



WMEmploye

# West Midlands Region Local Government Workforce Strategy 2025-27

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# Foreword

### **Rebecca Davis, CEO West Midlands Employers**

In my 20 years of public service I've never seen such a perfect storm facing our workforce. An aging workforce ready to pass the baton, rising vacancies that keep service managers awake at night, and a race for talent that feels like we're competing with one hand tied behind our backs - and the only winners are those without a vested interest in our sector.

But here's the thing - we're not just weathering a storm; we're standing at the threshold of the biggest transformation in local government history. Over the next five years the sector will change more than it has in the past 20 years. With 25% more 18-year-olds entering the workforce by 2030 we have an unprecedented opportunity to reshape our organisations. These digital natives bring fresh perspectives and new skills that could revolutionise how we serve our communities.

The challenges are clear: 9% vacancy rates, 15% agency usage, and 13.8% of our workforce are approaching retirement by 2027. But I don't see these as obstacles - I see them as our catalysts for change.

This strategy isn't just another document gathering dust on a virtual shelf. It's our blueprint for collective action across all West Midlands councils. Because here's the truth - no single council can solve these workforce challenges alone. We're stronger together, and that's not just a soundbite - it has to be our survival strategy.

From attraction to development, from recruitment to retention, we're laying out practical steps that work at local, sectoral, regional, and national levels. Think of it as a pyramid of progress - each layer building on the other, creating something bigger. The time for working in silos is over. Whatever reorganisation takes place across Councils, 'Local Government' will still remain and your piece of the puzzle within each Council is crucial to the big picture. By truly working together we can transform local government – ensuring it is an employer of the future.

#### Let's be bold. Let's be collaborative.

#### Let's commit to a workforce strategy that doesn't just respond to change - but helps to

Rebecca Davis Chief Executive, WME

drive it and set the pace.



# The West Midlands Region

The West Midlands, although geographically a small area, is a diverse and nonhomogenous region of 33 Council areas, currently consisting of 7 Metropolitan Councils, 3 County Councils, 4 Unitary Councils and 19 District Councils.



#### Population & Headcount Comparison Graph





# Why do we need a regional workforce strategy?

Although we are a diverse region, our Council employers face many of the same challenges in the recruitment, employment, retention and management of its employees. We recognise that no one council can solve these issues alone, and that working together either as a whole group, in sub sections geographically, or by Council type, employers have an opportunity to improve and enhance the experience of our employees, and in doing this improve the experience of users of council services.

This document sets out the key challenges faced by councils, and the strategies and approaches Councils can take to improve the employee lifecycle, and how WME can support this regional strategy.



# **1.** Attraction

### **The Challenge**

Local Government has an aging workforce, with a median workforce age of 47. Estimates predict that by 2027 13.8% of the workforce will be retiring. Whilst this presents some challenges in terms of loss of skills and organisational history and knowledge, it also opens the door for new recruits into local government with a range of new skills and approaches to work that will help Local Government transform to be future ready.

Local Government has barriers to recruitment which are broad, complex, and cannot be resolved by individual councils in isolation.

- People often do not know what local government does, or the range of jobs, professions and specialisms that a local Government career can offer.
- Unlike some other public sector bodies (such as Police, Armed Forces or the NHS) It does not have "one voice" with which to speak to potential applicants, whether they are in schools when looking at career options, school leavers looking for apprenticeships, graduates, returners or anyone looking for a job.
- Although Councils have been working hard on the Employer Value Proposition (EVP) for
  potential applicants, there is still a need to make clear the opportunities and benefits of working
  in the sector, to an audience who may have a low knowledge base of Local Government as a
  starting point.

In order to address the challenges, the opportunities to resolution have been categorised into a hierarchy which shows how each resolution can be addressed, and the limitations of addressing these at a local level only.



#### Local Implementation

• Development of a local attraction strategy and EVP for potential applicants into local government.

#### **Sector Specific Solutions**

 Work with partners [i.e., ADASS, CIPFA, RITP] on sector specific roles in hard to fill areas and where specific circumstances support sectoral working.

