

**Meeting:** Improvement and Innovation Board

**Date:** 15 February 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 Improvement and Innovation Board feed back their views of the priority issues for future improvement activity to address workforce capacity challenges and how the LGA delivers those priorities.

### **Contact details**

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# Workforce capacity in local government



## Executive summary

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 services across local government. Low pay is a factor in all service areas: additional factors are also identified. Section 42 summarises current support provided by the LGA to address workforce capacity challenges, and section 43 describes further potential offers, which would be dependent on the identification of funding.
3. The Board is asked to consider progress to date, support and policy offers and asks and to advise on any further improvement support which should be considered, while noting that it may be necessary to identify or reprioritise resources accordingly.

## Background

4. 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).
5. 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 cent<sup>1</sup>, those being assessed because they are believed to be at risk of significant harm increased by 99 per cent<sup>2</sup>, and Ofsted noted that the complexity of cases has increased since the pandemic began, meaning rising workloads even where the number of children on the caseloads has remained stable<sup>3</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children#looked-after-children](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children#looked-after-children)

<sup>2</sup> [https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=8915&mod-period=12&mod-area=E92000001&mod-group=AllRegions\\_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup](https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=8915&mod-period=12&mod-area=E92000001&mod-group=AllRegions_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup)

<sup>3</sup> [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](https://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)

- The number of requests for adult social care from new working age clients increased by 11 per cent<sup>4</sup>;
- The number of fly tipping incidents increased by 20 per cent<sup>5</sup>.

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 2035<sup>6</sup>.

6. 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)<sup>7</sup>. 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 2011<sup>8</sup>.
7. 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 2021<sup>9</sup>.
8. 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 one<sup>10</sup>. 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:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-social-care-activity-and-finance-report/2021-22>

<sup>5</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/env24-fly-tipping-incidents-and-actions-taken-in-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/env24-fly-tipping-incidents-and-actions-taken-in-england)

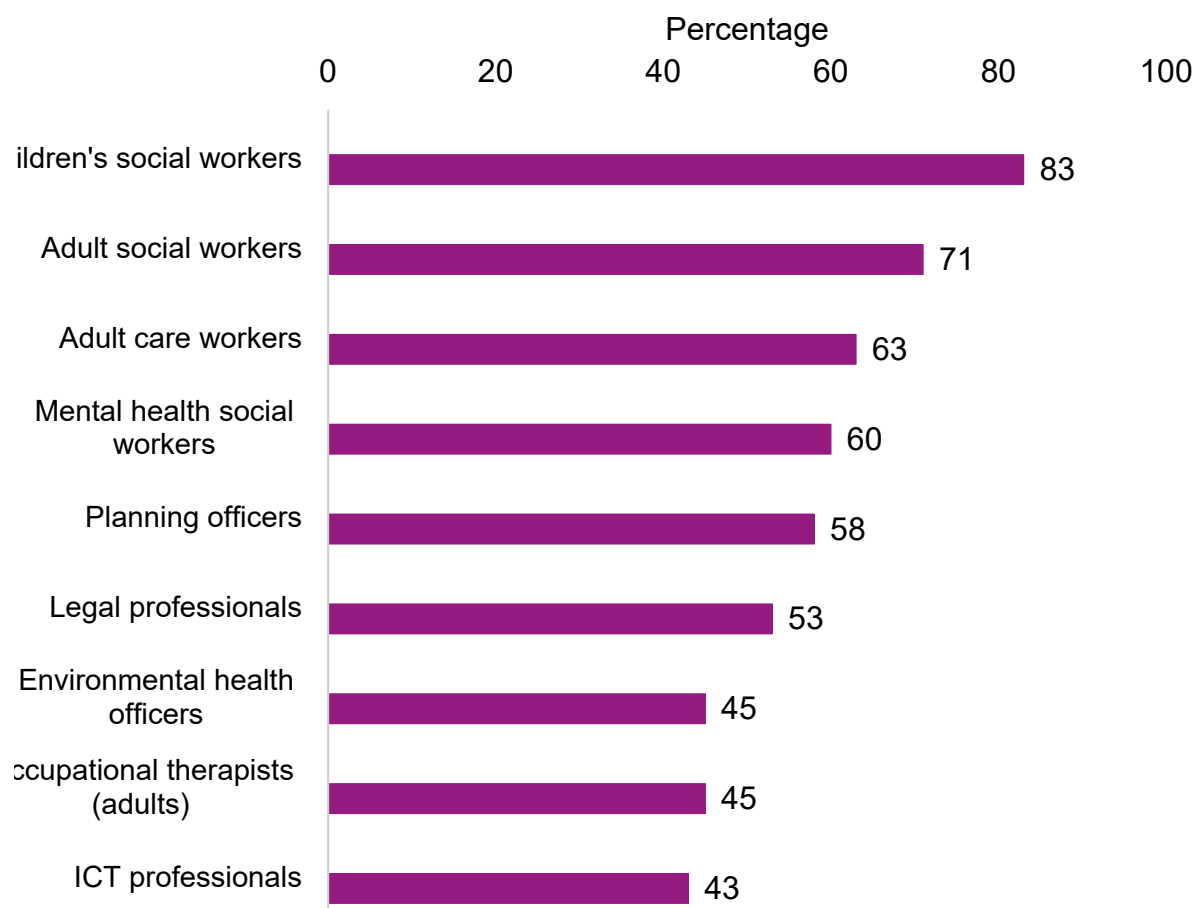
<sup>6</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/adult-social-care-workforce/asc-reform](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/adult-social-care-workforce/asc-reform)

