

Local Government Workforce Capacity Update

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Summary

This report sets out the latest draft of a prioritised plan of LGA action in relation to local government workforce capacity, seen in light of the relevant issues for service areas experiencing the greatest challenges, latest progress and actions underway and planned by other bodies. Members are asked to comment on the draft plan and the approach to prioritised action in relation to activity which is currently unfunded.

LGA Plan Theme: Support to the LG Workforce

Recommendation

The Executive Advisory Board is asked to review and comment on the draft plan and approach to prioritised action set out in the report, considering the full range of actions by councils, other bodies and the LGA in the round.

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Local Government Workforce Capacity Update

Background

1. The March meeting of the Board considered a report setting out the workforce capacity challenges which are impacting councils across a wide range of professions and services. Following feedback from the Board, officers have been identifying actions that the LGA can take, alongside activity already in train in councils and by professional bodies, to address these challenges.

Proposal

2. Both demand and supply pressures in many services mean there are insufficient resources to adequately fund staffing establishments. This paper sets out a proposed approach to prioritise activity in the context of limited resources both in councils and in the LGA.
3. The [Local Government Workforce Survey 2022](#) provides the most recent overview of workforce capacity challenges (including recruitment and retention difficulties) being experienced by the sector. Respondents stated their councils were experiencing the greatest difficulties in relation to the following occupations:

	Counties, districts and single tiers		Counties and single tiers		Districts and single tiers	
	Recruitment	Retention	Recruitment	Retention	Recruitment	Retention
Children's social workers			83%	72%		
Adult social workers			71%	57%		
Adult care workers			63%	52%		
Mental health social workers			60%	45%		
Planning officers	58%	36%				
Legal professionals	53%	29%				
Environmental health officers					45%	18%
ICT professionals	43%	29%				
Building control officers					43%	21%

These responses are consistent with other published research.

4. The plan which appears at Appendix A therefore focuses on activities to address the workforce capacity challenge in the following priority areas:

- a) Children's social workers
- b) Adult and mental health social workers
- c) Adult care workers
- d) Planning officers
- e) Legal professionals
- f) Environmental health officers
- g) ICT professionals
- h) Building control officers

There are also activities to be taken on a system-wide basis.

5. In many instances, councils can – and do - themselves (either individually or working together) take action to address the workforce capacity challenge, some of which are consistent across all service areas and so are not repeated in each case (such as use of apprenticeships, continuing professional development and other retention good practice). The LGA can also provide support and share best practice to support councils to take appropriate action. In other cases, there are professional bodies and other stakeholders who are best placed to act, sometimes with the LGA in a supporting role. In a few cases, the LGA will lobby for change on behalf of the sector alongside ongoing lobbying to press for longer term funding that reflects current and future demand for services.

6. This plan identifies for each priority occupation:

- the relevant issues leading to the capacity challenge
- activity which has been identified as appropriate to address the issues:
 - what can councils do for themselves (individually and working together)
 - what can relevant bodies do
 - the LGA's role:
 - providing support
 - lobbying for change

7. The plan also identifies actions the LGA will take on a sector-wide basis, to:

- provide support
- lobby for change.

These actions can be delivered within existing resources (through various sources of improvement grant funding).

8. Given the scale of the challenge, officers have considered any further actions which could be funded through alternative sources, for example:

8.1. testing with the sector the market for any support offers which could be provided on a commercial basis;

- 8.2. approaching other government departments for funding for support relevant to their remit;
 - 8.3. use of LGA reserves to fund support offers;
 - 8.4. a mixture of the above.
9. It is proposed that further, prioritised action will focus in the first instance on workforce capacity challenges related to children’s social workers. Work is underway to develop costed proposals to resource the following actions:
- 9.1. commission research to identify local authorities’ requirements for children’s social workers into the medium term and quantify the current and projected gap;
 - 9.2. conducting the Employer Healthcheck survey to improve children’s social worker retention (discussions are underway with potential co-funders).
10. The LGA is also discussing plans for the promotion of children’s social work as a career with Social Work England and other partners and will consider if any additional activity is required on this or any related joint projects. A verbal update will be given at the meeting.
11. Additionally, the LGA is being funded as part of the sector support programme to work with CIPFA to develop a workforce plan for finance teams within local authorities.
12. Resources Board considered this report at its meeting on 12th July, and was asked to agree proposed additional content to be included in submissions for Autumn/ Spring statements/ budgets in relation to workforce resourcing, set out in para 9.32 of Appendix A. A verbal update on feedback from the Resources Board will be given at the meeting.

Implications for Wales

13. Wales faces very similar issues with workforce capacity as are evident in England. Through the LGA 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

14. LGA actions to address the workforce challenge listed in Appendix A are funded through existing improvement support grant funding. As set out in para 9 above, costed proposals for member consideration will be developed for prioritised activity to support workforce issues: this may include commercial offers to councils and/or use of LGA reserves.

Equalities implications

15. 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.

16. Job seekers are looking for diverse workplaces: 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. This is important in terms of culture and career aspirations, but also means consideration of flexible working and doing more to support the health and wellbeing of staff.

17. 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, being mindful of equality, diversity and the impact on local communities.

Next steps

18. Officers will implement the plan set out in Appendix A and develop costed proposals for further action in relation to children's social workers, informed by feedback from the Board.