Workforce and Resourcing

Overview Select Committee

2 February 2026

Lead Director

Andrew Shilliam, Director of Corporate Services

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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1	Summary

1.1 Like many Councils, we continue to face recruitment challenges across a range of specialist and statutory roles where there are significant national workforce shortages or strong competition from the private sector.

1.2 Specifically, this includes Children's and Adult's Social Workers, and many of our technical and professional roles such as Accountants, Quantity Surveyors and Building Surveyors.

1.3 Vacancy rates here and elsewhere for these roles remain, though our intelligence and reports from other Councils show that it is not a problem unique to Leicester. Market conditions, national shortages, and rising salary expectations continue to impact permanent recruitment and drive temporary staffing reliance.

1.4 Despite these challenges, the Council has used several resourcing solutions, including the use of agency staff where necessary, to ensure services remain close to establishment and so that statutory service delivery is maintained.

1.5 With a specific focus on the area of Children's Social Work (Children in Need) and where pressures such as vacancy levels and agency deployment being the most acute, our resourcing solutions have resulted in successful recruitment initiatives and a modest growth in capacity.

2	Recommendations

2.1 The Overview Select Committee are asked to note and make comments on the report.

3	Background Information

3.1 A number of workforce and resourcing related questions arose from an earlier budget monitoring report shared at the 19th of March 2025 meeting and at subsequent meetings thereafter. These questions related broadly to the following:

- The level of vacancies that exist across the Council in service areas such as social care, planning, and highways.
- Recruitment activities and initiatives underway to address vacancies in these areas.
- Whether there are certain services areas or posts that are recognised as 'hard to fill' and what makes that so.
- The relationship between vacancies and service delivery, and the impact of these vacancies on staff morale and wellbeing.

3.2 This report is intended to:

- Provide a broad outline of the workforce challenges that Local Authorities, including Leicester, are facing.
- Give some context regarding our current workforce profile.
- Explain what we are doing in our People Service to support effective resourcing.
- Set out some of the other activities in place to address known workforce challenges.
- Provide information about resourcing initiatives that have had success.

- Briefly outline some future focused challenges and opportunities.

4   Workforce challenges and the national Labour Market context

4.1   Councils up and down the country continue to experience many workforce challenges, with evidence and experience showing that an ageing workforce, difficulties recruiting to specialist roles, and growing competition for talent across the public and private sectors are commonplace issues. Levels of pay, funding uncertainty, and 'image' have all contributed to Local Government being a less attractive place to work.

4.2   The Local Government Association (LGA) regularly undertakes a survey of English Councils regarding workforce recruitment. Findings in the 24/25 survey showed that almost all respondents reported experiencing a recruitment challenge in at least one service area, and in particular 80% of respondents reported that they experienced challenges in both recruiting and retaining Children's Social Workers. 77% said the same in relation to Adult Social Workers, making it the second biggest problem area when it comes to recruitment for those responding Councils. Other occupations in Planning, Legal, Digital, Environmental Health, Finance, as well as Children's and Adult's Social Worker have also been harder to recruit to.

4.3   The recruitment challenges faced by Council's that provide Children's Social Care services are not new, are known nationally, and well documented by the Department of Education.

4.4   In response, additional regulations were introduced in October last year to address some of those staffing challenges. These changes aimed to improve stability and retention within local authority workforces, which indirectly supports recruitment by making permanent roles more attractive and reducing churn.

4.5   As a broad outline, changes have been made that are intended to reduce the likelihood of losing staff to agencies and to enable Councils to recruit directly. Agencies can now only supply social workers to Councils if the worker has at least three years' experience with a Local Authority. Workers leaving a Local Authority can't return as agency staff in the same region for at least three months. And a regional price cap on agency social work rates is now in place so wages are more aligned with Council pay, therefore reducing costly agency premiums.

4.6   Year on year funding challenges mean that many Councils struggle to compete for talent, with the total local government offer failing to attract and retain skilled employees. Government have themselves recognised the need to do more to champion Local Government careers and employment, and have introduced the "Make a Difference, Work for Your Local Council" drive.

4.7   This is a national Local Government orientated recruitment campaign funded by Government and delivered in partnership with organisations such as the Local Government Association (LGA). It its intended to raise awareness of working in Local Government and the breadth of roles available across Councils, to highlight the social value and personal impact of Council work — including roles in Social Care, Planning, Digital, Legal, Finance and frontline services, and to help Councils attract talent to fill vacancies and improve recruitment outcomes amid widespread workforce and retention challenges.

4.8   We're making use of the campaign assets provided across own social media and have added additional data reporting fields to our own recruitment processes so we can identify areas we attract the most candidates as a result.

