



Local government: Skills shortages and workforce capacity





About APSE

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is owned by its members and, working on their behalf, maintains and develops a network of local government officers, managers and councillors from local authorities across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Working on a not-for-profit basis, APSE is dedicated to promoting excellence in the delivery of frontline services to local communities around the UK. Through the extensive APSE network, more than 300 local authorities and organisations are able to share information and expertise on vital frontline services, ask for advice and innovative solutions, and develop new, viable ways forward in an effort to help one another.

APSE provides a united national voice for its member authorities supporting its member authorities and advocating on their behalf across all UK administrations.

About this research

This paper was written and researched by Mo Baines, APSE Head of Communication and Coordination. The paper includes a short review of the current UK employment issues, the results of an APSE member survey and analysis of the results. These results were considered alongside discussions with APSE member councils, narrative responses to the survey and a specific forum at the APSE Performance Networks Seminar held in December 2021. Contact mbaines@apse.org.uk

Local government: Skills shortages and workforce capacity

This APSE discussion paper provides an analysis of the workforce challenges facing local government, considers its wider role in employment on an economy wide basis, and explores the findings of the APSE 'Big Workforce Survey'.

Section 1

1. Introduction

Local government faces many workforce challenges. Capacity and skills, attractiveness as a career choice, and competition from other sectors – who often pay more for less stressful job roles. More recently severe recruitment and retention issues, that have arguably been bubbling in the background, have started to make the headlines, as they have been recognised as a problem not just in local government, but on an economy wide basis.

This brief discussion paper, which shares the findings of APSE's 'Big Workforce Survey' will cover the current employment market in the UK and how this impacts or effects local councils as employers. It also addresses areas of key worker shortages such as in the care sector and HGV drivers, and poses some questions to consider solutions to these issues.

2. UK Employment and Local Government

As part of the wider economy the public sector, including NHS, Education, Police and Fire, makes up for around 5.68 million employees as of June 2021¹. From this number it is estimated that local government employs just over 2 million people. This was up by just 3,000 people (**0.1%**) compared to growth of **0.3%** in the NHS and **0.1%** in the Civil Service. However, comparing this data to 2020 (the 'Covid year') the numbers employed by the NHS grew by **3.5%** and the Civil Service by **3.9%** to cope with the health pandemic whereas in local government growth in that year was still restricted to just **0.2%**.

This indicates that the job numbers in local government have remained at much lower levels than elsewhere in the public sector, even under the pressures of the COVID health pandemic. During the years of austerity, it is estimated that councils lost around 27% of their spending power and around 25% of the overall workforce.²

Whilst councils have adopted a number of measures to manage job losses, including early retirement and redundancy, and alongside this job freezes and internal back-filling of posts or redeployment measures, there has undoubtedly been an impact on local governments' attractiveness as an employer.

1 ONS Dataset 'Public Sector Personnel Available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel>

2 UNISON data 2018 sourced through FOI requests from 231 council responses.

The once certain career pathways in local councils have instead been replaced by greater instability and, in some cases, a lack of progression. The traditional roles of direct labour and direct service organisations have, through fragmentation of delivery models in the public sector, lost the traditional benefits of these models in training workers and offering apprenticeships as well as career pathways.

3. Where are the skills gaps in the economy and local government?

During the pandemic the UK media and indeed the public at large, recast its understanding of the term 'key worker'. This is now no longer considered to be just job roles, such as a nurse or a doctor, as valued as such professions are. Instead, there is a much wider understanding of how all parts of the economy interlink, to provide vital services and keep the economy, and communities working.

This has meant that job roles such as care workers, refuse worker, parks attendants, street cleansing and drivers, and in areas like retail, food production and distribution, have all enjoyed a renewed, and in many cases a new, recognition, of their value. However, this has not always been matched by status and wages.

i. Care workers

There is a reported shortage of around 170,000 – 190,000 care workers, with 105,000 in England alone ³, leaving a gap in care need that means providers are reporting having to turn away requests for care. A survey carried out by the National Care Forum found that amongst 340 registered care managers two thirds reported that they had had to stop new residential home admissions or new home care requests.⁴ Vacancies are running at around 17%. With an ageing workforce and competition from places like retail, for jobs that are paying better with less stress, it is little wonder that care worker shortages are being acutely felt in local authority care services. The National Care Forum forecasts suggest that if the adult social care workforce is to grow in a way proportional to the projected number of people aged 65 (and over) in the population between 2020 and 2035, then an increase of 29% or the equivalent of 490,000 extra jobs would be required by 2035.

3 The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England Published by Workforce Intelligence Available at <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/national-information/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England.aspx>

4 'The Stark Reality of the Care Workforce' published by The National Care Forum (October 2021) Available at <https://www.nationalcareforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/NCF-TOM-survey-report.pdf>

This highlights the scale of the issues which local authorities face in recruiting and retaining care workers, but equally in a service heavily reliant upon outsourced contracts this further highlights the sectoral wide pressures that all providers face and the risk to the local authority as the 'client'.

ii. Drivers and HGV shortages

The Road Haulage Association⁵ suggests that we are 100,000 drivers short for HGV driver jobs in the UK; they argue that this figure has been made all the worse by EU drivers returning home, to other European countries, post Brexit.

Whilst arguably local authorities have been less reliant on EU workers for their HGV driver cohorts (or at least in most areas of the UK this has been the case) the draw of higher pay in industries that are now suffering from the loss of EU drivers, is now appearing to create some pulls away from public sector driving jobs.

HGV drivers account for 1 in 10 of transport and storage sector jobs, however the APSE survey data suggests that councils are finding some difficulties in recruiting drivers for non-HGV driving roles as well as HGV driver roles; this is appearing in services like refuse, waste and highways services.

iii. Hospitality industry/catering and cleaning jobs

Across the economy the COVID-19 pandemic has created an exodus from hospitality related jobs. ONS data⁶ suggests that between 23 August and 5 September 2021, 30% of hospitality businesses said that vacancies were 'more difficult to fill than normal'. This figure is an increase of 9% from the start of August 2021.

In part industry experts report that this is due to closures in the industry during lockdowns across the UK and staff, particularly where furloughed, finding new employment and not returning to the industry.

Within the local authority sector staff are drawn from this sector in areas like civic catering and events, school meals, and welfare catering and facilities management. Whilst more details about the APSE data is provided in Section 2 of this paper it stands to reason that economy challenges in this sector will inevitably filter through to local councils in recruitment and

5 Road Haulage Association August 2021 Available at <https://www.rha.uk.net/news/news-blogs-and-press-releases/news-updates/detail/-it-will-take-at-least-18-months-to-train-100-000-hgv-drivers->

6 ONS statistical release available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/hospitalitybusinessesaremostlikelytobestrugglingtofillvacancies/2021-09-16>

retention issues. APSE Performance Networks data has also consistently reported a high level of staff turnover in the sector.

iv. Construction and maintenance

Construction skills shortages have been well documented over the past few decades and show little signs of improvement. Vacancies for construction related jobs have now risen above pre-pandemic levels.