<sup>7</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/publications/ons-quarterly-public-sector-employment-survey](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications/ons-quarterly-public-sector-employment-survey)

<sup>8</sup> [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Data-and-publications.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Data-and-publications.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-s-social-work-workforce>

<sup>10</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/publications/2022-local-government-workforce-survey](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications/2022-local-government-workforce-survey)



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

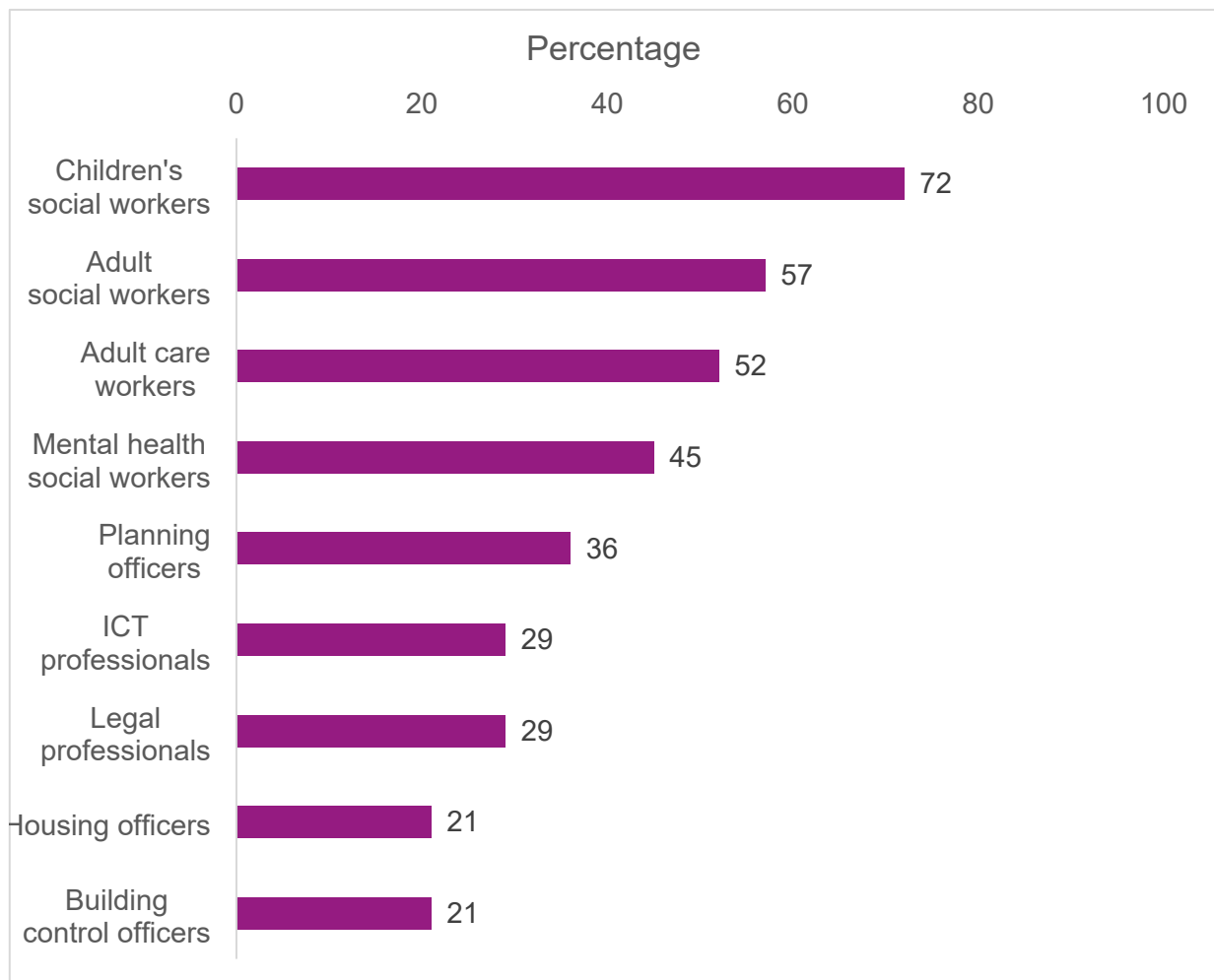
9. A further survey showed that 63 per cent of councils had experienced difficulties recruiting or retaining LGV/ HGV drivers over the past year or anticipated such difficulties<sup>11</sup>. From our discussions with the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers, it is also clear that trading standards services are experiencing challenges in recruitment.
10. The vacancy rate for children and family social workers was 16.7 per cent in September 2021<sup>12</sup>, and 94 per cent of local authorities in early 2022 found it difficult or very difficult to fill vacancies for experienced children's social workers<sup>13</sup>. The number of vacancies across all providers of adult social care increased by 52 per cent in 2021/22, by 55,000 to 165,000<sup>14</sup>.
11. 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:

