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In 2022, workplace EDI is really coming into its own, with organisations recognising that a happy and harmonious workforce is more productive and profitable, which put simply is just good for business whatever sector you are in. ▶

Darra Singh OBE is senior partner government and public sector at EY

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Transforming temporary recruitment practices in the West Midlands

West Midlands Employers has led a project to help set up a first-of-its kind regional temporary workforce solution aimed at improving access to quality staff. **Rebecca Davis** outlines the benefits of a local government-owned service

Challenges around recruitment, retention and access to talent aren't new to councils. But with the pandemic compounding issues, councils in the West Midlands came together and asked West Midlands Employers (WME) to explore opportunities to create their own West Midlands Agency that they could influence, direct and control.

So, WME looked into options to help overcome some of the recruitment challenges that our 32 council members in the region face. We started out by conducting some research, speaking to council leaders and temporary workers themselves, to understand some of the existing challenges.

There is no doubt that the scale of the task is vast. We spend around £126m on temporary agency workers across the region each year – representing 15% of our total workforce spend. This is against the backdrop of having around 62,000 permanent local government employees (excluding schools' staff).

How we engage temporary workers and how councils manage them, from resourcing to career management, needs a radical overhaul.

Our research showed many temporary workers have had negative experiences throughout the recruitment and onboarding process and this can put them off taking permanent role

Transforming our relationship with temporary workers

Councils are suffering from skills shortages and often look to temporary workers to fill the gaps – they are considered an essential part of the workforce and relied upon at times to keep critical services going. However, councils often found themselves in competition with fellow councils in the region to access this very talent and they all want greater stability across their workforce, during this time of unprecedented change.

Our research showed many temporary workers have had negative experiences throughout the recruitment and onboarding process and this can put them off taking permanent roles. When things are good they particularly enjoy placements where they felt part of the team and can help drive change within councils and local communities.

It's clear that if we are to create a solution that improves access to quality temporary workers, we also need to ensure a positive placement experience. This has a dual effect and in turn should encourage some temporary workers to become permanent, helping councils to stabilise their workforce.

This is one of the many initiatives set out within the new West Midlands Workforce Strategy for Local Government, to compliment and enhance existing council people strategies.

Creating a regional temporary workforce solution

WME led the project to create the strategy and then find a strategic partner to help set up a first-of-its kind regional temporary workforce solution. Aligned with the Workforce Strategy, we undertook a procurement process.

Opus People Solutions were selected to be our strategic partner, creating a one stop shop for temporary worker recruitment that will sit alongside the region's wholly owned WMJobs service. As a wholly owned local authority trading company they are committed to supporting the ambitions of the Workforce Strategy, to drive improvements for the whole



workforce, as well as reducing agency reliance and funnelling money back into the sector.

It was here that WMTemps was born. The culmination of an 18-month project, the service goes live on 1 April and the temporary worker resourcing solution looks to address the region's recruitment challenges by centralising and streamlining processes.

Benefits of a local government owned service

The decision behind having one collectively owned resourcing solution is of course, in part, to help local authorities reduce costs longer-term through service efficiencies – for example not having to run local procurement processes. A centralised solution eliminates the duplication of administrative support functions and streamlines governance processes.

Quality is also a priority. Having an overview of talent across the entire region, we aim to stop poor resource moving around the region and filter any candidates that do not meet the expected standards necessary for all placements. Councils will have greater options to overcome these crippling skills shortages, working together to establish solutions as opposed to being in a bidding war with their regional neighbours.

It also enables us to maintain greater control over our equality, diversity, and inclusion practices – ensuring that councils build a diverse pipeline of people into the recruitment framework, which also values diversity of thought and experience of staff.

This will help to ensure councils in the West Midlands have a workforce that reflects the diverse communities we serve, while highlighting the diverse services we provide. We want to create attractive and inclusive workplaces, encouraging all talent to apply.

All aboard

Now that the new resourcing solution for temporary workers has been set up, we're reaching out to councils in the region to sign-up to the initiative.

While it is early days, we believe this recruitment solution aimed at temporary workers will support councils in the region in overcoming many of their challenges, while creating a blueprint for others to follow suit. ▶

Rebecca Davis is chief executive of West Midlands Employers

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• If you would like to find out more about this new initiative contact Rebecca Davis at r.davis@wmemployers.org.uk