The industry training body CITB⁷ suggests that the industry will need to recruit around 217,000 new construction workers between now and 2025; this figure also includes professional categories such as a need for around 950 new architects.

As the UK continues to struggle to meet housing demands, with a need for around 340,000 new homes each year, it is unlikely such targets can be met without a serious surge in new construction workers. CITB estimate that this would take the annual recruitment rate to 43,000 new workers and swell overall industry numbers from 2.7 million to 2.84 million workers by 2025.

Local authorities previously held a key role in recruiting and training construction apprentices, however with the fragmentation and outsourcing of council housing, and subsequent outsourcing of building maintenance, this has significantly reduced apprenticeships. Many local councils are now however trying to make best use of the apprenticeship levy to reinvigorate apprenticeship programmes. APSE's state of the market industry reports all suggest a growth in apprenticeships generally across most services.

v. Environment and neighbourhood services

Environmental based services in councils can cut across many different job roles and directorates. This may include parks services, street-scene and public realm, alongside refuse and waste management posts.

One particular area of concern for local councils, which has been the subject of research by APSE is that of parks⁸. Reductions in staff numbers and a lack of structured professional qualifications, with the loss of experienced parks professionals through retirement, has led to some reported gaps in knowledge, for example arboriculture skills and knowledge. The

7 Britain builds back: Construction will need 216,800 new workers by 2025 to meet demand Published by CITB (2021) Available at <https://www.citb.co.uk/about-citb/news-events-and-blogs/britain-builds-back-construction-will-need-216-800-new-workers-by-2025-to-meet-demand/>

8 State of UK Public Parks 2021 <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/research/current-research-programme/state-of-uk-public-parks-2021/>

sector has lost around £690 million in the past decade, clearly reducing the ability for new recruitment in the service, as the impact of revenue cuts has led to a need to reduce overall workforce numbers.

Equally in some parts of the UK the relative low pay for loaders in refuse services has led to some hard-to-fill vacancies. APSE is aware from member councils in London and the South East that this can be an issue with both recruitment and retention.

Refuse services and highways are also services which employ HGV drivers and indeed those driving RCVs are in high demand jobs.

vi. Professionally qualified staff: Accountancy, Solicitors, Planners

Data across these areas within local government is difficult to quantify and to differentiate. However, reports of shortages in recruiting the right calibre of qualified finance officers, solicitors and planners are well documented across professional bodies.

Whilst Government(s) have attempted to make local councils more self-reliant in areas like audit there are well reported shortages in qualified auditors, leading to delays in accounts being signed off.⁹ Similarly potential pay gaps between the public sector for professionally qualified jobs in accountancy, law and planning mean fierce competition with the private sector, often where pay does not compete with the higher salaries offered elsewhere.

These shortages are already beginning to have an impact on local councils. A survey by the TCPA in 2020 found that whilst councils are declaring climate emergencies the critical shortage of skills and expertise, in relation to planning for climate change, has led to just 2% of local authorities considering future insurance availability and affordability when making planning decisions¹⁰. The TCPA further found that only a third of local authorities are seriously considering the impacts of climate change when deciding whether to grant planning permission.

4. What does this mean for local council recruitment and retention?

The above brief analysis provides a snapshot of much wider issues that in many cases have developed over a number of decades.

Many in local government will recognise some of these issues as systemic in nature; for example, the crisis in care worker recruitment, training and career pathways is a long-established need.

9 'Local authority audit hits breaking point as 91% miss deadline' ICAEW Insights Published: 21 Oct 2021 Available at <https://www.icaew.com/insights/viewpoints-on-the-news/2021/oct-2021/local-authority-audit-hits-breaking-point-as-91-miss-deadline>

10 Blog: Loss of skills and power: is local government critically unprepared for the climate crisis? Jessica Fieth for the TCPA August 2020 Available at <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/blog/blog-loss-of-skills-and-power-is-local-government-critically-unprepared-for-the-climate-crisis-jessi>

Similarly the public sector is not shielded from the wider economic impacts of changes on an economy wide basis; it is clear that the differing impacts of the health 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.

In Section 2 of this paper we explore the findings of the APSE workforce survey data.



