

Briefing 22-22



Pay rates amongst refuse workers in the UK

An analysis of the challenges facing the sector



Contents

Results at a glance	3
Section 1 – Purpose of the survey	4
Scope of the research	4
Background/Literature Review	4
Global HGV driver shortage	4
What caused the HGV driver shortage?	5
A shortage of Non-HGV Refuse workers?	6
A sector in the grip of a crisis?	6
Section 2 – Analysing the results of the survey	7
Methodology	7
Waste collection HGV Drivers: Average basic salary and hourly rate	8
Waste collection non-HGV Drivers: Average basic salary and hourly rate	9
Waste collection Loaders: Average basic salary and hourly rate	10
What is the standard overtime rate?	12
What schemes have been introduced to improve recruitment in the sector?	14
Experiences of retaining staff	14
What schemes have been introduced to help support staff?	15
Have Brexit and COVID impacted on recruitment and retention issues?	16
What are the reasons behind people leaving waste services?	17
The morale of the workforce	18
Skills shortages	19
Total labour costs as a percentage of total expenditure – APSE	
Performance Networks data	20
‘A need for investment in local government’ – APSE Comment	21



Results at a glance

Average Basic Salary

HGV Drivers	£24,651
Non-HGV Drivers	£21,410
Loaders	£20,743

Average Hourly Rate

HGV Drivers	£12.82
Non-HGV Drivers	£11.14
Loaders	£10.79

Overtime

% of respondents who stated the standard overtime rate (Monday-Friday) is 1.5x regular pay	68.09%
% of respondents who stated the standard overtime rate (Weekend) is 1.5x regular pay	80.00%

Main reason for staff leaving the refuse service

% of respondents who answered 'Higher pay in other sectors/employers'	68.42%
% of respondents who answered 'Retirement / early retirement / voluntary redundancy'	40.35%

Staff morale

% of respondents who answered 'staff morale is OK but could be improved'	59.65%
% of respondents who answered 'Low staff morale – we have a problem'	12.28%

Skills shortages

% of respondents who answered 'yes across some areas'	56.14%
---	---------------

Section 1 – Purpose of the survey

The survey was designed in response to a network query from a member authority. Under increasing pressure to review their waste services workforce salaries, the council concerned requested APSE support through its membership resources team to gather information on basic pay comparisons across the region and the wider UK. A survey of APSE's membership was chosen as the most reliable and accurate method by which to gather this information.

Scope of the research

The original scope of this research was to survey APSE's member authority refuse teams and arrive at accurate real time data on the pay rates of refuse workers: HGV drivers, non-HGV drivers and loaders. However, during the design stage of the survey, it was decided the scope of the survey ought to be expanded to include questions on retention and recruitment in the sector. The purpose of widening the scope was to gain insight into how the current labour market is impacting budgets, capacity and morale within the sector. This research compliments the findings of APSE's 2021 Local Government Skills Shortages and Workforce Capacity Discussion Paper (WCDP)¹, but with a specific focus on local authority waste collection teams.

Background/Literature Review

During the pandemic, the UK media and indeed the public at large, reappraised its understanding of the term 'key worker'. Local government frontline staff – care workers, parks attendants, street cleansers and refuse workers – came to be recast as the 'fourth emergency service'; recognised as providing vital services that ensure the national economy and local communities are able to function. For APSE, this acknowledgement has been long-overdue. Yet, for far too long, the tremendous efforts of those local government staff supporting the frontline has not always been met with commensurate salaries. Even before the serious disruptions of COVID and lockdowns, local government has struggled to recruit and retain staff.

Global HGV driver shortage

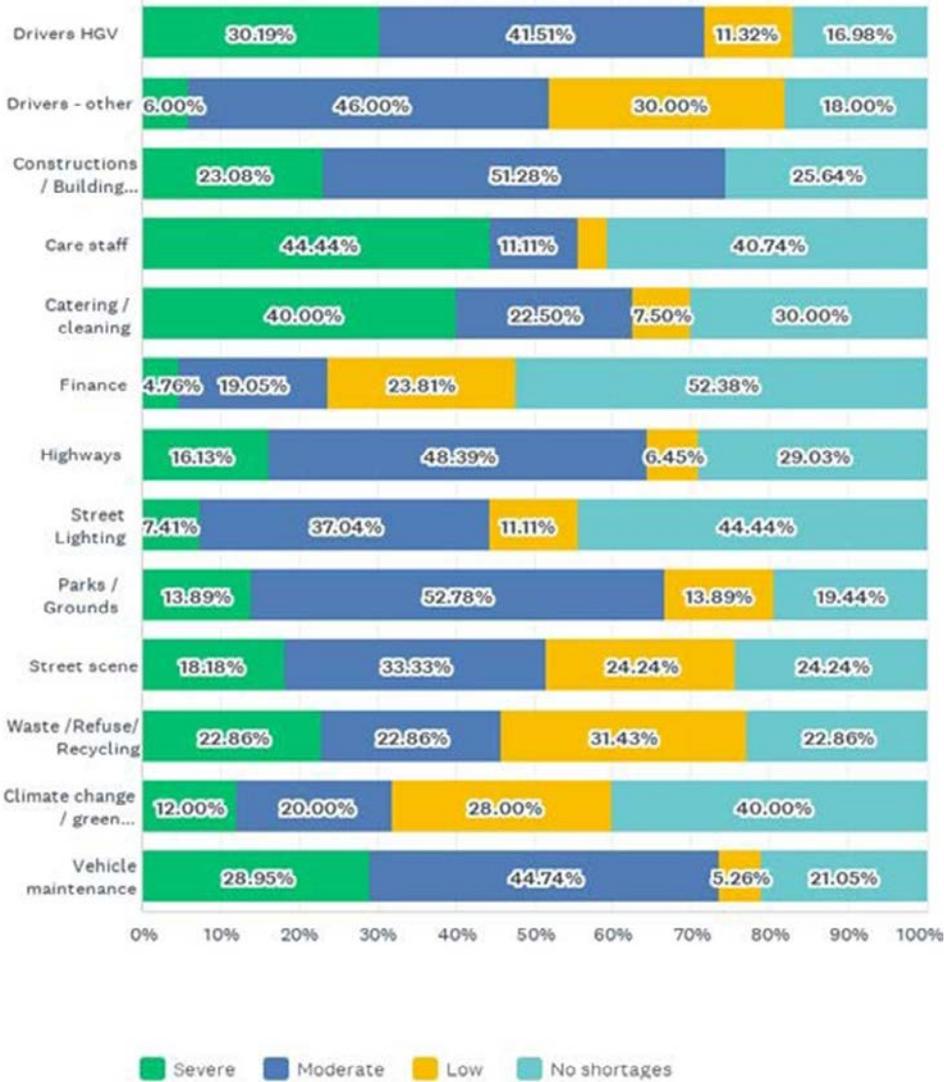
In 2021, major economies throughout the world experienced serious HGV driver recruitment shortfalls. In September of that year, Poland experienced a driver shortage of 123,000 and Germany had a shortfall of 76,000.² In the UK, The Road Haulage Association estimated that well over 600,000 HGV drivers are normally needed to keep the UK running smoothly, and that, in September 2021, the country was about 100,000 drivers short.