#### Whole Regional Approach

- Support for regional initiatives to demonstrate to candidates a "one voice" approach to jobs in the sector, including supporting wider national work through regionally coordinated programmes.
- Specifically, provision of case studies, job details, attendance at jobs fairs.

#### Long Term Ambition

• Targeted strategies for attracting potential applicants from a diverse range of demographics into local government working in partnership with regional local government organizations, employment support partners and educational institutions aimed at creating a "one voice" brand awareness local government.

# WME support

#### Enabling effective 'Attraction' strategies

- Provision of a "one source" of support for potential applicants through the <u>Local Government Careers</u> section of the dedicated WMJobs website.
- Materials aimed at careers advisors in schools to ensure Local Government Jobs are part of the considerations in careers discussions from the earliest point.
- Specific events to support the sector such as stand-alone jobs fairs and representation at local, sub regional and regional events, graduate fairs and exhibitions.
- Expert support for recruiting professionals in Councils to ensure they are using the most effective and targeted approach to attraction strategies.



# 2. Recruitment

### **The Challenge**

Local Government faces challenges in recruitment, with increasing vacancies in critical roles, a competitive labour market, and a lack of visibility as an employer of choice. Traditional recruitment methods no longer meet the needs of a rapidly evolving workforce, and councils are struggling to fill positions in key skill shortage areas such as social care, digital services, and planning.



### **Recruitment barriers include:**



#### **Competition for Talent:**

Private sector organisations and other public bodies, such as the NHS and the Civil Service, offer competitive salaries and benefits that often exceed what Local Government can provide.



#### Lengthy Hiring Processes:

Current local government recruitment timelines are averaging over 100 days from advertisement to hire, these are too slow to compete for in-demand talent.



#### Limited Employer Brand Awareness:

Many potential candidates are unaware of the variety of careers available in Local Government, leading to a smaller talent pool.



#### **Rigid Job Structures:**

Traditional job descriptions and structures may not align with modern workforce expectations, particularly among younger generations seeking flexibility, career progression, and purpose-driven work.



#### Skills Gaps:

Rapid digitalisation and the changing nature of service delivery require new skills that Local Government struggles to attract and retain.

#### Local Implementation

- **Modernising Recruitment Practices:** Streamlining hiring processes, reducing time-to-hire, and embedding inclusive recruitment approaches.
- Developing Employer Value Proposition: Strengthening and communicating the benefits of working in Local Government at a council level.
- Enhancing Digital Recruitment Capabilities: Leveraging applicant tracking systems (ATS) and Aldriven recruitment solutions to improve efficiency and candidate experience.

#### **Sector-Specific Solutions**

- Targeted Recruitment for Hard-to-Fill Roles: Working with sector partners such as ADASS, CIPFA, and RITP to address shortages in social care, finance, and planning roles.
- **Developing Talent Pipelines:** Strengthening apprenticeship, graduate, and returner programmes to attract and retain a diverse workforce.
- Flexible and Agile Workforce Models: Encouraging secondments, job-sharing, and talent mobility within and across councils to maximise resource utilisation.

#### Whole Regional Approach

- Regional Employer Branding Campaign: Collaborating with West Midlands authorities to present a unified, compelling narrative about careers in Local Government.
- Shared Recruitment Toolkits and Best Practices: Providing councils with standardised resources to enhance recruitment effectiveness.
- Strategic Partnerships with Education and Employment Networks: Engaging universities, colleges, and employment agencies to develop sustainable talent pipelines.

#### Long Term Ambition

- Building a Future-Ready Workforce: Aligning recruitment strategies with workforce transformation trends, including automation, hybrid working, and new skill demands.
- Leadership and Succession Planning: Developing programmes to nurture and retain leadership talent within Local Government.
- Embedding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Recruitment: Ensuring recruitment processes support an inclusive and representative workforce that reflects the communities served.
- Establishing Local Government as a Career of Choice: Long-term investment in brand awareness, career pathways, and advocacy for sector-wide workforce development.