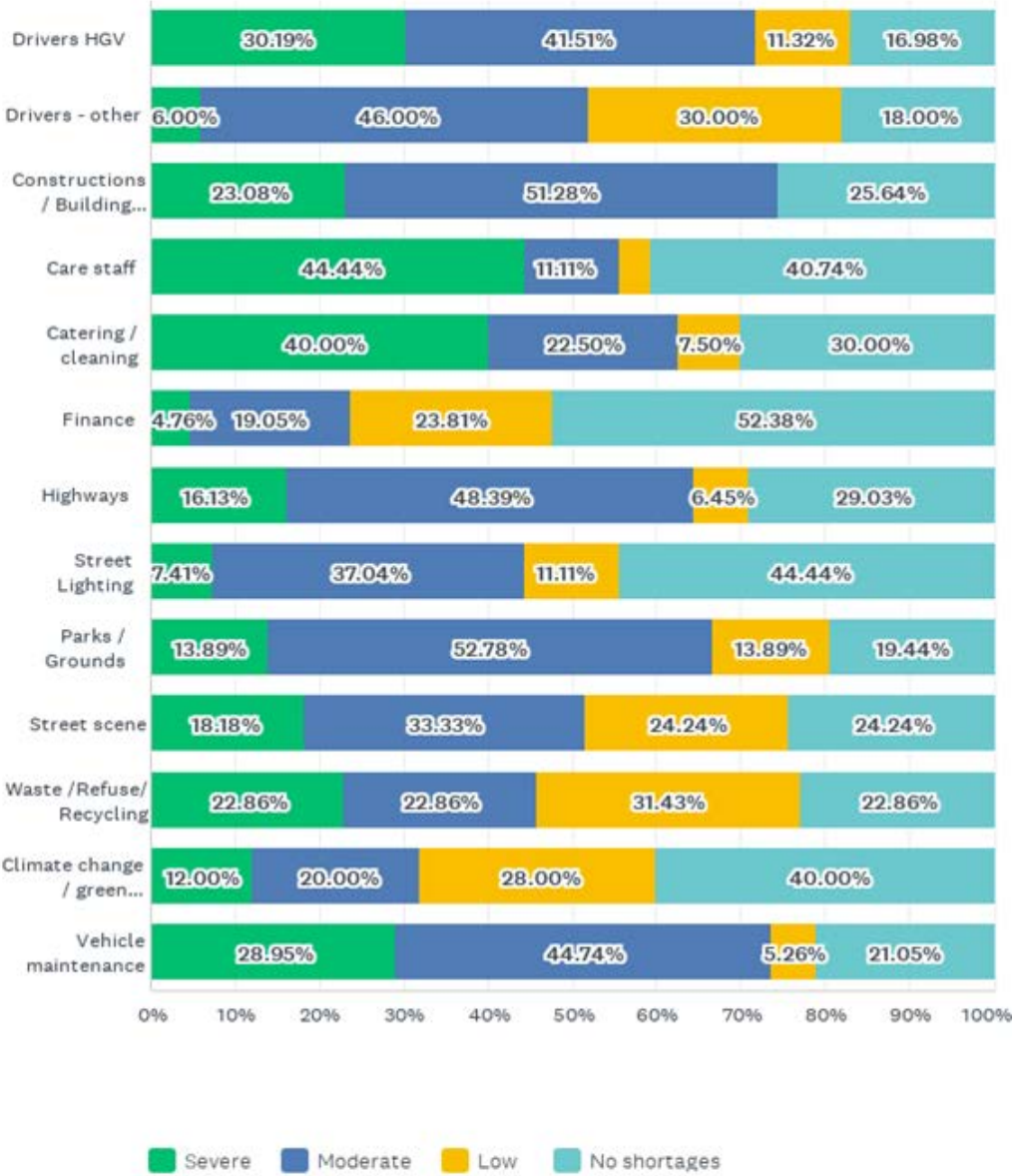
Section 2

Findings of the APSE 'Big Workforce Survey'

APSE conducted a survey of its member local councils between, 7 October and 7 November 2021. A total of 113 respondents submitted their views with a completion rate of 92%. Respondents were relatively evenly spread across APSE's six areas of activity in APSE Scotland, APSE Wales, APSE Northern Ireland, APSE Northern, APSE Southern and APSE Central. 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.

The following provides the question set, results and analysis.

Q1: Do you suffer from recruitment difficulties in any of the following areas of work?



71.7% reported severe or moderate HGV driver shortages with 52% reporting a shortage of drivers more generally. Over 74% reported shortages in construction related workers, where they are employed by the council and **62.5%** reported shortages in catering and cleaning staff. In social care overall respondent number were less than other areas but of the 27 respondent councils in this specific area of work **65.6%** reported severe or moderate shortages (with **44.4%** reporting severe shortages). Finance service respondents reported **23.8%** were suffering from moderate or severe shortages.

48.4% report moderate shortages in Highways services, rising to **64.5%** when added together with those experiencing severe shortages, with street lighting showing a figure of **44.4%** for severe and moderate shortages. **52.7%** report a moderate shortage in Parks services with **13.9%** reporting severe shortages. **51.5%** report shortages in street scene services, and **45.7%** in refuse and recycling. 32% reported shortages in green projects/climate change roles but again overall council respondents were low for this question at 25. In vehicle maintenance **73.6%** reported severe or moderate shortages.

Geographic differences

When filtered the South of England reports a much higher level of HGV drivers than the overall figures, with **69.2%** reporting shortages as severe and combined with moderate shortages this rises to near to 77% when including moderate shortages which is **5.3%** higher than the UK wide. The UK wide figure for severe shortages is much lower at **30.2%**.

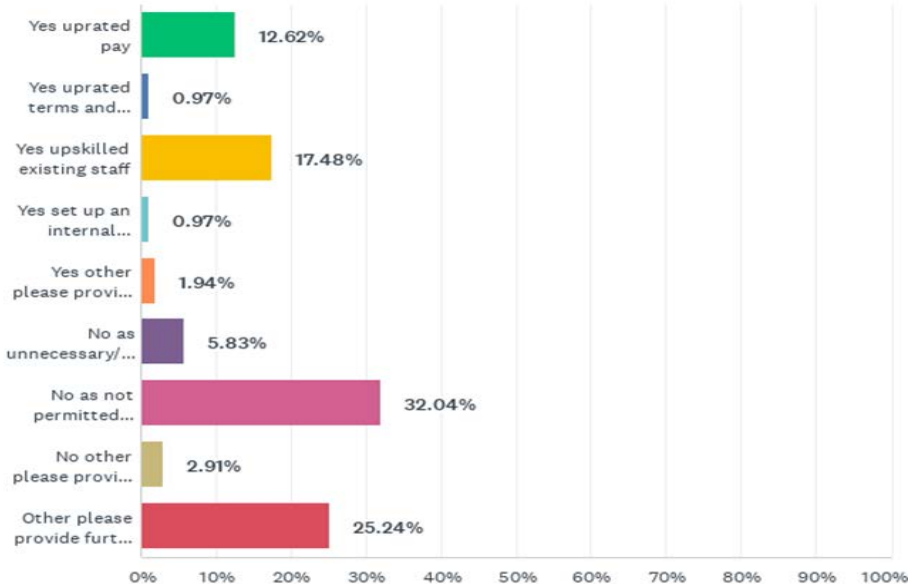
Within Scotland the most severe shortages appear to be in Care services with 75% of respondents reporting care worker shortages as severe, followed by catering and cleaning with **66.6%** reporting severe shortages in these areas.

In the North of England vehicle maintenance shortages feature with **84.6%** of respondents reporting moderate or severe shortages. In Central England driver shortages for HGV are less than elsewhere with **14.2%** reporting severe shortages however in more general driving roles this figure is at **42.8%**, albeit this is still behind a reported **58.3%** in the South, but the figure is higher in Central England than the North of England.

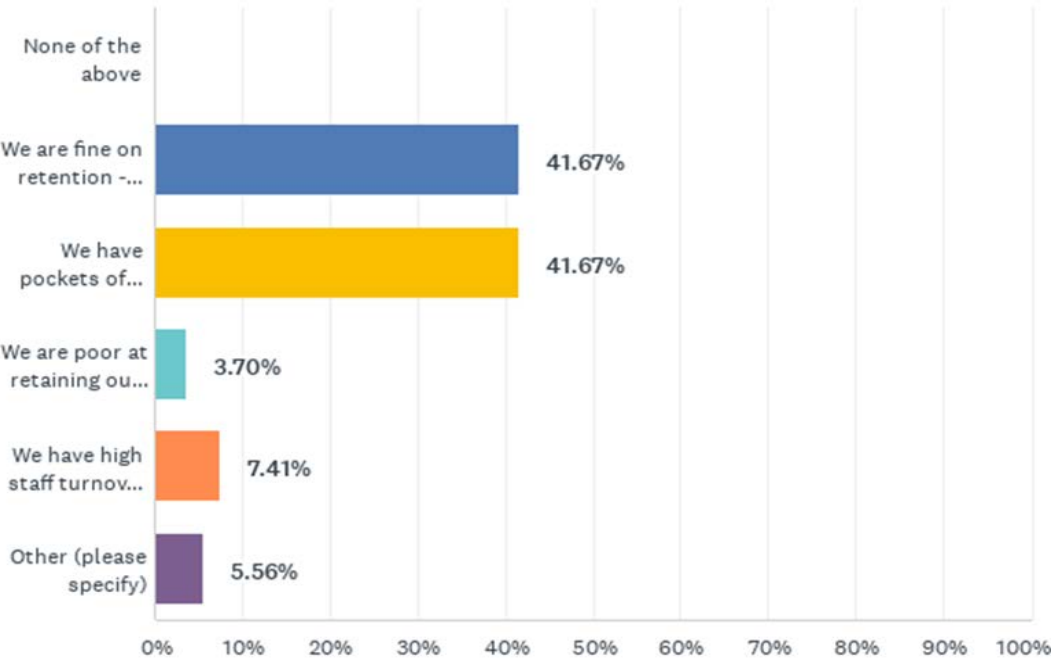
Q2: Have you introduced any schemes to improve recruitment?