As one would expect, these kinds of shortages fed through to UK local government. Findings from APSE's WCDP, released in December 2021, revealed 71.7% of those surveyed reported severe or moderate HGV driver shortages with 52% reporting a shortage of drivers more generally. As shown in Figure 1, when filtered, the South of England reported a much higher level of HGV drivers shortages than other APSE regions, with 69.2% reporting shortages as severe and, when combined with moderate shortages, this rose to near 77%, which is 5.3% higher than the UK-wide figure. The UK wide figure for 'severe shortages' was much lower at 30.2%.

1 APSE Briefing 21-56: Local government: Skills shortages and workforce capacity (2021) Available at: <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/briefings/2021/21-56-local-government-skills-shortages-and-workforce-capacity/>

2 'Why is there a shortage of lorry drivers? The HGV crisis explained' Metro, Published Friday 24 Sep 2021, Available at: <https://metro.co.uk/2021/09/24/why-is-there-a-shortage-of-lorry-drivers-the-hgv-crisis-explained-15310821/>

Figure 1: Do you suffer from recruitment difficulties in any of the following areas of work? APSE Briefing 21-56: Local government: Skills shortages and workforce capacity (2021)



What caused the HGV driver shortage?

A perfect storm of long-run factors and short-term triggers helped facilitate the serious HGV driver shortage in the UK.³ These include:

- In recent decades HGV wages haven't kept up with other sectors which means fewer people want to enter the industry.
- Around 15,000 eastern European drivers left the UK during the pandemic and have yet to return.
- The average age of lorry drivers is 55 which means the sector has been left exposed to a glut of retirements in recent years.
- IR35 tax changes cut earnings for agency drivers, leading many to quit the industry.

³ 'Lorry driver shortage: where have all the truckers gone and what can we do about it?' MoneyWeek, Published 10 September 2021, Available at: <https://moneyweek.com/economy/uk-economy/603824/lorry-driver-shortage-where-have-all-the-truckers-gone-and-what-can-we-do>

A shortage of Non-HGV Refuse workers?

The global shortage of HGV drivers, and subsequent mass media interest in the HGV shortage, fuelled extensive market research into the topic. Conversely, information on recruitment and retention rates amongst non-HGV refuse workers – both drivers and loaders – is much more limited.

APSE's own research on this area, via our 2021 WCDP, revealed 46% of respondents reported moderate difficulties in recruiting for non-HGV driver positions, with 6% reporting severe difficulties. Though the difficulties in recruiting for non-HGV drivers were noticeably less than for HGV drivers, the occupation was second lowest when it came to reporting 'no shortage difficulties' at 18% (HGV drivers being the lowest at 16.98%).

Elsewhere in the WCDP survey, 22.86% of refuse and recycling respondents reported severe recruitment difficulties, placing it in the upper half of local authority service areas experiencing severe staffing shortages. So though not as severe as other local government services, the recruitment picture painted by the WCDP findings for waste collection services is far from rosy.

A sector in the grip of a crisis?

Recruitment shortages across the UK economy, driven primarily but not solely by the reduced presence of EU workers, has meant many industries have had to increase their salary offers. This was made clear in a Guardian article from September 2021, in which it was noted, *"Pre-Brexit and Covid, the average HGV driver would have earned about £35,000; now, Waitrose is reportedly offering £53,780 as a starting salary, while Gist, which supplies drivers for Tesco and M&S, is offering £56,674, plus a £5,000 bonus... Local authorities are haemorrhaging drivers like never before, because they can't afford to match these salaries."*⁴

The public sector is not shielded from the wider economic impacts of changes on an economy wide basis. The findings of the WCDP demonstrated that differing impacts of the pandemic on employment trends are now appearing in local councils, as competition for employment talent opens up, alongside inflationary pressures, where public sector wages, especially within local councils, tend to lag behind those of the private sector, and other public sector employers, such as the NHS. This, in turn, is drawing existing and potential local government refuse workers away from the sector.

In the wake of these documented pressures on waste collection services, this survey was designed to measure the extent to which the shocks of the UK's purported "Rubbish Collection Crisis" of autumn 2021 are making their impact felt on budgets, capacity and morale within the sector. The survey also explored what measures local authorities are putting in place to accommodate these impacts and maintain high-quality waste services.

4 'Maggots and mayhem: behind the scenes of Britain's big bin crisis' The Guardian, Published 21 September 2021. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/21/maggots-and-mayhem-a-day-on-a-bin-round-in-broken-brexit-britain>

Section 2 – Analysing the results of the survey

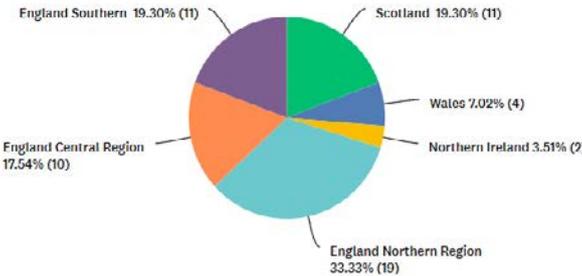
Methodology

APSE conducted a survey of its member local councils between 14 March and 1 April 2022. A total of 57 respondents submitted their views with a completion rate of 100%. This provides a good representative sample from APSE’s cohort of around 200 collection authority members.

Respondents were relatively evenly spread across APSE’s six areas of activity: APSE Scotland, APSE Wales, APSE Northern Ireland, APSE Northern, APSE Southern and APSE Central.

Which area of the UK are you from (APSE areas used for this question)?

Answered: 57 Skipped: 0



It may appear that the results of the APSE survey skew slightly towards the Northern Region of England, as well as Scotland. However, one respondent from the South of England manages waste services for three other councils, so the number of council areas represented by this survey in that region is 14 as opposed to 11.

On the issue of regional variation it is also worth stressing that when digging into the individual responses, one finds several local authorities that buck their regional trend with regards to their salary offers; influenced by other factors such as the urban density of the locality. So although the average salary discrepancies between regions and countries are revealing, one ought to appreciate that the regional averages are just that – an average – and that it can hide big salary disparities within regions.

The Northern Ireland sample is slightly lower due to overall low numbers of councils in Northern Ireland since the 2014 reorganisation and booster samples were not therefore available.

Waste collection HGV Drivers: Average basic salary and hourly rate

Figure 2: What is the basic salary of your waste collection HGV Drivers?