By adopting a multi-layered approach to recruitment, Local Government in the West Midlands can position itself as an employer of choice, attract the talent needed for the future, and build a workforce that is resilient, dynamic, and aligned with the needs of its communities.

# WME support

#### Expanding Regional Temporary Worker Solutions (e.g. WMTemps)

• Provision of a dedicated regional framework through **WMTemps**, to stabilise the permanent workforce and reduce reliance on agency workers.

#### Expanding Regional Recruitment Solutions (e.g., WMTalent Acquisition)

- Enhancing recruitment processes through **technology-driven solutions**, to support councils in hiring efficiently and ethically, improving applicant tracking, and reducing time-to-hire.
- Delivering **specialist consultancy** to help councils refine their recruitment strategies and implement innovative hiring practices.

## Strategic Partnerships for Recruitment

- Continuing engagement with key partners such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), educational institutions, and employment organisations to promote careers in local government.
- Working with professional bodies such as CIPD to deliver Strategic Workforce Planning Training and Consultancy to enhance recruitment capabilities.



Employer Branding and Talent Attraction

- **Providing a regional employer brand campaign** to position local government as an attractive career destination for young professionals and individuals considering a career change.
- Providing case studies, success stories, and enhanced Employer
   Value Proposition messaging to highlight the benefits of working in local government.
- Supporting councils in the development of recruitment marketing approaches to attract top talent in hard-to-fill roles.

## Diversity and Inclusion in Recruitment

- Provision of the <u>Inclusion Lens Toolkit</u>, a 70-page resource designed to help councils improve workforce diversity and inclusion.
- Supporting councils in embedding inclusive recruitment practices that attract diverse talent and remove barriers to employment.
- Developing targeted outreach strategies to engage underrepresented groups and widen talent pipelines.



# 3. Development

### **The Challenge**

Local Government faces challenges in workforce development, requiring continuous upskilling, leadership growth, and professional learning to meet evolving service demands. The sector must adapt to technological advancements, demographic changes, and shifting policy landscapes while ensuring employees are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed.





### **Development barriers include:**



#### Limited Investment in Learning & Development:

Budget constraints often reduce opportunities for professional development, impacting career progression and retention.



#### Leadership Gaps:

A significant proportion of the workforce is approaching retirement, necessitating strong succession planning and leadership pipelines.



#### Changing Skill Demands:

Digital transformation and service innovation require new competencies that are not yet widely embedded in the workforce.



### Lack of Career Pathway Awareness:

Many employees are unaware of development opportunities within Local Government, leading to disengagement and attrition.



# Fragmented Development Approaches:

Training and development initiatives often vary across councils, limiting regional consistency and scalability.

#### Local Implementation

- Enhancing Learning & Development Programmes: Providing access to accredited training, professional qualifications, and continuous learning opportunities.
- **Developing Career Pathways:** Clearly mapping out progression routes for employees at all levels.
- Embedding Coaching & Mentoring: Encouraging knowledge-sharing and professional growth through structured coaching and mentoring schemes.

#### **Sector-Specific Solutions**

- Leadership & Succession Planning Initiatives: Collaborating with professional bodies such as CIPD and SOLACE to cultivate future leaders.
- **Specialist Skills Training:** Addressing workforce gaps by partnering with industry leaders in digital, social care, and finance training.
- **Professional Accreditation Support:** Encouraging employees to attain recognised qualifications that enhance sector expertise.

#### Whole Regional Approach

- Regional Talent Development Strategy: Establishing shared learning platforms and training initiatives across councils.
- Knowledge Exchange Networks: Facilitating collaboration and best practice sharing between local authorities.
- Standardised Development Frameworks: Creating regional guidelines to ensure consistency in employee development.
- Cross-Council Training Programmes: Leveraging economies of scale to offer cost-effective training solutions.

#### **Long-Term Ambition**

- Future-Proofing Workforce Capabilities: Aligning training initiatives with emerging trends such as automation, AI, and service digitalisation.
- Embedding a Culture of Lifelong Learning: Encouraging continuous professional development as an integral part of organisational culture.
- Strengthening Public Sector Leadership: Investing in leadership development at all levels to ensure sustainable and innovative governance.
- Building Inclusive Development Pathways: Ensuring all employees, regardless of background, have equal access to growth opportunities.