When asked about any schemes to improve recruitment **12.6%** of respondents have uprated pay in order to address recruitment issues with **17.4%** upskilling existing staff. Amongst other respondents' text answers many included 'growing our own' in terms of training and developing staff, some have introduced 'Total Pay and Rewards' processes, including evaluation, or revaluation of roles, and some have introduced recruitment pools for waste services. The use of job fairs, and increasing advertisement reach on twitter, Facebook and other social media settings, is also being actively pursued but with some mixed successes. In addition, the use of internal agencies and training or management training schemes is being actively explored in some councils. In Care settings the success of management training schemes appears to be patchy, with staff retention issues remaining a point of concern.

In near to a third of respondent councils however they report that the corporate position is that they are unable to vary existing recruitment processes to address the shortage of skilled workers.

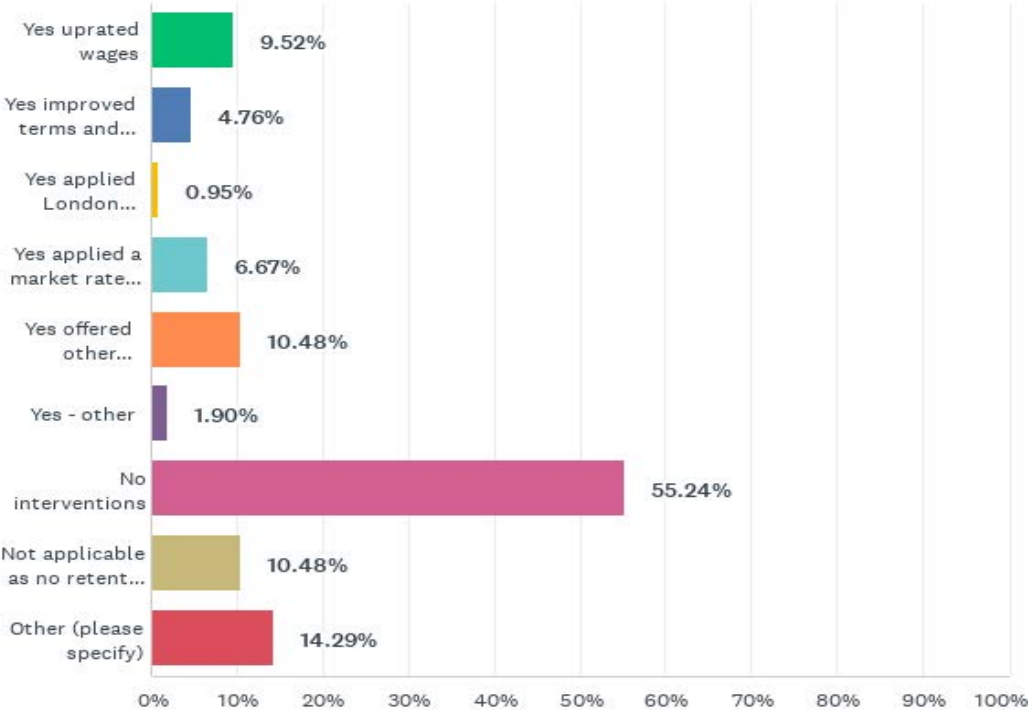


Q3: Thinking about retention of staff how would you best describe your experiences?



The same number of respondents (**46.7%**) report that they are generally fine on retention of the workforce, however an equal number say that they have pockets of areas where retention of staff is difficult and **7.4%** who report overall high staff turnover. Of specific concerns in the narrative responses are low hour jobs, in areas like cleaning, are increasingly proving to be difficult areas in which to retain staff; covid has had an impact with employees taking a different view of their own outlook on life and in some cases opting for early retirement; and stable staff teams, who have worked together long-term opting to move on or retire at the same time.

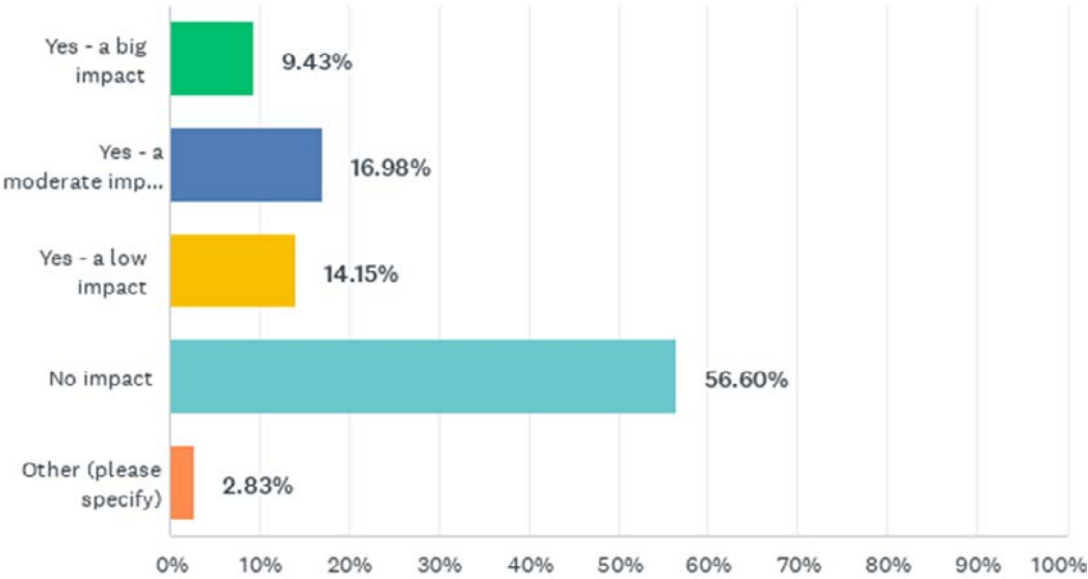
Q4: Have you made any interventions to support staff retention?