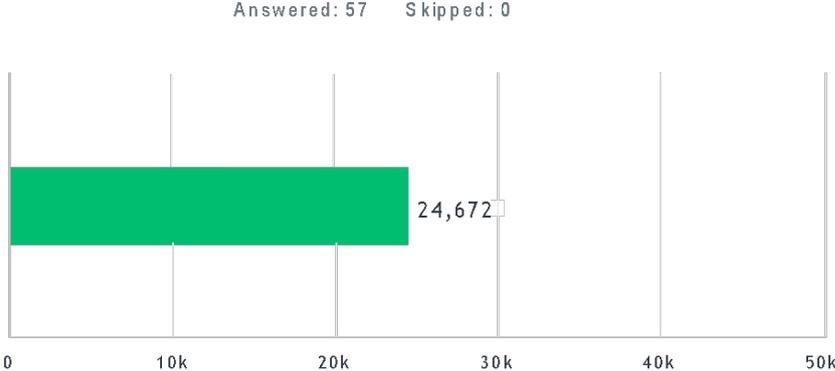
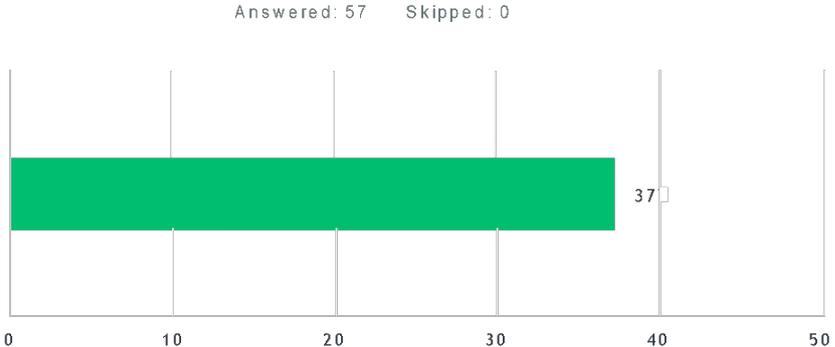


Figure 3: What are the contracted weekly hours for your waste collection HGV drivers?



Of those surveyed (Figure 2), the average salary of a waste collection HGV drivers was calculated at £24,672, with the average contracted weekly hours standing at 37 hours. This means the average hourly rate works out at £12.82.

When one compares the figure of £24,672 with other salary-check resources (Figure 4), namely recruitment websites, one finds APSE's average figure correlates very strongly with the average aggregate salary of the recruitment websites (£24,698).

Figure 4: HGV Driver online salary-check resources

Website	Average salary	Average Hourly Rate
Total Jobs ⁵	£24,449	N/A
Talent ⁶	£24,375	£12.50 per hour
Check-a-salary ⁷	£25,271	N/A
Average aggregate salary	£24,698	

5 'What is the average salary for Refuse Driver jobs?' www.totaljobs.com. Accessed 19 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.totaljobs.com/salary-checker/average-refuse-driver-salary>

6 'Class Refuse Driver average salary in United Kingdom 2022' www.talent.com. Accessed 19 May 2022. Available at: <https://uk.talent.com/salary?job=class+refuse+driver>

7 'Refuse Driver Salary' www.checkasalary.com. Accessed 19 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.checkasalary.co.uk/salary/refuse-driver>

When one breaks down the findings by region and by country, one finds that the regional differences in HGV salary offers are not particularly pronounced; the difference between the highest paying region and lowest, in terms of average hourly rate, is just £1.85, though when taking into account the impact of higher agency rates, where councils are unable to recruit and are therefore reliant upon agency workers the difference is much starker.

One would expect, as is the case in the wider UK economy, that salaries offered in APSE’s Southern Region would outstrip those offered elsewhere. However, the average salary of waste collection HGV drivers in APSE’s Central Region of England are marginally higher than those in the South.

Furthermore, though the APSE Southern Region possesses the second highest average salary, its average hourly rate is lower than that of Wales. Notably however the higher average contracted hours will reduce the overall hourly rates which could be a further fact in the Southern Region.

Figure 5: HGV Driver Regional Breakdown

APSE Region	Average salary	Average Contracted Hours (per week)
Wales	£25,476	37
Northern Ireland	£22,174	37
Scotland	£24,058	37
Central England	£25,724	37
North of England	£24,011	37
South of England	£25,631	38

Waste collection non-HGV Drivers: Average basic salary and hourly rate

Figure 6: What is the basic salary of your waste collection non-HGV Drivers?

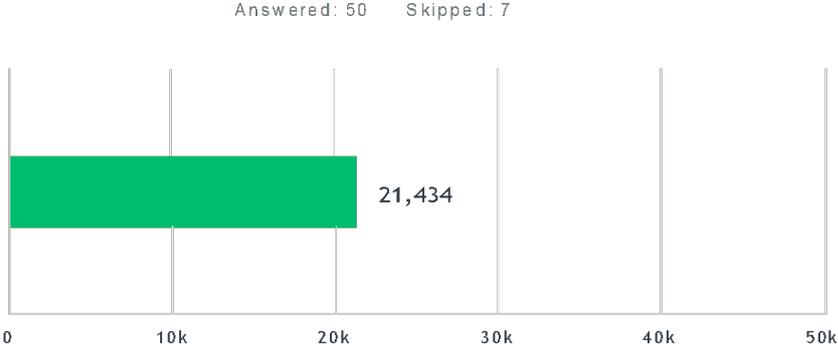
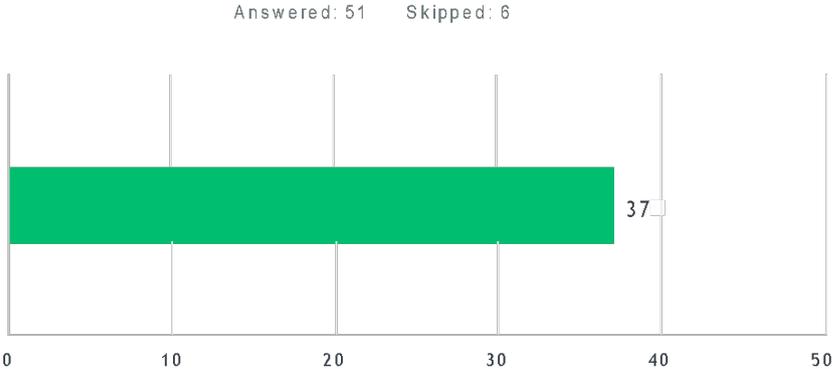


Figure 7: What is the contracted weekly hours for your waste collection non-HGV Drivers?



Of those surveyed (Figure 6), the average salary of a waste collection HGV drivers was calculated at £21,434, with the average contracted weekly hours standing at 37 hours. This means the average hourly rate works out at £11.14.

Unlike HGV refuse drivers or refuse loaders, there is no data available from salary-check resources online for non-HGV refuse drivers. Therefore, one is unable to cross-reference and compare APSE’s findings with other resources.

When one breaks down the findings by APSE region (Figure 8), one finds that, as with most other sectors, the salaries offered in the South of England outstrip those offered elsewhere. The submissions of two London authorities is also likely to pull the average up for the Southern Region, as the Minimum Wage for London is calculated independently from the National Minimum Wage to reflect the high cost of living in the capital.