4.9   External factors beyond our own local control, such as the changes to work permits for people immigrating to the UK and the sponsorship arrangements for skilled workers create some additional recruitment challenges. The salary caps for skilled workers has also changed. These factors have reduced our ability in some cases to recruit to roles that have previously been filled by international candidates who legitimately immigrate to the UK.

4.10   Regarding the public sector market in Leicester and Leicestershire, we know it is a particularly competitive one, with many other large 'public' employers and attractive places to work. We compete for the same talent with many of these employers. The following table provides a breakdown by employer of the workforce size for context.

Employer	Workforce Size (FTE) approx.
University Hospitals Leicester	17,000
Leicestershire County Council	7,500
Leicester Primary & Secondary Schools	6,500
Leicester City Council	5,600
University of Leicester	4,000
De Montfort University	3,500
Leicestershire Police	3,400
Leicestershire Fire & Rescue	700
TOTAL	**48,200**

5   Our workforce profile – a snapshot

5.1   Through the information we collect about our workforce we know that:

- We employee approximately 5,600 FTEs across all services.
- Our workforce has reduced significantly in size since 2014.
- Across all grades we know that the average time in post is 13 years.
- Workforce turnover has remained at approx. 13%.
- Within the Children's Social Care service, we employ 609 FTEs across all grades.
- Within the Adult Social Care service, we employ 813 FTEs across all grades.
- Most of our vacancies aren't for leadership roles - 89% or 1,136 of the vacancies in 23/24 were for jobs Grade 9 or lower.
- Most employees at the Council are Grade 9 or below – over 5000 of our 5600 or so FTEs.
- Almost 50% of our current workforce are 50+.
- Leicester has a working population of 157,000 people.

5.2   Like many Councils, Leicester experiences workforce challenges in roles where there are national talent shortages, including Social Workers (particularly those at Level 3 and within the Children In Need team), Planners and some Trades roles.

5.3   Equally, we face high competition from Private and Commercial Sectors related to Accountant, Quantity Surveyor, Building Surveyor, Legal Specialist, Engineer and Project Manager positions. These specialist roles face wage inflation pressures, higher private-sector salary competition and have a limited available candidate pool because of the knowledge and practical skills required.

5.4   We currently make use of several levers to address the challenges we face when it comes to attracting and retaining staff at all levels. These include the use of targeted

strategies that enable us to grow our own talent from within. A more detailed outline of some those is outlined below.

'Grow your own' strategies

5.5   Where the external market is highly competitive or there is a shortage of skilled professionals, one of the most effective long-term strategies is to grow our own talent. We have an internal first recruitment model that enables the progression of staff within the authority.

5.6   Also, by investing in structured apprenticeship, trainee, and graduate pathways, we can develop a strong internal pipeline for hard-to-fill and specialist roles. This approach not only secures the skills we need for the future but also strengthens retention by providing clear progression and development opportunities.

5.7   In 2025 we had 62 apprenticeship placements. Of these 16 where recruited within trade roles which are identified as hard to fill and 3 are people considered to be from a looked after background. This creates a sustainable pipeline of colleagues who understand our services, values, and communities from the outset and are more likely to be committed to working at the Council for longer.

5.8   Similarly, at a higher level in Social Care, our successful degree qualification pathway supports non-qualified staff to progress to fully qualified Social Workers, building capability and future staffing resilience from within. We have also joined the LGA pathway to planning programme, which has enabled graduate planners to join as a cohort with a clear progression plan in place for each of them which focus on retaining them in the workforce after the programme has concluded.

5.9   The procurement of a new apprenticeship partner also allows for further work around staff development, and especially by creating talent pools and expanding the apprenticeship offer for all roles. The new provider has experience in helping organisations to maximise the available levy funds more creatively and providing better value for money.

5.10   Initiatives such as Women In Construction enable us to embed grow your own from underrepresented groups in a key hard to fill roles like some of our Trades occupations. This has increased the number of female apprentices in Housing during 2025, with 9 new FTE female apprentices starting at the Council in these roles compared to 31 FTE male apprentices.

5.11   The Resourcing Team within People Services have also built strong community links, partnering with HMP Welford Road and holding job sessions within the prison to target certain roles. They also work closely with the Employment Hub and Department for Work and Pensions, often attending events to showcase Leicester City Council as an employer of choice like the youth jobs fair, which targeted unemployment in care leavers and under 24-year-olds.

Temporary Workforce Position

5.12   In high-pressure areas, agency staffing has been effective in reducing immediate and more critical operational risk and has allowed us to maintain workforce levels close to establishment. That said, we are very aware that agency staffing is a more costly arrangement and have strict controls around its use.