Although **55.2%** report that they have not taken any action to improve staff retention **9.5%** report that they have uprated wages to try and help retain staff. A further **10.5%** report that they have used other incentives, whilst **6.7%** report that they have used market rate supplements. Although market rate supplements can be contentious, and raise the spectre of equal pay issues, they can be a useful tool if properly applied, and there is clear objective justification. They should however only be used with appropriate HR and legal advice.

When it comes to other forms of interventions working hours and working days appear to be seen as critical to workforce stability; accommodating work life balance needs and promoting agile working. This clearly cannot be the case for all staff, especially in some frontline services where there is a need to work in teams, such as refuse collection, but this provides some opportunities for some functions.

Q5: Has Brexit impacted on recruitment and retention issues?



56.6% report that there has not been an impact from Brexit whilst the moderate and low impact combined responses are **31.1%** with **9.4%** reporting a big impact. When filtered by the South of England responses there is a marginal increase in responses to **10.5%** who experienced a big impact but this jumps to **13.3%** in Central England, where however the combined low to moderate impact score is **31.1%**. The North of England reports the highest area of no impact at **66.7%**.

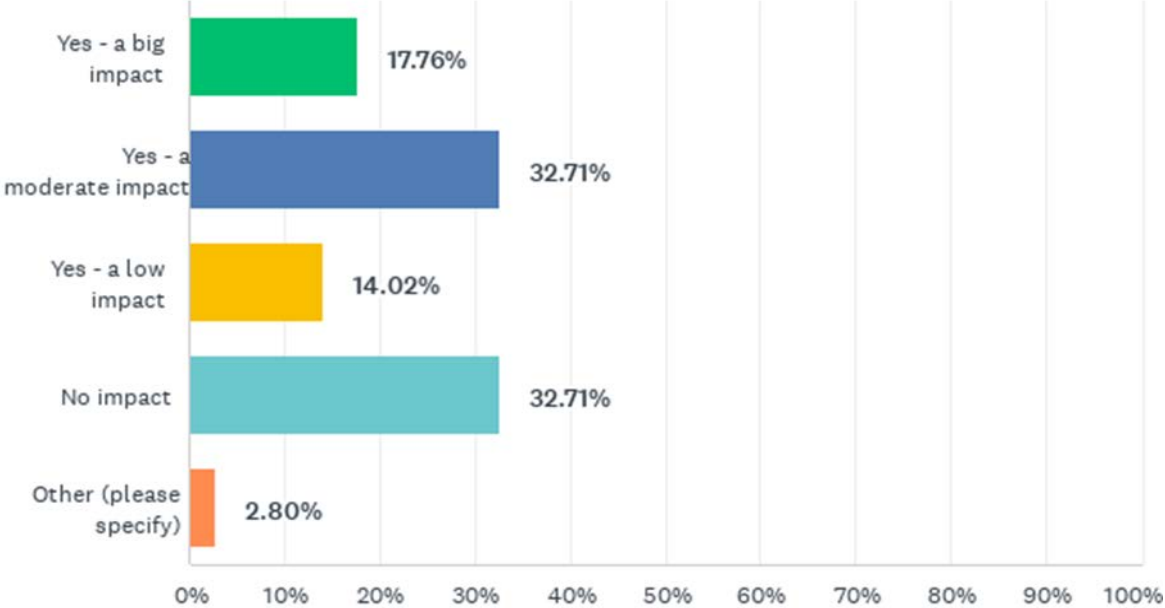
This question is worthy of more detailed analysis when exploring this on an economy wide basis. In spite of the survey suggesting a lower-than-expected impact of Brexit in councils when looking at overall employment data, in the first week of November 2021, on an economy wide basis, there were an estimated 2.7 million job vacancies and 221,000 new job adverts posted in that week along. The 221,000 new job adverts was the fourth-highest weekly figure since the start of last year (2020). Conversely the numbers of EU citizen’s seeking work in the UK in 2021 dropped by 36%; however, this data does not offer any further detail on explicability; is this reduction purely due to Brexit or also attributable as many might expect to the impact of the health pandemic?

What appears to be happening within local authorities is a correlation between job type and the impact of Brexit on a geographic basis; for example drivers in the South of England, and loss of construction workers on a fairly event basis across all parts of the UK.

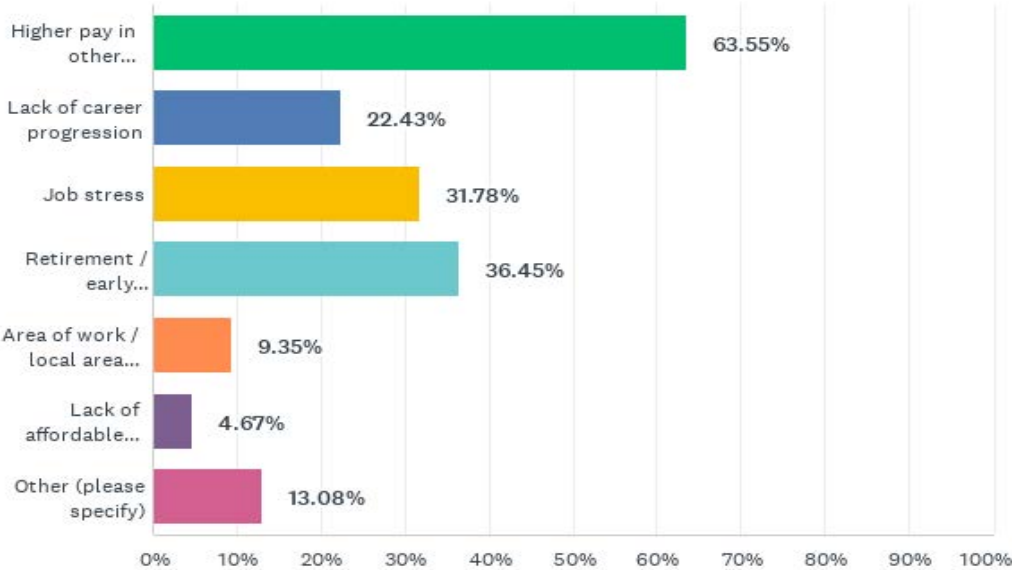
The issue now for local councils is will the pull of higher wages in some other sectors of the economy continue to draw workers away from local government, or will the overall balance of pay, better terms and conditions, such as sick pay and annual leave, and access to a contributory pension scheme provide a better option for workers?

Q6: Has the COVID pandemic had an impact on staff recruitment and or retention?

When asked about the COVID-19 health pandemic on recruitment and retention issues **50.5%** reported a big or moderate impact on recruitment and retention issues, whilst near to a third of respondents reported no impact and just over 14% reported a low impact. When filtered by sector the impact of Covid appears to be heightened in areas such as catering, cleaning and social care, and exacerbated by an ageing workforce in areas like waste, recycling and street scene.