That said, much like with the HGV drivers, the regional differences in non-HGV driver salary offers are not particularly pronounced; the difference between the highest paying region and lowest, in terms of average hourly rate, is just £1.07. Again however the caveat to this data is the impact overall when councils are reliant upon agency workers and pay higher rates out of necessity.

Figure 8: Non-HGV Driver Regional Breakdown

APSE Region	Average salary	Average Contracted Hours per Week
Wales	22,135	37
Northern Ireland	21,177	37
Scotland	20,424	37
Central England	22,231	37
North of England	20,581	37
South of England	22,476	37

Waste collection Loaders: Average basic salary and hourly rate

Figure 9: What is the basic salary of your waste collection Loaders?

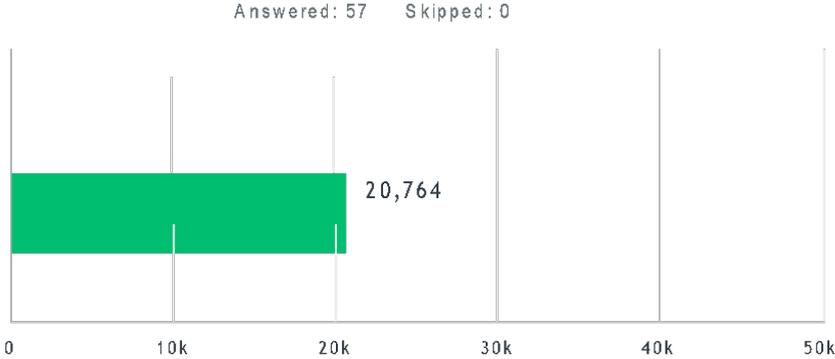
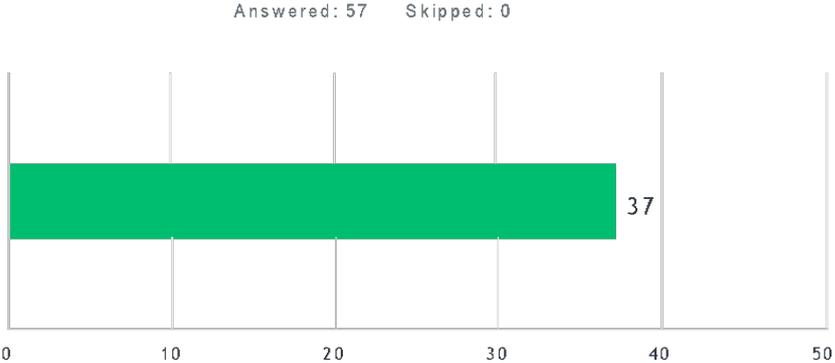


Figure 10: What are the contracted weekly hours for your Loaders?



Of those surveyed (Figure 9), the average salary of a waste collection HGV drivers was calculated at £20,764, with the average contracted weekly hours standing at 37 hours. This means the average hourly rate works out at £10.79.

When one compares the figure of £20,764 with other salary-check resources, namely recruitment websites, one finds the APSE’s average figure once again correlates strongly with the aggregate salary of the recruitment websites (£19,902).

Figure 11: HGV Loader online salary-check resources

Website	Average salary	Average Hourly Rate
Total Jobs ⁸	£16,622	N/A
Talent ⁹	£22,425	£11.50 per hour
Check-a-salary ¹⁰	£20,661	N/A
Average aggregate salary	£19,902	

When one breaks down the findings by APSE region (Figure 12), one finds that, much like with HGV and non-HGV drivers, the regional differences are not particularly pronounced; the difference between the highest paying region and lowest, in terms of average hourly rate, is just £0.63. A larger sample from APSE Southern could however change this figure upwards, particularly again with regards to the London Living Wage and initiatives to increase lower paid jobs into Living Wage posts.

As with HGV drivers, the average salary of refuse loaders in APSE’s Central Region is highest in the UK.

Figure 12: Loader Regional Breakdown

APSE Region	Average salary	Average Contracted Hours per week
Wales	20,181	37
Northern Ireland	20,987	37
Scotland	20,625	37
Central England	21,515	37
North of England	20,304	37
South of England	21,184	37

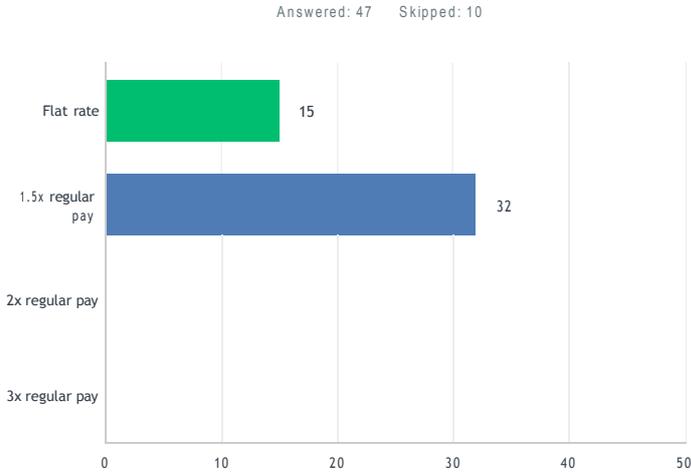
8 'What is the average salary for Refuse Loader jobs?' www.totaljobs.com. Accessed 19 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.totaljobs.com/salary-checker/average-refuse-loader-salary>

9 'Class Refuse Loader average salary in United Kingdom 2022' www.talent.com. Accessed 19 May 2022. Available at: <https://uk.talent.com/salary?job=class+refuse+loader>

10 'Refuse Loader Salary' www.checkasalary.com. Accessed 19 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.checkasalary.co.uk/salary/waste-collector>

What is the standard overtime rate?

Figure 13: If your refuse workers are eligible for overtime pay, what is the standard overtime rate whilst working Monday-Friday?



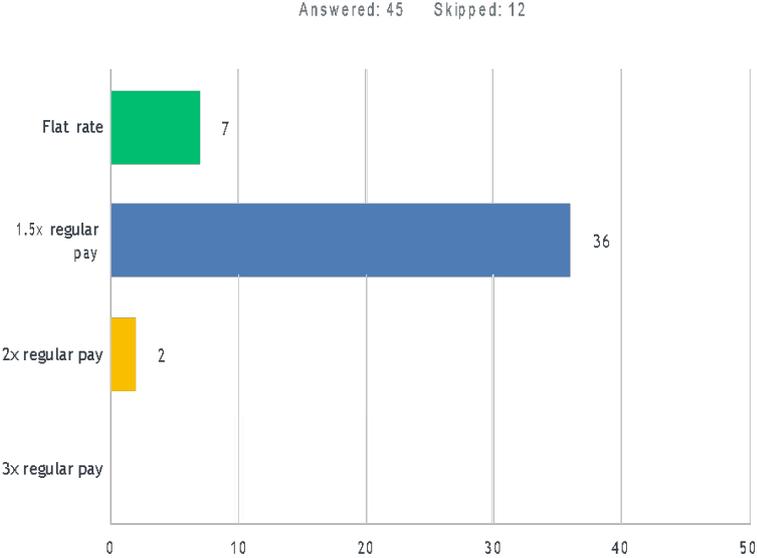
As with salaries, APSE was also interested in gathering accurate real time data on the standard overtime rate for refuse workers.