5.13 Since January 2025 we have placed 194 agency staff in a variety of job categories via our agency partner Reed – see below. In addition, there have also been number of additional placements in Education, Finance and Trades roles through their own procured route and because of the specialist nature of the roles concerned being better fulfilled by a specialist agency partner. These are at a much lower number.

Job Category	In post
Social care	88
Trades & Operative	55
Legal	21
Other	30

5.14 Agency staffing remains an important short, medium, and long-term workforce fulfilment option for us and many other Councils, particularly while permanent recruitment and internal workforce development strategies mature. That said, it should be noted that with the introduction of increased control around the use of agency staff we have successfully reduced our reliance and spend on agency in recent years.

5.15 Our casual workforce also provides additional capacity to the Council in certain areas. In Festivals & Events, where a contractual post would not be fit for purpose, the use of casual employees works well. This is often due to the dynamic nature of the resource and the relation to the evolving festivals programme, and it helps to have a reliable bank of casual workers that can be called on as required. By relying on a casual workforce in these areas, we have significantly reduced the use of Agency Staff.

6 People Services – Our Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP) model of delivery and other activities

6.1 We have also introduced some significant structural changes to our People Service during the last quarter of 2025. By bringing in the HRBP model approach to our People (HR) Service, which sees HR professionals work closely leadership at all levels in order to align people management strategy and practices with organisational strategy and requirements, we believe that this will better support the organisation to anticipate workforce needs and to plan and put in place better resourcing arrangements.

6.2 The service will operate as a strategic partner to Council services, providing insight, challenge, and expertise on workforce, culture, and organisational performance. The model typically sits alongside shared services and centres of excellence. We will offer more tailored advice on workforce planning, organisational design, talent management, employee relations, and change management. Decisions about people will be better informed by both data and a deeper understanding of the business context, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

People Service – support

6.3 In addition to the introduction of a new structure within our People Service, we have also created dedicated Technical Specialist and People Manager frameworks to ensure roles are evaluated consistently and fairly within the pathway that best reflects their purpose. Our approach recognises the distinct value of both types of roles, ensuring each pathway is supported, rewarded, and developed appropriately.

6.4 Technical specialists play a critical role in delivering high-quality, expert services, and we enable them to progress and be valued across all grade groups without needing to move into management. This allows us to create clear technical pathways with visible monetary progression as individuals deepen their specialist skills. A strong example is

within Planning, where a structured technical route - from entry-level Planner through to Senior Planner - has been established.

6.5   This approach enables the creation of roles focused on technical expertise, strengthens professional capability, and helps close the gap between our internal pay scales and external competitors.

6.6   In parallel, our People Manager pathway focuses on leadership capability, team development, and organisational culture, ensuring colleagues can grow in the direction that best aligns with their strengths and aspirations, while the organisation benefits from both technical excellence and strong, confident leadership.

6.7   While we recognise that some traditional methods of attracting talent - such as pension benefits - have become less influential in the current cost-of-living climate, and that candidates are often seeking higher base salaries, we are clear that being the highest payer in the market is not our ambition. Instead, we focus on attracting people who are motivated by public service and want to build their careers at Leicester.

7   Strategic Workforce Planning

7.1   A strategic approach to workforce planning is proven to enable organisations to identify potential skills gaps, succession risks, and hard-to-recruit roles early, allowing time to invest in training, apprenticeships, and alternative talent pipelines. These targeted initiatives reduce the reliance on agency staff, supports continuity of service delivery, and improves value for money.

7.2   In practice, strategic workforce planning involves understanding the current workforce - such as workforce size, skills, demographics, and costs – and considering how this relates to what will be needed in future. This involves looking at trends like service demand, funding pressures, technological change, and policy reform. By doing so, organisations can identify gaps, surpluses, and risks, and develop targeted actions such as recruitment plans, training and development, succession planning, and create an evidence based and planned approach to new ways of working.

7.3   In the long term, Councils with a strategic approach to workforce planning are better positioned to deliver high-quality services, manage risk, and respond effectively to future challenges while making the best use of public resources.

7.4   Recognising the value of this activity, we have designed and are in the early stages of introducing a workforce planning approach to Council services. Services have been asked to complete service plans that detail their workforce priorities. Within this succession planning, skills gap analysis and vacancy gap analysis are easily identifiable. Service plans also identify which roles are deemed as business critical.

7.5   And whilst services are responsible themselves for their own workforce planning and vacancy mapping, we will continue to assist them in this activity and the HRBP model makes that more possible.