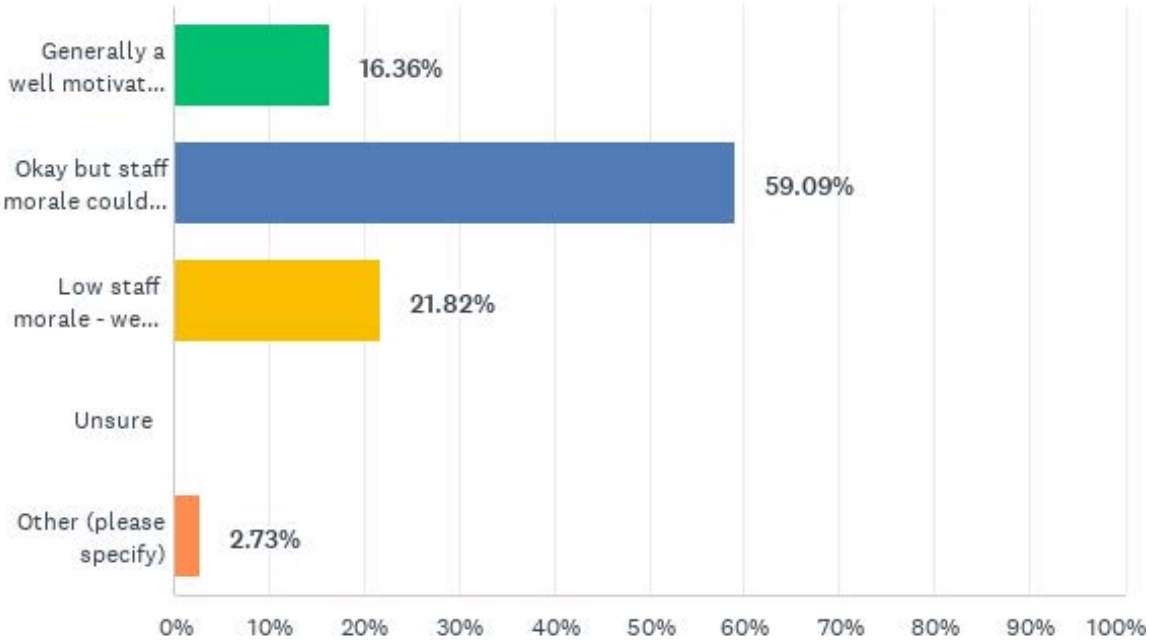


Q7: What do you believe to be the main reason for people leaving your council/service?



When asked about the reasons people may leave the council respondents were able to select more than one answer. The responses to this question provide a stark warning for local councils as employers. **63.5%** of respondents cite higher pay in other sectors/employers as a reason for workers leaving council employment. **36.4%** cite retirement, early retirement and voluntary redundancy as the second highest cause of workers leaving; this may reflect the issues of the ageing workforce in local government, as well as the impact of budget pressures in recent years. Near to a third report job stress as a major factor in decisions to leave whilst over 22% cite job stress as a factor. Other narrative responses suggest that, whilst job security was previously seen as a benefit within local government, the recent financial uncertainties for local councils has destabilised trust in them, as a secure employer. One respondent suggested the lower pay in the public sector was a trade off for job security but as that is no longer the case the workforce is more willing to go 'where the money is' if job security is no longer a factor to retain staff.

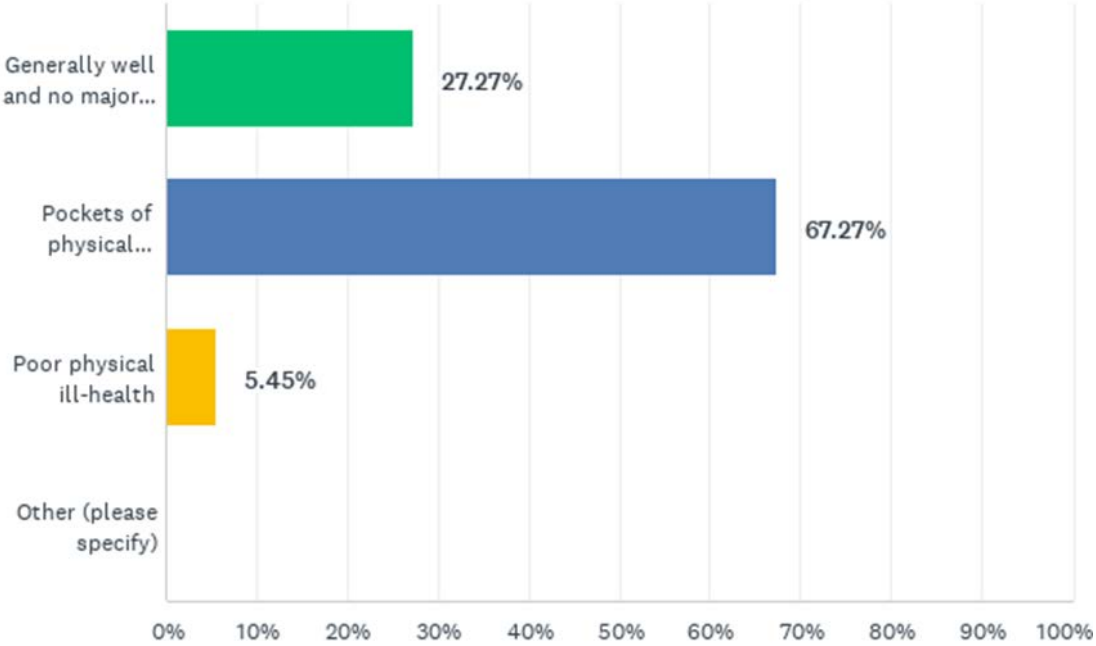
Q8: Thinking about staff morale what best describes your current workforce?



Looking back at APSE's survey and subsequent briefing on staff wellbeing towards the end of 2020, (APSE Briefing 20-97) when asked about morale 43.09% reported that morale was okay. In this latest survey however 59% report that staff morale could be improved. This seems to suggest that staff resilience is waning as the pandemic continues to place pressure on services. The hoped-for pandemic recovery is now perhaps viewed as more ongoing with 'normality' increasingly removed from day-to-day work experiences. Similar to the 2020 survey near to 22% report that staff morale is considered to be low. Again, the overall picture is a continuation of that lowering of staff morale.