The first question relating to overtime asked what the standard overtime rate was for refuse workers during the working week (Figure 13). The large majority of respondents answered 1.5x regular pay (**68.09%**). However, it is worth drawing attention to the responses of those who answered 'Other'. This option on the survey offered respondents the chance to be more specific with their answers. Comments included unlisted rates and more specific conditions for overtime such as:

- "First 2 hours is basic pay then after that it is 1.5x"
- 1.25x
- "All drivers receive a vehicle prep allowance £1180 approx. p.a. plus a weekly wash off payment of £19"
- 1.33x
- "1.5x if work over 37hrs"
- "First 5 hours over 37 is basic pay, after 42 hours it is 1.5x"

Clearly these differences relate to local circumstances and reflect the changes to NJC 'Part 3' arrangements leaving many matters to local determination.

Figure 14: If your refuse workers are eligible for overtime pay, what is the standard overtime rate for weekend work?



The second question relating to overtime asked what the standard overtime rate was for refuse workers during the weekend (Figure 14). An even larger majority of respondents answered 1.5x regular pay (**80.00%**). Again however, the comment box allowed respondents to expand a little more on the options available; providing for more specific rates and the conditions that need to be met to unlock the extra pay:

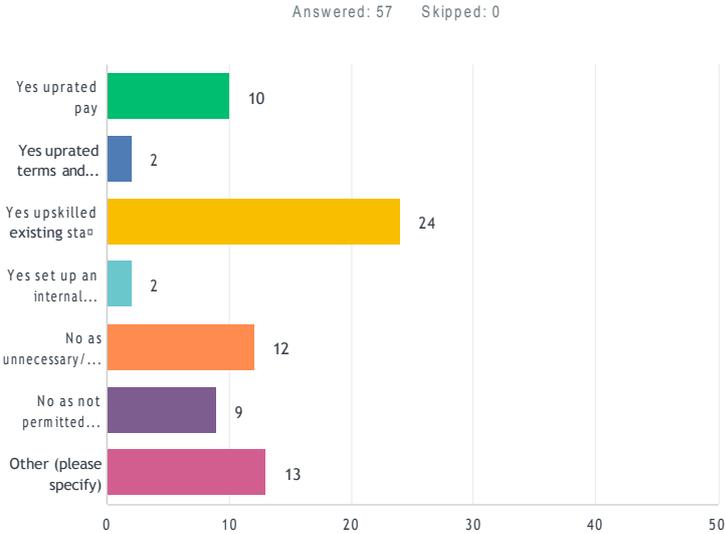
- "First 2 hours single time then 1.5x"
- "Saturday – Time and one half, Sunday – Double time"
- "Saturday = Flat Rate Sunday = 1.5x Regular Pay"
- "Double time for Sunday working"
- 1.25 x regular pay
- "2.0x on Bank Holidays and Sundays"
- "1.33x regular pay"
- "any additional hours at plain time catch up Saturdays attract an additional £50 thank you payment"
- "Time and a third for Saturday, double time for a Sunday"
- "first 5 hours over 37 is basic pay – after 42 hours it is time and a half"
- "1.5 on a Saturday and 2 x on a Sunday"
- "Time and a Third Saturday, Time and a Half Sunday"

With both questions, 1.5 x regular pay would appear the standard overtime rate for refuse workers across UK local government, especially with weekend working. However, that 1.5 x standard pay rate hides a not insignificant level of divergence between authorities; with some refuse teams enjoying 2x regular pay at weekends and others a flat rate.

The main takeaway from these overtime-related questions is that with better use of route optimisation software, planned vehicle maintenance to minimise downtime of vehicles and crews, and the use of in-cab technology to minimise additional calls on crews – for example through identifying genuine 'missed bins' and where residents have failed to present their bins – the use of overtime appears to be an issue of 'last resort' in many councils. It will remain a necessity in some areas, and is used as a flexible tool to meet ad-hoc demands, but overall the use of enhanced overtime payments is an area which waste managers are increasingly aware of as a cost issue to the service.

What schemes have been introduced to improve recruitment in the sector?

Figure 15: Have you introduced any schemes to improve recruitment?

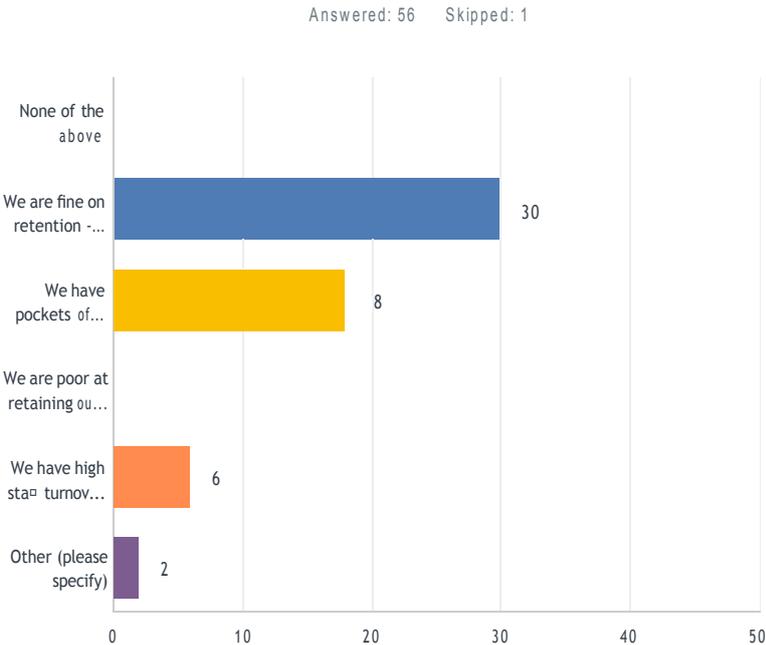


Members were asked whether any schemes had been introduced to help improve recruitment of waste collection staff (Figure 15). Almost two-fifths of respondents (**42.11%**) answered they were upskilling staff, with almost a fifth (**17.54%**) uprating pay and **3.51%** uprating terms and conditions. Just over a fifth of respondents reported having no problem with recruitment whereas **15.79%** reported being prevented from introducing any recruitment schemes due to council policy and/or legal issues.

A review of the comment box reveals several councils are using a market supplement to attract HGV drivers, with one authority “introducing retention, starting and referral bonuses” and another offering a “One off payment for staying for 6 months.” One authority – a ‘Core City’ authority – has introduced a four-day working week to help with recruitment.

Experiences of retaining staff

Figure 16: Thinking about retention of staff how would you best describe your experiences?

