

Rising to the Challenge – Building the NW Local Government Workforce of the Future

Gillian Bishop, Chief Executive, North
West Employers

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Irrespective of where the conversation starts within local government circles, you can almost guarantee that as part of the discussion you will end up talking about the biggest challenge that is facing us – yes, it is finances, but also our people, our workforce. The focus of the discussion centres around; where has everybody gone, why can't we recruit, and how do we keep hold of our great people?

So why is this the case, and what can we do about it?

In terms of why this is happening there are several factors that are contributing to the grand resigns, and redesign of the workforce. From the '*new-normal post-covid*' discussions, to the post-pandemic analysis of '*what is it all about?*'. The new Gen Z approach to working has evolved from that of the Millennial in that the outlook has transitioned to working as a means to an end instead of vice versa. Many preferring a portfolio based career with opportunities to switch activities, as well as flexible working arrangements.

This cultural shift has been compounded by the increasing competition within the private sector with the seismic shifts and growth of distribution and retail opportunities that are able to offer flexible working patterns and rates of pay that are more competitive than some of the pay rates and conditions that the local government sector is able to offer.

We are party to a range of debates and discussions focused on how we attract and retain our existing workforce and recruit and grow our future talent. We have just seen the publication of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, which is the first comprehensive workforce plan for the NHS putting staffing on a sustainable footing and improving patient care. It focuses on retaining existing talent and making the best use of new technology alongside the biggest recruitment drive in health service history.

Workforce planning, discussed in our recent Talent Rebels round table discussion in partnership with Gatenby Sanderson, involved several councils recognising that more focus is required in identifying critical roles and profiling the workforce, combining a range of initiatives and data analysis for a more coherent talent strategy.

At the LGA conference in Bournemouth this year, the local government Chief Executives considered what the local government equivalent of a long-term strategic approach to the local government workforce challenges and opportunities is? It is recognised that as a sector we are not a national entity, and that each local council, system and locality is different. However, it has to be said that although we can recognise and celebrate difference we can and should identify our similarities and opportunities and there can be enough common ground to enable a strategic agreeable geographical and sectoral response to one of the greatest resource challenges that we have experienced in a very long time.

So what is the art of the possible to address these challenges and opportunities?

We need to develop a narrative, our elevator pitch that clearly and succinctly describes and energises our audience to the world of opportunity that local government can offer.

We are surrounded by fantastic colleagues whose careers have been centred around working with, in and alongside local government over decades. However, when we are asked 'so what do you do?' how easy is it to describe the intricacies of what we do in our roles – not at all - so it is easier to just say "I work in local government", but this masks the complexity and diversity of what we do and contribute. So, there is a challenge and opportunity to develop a compelling elevator pitch for local government!

This call to develop a clear narrative, and to use this as a campaign at a local, regional, and national level will assist us to clearly articulate why our young people and future talent should join us and benefit from the vast array of opportunities that the sector can offer.

Once we have attracted colleagues to join us then, how do we create the culture and environment for them to maximise their full potential? We know that there's an amazing and innovative range of induction activities that take place within our authorities to ensure that colleagues experience a positive start to their local government journey. Once they have settled into their role, annual appraisals and regular reviews and development opportunities provide access to a range of internal and external opportunities to increase the depth and breadth of their local government experience and expertise.

We, at North West Employers, have the privilege of working with our member organisations on the co-design, delivery and evaluation of a plethora of networks, sessions, projects and programmes to retain and develop our existing talent and to recruit and secure our future talent.

Tri-Sector Challenge

One great example of our small contribution to developing the future talent in the NW is through the Tri-sector Challenge. The NW hosted its first Tri Sector Challenge in June 2023 at the Theatre of Dreams - Old Trafford.

The Tri-Sector Challenge offers a fantastic opportunity for aspiring leaders to gain exposure to issues outside of their normal work, giving them a taste of what senior management is really like. Teams from local authorities and partner organisations compete against each other as they are asked to be the Chief Executive and Senior Team of a fictional organisation in a fictional place for the day.

The day creates an opportunity for our future leaders to put themselves in the shoes of their senior team, and in a safe space allows them to identify which areas to prioritise, deal with politically sensitive issues and maintain customer focus when determining how to provide the public with the best services possible despite limited resource. Throughout the day, they will have to navigate requests for briefings from the Leader of the Council, requests for meetings from key strategic partners and deal with the media, all against the clock!

The NW had 12 teams enter the Challenge in our first year, which was a brilliant take up from our member organisations, demonstrating the commitment that our region has to talent development.

The participants had the opportunity to compete for different awards throughout the day, some they knew about, and some were a secret! From this year the winners were as follows:



**NW Tri-Sector Challenge Overall Award
Winner for 2023
Cheshire West and Chester Council**



**Shining Star Award Winner
Bury Council**



**Leadership award Winner
Cheshire West and
Chester Council**



**Communications Award
Winner
Wigan Council**



**Behaviours Award Winner
Blackburn with Darwen
Borough Council**

We are committed to finding, securing, and supporting our existing and future talent. The Tri-sector challenge is just one way that we will continue to do this, and from our offer ([Our Offer](#)) and through our bespoke support we can work with and alongside our members to assist in tackling the recruitment and retention challenge and secure our future talent.

Looking forward

We will look forward to seeing our next cohort of future leaders at the Tri Sector Challenge 2024, and until then we will continue in our quest to raise the profile of local government as a career of choice, provide mentoring and coaching and a whole range of other opportunities for our colleagues to maximise their full potential.

The mantra of the All Blacks, the New Zealand Rugby Team recognised as the most successful team ever, is performance = capability x behaviour, they have 1 captain and 15 leaders with their values being humility, excellence and respect.

You can read more about when 'you are on top of your game...change your game' in the internationally bestselling book 'Legacy' by James Kerr, who provided another inspirational and thought provoking session at this year's LGA conference. There is more to come on this when we do our book review.

Reflection

Until then, there are some questions that we can consider as a sector:

1. What can be our NW Haka, our USP, our elevator pitch?
2. How do we **create** our plan for attraction, retention and creation of career pathways for future talent?
3. How do we **develop** opportunities for our future leaders to maximise their performance, capabilities and our collective capacity?

4. How do we **maintain** a culture of humility, excellence and respect?

Fulfilling these questions in our mind, will drive us to be the best ever just like the All Blacks. These are on our 'to do' list, so we will look forward to joining forces with you to drive this agenda further forward.

Thanks for reading, welcome your thoughts, join the discussion and let's together make the Local Government Sector in the NW the place where everyone wants to be.

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