By taking a strategic and collaborative approach to workforce development, Local Government in the West Midlands can ensure a skilled, engaged, and future-ready workforce capable of delivering high-quality public services.

# WME support

#### Strategy and Consultancy – Driving Transformation

- Workforce and Organisational Development Consultancy – Supporting councils in shaping effective structures, culture, and workforce strategies.
- Strategic Workforce Planning Helping councils anticipate future workforce needs and build resilient talent pipelines, working with partners like the CIPD.
- Leadership Development & Facilitation – Providing expert guidance to strengthen leadership teams and drive transformational change.
- WMOD Elite Network Enabling collaboration and best practice sharing for Organisational Development leaders across the region.

#### Training and Development – Equipping the Workforce for the Future

- **CPD and Training Delivery** Offering accredited training programmes to upskill employees and develop future-ready capabilities.
- Finding Your Future Leaders Identifying and nurturing emerging leaders to ensure a strong pipeline of managerial and executive talent.
- Advancing Diverse Talent Delivering targeted programmes to develop and retain individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, such as Allyship and Breaking Through.
- Developing New Managers Supporting first-time managers with essential skills to transition successfully into leadership roles.
- Senior Leadership Growth Facilitating executive development programmes that strengthen strategic leadership capabilities.

Personal Development – Empowering Individuals for High Performance

- Coaching and Mentoring Support

   Providing structured coaching and mentoring schemes to enhance individual and organisational performance via the WME Coaching and Mentoring Pool.
- Executive Coaching Offering personalised coaching for senior leaders to refine their leadership approach and drive organisational success.
- **360-Degree Performance Reviews** Implementing comprehensive feedback processes to support personal and professional growth.
- Psychometric Tools Delivering assessments that provide valuable insights into leadership styles, team dynamics, and individual strengths.





# 4. Reward

### The Challenge

In the Local Government Sector, individual employers operating within a national bargaining framework face a number of unique challenges.

No Council in the West Midlands has to date opted out of national bargaining, and all are covered by various national terms and conditions (primarily NJC "Green Book", Craft or "Red Book", Chief Officers and Chief Executives, as well as specific conditions for Fire and Teaching and non-teaching staff). These are amended or supplemented by a raft of local agreements developed with the implementation of Single Status, and since Councils have looked to modernise terms and conditions to better suit the workforce, remove unnecessary bureaucracy and manage costs.

Additional national pressures from the National Living Wage, reviewed annually and set by the national Government also have a significant impact on the national pay spine.

A further need to demonstrate clear value for money and to keep within any equal pay challenges means councils are restricted in what additional payments they can make for hard to fill roles, to reward excellent performance, and to otherwise incentivise employees.

#### Local Implementation

• Councils should have a robust local Pay Policy which sets out their approach to a number of drivers in pay and reward, including approach to quartile pay, solutions to resolve any Gender Pay Gap or equal pay challenges, non pay reward and benefits strategies and how these are promoted and accessed by employees.

#### **Sector Specific Solutions**

 Certain sectors (such as social work) have benchmarked regional approached to additional pay elements, such as recruitment and retention payments or a "golden hello" which should be reviewed and monitored across the sector to avoid a spiralling effect and unnecessary churn of employees leaving to "chase" a better package. Whilst it is recognised that grades will vary between employers, better sharing of benchmarking data and the operation of effective Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) for roles, will support a more robust and effective approach to pay management in difficult sectors.

#### Whole Regional approach

- As individual employers a whole regional approach to base pay is problematic, with local grade structures being laid over the national spine.
- More regional collaboration could be done on approaches to career paths to support linked grades across certain professional roles, providing clear routes to progression and enhanced pay

#### Long Term Ambition

 It remains to be seen whether councils in the region will in the future choose to break away from national bargaining to obtain more freedom to act in the Pay and Reward space. It is recognised that whilst this may seem attractive for some employers there are several disincentives, including the difficulties of working with Trade Unions outside of National Bargaining and the need to significantly enhance the local provision of pay and reward / employee relations negation expertise at a local level to support this.