<sup>11</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/publications/local-highways-weather-resilience-survey-2022](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications/local-highways-weather-resilience-survey-2022)

<sup>12</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-s-social-work-workforce>

<sup>13</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1123954/Childrens\\_services\\_Survey\\_Wave\\_6\\_Dec22.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1123954/Childrens_services_Survey_Wave_6_Dec22.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [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](http://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 20/22

12. 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.

13. 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 occupations<sup>15</sup>;
- 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 cent<sup>16</sup> (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 services<sup>17</sup>.

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 families<sup>18</sup>. 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 families<sup>19</sup>.

- 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.

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<sup>15</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/publications/2022-local-government-workforce-survey](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications/2022-local-government-workforce-survey)

<sup>16</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/454afee-eb35-4226-5de6-08dad5210ff4>

<sup>17</sup> [www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/advice-and-guidance/helping-london-authorities-deliver-placeshaping-capacity-survey](http://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/advice-and-guidance/helping-london-authorities-deliver-placeshaping-capacity-survey)

<sup>18</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202122-education-childrens-services-and-skills](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202122-education-childrens-services-and-skills)

<sup>19</sup> <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/>

Newly qualified staff now make up a greater proportion of posts in children's social care<sup>20</sup>: 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 families<sup>21</sup>.

Ninety per cent of councils reported at least one capability gap in their management team and 83 per cent reported at least one capacity issue<sup>22</sup>.

- 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 reason<sup>23</sup>.

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 services<sup>24</sup>;

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<sup>20</sup> [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](https://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)

<sup>21</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-review-into-the-murders-of-arthur-labinjo-hughes-and-star-hobson](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-review-into-the-murders-of-arthur-labinjo-hughes-and-star-hobson)

<sup>22</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/publications/2022-local-government-workforce-survey](https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/2022-local-government-workforce-survey). 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'.

<sup>23</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-workforce-survey-research-reports](https://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.