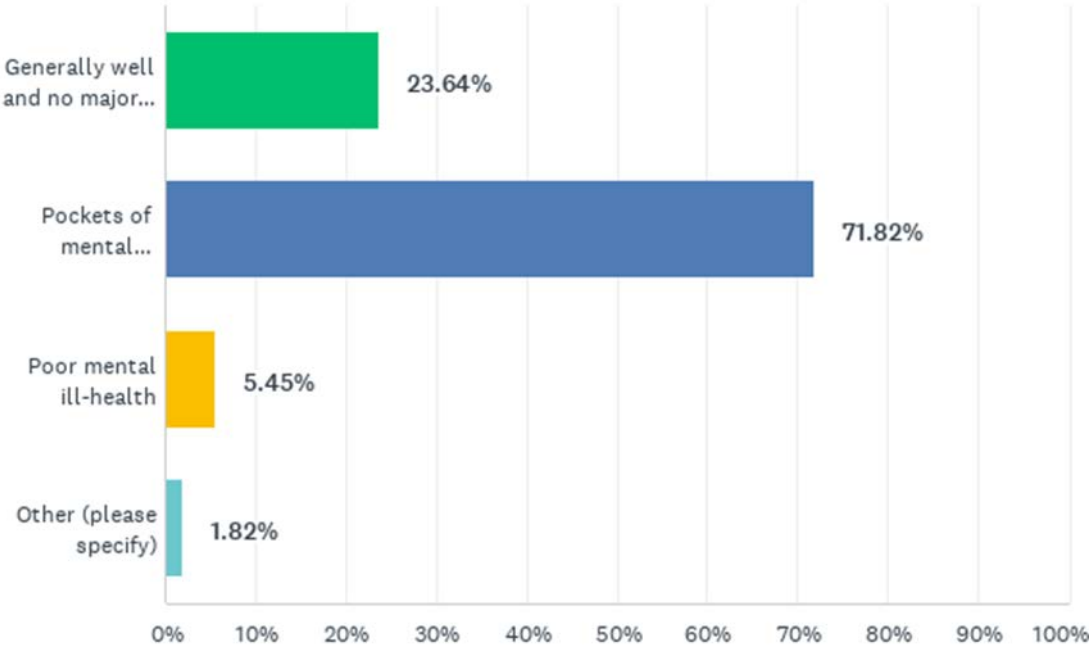
It is worth reflecting on the 2020 survey findings where many APSE member councils reported that staff felt that they were less appreciated for their efforts, in supporting the pandemic effort, than other parts of the public sector; and in those other areas of public sector work the pay awards are considerably higher than in local government, further demotivating the workforce. Just **16.3%** reported that they felt staff morale was generally good with a well-motivated workforce.

Q9: Thinking about staff physical well-being how would you describe your workforce?



Whilst **27.2%** report that staff are generally well with no physical health issues **67.2%** reports pockets of poor physical health. Again, this correlates to the 2020 report which also found many managers felt that staff in some areas were suffering from poor physical health in many demanding jobs roles. It may also be a consequence of an ageing workforce profile.

Q10: Thinking about mental well-being how would you describe your workforce?



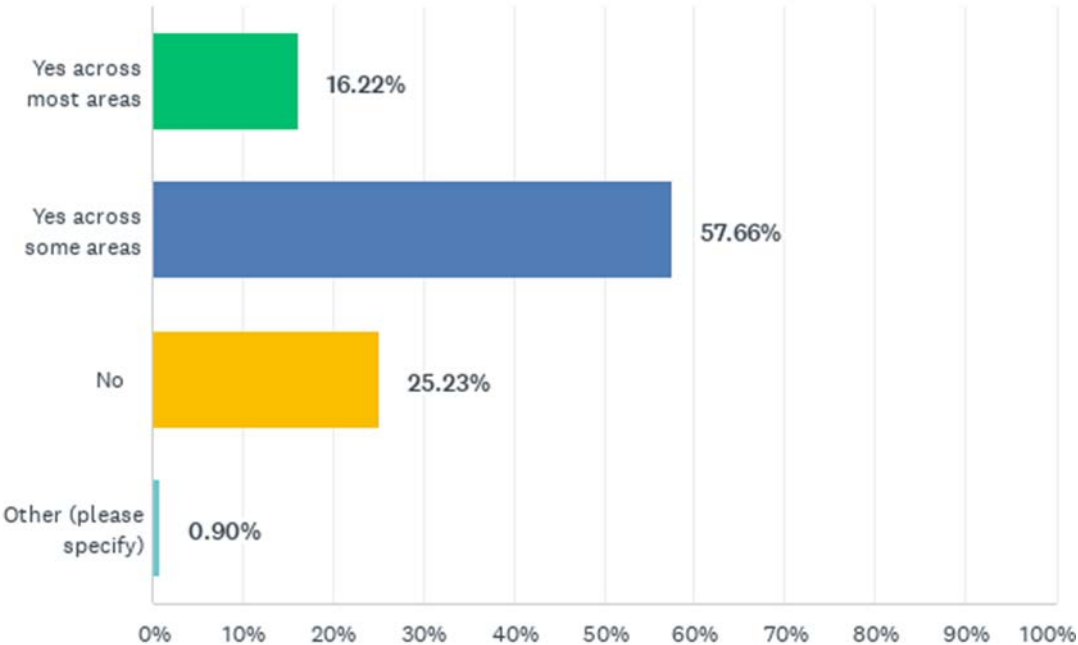
When it comes to mental well-being again, we see a high number of respondents at near to 72% who report that there are pockets of mental ill-health. Again, in the 2020 survey a similar pattern emerges with **84.8%** of respondents reporting concerns about the mental well-being of their directly managed workforce or colleagues, with 56.65% reporting that mental well-being amongst the workforce was at an all-time low. This does not appear to have improved significantly since the 2020 survey and remains a concern albeit there is a marked improvement, which could suggest that the return to more workplace interactions, between staff, has helped to address some of the issues identified in 2020, which included isolation from colleagues and feelings of being without direction in some areas. However again with the onset of the Omicron variant and further disruption to ways of working any improvements to mental well-being could prove to be quite fragile.

Q11: Which of the following presents the biggest risks to recruiting and retaining your workforce

When asked about the biggest risks, to recruiting and retaining staff, low pay is again cited as a risk to recruitment and retention, with near to 80% of respondents treating this as a high to medium risk in losing staff. The ageing workforce however is also a marginally higher risk with 86% believing this presents a high to medium risk to recruitment and retention of the workforce. **69.4%** cite competition from other employers; which correlates to other answers as to why we lose people from local government within the survey and **65.7%** who feel that there is a high to medium risk of local government not being seen as an ‘attractive career choice’. Travel costs or access to workplaces are cited as low to no risk area for **78.5%** of respondents, though this may of course not be representative of all geographies, with some rural authorities without viable bus routes for example, experiencing these difficulties and 45% cite that a mismatch of skills is a high to medium risk for recruitment of staff.