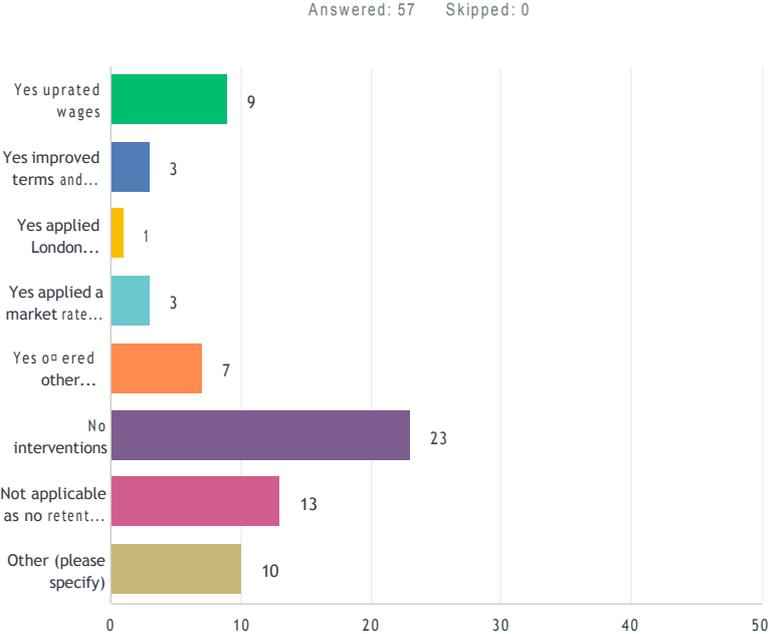


When asked about their experience of retaining staff, over half of those surveyed (**53.57%**) noted they were 'fine on staff retention – most staff stay with us for a reasonable time'. A little under a third of members (**32.14%**) answered 'we have pockets of retention issues', with **10.71%** stating they have 'high staff turnover and constantly have to recruit.'

A regional breakdown of the data does not reveal any noticeable discrepancies between the APSE regions, only that the experiences of each APSE region on retention reflects the general trend above.

What schemes have been introduced to help support staff?

Figure 17: Have you made any interventions to support staff retention?



The September 2021 Guardian article, referenced in Section 1, reported that: "In an attempt to retain drivers, Torbay Council recently put up their salary by 61p to £11.49 an hour, plus £60 for every full week worked." The above question was put to respondents in order to ascertain whether the pay or conditions uplift, much like the one introduced by Torbay Council, had been adopted by other council waste teams across the UK.

The results show that two-fifths of respondents (**40.35%**) had made no interventions to support staff retention, with a further **22.81%** not making any interventions as they have no retention issues. The remaining **36.84%** of respondents, including the **17.57%** who answered 'Other', have intervened to ensure their refuse workers are not drawn away from the sector. These interventions include:

Uprated wages	15.79%
Improved terms and conditions	5.26%
Applied London Weighting	1.75%
Applied a market rate supplement	5.26%
Offered other incentives	12.28%

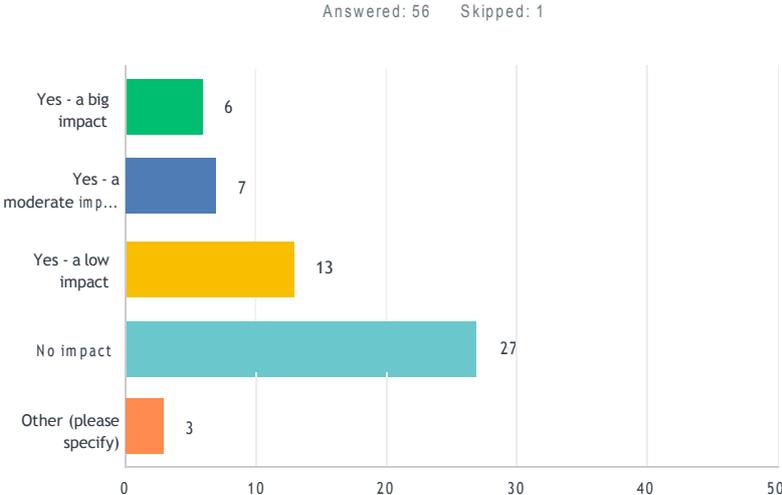
Uprating wages was the most popular interventionist measure adopted by respondents (**15.79%**). Other interventions reported by respondents in the comment box were, on the most part, variations of uprated pay. These include:

- “Improving the banding to be more competitive.”
- Offered one-off payments after 6 months of retention
- “Paying market supplements.”

Taking into consideration these comments, the number of respondents who have experienced ‘uprated pay’ rather than simply ‘uprated wages’ is more than double the figure of **15.79%**.

Have Brexit and COVID impacted on recruitment and retention issues?

Figure 18: Has Brexit impacted on recruitment and retention issues?

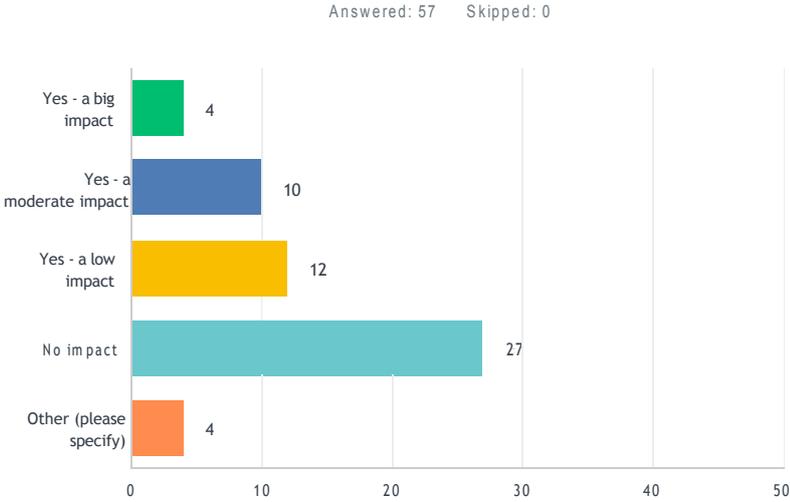


Referring back to Section 1, Brexit, and the inability of EU HGV drivers to obtain visas to work in the UK, had been cited as a factor in the shortages afflicting the road haulage sector and, by extension, local authority refuse teams. The question above was designed to gauge the extent to which Brexit had been a *major* factor in recruitment and retention issues.

Figure 18 shows that a little under half of the survey respondents (**48.21%**) believe Brexit has had zero impact on recruitment or retention into their waste service, with a further **23.21%** noting it has had ‘little impact’.

That isn’t to suggest that Brexit is a ‘dog that didn’t bark’ issue for UK local authority waste teams; around a quarter of respondents (**23.21%**) believe Brexit has had a moderate to big impact on recruitment and retention. However, it does suggest that, where there are staffing issues across local authority refuse teams, Brexit is but one of several long and short-term factors converging to create problems. One can say much the same for the question posed with ‘Brexit’ replaced with ‘COVID’: the findings to both questions are near identical, as one can see in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Has COVID impacted on recruitment and retention issues?



However, to add a note of caution, it may very well be the case that the full impacts of Brexit and COVID are yet to fully manifest themselves on recruitment and retention in waste services. Both phenomena are still fresh in the memory – arguably still ongoing – and it may be best to see them as contemporary ‘live’ issues rather than isolated ‘historic’ events.