# WME support

#### Pay and Grading -Provision of Expertise

- Benchmarking Club for Districts to look across job families in hard to recruit roles to ensure salaries are keeping with tolerance given local pay structures, as well as bespoke benchmarking on request.
- Equal Pay Audits and Equality Impact Assessments to ensure any changes to pay and/or terms and conditions do not adversely impact on any one group and can be defended from an equal pay perspective.
- Job evaluation audits and system improvements, as well as delivering an independent job evaluation service to ensure roles are measured within a robust and defendable framework.
- Bespoke Consultancy to support approaches to pay and reward tailored to individual councils including TUPE expertise and harmonisation approaches.



# 5. Retention

The Challenge



Replacing an employee can be expensive, and depending on the level, area of work and shortage in the labour market can be a time consuming, and a frustrating area for hiring managers who need to focus on service delivery. Average costs to hire are circa £3,000 with most councils having turnover rates between 11% and 5% with a median of 7.9% (from 16 councils reporting – Infinistats 2023 Human Capital Metrics survey).





In addition to the cost and time lost, turnover is disruptive and destabilising for the workforce in teams and can often "ripple" where groups have worked together, and individuals place high value on the team dynamic.

Of course some turnover is to be welcomed, and in the current climate where councils may be looking to downsize the opportunity for some natural turnover can be used to achieve other aims, however where turnover occurs with highly skilled, hard to recruit, or newly recruited staff, councils should consider what action can be taken to minimise the impact.

#### Local Implementation

- Effective monitoring and reporting on turnover are key to determining whether there are trends and indicators which show problem areas. For example, are leavers coming from new hires or those recruited within the last 6 months? This may indicate a mismatch between the recruitment "promise" in the EVP of the Council and what new hires then experience, or certain services which may indicate a cultural, wellbeing, or workload issue, which needs to be investigated.
- Exit interviews for leavers provide useful insight into reasons for leaving but should be done in a way which is meaningful, with any issues raised followed up. See the <u>CIPD Exit Interview factsheet</u> for more information.
- Other approaches for non-professional employees who may also be hard to recruit include effective and targeted benefits and wellbeing solutions which have something for every employee. A culture of recognition, gratitude and thanks from managers and wider service leads, and through the organisation including public recognition such as on virtual notice boards, publishing of customer compliment letters and visible appreciation.
- Most Councils use annual employee surveys to measure the temperature among staff, however such mechanisms are only effective if the results are communicated, and any outcomes / actions implemented and shared.

#### **Sector Specific Solutions**

 Approaches to specific sector retention are discussed in the Development sector – where access to support through specific professional bodies help employees feel valued and provide a forum for professional development.

#### Whole Regional Approach

 As Councils move into thinking about Local Government reorganization it may be helpful to take a sub-regional approach to workforce planning, so that future job roles and required skills, knowledge and experience are looked at holistically across more than individual employers. This will support retention of the best talent in the sector but will require councils to take a much less protectionist approach to such planning.

#### Long Term Ambition

 As the workforce changes over the next few years as a result of Local Government Reorganisation, the way that employees are managed through this process will be key to making Local Government an attractive place to work in the future for those individuals. This is discussed more in the next section, however Councils can do much to get the fundamental approaches to retaining talent in place now.

# WME support

## Managing the day to day workforce

- Facilitated Networks to support key groups, whether sectorally or at a leadership level to keep motivated aspiring employees in the sector.
- Support to develop effective approaches to employee surveys, whether annual or exit specific, as well as auditing and action planning to support key groups with diversity and inclusion initiatives.
- Service restructuring including TUPE provision.
- Regional Joint Council WME as the Regional Employers.' Organisation can work with the three main trade unions to ensure uniform, consistent and fair approached to restructuring are used, and to agree common terms where possible in areas such as redundancy selection and pooling, redeployment and harmonisation of terms and conditions.