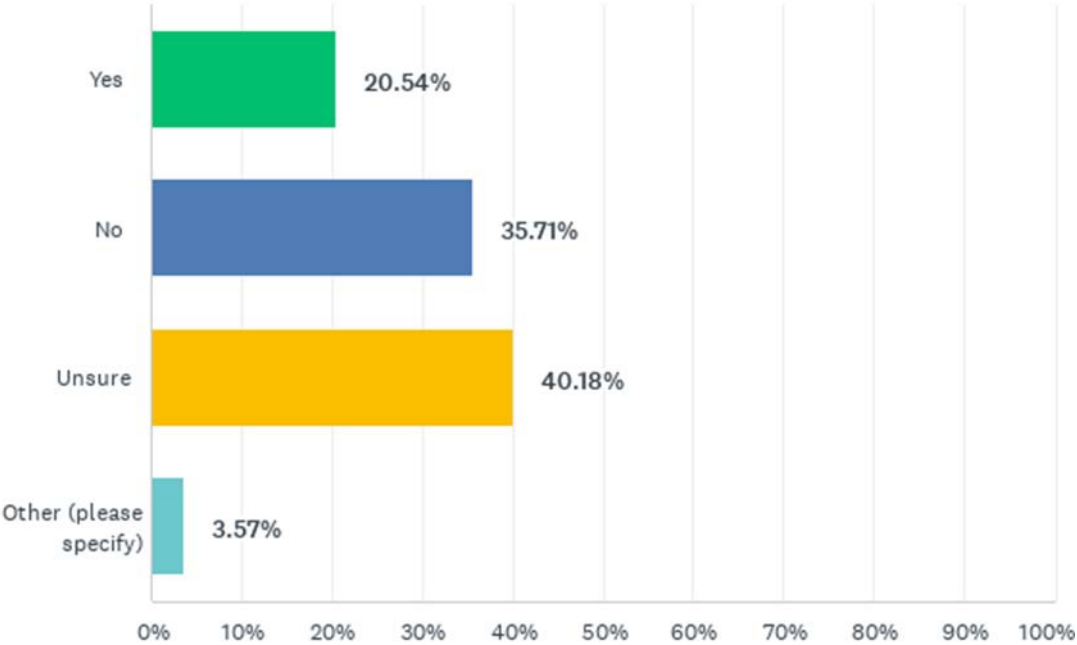
When it comes to housing costs around a quarter of respondents suggest this is a high-medium risk. Additional filtering on this question suggests that this is concentrated more in the South of England with the remaining three quarters of respondents suggesting housing costs is of low (52%) or no risk (17%) to recruitment and retention of staff. Again, however it should be noted that this will vary from service to service and from area to area across the UK.

Q12: Do you have skills shortages?



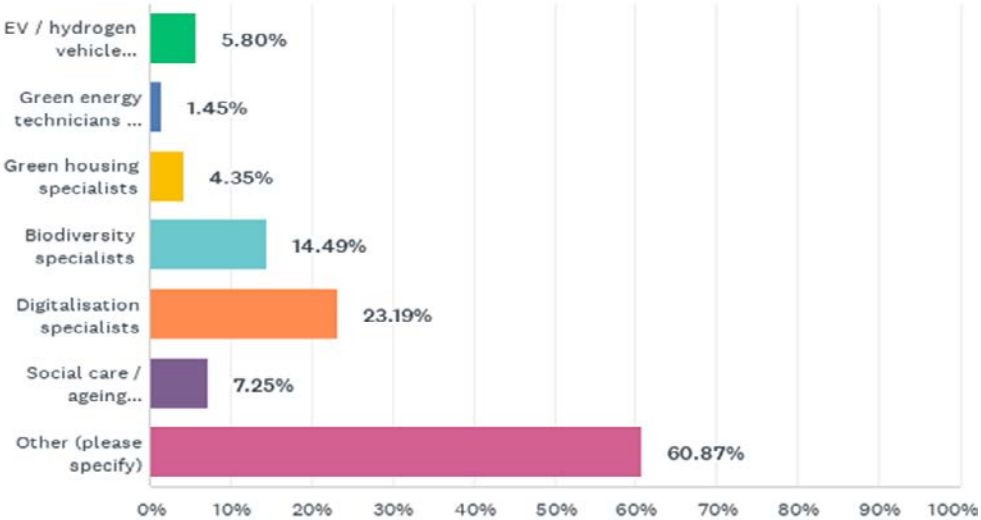
When it comes to skills shortages **57.6%** report that they have shortages in some areas whilst **16.2%** report that they have shortages across most areas. A quarter report that they do not have specific skills shortages in their area. When compared to the issues of recruitment and retention issues there is a degree of correlation between services and jobs roles with drivers in waste, refuse and highways, construction and maintenance work and soft FM services.

Q13: Thinking about climate change and green skills do you believe you have skills to meet future service needs?



When asked about green skills to meet climate change ambitions the answers were a little more ambiguous than elsewhere with the highest recorded responses falling within the 'unsure' category at just over 40%. However narrative responses to this question suggest that councils are still working out what green skills they will need for the future, and where those skills may need to fit. An encouraging **20.5%** felt that they did have the skills to meet climate change though it is hoped that this figure will increase in future surveys, as awareness and knowledge of green skills, develop at pace in local government, particularly in frontline services.

Q14: Have you recruited any of the following?



When asked about recruitment to specific areas of work over 23% report recruiting to digital skills, with **14.5%** reporting they had recruited biodiversity specialists to council roles. Social care and population specialists are lower at **7.2%**. Within the narrative responses some report that rather than recruiting new specialists they are looking to upskill existing staff; examples of this include converting vehicle technicians to specialise in electric fleet, or hydrogen, and repairs and maintenance in areas such as solar PV issues. Many however reports that they had not recruited recently to any specific specialist areas; this reflects the approach to upskilling existing staff reported elsewhere within the survey responses.

Survey Respondents

Survey respondents fell evenly across a range of frontline services with the majority falling within waste, refuse, soft FM services, street scene parks and highways services and the lowest responses from finance and IT and social care.

Responses were also evenly distributed and are representative of APSE’s administrative areas across the UK, but with a slightly lower sample size in Northern Ireland as detailed at the start of Section 2.

Section 3

APSE Comment

The COVID-19 health pandemic has created a renewed focus on the local government workforce, at least within local authorities, but it is questionable whether this is fully recognised and appreciated at government levels across the UK.

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, it is vital that such matters are considered for future service delivery.

The APSE local government commission made a number of findings and recommendations that centred upon the workforce.

First of all, 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.

It also found that many of the job cuts across local government have impacted the most on women in local government. Our survey supports this finding showing that, within soft FM services and social care, recruitment and retention remain as stubborn and difficult issues, with competition for better pay and rewards amongst other 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, and drivers more generally, alongside construction skills, 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. Through the survey responses it appears that some of these issues are already being trialled, by councils, as they seek to attract new talent into the local government sector. 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 and a need for new skills, particular in greening services as councils have made their climate and ecological emergency declarations.

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.

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 Mo Baines on mbaines@apse.org.uk.

Mo Baines

APSE Head of Communication and Coordination

Email: mbaines@apse.org.uk

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