What are the reasons behind people leaving waste services?

Figure 20: What do you believe to be the main reason for people leaving your service?

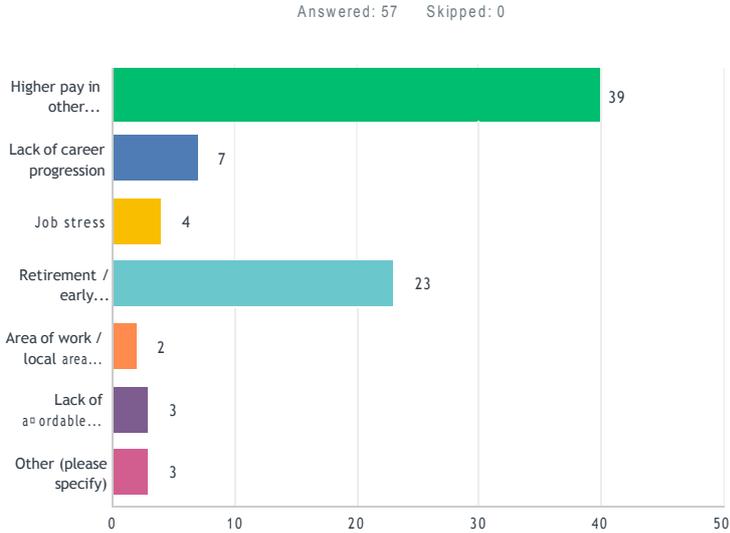


Figure 20 confirms the trends noted in Section 1; that the biggest driver behind local authority refuse workers leaving the sector is higher pay in other sectors. **68.42%** of respondents surveyed identified higher pay in other sectors/employees as the main reason for people leaving their waste service, with **40.35%** citing ‘Retirement/early retirement/voluntary retirement’, reflecting the ongoing issues of the ageing workforce in local government.

When the figures above are mapped against APSE's WCDP, one finds a strong correlation between the findings of both surveys:

Main reason for people leaving the service	Pay rates amongst refuse workers (this survey, 2022)	Workforce Capacity Discussion Paper (2021)
Higher pay in other sectors/ employees	68.42%	63.5%
Retirement/early retirement/ voluntary retirement'	40.35%	36.4%

It is interesting to note that **5.26%** of respondents noted 'lack of affordable housing to work in the area' as the main reason behind people leaving the service, confirming the findings of APSE and UNISON's 2021 Report 'A decent place to live: Homes fit for Key Workers'. The report found that housing is increasingly unaffordable for workers who struggle to find decent affordable homes in which to live near to their place of work, or indeed, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a place in which to work if needed.¹¹

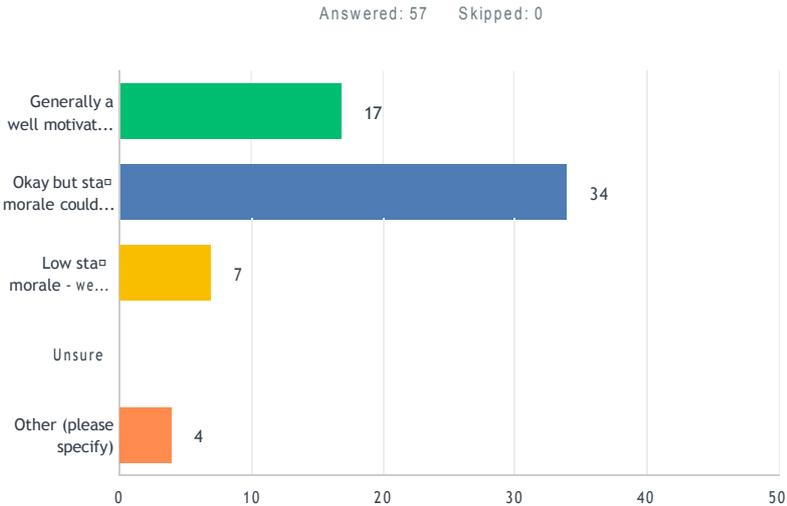
Other reasons cited by respondents as to why people are leaving their waste service include:

Lack of career progression	12.28%
Job stress	7.02%
Area of work / local area quality	3.51%
Other	5.26%

A regional breakdown of the data reveals that waste services in APSE's Southern Region are particularly vulnerable to losing staff as a consequence of higher pay in other sectors (**81.82%**). This would make sense when one considers, as per the findings of APSE's WCDP, the South of England reported a much higher level of HGV drivers shortages than other APSE regions, with **69.2%** reporting shortages as severe and, when combined with moderate shortages, this rose to near **77%**, which is **5.3%** higher than the UK-wide figure.

The morale of the workforce

Figure 21: Thinking about staff morale what best describes your current workforce?



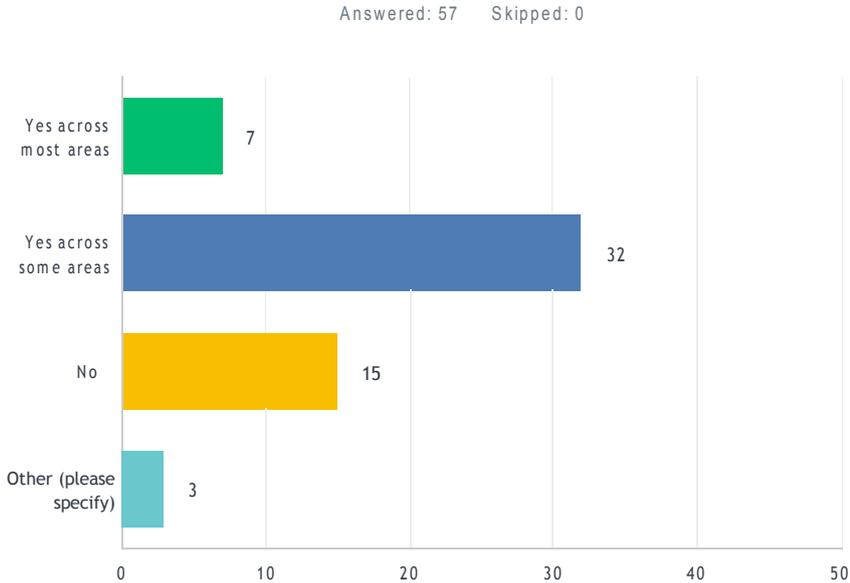
11 A decent place to live: Homes fit for Key Workers' APSE and UNISON (2021) Available at: <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/research/current-research-programme/a-decent-place-to-live-homes-fit-for-key-workers/>

Looking back at APSE’s survey and subsequent briefing on staff wellbeing towards the end of 2020, when asked about morale 43.09% reported that morale was okay.¹² In the WCDP Survey of late 2021, **59%** reported that staff morale could be improved, near identical to the findings of this survey where **59.65%** reported morale was ‘okay but could be improved’.