8   Focus on Children's Social Workers

8.1   Given the know concerns around recruiting to posts within Children's Social Care, a targeted workforce strategy is in place in Children's Social Work in particular and which includes numerous activities that are intended to reduce our reliance on agency staff and strengthen long-term workforce sustainability.

8.2   A targeted attraction campaign and micro-site has been established to position Leicester as an employer of choice and highlight professional support, career pathways and benefits.

8.3   Regarding agency-to-permanent conversion, there has been a proactive focus and effort on the conversion of temporary to permanent staff, with five Social Workers successfully converted to permanent roles to date.

8.4   Our grow your own 'Social Work Academy' provides structured training and development for newly qualified Social Workers, which helps to build internal pipeline capacity and support retention. 17 newly qualified Social Workers started in September 2025 and will undertake their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment before becoming Level 2 social workers.

8.5   Our international recruitment approach helps to expand the talent pool particularly when domestic shortages exist. To date,14 international Social Workers have been recruited, and all have been deployed to Children In Need teams. We've managed to retain all of the cohort to date. This programme has strengthened workforce stability and demonstrated strong onboarding and support structures. All are expected to have achieved their Level 3 (senior social worker) status within the next 6 months.

8.6   A further round of international recruitment is being completed in the first quarter of 2026, with 10 workers joining in April and then 10 more in October around the Access and Supported Year in Employment programme. This provides an influx of level two staff who we can develop into level three workers. However, changing regulations on work visas are a significant risk to this long-term strategy therefore we may need to pivot our efforts elsewhere. The additional resources required to support initiative are also more intensive.

8.7   On workforce diversification, under the 'Families First' agenda there will be an increasing ability for those "differently qualified" staff to hold cases of children on "Child in Need" plans with the support and oversight of a Qualified Social Worker on some cases, though this does not include those that involve looked after children or those on a child protection plan.

9   Our Children In Need (CIN) team at a glance

9.1   This is an area that Leicester, like many other Local Authorities, has found typically hard to recruit to. Nationally these sorts of teams are considered to have higher caseload numbers compared with other children's services teams, many of them involving complex, long-term cases involving neglect, domestic abuse, parental mental health, substance misuse, and poverty, with work sitting between early help and statutory intervention, meaning cases can become quite long term and can often escalate very quickly meaning that that are resource intensive areas of work.

9.2   Historically, CIN teams have relied heavily on agency social workers, though we know that agency roles often offer individuals significantly higher pay and greater flexibility therefore making any permanent positions extremely challenging to recruit into.

9.3   On the whole, recruitment to CIN social work teams is challenging because the role combines high caseloads, emotional intensity, professional risk, and system-wide pressures, while competing with agency pay and alternative roles that offer greater stability and control. Without improvements in workload, support, progression and system capacity, CIN teams remain one of the hardest areas to staff sustainably for many Local Authorities.

9.4   We know it is a service that faces increasing pressures due to a sharp rise in demand, with referrals increasing by over a third and single assessments by 70% in the past six months. Moreover, between April – October 2025, referrals increased by 37.4%, from 353 to 485, single assessments increased by 70%, from 242 to 410, and Child Protection Plans increased by 6%, from 49 to 52.

9.5   The CIN service currently has an establishment of 57.25 FTE; it grew in October 2025 by a further 8 posts which reflects a proactive commitment to strengthening capacity, supporting caseload sustainability, and improving workforce resilience.

9.6   In addition to increasing staff, these challenges are also being managed within the service in other ways, including the introduction of targeted case reviews, demand prevention activities, workload sharing practices, and permanent recruitment campaigns.

9.7   There is some reliance on a temporary workforce, with 12 agency Social Workers currently deployed in CIN teams to mitigate the known service pressures and maintain safe and effective caseload management.

9.8   While these agency staff provide essential interim capacity, the roles remain permanent vacancies within the establishment. A recruitment is exercise is also currently underway to fill these roles on a permanent basis, which is more likely to be more successful due to the new rules introduced by Government.

9.9   Since October 2025 and under these new rules, and as a reminder, all agency workers must have worked directly for a local authority for three years before becoming an agency worker. Agency pay rates are also now capped on a regional basis. "Project teams" - essentially purchasing team of social workers along with their manager from an agency – are also no longer allowed.

9.10   These changes are intended to reduce the more lucrative nature of agency work and to put local authorities on a more even footing when it comes to recruitment. These DFE statutory regulations also introduced a reporting mechanism with a quarterly data return scrutinised by the DFE, this is also reviewed regionally by the Tier Two leads group and the HR regional social work group.