<sup>24</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-workforce-survey-week-ending-14-january-2022](https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-workforce-survey-week-ending-14-january-2022)

- Two-thirds of adult and children's social workers in January 2022 said they were experiencing deteriorating mental health because of their roles<sup>25</sup>;
- 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 year<sup>26</sup>;
- 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 minimum<sup>27</sup>;
- 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 regulation<sup>28</sup>;
- Given the responses given to the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health workforce survey<sup>29</sup>, 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 exhausted<sup>30</sup>. This has implications for the full range of public health systems and functions, including emergency planning<sup>31</sup>;
- 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 years<sup>32</sup>;
- 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 reason<sup>33</sup>. 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

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

<sup>26</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202122-education-childrens-services-and-skills](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202122-education-childrens-services-and-skills)

<sup>27</sup> [www.cieh.org/policy/campaigns/workforce-survey-england/](http://www.cieh.org/policy/campaigns/workforce-survey-england/)

<sup>28</sup> Identified by a cross-government task and finish group convened by DLUHC post-pandemic looking at issues in local regulatory services

<sup>29</sup> [www.cieh.org/policy/campaigns/workforce-survey-england/](http://www.cieh.org/policy/campaigns/workforce-survey-england/)

<sup>30</sup> [www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2021/08/public-health-workforce](http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2021/08/public-health-workforce)

<sup>31</sup> [www.fph.org.uk/media/3031/fph\\_systems\\_and\\_function-final-v2.pdf](http://www.fph.org.uk/media/3031/fph_systems_and_function-final-v2.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> [www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2022/november/planning-enforcement-resourcing/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2022/november/planning-enforcement-resourcing/)

<sup>33</sup> <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)<sup>34</sup>. 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 months<sup>35</sup>. 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 profession<sup>36</sup>.
- 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.

14. 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.

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<sup>34</sup> Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity Employer Pulse Check 2021 (unpublished)

<sup>35</sup> Views supplied to the LGA by LABC

<sup>36</sup> [www.hse.gov.uk/research/insight/building-control-pubn-summary.pdf](https://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.

15. 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**

16. 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;
  - 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.
17. 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.
18. The LGA continues to work with professional and regional bodies and to meet with relevant Government departments, to discuss relevant issues and possible solutions.
19. 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**

20. 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.*

**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**

21. 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.
22. 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.

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

23. 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.

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

24. 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.

**Councils can improve the responsiveness of the national employment and skills system**

25. [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.

## **Councils need flexibilities in implementing apprenticeships**

26. 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.
27. 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.
28. 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.

## **Councils need investment to support economic development**

29. 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 report<sup>37</sup> earlier this year which identified recruitment challenges and skills gaps in light of changing demands on the service.
30. 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.

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.

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<sup>37</sup> [www.cedos.org/future-of-economic-development-research/](https://www.cedos.org/future-of-economic-development-research/)

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

### **Councils need a ten-year workforce strategy for health and adult social care**

31. 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.

### **Councils need an independent review of care worker pay**

32. 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.

### **Councils need financial support to address significant challenges in adult social care recruitment and retention**

33. 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).

### **Councils need a knowledge and skills framework for adult social care**

34. 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).

### **Councils need the removal of barriers to swift ‘onboarding’ of new staff**

35. 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.*

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

36. 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.

### **Councils need a holistic workforce strategy for children and family services**

37. 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*

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

38. 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.

### **Councils need a resources and skills strategy for planning and place-making**

39. 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.

### **Councils want to work with government and industry to grow the environmental skills to deliver the Environment Act**

40. 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.

### **Councils need the removal of barriers to recruitment and retention of HGV drivers**

41. 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 shortages<sup>38</sup>. 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**

42. 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;

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<sup>38</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-workforce-survey-week-ending-14-january-2022](https://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.
43. 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**

44. 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.

45. 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**

46. 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**

47. The LGA activities listed at paragraph 42 will be implemented within existing budgets. Improvement and support proposals references at paragraph 43 are subject to negotiation with DLUHC as part of the 2023/4 sector support programme.

## **Equalities implications**

48. 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.
49. 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.
50. 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**

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