When one triangulates the findings of these three APSE workforce surveys, one finds this survey maintains the point made in the WCDP; that the dip in morale may suggest that staff resilience is waning. The hoped-for pandemic recovery is now perhaps viewed as less a recovery and more a grinding extension of the pressures brought on by the pandemic. However, it is also worth acknowledging the percentage of respondents to this survey who reported ‘low staff morale’ (**12.28%**) is not as high as the figure reported by the wider local government workforce in the WCDP, hinting at other local government services where staff morale is generally much weaker.

Skills shortages

Figure 22: Do you have any skills shortages?



When it comes to skills shortages, **56.14%** reported they have shortages in some areas whilst **12.28%** reported they have shortages across most areas. As with the question on morale, this correlates strongly with the same question posed to the wider local government workforce as part of APSE’s WCDP: **57.6%** reported they have shortages in some areas whilst **16.2%** reported they have shortages across most areas.

This correlation would suggest that waste collection services, much like wider local government, is outperforming other industries in the UK economy when it comes to upskilling staff. The Open University’s 2021 Business Barometer found that **63%** of business leaders are struggling with recruitment because candidates did not have the skills or necessary experience.¹³ So although the figure of **57.6%** is absolutely not a cause for celebration within local government – and indeed there is much room for improvement – the figure needs to be viewed in light of the skills shortages impacting the wider UK economy.

12 APSE Briefing 20-97 COVID-19 and workforce resilience: Results and analysis of the APSE Survey (2021) Available at: <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/briefings/2020/20-97-covid-19-and-workforce-resilience-results-and-analysis-of-the-apse-survey/>

13 ‘Business Barometer 2021’ Open University. Published 7 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.open.ac.uk/business/pse-business-leaders>

Total labour costs as a percentage of total expenditure – APSE Performance Networks data

APSE Performance Networks data suggests that whilst labour costs as a percentage of overall service costs have stayed relatively stable, the cost base of the service could see significant changes in the future. These changes are likely attributable to pressure on wages, increased costs in fuel and replacement capital costs as councils transition to greener RCV fleets.

APSE Performance Networks is the largest voluntary public sector benchmarking service in the UK. With more than 200 UK local authorities in membership, Performance Networks benchmarks across 17 frontline services, including refuse and recycling. For more information about the service, and how you can get involved [click here](#).



'A need for investment in local government' – APSE Comment

"Waste collection is one of the cornerstone council services to our community." Roger Gamba-Jones, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services at South Holland.¹⁴

One would struggle to find a more fitting description of the waste collection service than the above quote. The fact that it emerged following the "Rubbish Collection Crisis" of August/September 2021 throws into sharp relief just how important refuse workers are to securing the beauty and safety of our neighbourhoods. Without the tremendous efforts of waste teams across the UK, local communities and business would find themselves embroiled in 'Maggots and mayhem' – if we could borrow a phrase from the Guardian article referenced in Section 1.

Echoing the findings of APSE's WCDP survey in late 2021, this survey and subsequent analysis finds that there are clearly issues of pay and rewards within local government and emerging and growing issues of skills. To create resilient local services – and by extension beautiful and safe neighbourhoods – it is vital that such matters are considered for future service delivery.

The APSE Local Government Commission 2030 made a number of findings and recommendations that centred upon the workforce.¹⁵

The Commission found that severe and uneven reductions, to the local government workforce, and the differential working conditions between local government and other public services, was damaging the future sustainability of the local government workforce. These findings can be triangulated with this survey and that of the 2020 survey whereby local council pay is evidentially worse than other public sector employers.

The Commission called for career development pathways to encourage people into, and retain them, within local government and this should include a reflection of the diverse communities, served by local councils. Cuts to overall job numbers, and being unable to recruit to replace those job losses has arguably limited progress on diversity in many areas and sectors within local government.

One solution to this could be the creation of a national linked system of pay and conditions across the public sector, which would help to remove pay gaps between equivalent jobs in local government and other public services, as recommended by the APSE Commission. This could be applied to align with the principle of 'equal pay for work of equal value'.

The shortages of skills in key areas such as HGV drivers, also speaks to a further recommendation of the APSE Commission which calls for the development of new skills and capability career pathways into local government, with training and career development for existing employees. This is not just essential to meeting the current gaps in skills and capacity but to address the known pressures which will be placed on councils with an ageing workforce.

14 'Waste collection still disrupted by HGV driver shortage' Local Government Chronicle. Published 1 September 2021. Available at: <https://www.lgcplus.com/politics/workforce/waste-collection-still-disrupted-by-hgv-driver-shortage-01-09-2021/>

15 'Local by default' APSE Local Government Commission 2030 Final Report (2021) Available at: <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/research/local-government-commission-2030/commission-report-findings/>

Furthermore there is a need for new skills, particular in greening services, as a consequence of over 300 councils now having declared a climate emergency. Refuse and recycling services will have a fundamental role to play in reducing the carbon footprint of the council. As per the provisions of the Environment Act 2021, refuse teams will also have a much bigger role to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by reducing waste and increasing recycling to support a circular economy approach.

Local councils' services are well placed to evolve into more integrated services, as demands on public policy outcomes and available resources, are bound to spur on more innovative means of service delivery. However, this will take time and investment in the local government workforce to enable those changes to take shape and take place. This is difficult to do if local councils are already 'fire-fighting' on recruitment and retention issues in core areas of work, and face competition from not just other employers in the wider economy, but from other areas of the public sector, that appear to be better resourced and attract better rewards.

Addressing this myriad of competing issues in workforce matters, and the health and well – being of the local government workforce, will be an absolute imperative in the very near future. For many services they may already feel that they are at a tipping point in managing these complex workforce issues; and the response to those issues may well as advocated by the APSE Local Government Commission, need to be addressed through both local and government level actions to resolve some ingrained and systemic issues within the local government workforce.

Whilst uprating the pay of the local government workforce sits at a national level across the four nations there has to be some sympathy between both employers and trade unions within the sector. It is recognised that the waste sector is hard-working and physically challenging for the workforce. Equally managers are forced to make decisions made against the hard facts of available budgets and limited resources. The NJC agreement for England at 1.75% for the settlement of 2021-2022 was considered derisory by many given the rate of inflation and inflationary pressures on wages is likely to materialise in the coming year; in advance of which the predictability of localised wage disputes is obvious. This of course raises the spectre of disruption to equal pay evaluations, should some local government sector wages overtake other sectors, arguably equally deserving of pay increases in areas like social care, which are suffering from chronic staff shortages and recruitment and retention issues.

If any APSE contacts would like to comment on this briefing or would be interested in an online discussion about its findings, please feel free to email Matt Ellis on mellis@apse.org.uk.

Matt Ellis

APSE Communications Officer

Association for Public Service Excellence

NEW MUNICIPALISM

Delivering for local people and local economies

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Gold

Association for Public Service Excellence

3rd Floor Trafford House

Chester Road

Stretford

M32 0RS

Telephone: 0161 772 1810

Email: enquiries@apse.org.uk

www.apse.org.uk