

52. All of the above boards are therefore asked to consider this report and provide feedback on priority issues related to this theme. Following the Resources Board discussion, the expectation is that Executive Advisory Board will then be asked to consider the LGA's work on the theme in the round.

Implications for Wales

53. Wales faces very similar issues with workforce capacity as are evident in England. Through the workforce team's regular engagement the WLGA feeds into discussions and the sharing of good practice and experience. The working assumption used is that any steps to improve capacity in England would also be applicable in Wales, taking note of relevant responsibility devolution.

Financial implications

54. The LGA activities listed at paragraph 36 will be implemented within existing budgets. Improvement and support proposals references at paragraph 37 are subject to negotiation with DLUHC as part of the 2023/4 sector support programme.

Equalities implications

55. Capacity gaps in councils' workforce have the potential to have negative impacts on people with protected characteristics: for example, an inability to meet demand for adult social care can impact older people and people with disabilities.
56. Addressing equalities considerations is a crucial part of work to maximise the potential pool of local government workers and aid retention: support to councils to consider equalities good practice is an important part of the workforce provided by the LGA.
57. By working with councils and with relevant professional bodies, the LGA will target its policy and improvement work to address workforce capacity challenges towards those service areas where it is most needed, with particular consideration of impacts on people with protected characteristics.

Next steps

58. A report incorporating feedback from policy boards will be brought to Executive Advisory Board for consideration on 9th March 2023.