10   Other successful resourcing initiatives in areas that once were considered hard to recruit

10.1   Generally, and when we become aware of them, roles that become recognised as hard to fill often benefit from proactive and bespoke campaigns managed by the resourcing team. The introduction of the HRBP model will allow us to be more consistent and supportive with this activity. Currently and where necessary specialist adverts, media plans and headhunting activity for specific roles does take place. Recently these methods have helped us to successfully recruited a Head of Finance, a Vehicle Technician, and a Fleet Services Manager.

10.2   The success of targeted recruitment activity is particularly evidenced when it comes to recruiting to trade-based roles. For example, we ran a recruitment campaign from April 2024 to July 2025 and which included activities such as hosting stands at B&Q, placing specialised signage on work vans and within communities. This activity led to the recruitment of 33 additional staff. What's more, of the 16 trade workers in this area, 6 of those were eventually converted to permanent posts.

10.3   Targeted job evaluation work that has taken place in Legal, IT and Planning has also resulted in being able to reduce the number of hard to fill roles through the creation of career pathways. These clear progression plans allow individuals to join us on a level suited to them and together with an outline of the defined next steps that they can see and eventually take which will allow them to progress, that has improved retention in those areas.

10.4   For example, by adding the Senior Lawyer Grade 11 post and linking this specifically to the Grade 10 and 9 Qualified Lawyer role we have improved retention and reduced agency staff in Legal Services. That has allowed us to end 17 Qualified Lawyer agency bookings during 2025.

10.5   Similarly, in Planning, the extended career grades and introduction of the People Manager role have allowed people to see more clearly their career pathway and future and have allowed skilled technical managers the time and space to focus on the technical requirements of the service while the People Manager takes responsibility for people focused workforce matters. This has had a positive effect on staff retention.

11   Areas of emerging interest

11.1   Service intelligence seems to suggest that there are some positive opportunities when it comes to recruitment, especially in a changing labour market.

11.2   Because of the strong connection between purpose and social impact, more people seem to consider public service, community impact, and meaningful work as an increasingly important factor in work. Councils are well placed to take advantage, particularly when it comes to younger and values-driven applicants.

11.3   Flexible and modern working practices are also becoming an increasing important point of interest for people when it comes to work choices. As we do, offering a range of working options, flexible hours, job share opportunities and Family-friendly policies can widen the talent pool and appeal to people who might otherwise be excluded (e.g. carers, people with disabilities).

11.4   With Local Government Reorganisation under consideration, that too can prevent some interesting opportunities for Councils when it comes to recruiting staff. With modernisation and service change and transformation likely to be part of any reorganisation efforts, activity in those areas can be appealing to prospective candidates for a number of reasons.

11.5   What's more, it presents an opportunity for Councils to reset employer brand, promote a new organisational vision and identity, and to highlight the values that are important to what it does.

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12   Details of scrutiny

12.1   N/a

13   Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

13.1   Financial implications

Agency rates are typically much higher than the cost of a permanent members of staff, so where agency is used to provide cover this can add considerable cost to the provision of services. The Council has processes in place to ensure that these additional costs are properly approved, controlled and managed.

Stuart McAvoy, Head of Finance
21st January 2026

13.2   Legal implications

Whilst there are no direct legal implications arising from this report, it should be noted that long term use of the same agency staff carries an equal pay risk and it is therefore prudent for them to only be used as a short-term solution. The use of market pay also carries an equal pay risk and it should therefore only be applied where there is clear evidence of recruitment and retention issues associated with levels of pay. It is therefore important to only apply market pay supplements on a temporary basis and for them to be regularly reviewed.

Paul Holmes, Head of Law
21st January 2026

13.3   Climate change and carbon reduction implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications associated with this report.

Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246
16th January 2026

13.4   Equalities implications

With respect to the equality implications of the report, there is an opportunity to explore how proportionate and measured positive action could enable the widening of the talent pool for hard to fill vacancies in the medium to long-term. There are examples from other organisations which demonstrate how alignment of workforce planning objectives with equity, diversity and inclusion can address complex recruitment and succession issues.

In terms of pay equity, a risk could arise from the use of agency staff if this leads to disparities in pay outcomes with respect to sex. If the Equality (Race and Disability) Bill is enacted a similar risk may occur in relation to race and disability pay disparities.

In terms of service delivery, mitigating action is already being implemented with respect to minimising impact on diverse groups or individuals who access and rely on our services and recruitment challenges. However, striking the right balance between recruitment of agency staff to meet the needs of our diverse population, and negating any potential negative implications relating to pay equity is important.

Aloma Onyemah, Head of Communities & Equalities
21st January 2026

14   Background information and other papers

N/a