# 6. Movement

### **The Challenge**

Even those councils not required to significantly restructure due to Local Government Reorganisation will be facing a period of change with a requirement to save costs – with the paybill for councils being the largest expenditure.

Councils will be looking for ways of reducing staff numbers and the paybill costs, whilst ensuring key services are maintained and not building up significant costs by allowing access to expensive exit packages, pension strain, and costs from exits for a long serving and ageing workforce.

#### Local Implementation

- Councils individually can agree approaches to exiting people from the organisation through Mutually Agreed Resignation Schemes (MARS) or other such approaches in a way to manage exit costs and avoid the need for compulsory redundancies.
- Additionally, councils may wish to consider whether "golden handcuffs" are an option when working towards new unitary status through LG Reorganisation and whether it can be demonstrated these are an effective use of the public purse in times of significant financial constraint.
- Councils are also already using vacancy controls to ensure posts are only recruited where necessary and that other avenues to delivering services are explored before permanent hires are made.
- Councils need to strike a balance between reducing the use of expensive and unstable agency provision, with the need to have a more flexible and agile, smaller workforce.
- Effective workforce planning is key therefore in ensuring this balance meets individual council needs for now and as the future evolves.

#### **Sector Specific Solutions**

• Specific sectors can look at approaches to the management of staff in sectors where circulation in the workforce is an issue. Previously this has included areas such as standard reference forms in Adults and Childrens social care, (particularly used for temporary workers) to reduce the risk of poor performance moving around the region.

#### Whole Regional Approach

 Consideration could be given across the region to a different approaches to displaced Local Government employees, with a central "clearing" service provided via <u>WMJobs</u> and the ATS service to support employees, keep skills in the sector, and reduce the need for redundancy payments and related pension strain costs.

#### Long Term Ambition

• At the end of the current period of local government reorganisation the size and shape of many councils across the Region will be very different. During the transition period council employers will have to work hard to retain staff going through periods of uncertainty and upheaval, particularly where the roles and skills are not unique to the public/local government sector.

# WME support

# Providing legally compliant HR expertise

- Bespoke consultancy support for restructuring work in services including outsourcing and TUPE.
- Expert support for management of redundancy processes, equality impact assessments and provision of workforce planning tools.



# Conclusion

WMEmp

This Regional Workforce Strategy highlights the 6 critical areas that need to be addressed across the West Midlands to ensure a sustainable, efficient and highly skilled local government workforce. There are several dependencies and opportunities between the six elements of this workforce strategy.



- Employer branding efforts in attraction directly impact recruitment success
- A Regional "one voice" approach needs coordination across both stages
- Quality of attraction affects recruitment timelines and costs



- Initial skill gaps identified in recruitment inform development needs
- Career pathway clarity at recruitment stage affects development planning
- Leadership pipeline begins at recruitment selection



- Professional growth opportunities directly impact retention rates
- Leadership development connects to succession planning needs
- Skills enhancement affects internal mobility options



- Pay structure limitations impact retention in competitive sectors
- Benefits package
   effectiveness influences
   retention decisions
- Recognition systems affect employee engagement and stability



- High turnover areas inform restructuring priorities
- Retention patterns affect workforce planning decisions
- Staff stability influences
   reorganization success

### To address these challenges the strategy emphasises that we need;

- Regional collaboration to create unified employer branding
- Modernised recruitment processes to reduce hiring timeframes
- Enhanced development pathways linked to retention strategies
- Balanced approach to reward within national constraints
- · Coordinated movement strategies during organisational change

The success of this strategy depends on effective coordination between individual councils, sector-specific initiatives, and regional approaches - supported by West Midlands Employers' expertise and resources.

Success in any one area fundamentally depends on and influences outcomes in others, suggesting the need for an integrated implementation approach. Implementation requires careful consideration of the interdependencies between different workforce elements, to ensure sustainable outcomes for the Region's local government sector. It is critical for us to collaborate as a region and sector, in order to succeed as individual employers.

# **Additional resources**

# Want to know more about the work of WME in the region?

Here are some other resources you may find useful:



#### Click here to view our WME Website





### Get in touch

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